Ontological Frameworks: Carnap and Quine on Methods of Ontology

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ONTLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS:
CARNAP AND QUINE ON METHODS OF ONTOLOGY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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PREFACE

Ontology—the study of what there is—is one of the oldest areas of philosophical inquiry. Among contemporary philosophers engaged in ontology, Rudolf Carnap and W. V. Quine have had a sizable influence, especially among Anglo-American philosophers. The aim of this dissertation is to develop a method of doing ontology that borrows from both of them. Occasionally ideas are used from one that may perhaps appear to conflict with stated views of the other. It is not the purpose of this dissertation just to defend both or either of these philosophers. Rather, the purpose is to make use of ideas from each that seem theoretically useful. Where their work seems unclear or problematic, and thus in need of interpretation, my rule has been to interpret so as to make the resulting view useful for my own project. If the result seems not to adequately represent the views of either philosopher, then so much the worse as an interpretation—this study is not intended merely as a commentary.

I should like to acknowledge the help of my committee in writing this dissertation. In particular, I have benefitted the most from my acquaintance with Professor Paul Moser. If there is anything of value in this dissertation it is in large part due to his influence on my thinking. Lastly, I should like to thank my father, Edgar Owen, for all of his help and support in bringing this project to completion.
To All My Friends
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CHAPTER I
REALISM AND ONTOLOGY

Introduction

Realism, in a minimal sense, is the doctrine that there is something independent of our cognitive activity, i.e., some “way things are” independent of our conceiving. This might include objects, events, as well as their properties. This is a minimal view since it does not specify what exists, or what there really is as opposed to what there merely seems to be. As stated, this is a metaphysical doctrine, since it is concerned only with issues of existence, and not with any epistemic, alethic, or semantic issues. This contemporary doctrine is distinct from its predecessor of the same name, the view that abstract entities have conceiver-independent existence. This latter view is about the nature of universals; as such its opponent is nominalism. The contemporary doctrine of realism is opposed to, among other views, idealism of the sort that says, following Berkeley, that to be is to be perceived or conceived; that the way the world is is a function of our cognition, and not simply that cognition bears on the way we know what the world is like. Whereas this sort of idealism is epistemic, realism is non-epistemic.

In spite of the intuitive plausibility of realism, the view has been under attack for at least as long as it has been in existence as a doctrine distinct from its predecessor of the same name. As early as the 1930’s we find that Rudolf Carnap, the logical-positivist, was no friend of realism, nor of anti-realism either, for Carnap was no friend of
metaphysics generally. More recent attacks on realism come from many corners. One strategy, endorsed by Hilary Putnam, is that the very idea of realism is incoherent, that it lacks any clear-cut meaning, and hence cannot be intelligibly embraced as a philosophical doctrine. Another strategy, endorsed by Rorty and the "neo-pragmatists," urges us to drop the doctrine altogether since it seeks a foundation in certainty—the Cartesian quest—that cannot be had and that we don't actually need anyway.

Recently Paul Moser has formulated an argument aiming to show that, while realism may indeed be true, we have no non-questionbegging way of ever telling when we have any knowledge of the realist world. He maintains, contra Putnam, that the doctrine is quite intelligible, and that, contra Rorty, it cannot be dismissed quite as easily as the pragmatists would have us believe. If his argument is successful, then not only is realism doomed, but so is metaphysics generally, traditionally understood as knowledge about reality rather than knowledge of mere appearance. Consequently, Moser maintains that if we aim to meet skeptical challenges, the only justifiable position we can take on such issues, i.e., one that does not rely on assumptions that beg questions against the skeptic, is that of agnosticism. This is the view that we are in no position to either affirm or deny metaphysical propositions.

Ontology has often been taken to be a paradigm case of metaphysical inquiry. It is that branch of philosophy that asks about the nature of being and beings. Some examples of ontological questions are, 'What is being?', 'What sorts of beings are

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there?’, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’. Ontological questions do not ask what being *seems* to be like, or what sorts of beings there *seem* to be, or why there *seems* to be something rather than nothing. Ontology is the study of what there *really* is, not what there merely appears to be.² The distinction we make between seeming, or appearance, and reality is just the distinction between what we conceive or perceive, and reality as it is independent of our conceiving or perceiving. Since realism is concerned with reality itself, and not merely appearances, and ontology is that discipline concerned with the nature of being, as opposed to how being merely appears, ontology would seem to be necessarily realist. But if realism is in trouble, then so is ontology—or is it?

The chief concern of this dissertation is chiefly with ontology. A defense is offered for a non-realist method of doing ontology. Thus, the chief task is with what might be called “meta-ontology.” This is the study of various methods of doing ontology, rather than the study of various ontologies. This method is intended to be neutral with respect to any particular ontology. In the last chapter, however, we will step down from the meta-level and defend a particular ontological view, namely, a version of physicalism inspired largely by Carnap. The view defended there is labeled “logical physicalism” so as to distinguish it from contemporary metaphysical views. But before proceeding to the

²There is, of course, the issue of what actually appears. Presumably, even when I am being merely appeared to in some way, there is something that is appearing, that is, I am actually in some particular mental state. We can distinguish here between realism as the view that there are objects independent of our conceiving, and realism as the view that there are objects independent of the mental. The former allows for the reality of mental events, whereas the latter would deny that such appearances are real. I take it that conceiver-independence is the more general form of realism, for it allows for realism about mental states, as well as realism about non-mental objects.
meta-ontological issues directly, we need to examine the doctrine of realism in some detail and some of the arguments for and against it. As we will see, there is more than one notion of realism in circulation, and different ways of defending these different realisms, as well as different arguments against realism.

**Metaphysical Realism**

Michael Devitt distinguishes between three doctrines of realism:

**Weak, or Fig-Leaf, Realism:** Something objectively exists independently of the mental.

**Common-Sense Realism:** Tokens of most current observable common-sense and scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental.

**Scientific Realism:** Tokens of most current unobservable scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental.³

These three doctrines of realism are distinguished by what they say exists. Weak realism asserts the existence merely of something, we know not what, perhaps a sort of Kantian noumenal world. Common-Sense realism asserts the existence of the medium-sized objects of ordinary experience, e.g., tables, trees and dogs. Scientific realism asserts the existence of such entities as atoms, quarks, gluons, muons, fields, forces and the other exotic stuff of atomic and sub-atomic physics, i.e., objects that cannot be perceived directly by the senses. Some of the objects of scientific-realism may even be unperceivable in principle by humans.

What makes all three of these different doctrines versions of realism is their

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positing of something existing independently of human conceiving. Realism generally, on this approach, is the view that something exists in such a way that its existence is not dependent on the activity of any conceiver. Put another way, it is the view that what the world is like is not a function of the way conceivers take it to be. This is a metaphysical view of realism; it is a doctrine about what reality is like. It is this metaphysical doctrine of realism that will be our chief concern.

Dummett’s Semantic Realism

As indicated earlier, there are other notions of realism, some of which are non-metaphysical. The most widely held non-metaphysical notion of realism in circulation is that of Michael Dummett. Let’s look briefly at what Dummett says about realism.

Dummett has stated that “the whole point of my approach to these problems has been to show that the theory of meaning underlies metaphysics. If I have made any worthwhile contribution to philosophy, I think it must lie in having raised this issue in these terms.” 4 Dummett has, as much as any philosopher can be said to, taken the “linguistic turn.” Consequently, he states the doctrine of realism accordingly:

I shall take as my preferred characterisation of a dispute between realists and anti-realists one which represents it as relating, not to a class of entities or a class of terms, but to a class of statements, which may be, e.g., statements about the physical world, statements about mental events, processes or states, mathematical statements, statements in the past tense, statements in the future tense, etc. This class I shall, from now on, term ‘the disputed class’. Realism I characterise as the belief that statements of the disputed class possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a

This characterization of realism looks for all purposes like a bit of semantic theory. It seems to be a view about the nature of the truth values held by some particular kinds of sentences. If we hold to the metaphysical doctrine of realism, we might be justified in thinking that Dummett is just not talking about the same thing as we are, that he has changed the subject, or, at the very least, that he holds a different concept of realism than, say, Devitt. In this case, substantive disputes between Dummett and others may be impeded by verbal disagreement over what is to count as the doctrine in dispute.

This would, perhaps, be too quick, for Dummett claims that he is indeed talking about the metaphysical doctrine of realism. He describes realism as the view that certain of our statements are about “an objective reality existing independently of ourselves.”6 Realist claims are “ontological.”7 Realism is opposed to phenomenalism and idealism.8 This suggests that Dummett is indeed talking about the metaphysical doctrine of realism as Devitt understands this doctrine. Perhaps the difference between Dummett and Devitt is not in terms of the doctrine of realism per se, but rather the choice of method for dealing with metaphysical problems. Let’s look at what motivates Dummett’s semantic method for dealing with metaphysical problems.

Dummett has two reasons for employing a linguistic method as a way of dealing with metaphysical issues. First, when we employ traditional metaphysical approaches,

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6Ibid., 146.
7Ibid., 228.
8Ibid., 230.
9Ibid., 145, 147.
we find eventually that,

We don’t know how to resolve these disputes. The moves and counter-moves are already familiar, having been made repeatedly by philosophers on either side throughout the centuries. The arguments of one side evoke a response in certain of the spectators of the contest, those of the other side sway others of them; but we have no criterion to decide the victors. No knock-out blow has been delivered. The decision must be given on points and we do not know how to award points.  

Dummett’s view is not that metaphysical strategies for solving philosophical problems have failed to produce results. Quite the contrary; they have lead to an abundance of results, most all of which are now well-known. Consequently, philosophers have taken up sides, each defending their respective positions by means of now familiar moves and counter-moves. The problem is that we do not seem to have any way of deciding who are the winners and losers. We lack a sufficient criterion for what will count as a correct conclusion. Since neither side seems to have effected a clear knock-out blow, using the analogy of a boxing match, the winner must be decided by points. Dummett’s claim is that we have no criterion for deciding how to award points.

What does it mean to say that we don’t know how to award points? This is subject to more than one interpretation. On one reading, it amounts to the claim that we do not know what to count as a virtue for some theory and what to count as a liability. This is not a good interpretation. There are numerous criteria in circulation for determining the virtues and liabilities of a theory, such as principles of parsimony, e.g., Occam’s razor, Quine’s maxim of minimum mutilation, pragmatic considerations as to whether the theory does the work one intends it to, logical considerations of probability, possibility, etc.,

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evidential considerations, and so on. If anything, we have an over-abundance of criteria for determining the virtues and liabilities of a theory. It seems just wrong to say that we do not know how to award points owing to a lack of criteria. This makes the problem an epistemic one, a failure to have knowledge of criteria and how to employ them. This seems to be plainly false.

Another, more plausible view, is that we don't know how to award points because we have no way of settling on criteria for the goodness of a theory that will be acceptable to every party in the debate. The idea here is that, for any criterion we might adopt, there will always be some party that will dispute the choice of that particular criterion. The problem, according to this view, is not epistemic; it is not that we lack knowledge of various criteria and how to use them. Rather, the problem of deciding on correct criteria is itself, perhaps, yet another metaphysical problem, and so will be subject to dispute just like other metaphysical problems. If this is what Dummett is claiming, and this may be an overly-generous reading of Dummett, what he needs to show is, first, that the choice of criteria is itself a metaphysical, rather than some other sort of problem, and second, that such criteria are, in principle, unobtainable.

Let's grant, for purposes of argument, that the problem is indeed metaphysical, and not just epistemic or semantic. The problem with Dummett's reasoning is that we do not find an argument that it is, in principle, not possible to arrive at such criteria. He instead appeals to historical failures to arrive at such criteria. But philosophers have been making this sort of claim for perhaps as long as their have been philosophers. The length of time the disputes have been going on is irrelevant. One can easily imagine students
at the Lyceum complaining about how they are still arguing over the same old problems Socrates worried about, with no end in sight. Although Dummett may well be right that we still lack the needed criterion, short of showing that we cannot in principle have such a criterion, this argument will fail to convince.\(^{10}\)

Dummett’s second reason for employing a linguistic method in dealing with metaphysical problems is that,

metaphysical questions are formulated in terms of the appropriate picture of the reality to which our statements relate: the picture of an objective disposition of matter within space-time, existing in supreme indifference to us and the way it impinges on us, as against the picture of a world of sense perceptions, out of which we construct the material universe as a representation of their complicated regularities.\(^{11}\)

Each particular metaphysical theory, on this view, employs a different “picture” and so reaches a different view. The problem is that the proponents of these positions “debate in favour of one or other of these competing pictures as if they were rival hypotheses to be supported by evidence.”\(^{12}\) Dummett thinks this is just the wrong approach: “what we need to do is formulate theses which are no longer in pictorial language but which embody the intended applications of these pictures.”\(^{13}\) His suggestion is that once we do

\(^{10}\)It is just this sort of principled argument that Moser mounts against realism. Namely, Moser’s argument is one that aims to show that we cannot have non-questionbegging grounds for justifying any claims of metaphysical knowledge. His argument does not show that we cannot have metaphysical knowledge. Rather, the issue is that we have no way of determining, in a manner that does not beg any questions against certain forms of skepticism, when we are in possession of such knowledge. See Moser, *Philosophy After Objectivity*, 27.

\(^{11}\)Dummett, *Logical Basis*, 338.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., 339.

\(^{13}\)Ibid.
this we will see that such theses belong to one or another theory of meaning. Consequently, "when we have resolved the issue about the correct meaning-theory, then we shall surely find that one or another of the rival pictures will force itself on us, unless it proves that we want to reject all the competing pictures."^{14}

Why should we agree with Dummett that realism is (necessarily?) merely "pictorial"? Dummett does not appear to have any argument for this view. And why should we think realism is any more pictorial than any other philosophical position? Does Dummett think that all philosophers who discuss and dispute such views are making no theoretical claims whatsoever? This seems highly implausible, for, as we will see in a discussion of Putnam, there does seem to be sufficient cognitive content to realism, contrary to what some philosophers have said. But let's grant, at least for the sake of argument, that metaphysical propositions are merely pictorial and harmfully so in the way he says. Let's look at Dummett's suggestion for expunging the pictures and making realism into a thesis with some cognitive content.

Dummett's solution is to interpret metaphysical theses such that they become semantic theses. We then see a possible way of resolving metaphysical disputes, namely, by embracing a particular theory of meaning. But if this is to be the approach, why should we think that theories of meaning are themselves any less pictorial than metaphysical theories? Dummett seems to think that arriving at the correct theory of meaning will be unproblematic. Why is this?

For Dummett, the way to arrive at the correct theory of meaning is to embrace

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^{14}Ibid.
both pragmatism and verificationism: "if the demand for stability is acknowledged to be just, verificationist and pragmatist meaning-theories are not genuine rivals but complementary aspects of a single enterprise which alone can fully describe the working of that most profound of all human creations, language."

The pragmatic component is relatively unproblematic; it requires that we "derive, from the content of a statement, as determined by its consequences, what is to count as verifying it." It is the verification condition that is problematic.

Dummett is no crass verificationist, for, as he says, "a verificationist theory cannot crudely identify the truth of a statement with its having been verified, on pain of being unable to recognize quite simple reasoning as valid." The task is that "it must explain truth as attaching to a statement in some such way as that it does so when the statement either has or could have been verified." So far so good, but next he says:

Whatever the correct formulation should be, the resulting notion of truth will not be subject to the principle of bivalence. It was precisely the observation that the language contains sentences for which we have no ground for assuming that they will, or even can, be either verified or falsified that provided one reason for overthrowing the truth-conditional meaning-theory.

So, in order to maintain the verificationist part of the correct meaning theory we must give up bivalence. This does not, however, necessitate giving up logic altogether,

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15 Ibid., 321.
16 Ibid., 320.
17 Ibid., 318.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
according to Dummett. Rather, we “must hold that reality is in some degree indeterminate...[that] reality itself is indeterminate; it has gaps, much as a novel has gaps, in that there are questions about the characters to which the novel provides no answers, and to which there therefore are no answers.” Dummett has now arrived at the position that reality itself is indeterminate, and he does not, apparently, mean by this that reality is as the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics says it is. Rather, the claim is that there are “gaps” in reality itself, and not just in our explanations of reality.

How are we to think of this in anything other than pictorial terms? What could it possibly mean to say that reality has gaps? Dummett suggests that,

A verificationist might be able to fashion a semantics of possible worlds—alternative plenary descriptions of reality, relative to each of which bivalence holds—attributing to each speaker a conception of what it is for any given statement to be true in any one such world. If he interprets the logical constants as obeying the two-valued semantics relatively to each world, he will obtain a classical logic; but he may still identify assertibility (absolute truth) with truth in all worlds, so that bivalence will fail and reality will still have gaps.21

Dummett’s suggestion here is to identify the gaps with the denial of the principle of bivalence. On this view, to say that reality has gaps is just to say that there are more than two truth-values. The way to do this is to construct a semantics of possible worlds such that truth obtains relative to each particular world, and bivalence fails for statements about all worlds. There are, however, two problems with this approach. First, identifying the gaps with bivalence would make them merely semantic rather than features of the

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20Ibid.
21Ibid., 319.
world. This would, of course, make them less pictorial, but Dummett insists that the gaps are features of the world, and not merely of logical or semantic systems. Second, it is only at the level of statements about all possible worlds that gaps occur, and not in any particular world. This would seem to imply that, in order for any particular world to have gaps, all of them must, in some sense, be real. In other words, Dummett must embrace modal realism, a view that one imagines he would find quite abhorrent.

The upshot of all of this is that Dummett seems not to escape the charge of relying on pictures rather than theories any better than does the realist. Whereas it does seem that we can make sufficient cognitive sense of realism, it is not at all obvious that equally good cognitive sense can be made of the idea that reality has gaps and that we must abandon the principle of bivalence. Realism would thus seem to remain unharmed by Dummett’s attack. Let’s turn next to Putnam’s challenge to realism.

**The Incoherence Argument Against Realism**

Some philosophers have argued that the very idea of realism, construed as a metaphysical doctrine, is incoherent. On this view we can dismiss realism as a viable philosophical position on semantic grounds: it can’t be made good sense of, so we have no clear idea what it is that it asks us to affirm. One of the chief exponents of the incoherence argument against realism is Hilary Putnam.

Putnam finds that a useful way of viewing the philosophical debate over realism and anti-realism is by analogy with the debate over the correct interpretation of the theory of quantum mechanics. According to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, “any application of the theory requires that, in addition to the ‘system’ being
talked about, there be 'apparatus' or an 'observer' which is not included in the system."\textsuperscript{22}

The point here is that quantum mechanical descriptions, unlike classical mechanical ones, make essential reference to some observer or apparatus. Such descriptions do not capture the observer-neutral properties of the system. Rather, quantum mechanical descriptions capture only observer-dependent properties; observer-neutral properties, if we can meaningfully say there are such things, are inaccessible to quantum mechanical description. According to this view "every property of the system is considered to have meaning and existence only in relation to a particular measuring apparatus in a particular experimental situation."\textsuperscript{23} Such claims might be taken as an endorsement of idealism, or perhaps phenomenalism. Putnam does, however, allow that there is something observed, even if all our knowledge of it is observer-dependent. This something is not completely malleable, and resists our efforts to shape it as we will.\textsuperscript{24}


\textsuperscript{23}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24}Putnam allows here for an intelligible notion of mind-independent reality, while maintaining that any specific claims about the nature of such reality are meaningless. If the idea of a "limit concept" is intelligible, then it seems possible that we can have such concepts, and yet be unable to make any claims about what such concepts denote. For example, I have a concept of the edge of the physical universe. Yet it seems possible to hold that it makes no sense to talk about what is or is not on the other side of the edge of the physical universe. If there is something on the other side, then it must itself be part of the universe, since my concept 'universe' is that it contains everything. If there is nothing on the other side, then in what sense is there an edge to the universe? This appears to be a case of my having an admittedly "slim" concept of something about which I am unable to predicate any meaningful claims. The notion of a malleable, yet unknown, reality is this sort of concept. It is intelligible, but it isn't enough to support realism.
Putnam draws two implications from this view of quantum mechanics which have a bearing on philosophy. First, "in principle, then, there is no 'quantum mechanical theory of the whole universe'." This is so because of the necessary reference to some observer, himself always excluded from the system being described. Second, there is no "picture of the universe which is so complete that it actually includes the theorist-observer in the act of picturing the universe," i.e., no "'God's-Eye View' of the whole universe." The longing for just such a view is what prompted Einstein's response to the Copenhagen interpretation and John Wheeler's "many worlds" interpretation. Putnam uses these implications of the Copenhagen interpretation to recast the debate over realism as the debate over the possibility of an observer-neutral description of the world. On this construal those who subscribe to the Copenhagen interpretation are anti-realists, (or at least non-realist), while those who hold out for an observer-neutral description are realists.

Putnam concludes that, given this way of casting the problem, realism as the view that something is conceiver-independent, must be abandoned. The notion of a "cut between the observer and the system" can be formulated "by saying that the observer can take as large a totality as he wishes as the system (excluding totalities which include himself in the act of performing the measurement), but that he himself (or at least part

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25Ibid., 4.

26Ibid., 5.

27Ibid., 6–8.
of himself) must always lie outside the system." This formulation highlights the role of the conceiver in the very concept of reality, or as Putnam puts it, the relationship between system and observer. Putnam's own view, "internal realism," is the view that the very idea of reality necessarily includes some notion of conceiver-dependence on pain of being unintelligible. According to Putnam, there is in all our representations of the world a necessary reference to some observer, himself not an element of the world described. Consequently, all our representations of the world are of the world as it is for some observer, and not of the world as it is conceiver-independently.

What should we make of Putnam's talk of a "God's eye view?" The realist can admit, with no problem whatsoever, that all our representations are perspectival. Indeed, it is difficult to even imagine what non-perspectival representation would actually be like. Why should we think that it follows from this that perspectival representations cannot be of reality as it is independent of any conceivers? Furthermore, why should we think that realism requires a complete and total representation of the world, a representation that includes the conceiver within the description, something Putnam says cannot be done?

Contrary to what Putnam says, we can have representations of conceiver-independent reality that do not require a "God's eye view." Here is how to have them. Consider your concept of 'horses'. This complex concept will perhaps include component concepts such as 'mammal', 'four-leggedness', 'suitable for riding by humans', 'carriage-drawing' and 'whinnying'. You may have acquired these concepts by various means, e.g., reading about horses, seeing pictures of horses, hearing stories about horses, etc.

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28 Ibid., 17.
Let's grant that all of this conceptual information derives, at some point, from acquaintance with horses or pictures and descriptions of horses. Now in order to have a conceiver-independent concept of horses simply take this concept and consider it as applying to horses regardless of any human conceiver's conception of horses. In other words, imagine that horses are the way you actually do conceive of them perspectively even though there are no conceivers present. Imagine, for instance, that horses as we conceive of them now were just like this prior to the evolution of human beings. This concept of 'horse' will now have all the content it needs in order to count as a legitimate concept, but will make no essential reference to a conceiver. The realist will also maintain that, although such representations are perspectival, it is nonetheless a representation of conceiver-independent reality. If this concept is intelligible, and has the content it seems to have, then it seems that we can have concepts of conceiver-independent objects, and Putnam is either mistaken, or he just fails to have the same sort of concepts.

If this is correct, Putnam's objection to realism can be overcome. But let's take a critical look at Putnam's alternative view to realism—internal realism. Putnam can be understood as subscribing to the following thesis:

 IR: All our representations of some object X are of X-as-conceived, and not of X as it is independent of any conceiver.\(^{29}\)

IR accurately states what is essential to internal realism. It directly challenges the very possibility of realism. It allows the realist his notion of a conceiver-independent reality, but prohibits him from making any claims about such a reality. IR is not merely the claim that all representations of the world are representations for some representor. It is trivially true that if there are any representations then there is some representor. Internal realism asserts the non-trivial claim that there are no intelligible representations of the world thought of as conceiver-independent. IR is also broad enough to capture Putnam’s view of our representations of our own language.

One problem for IR stems from the analogy with quantum mechanics. The lesson Putnam draws from quantum mechanics is that all representations of quantum mechanical objects make essential reference to some observer. This is not necessarily true. Surely we can imagine a physicist forming a representation of a quantum mechanical object whirling about a particle accelerator while nobody is watching. What we, perhaps, cannot represent is that we could have any knowledge of unobserved quantum particles. This, however, is an epistemic issue that is distinct from the issue of how we form representations. The former is concerned with evidence and truth conditions; the latter is concerned with conceptualization and imaginability.

As has been shown, we seem able to form representations of objects as they are in themselves, unobserved by any conceiver. This requires only that we distinguish between the what some concept of something may be relative to for its meaning, and the object referred to by the concept. The relativity of objects to something, e.g., a conceiver or a language, does not follow from the relativity of the concept to something for its
meaning. By keeping this distinction clear, the intelligibility of realism is preserved. The lesson here is that there is no semantic shortcut to anti-realism. We can meaningfully assert the thesis of realism without threat of unintelligibility. If there is a good argument against realism it must at least presume the intelligibility of realism. Moser’s argument, which we shall look at next, grants the intelligibility of realism, and attempts to undermine it by appeal to some of its own assumptions, or at least assumptions that any realist ought to accept.

Moser’s Argument Against Realism

Paul Moser has constructed an argument aiming to show that “if we demand support for our beliefs from agnostic-resistant non-questionbegging epistemic reasons, then we should withhold judgement on the truth of both ontological realism and ontological idealism about objects and essences.” Failure to employ non-questionbegging reasons on the part of the realist will result in a failure to persuade certain skeptics, since they will always have available the reasonable option of asking why anyone should accept question-begging reasons. After all, by using question-begging reasons one can defend any position. Consequently, Moser endorses philosophical agnosticism, the view that we should withhold from making judgements about metaphysical claims generally, if we aim to defend them against skeptical challenges.

Moser’s notion of ontological realism is what we have generally been calling

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30Mosé, Philosophy After Objectivity, 33–37.

31Ibid., 41.
realism. He contrasts ontological realism with ontological idealism so as to mark the
distinction between whether the objects a realist has concepts of are conceiver-
independent or conceiver-dependent. Ontological agnosticism is the view that *neither* of
these opposing positions can be affirmed. The argument is, thus, much more general than
an argument aimed just at realism. It is an argument aimed at *any* metaphysical claim
about the nature of reality as it is conceiver-independently. Idealism, as well as realism,
makes such claims, since idealism claims that reality is conceiver-dependent, and not
merely because we think it is. For the idealist, the fact that reality is conceiver-dependent
is not a fact about conceivers, but about reality itself. Both realism and idealism are, in
this sense, metaphysical views. The argument is not very long, although it has far-
reaching consequences, and is worth quoting in full:

1. *Ontological* knowledge, by definition, is knowledge of conceiving-
independent reality: for example, knowledge that a conceiving-independent
fact obtains, such as a conceiving-independent fact entailing the existence
of an essential property or a physical object.

2. Our *effectively* discerning (that is, discerning with non-questionbegging
evidence) that anyone, including ourselves, has knowledge of conceiving-
independent reality requires that we have *effective access to* conceiving-
independent reality: that is, access whose use is not a source of
questionbegging evidence regarding the pertinent questions concerning
whether one actually has knowledge of conceiving-independent reality.

3. Access to anything by spatio-temporally finite conceivers, such as
ourselves, depends on features or processes of conceivers—for example,
perception, memory, introspection, testimony, intuition, common-
sense—that are subject to *effectively unanswerable* questions about
whether they decisively influence or create what is accessed: in particular,
questions about whether their input conveys something that exists
independently of one’s conceiving of it.

4. Hence, spatio-temporally finite conceivers, such as ourselves, cannot, or
at least do not, have effective access to conceiving-independent reality.

5. Hence, we cannot effectively discern that we have ontological knowledge, even if we happen to have it.\(^\text{32}\)

If our aim is to have non-questionbegging reasons for metaphysical knowledge, then this argument shows that we should reject realism. It does not follow, however, that we should thereby embrace idealism, or any other anti-realist position, insofar as such positions require non-questionbegging reasons for support of their metaphysical claims. Moser’s argument supports a \textit{conditional agnosticism} about metaphysical knowledge claims. It is conditional in that it is aimed only at those who attempt to provide non-questionbegging support for their metaphysical claims. The argument does not claim that realism as a metaphysical position is incoherent. It allows for the intelligibility of the concept of realism. It is aimed instead at metaphysical claims by realists to know what the world is like. This will include the metaphysical claim that the world is such that it does contain conceiver-independent items. Although this claim does not specify in detail what such items are, or what features they have, it is a knowledge claim insofar as it claims to state what the conceiver-independent world is like.

Premise 1 gives a definition of what realists have typically understood by ontological knowledge. Although Moser calls this “ontological” knowledge, we could just as well call it “objective,” or “metaphysical” knowledge. Use of ‘ontological’ here designates knowledge of what there is. The argument will, however, cover more than just ontological knowledge. It covers any and all alleged knowledge of conceiver-independent

\(^{32}\)Ibid., 41–42.
reality, i.e., metaphysical knowledge generally. The distinction employed here is between ontological knowledge and metaphysical knowledge where the former is a subset of the latter. Ontological knowledge is knowledge having to do with the nature of being and issues of what there is. This need not exhaust all metaphysical knowledge. For example, metaphysical knowledge of the nature of causality can usefully be distinguished from ontology. As will be seen later, the term ‘ontology’ can usefully be employed to designate a subject of study that does not fall prey to Moser’s argument. The point here is just that, understood in this way, Moser’s argument is aimed at metaphysical knowledge generally.

Premise 2 sets a necessary requirement for our being able to determine, in a non-questionbegging and epistemically relevant way, when someone, ourselves included, has metaphysical knowledge. Notice, this is not a requirement for having metaphysical knowledge. The argument is not concerned with the issue of what epistemic conditions are required for having knowledge. Whatever those conditions are, this argument is intended to be neutral on that issue. The point at issue in premise 2 is whether we can determine if someone has metaphysical knowledge without appealing to question-begging evidence.

Premise 2 requires of the realist that, in order to effectively settle his claim to having metaphysical knowledge, he “produce a means of access to conceiving-independent reality that does not involve begging pertinent questions about whether that means of access is indeed a reliable, or (typically or even sometimes) successful, avenue
to conceiving-independent reality. "33 Keep in mind that premise 2 is not a requirement that we must know that we know; premise 2 does not require second-order knowledge in order to discern that there is first-order knowledge. The access in question need not necessarily itself be known by the knower.

This requirement is not, however, limited only to the realist. Premise 2 claims that anyone who would determine whether or not someone, themselves included, has objective knowledge requires this sort of non-questionbegging, epistemic access just in order to make such a determination. So, for example, we can imagine one sort of skeptic who argues that the realist lacks the required epistemic access. This skeptic must herself have such access, however, in order to make such claims in a non-questionbegging way. Moser's agnosticism aims to avoid this sort of skepticism. It takes the view that the agnostic need not have this access himself just in order to challenge the realist. The agnostic claims only that anyone who would claim to be able to discern whether someone does have such knowledge, requires such access. Consider, for example, two philosophers: N the non-realist, and R the realist. R claims to have objective knowledge; N challenges R's claim to objective knowledge on grounds that R lacks the required epistemic access. In order for N to effectively discern that R does not have objective knowledge, N herself is required to have such access. Otherwise N herself will be guilty of question-begging against the realist. The question is, what non-questionbegging reasons can N give in support of her claim that R does in fact not have the knowledge that he claims to have? And here N is herself caught in the same trap as R.

33Ibid., 42.
Premise 3 claims that all relevant epistemic access appears to be irredeemably suspect. It seems to be part of "the inescapable human cognitive predicament" that beings such as ourselves, i.e., spatio-temporal beings, are unable to have the required sort of access, because we have no non-questionbegging means of determining whether any access to anything at all does not affect what is accessed in an epistemically relevant way. In other words, given any particular sort of access, e.g., intuition, perception, etc., we apparently have no way to judge whether this access is reliable, for we require the very access in question in order to make such a determination. Consequently, if we did have the required access, we would, in virtue of having it, have a way of answering the skeptical questions regarding its reliability.

Imagine then that realist R claims to have access of type A to conceiver-independent reality. Skeptic S challenges R, asking him to give non-questionbegging reasons for his claim that A is in fact the sort of access that he R needs in order to have metaphysical knowledge. If R has access A then he must be able to give non-questionbegging reasons for his claim that A is the required sort of access, otherwise R could claim that any sort of access is sufficient to meet the challenge. The question is, can R give any non-questionbegging reasons for thinking that A is in fact an epistemically reliable means of access to conceiver-independent reality? Premise 3 says no, because justification of any such claim will be suspect on grounds that it itself requires the very access in question in order to give non-questionbegging reasons for the claim that A is in fact the required sort of access. But this just begs the very question at issue since R

34Ibid., 43.
is employing A in order to substantiate his claim that A has the required sort of reliability. This is clearly a circular strategy; it will fail utterly to convince the skeptic.

Consider the Snellen chart test for eyesight as an example of the problem involved here in testing the reliability of the access in question. The Snellen chart consists of various letters of various sizes correctly identifiable by the "normal eye" from a particular distance. The point, for purposes of the argument for agnosticism, is that, "the Snellen standard for normal vision is based loosely on an assumed statistical average concerning human visual perceivers, not on considerations purporting to indicate objective reliability of vision," and thus "we cannot presume the reliability of our vision to deliver non-questionbegging epistemic reasons in favor of the reliability of our vision." 35 The Snellen chart is used to test for whether some individual has average vision. 36 It is misguided to think that it does anything more than this. Premise 3, argues for the general claim that we have no such reliable access to anything.

Premise 4 is entailed by premise 3. If we have no reliable access to anything, then we have no reliable access to conceiver-independent reality. Hence, we conclude from premise 4 that we have no non-questionbegging way of determining that we have

35Ibid., 45.

36There are, of course, other reasons for taking a Snellen test. One may just wish to see better than one currently does. One would then take a Snellen test for purposes of obtaining corrective lenses. This is, of course, a good reason for taking the test, but such reasons are irrelevant for purposes of the present argument. Furthermore, it doesn't follow that because one can see better with corrective lenses, prescribed on the basis of results from a Snellen test, that one is therefore seeing what there "really" is in some conceiver-independent manner. There are no metaphysical eye-glasses that can provide the required access to conceiver-independent reality.
metaphysical knowledge, even if we do in fact happen to have such knowledge. The argument shows that we have no non-questionbegging reasons for claiming that we have metaphysical knowledge, even we have such knowledge. Thus, Moser’s agnosticism is the view that we should avoid making claims of having metaphysical knowledge since we have no non-questionbegging way of discerning that we do have such knowledge.

A pressing question for agnosticism is whether Moser himself is making a claim to have metaphysical knowledge. Premise 3 appears to be a claim about what certain perceivers are really like. In particular, it appears to claim that as spatio-temporal conceivers we cannot have the required sort of non-questionbegging access to anything. The issue facing premise 3 is whether it makes a claim to know what spatio-temporal conceivers are really like. If it does, then in order to affirm it we require the same sort of access mentioned in premise 2. But if this is the case, then the argument collapses, since the argument aims to show that precisely this sort of access in unavailable.

This objection overlooks an old and forceful reductio strategy practiced by Pyrrhonian skeptics:

An agnostic’s reductio strategy claims that on assumptions made by typical realists, we cannot have an effective challenge to, or defense against, agnosticism about realism. Given such a strategy, an agnostic need not countenance ontological knowledge to challenge such knowledge. An agnostic can consistently hold that, on typical realist (defining) criteria for justification, we are justified in endorsing the premises of the previous agnostic argument. The reductio strategy does not entail (or otherwise indicate) that the realist criteria in question are suitably effective, or non-questionbegging, as an avenue to ontological knowledge. An agnostic thus has plenty of room to escape the threatening inconsistency.37

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37 Ibid., 50.
The agnostic need not make metaphysical claims himself in order to run a convincing argument against the realist. The questionable premise(s) are laid down as what would be acceptable to a realist on his own terms, thus, it is the realist who accepts the premise(s) in question. This sort of agnosticism is plausible and can be consistently maintained, even though it itself lacks the required epistemic access. It can challenge the realist on his own terms without thereby succumbing to a counter-challenge. Agnostics merely employ as one of the steps in the argument a condition that the realist must accept; agnostics themselves need not accept this condition as applying to their own position, for they

can consistently offer neither a claim to the reliability of reductio inferences nor a claim to the meaningfulness of an agnostic truth-claim about which someone might be agnostic. Still, they can issue challenges that one conceptually cannot meet. Even if these challenges (semantically or pragmatically) "presuppose" certain claims, agnostics need not make any unconditional commitment to the truth of what is thereby presupposed; they need not grant that presuppositions are objectively true or otherwise favorable to the cause of realism. Agnostics can consistently proceed just "for the sake of challenge."

The point is that agnostics need not be committed even to the truth of their own arguments, since they are not affirming any positive claims about the nature of conceivel-independent reality. Agnostics can successfully offer challenges to the realist who then has two alternatives: one, show that the challenge can be met by refuting or posing successful objections to the argument, or two, refuse to respond to the argument. If the realist can successfully rebut the agnostic's argument, the possibility of the truth of his own position is preserved. Taking the second strategy will always leave the realist open to charges of appealing to question-begging assumptions from the agnostic. At the very

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38 Ibid., 56.
least, the realist who appeals to these sorts of assumptions ought, at least for the sake of intellectual honesty, to make explicit that he is in fact begging questions against the skeptic. What is important for the present point, however, is that the agnostic need nowhere affirm the truth of his own premises just in order to make the argument militate against the realist.

Failure to recognize the validity of this strategy is perhaps what motivates a facile rejection of skepticism as being self-refuting. Such objections assert that the skeptic is caught in a self-contradiction due to his use of claims in an argument that are inconsistent with his own position. The problem with this strategy is that it assumes that the person using the argument must himself grant its validity. This is not a required assumption. The force of this argumentative strategy is just that it requires only that the person to whom the argument is directed accept the premises. In this sense, it is a kind of *ad hominem* argument, although not merely *ad hominem*. So long as the realist to whom the argument is directed accepts the premises, then the argument will carry sufficient weight against realism. The person stating the argument is under no obligation to accept the argument unless he too employs a position against which the argument is directed, e.g., an idealist running an argument against a realist. Since Moser is an agnostic, in the strictly qualified sense, he need not be compelled to accept any of the assumptions of this argument as militating against his own position. This sort of agnosticism hoists the realist on his own petard, leaving the agnostic untouched. It is as if the agnostic has gathered together various components from among the realist's own store, combined them in a particular way, and then offered them back to the realist.
The realist may, after being confronted with this argument and its outcome, perhaps take the view that the entire argument can be rejected on grounds that it leads to an implausible skepticism. Michael Devitt, for example, says that "scepticism is simply uninteresting; it throws the baby out with the bath water." But as Moser points out, "one pressing question is whether realists actually have a real baby—that is, effectively supportable ontological knowledge—to throw out." Roderick Chisholm, on the other hand, in discussing the problem of the criterion, begins with the "commonsense conviction that there are things that I know—such things as the fact that at this moment I am in a room with other people." Since there are things, on Chisholm's view, that are known, then it must at least be possible to give some account of knowledge. The problem with Chisholm's strategy is that it does not properly challenge the kind of agnosticism we have been discussing. The kind of agnosticism described does not say that we cannot have knowledge. It also does not claim that we cannot know anything about our sensory experiences. Furthermore, it does not prohibit meaningful theorizing about the nature of knowledge. It is aimed only at knowledge of conceiver-independent reality. Unless one takes the view that knowledge must be of conceiver-independent reality, this sort of objection from Chisholm is misplaced. It is only the realist (as well as the idealist) who is challenged, and not the project of epistemology generally.

39 Devitt, Realism and Truth, 75.

40 Moser, Philosophy After Objectivity, 46.

If the argument for agnosticism is good, and it does appear to be so, then non-questionbegging claims to metaphysical knowledge must go by the board. Of course, we may yet be in possession of such knowledge, for the argument does not show that we are incapable of having such knowledge. The argument shows only that we cannot ever objectively verify that we are in possession of it. Hence, it is a moot point to maintain that we can still have such knowledge, for such having in the absence of verification will provide scant comfort to the metaphysically inclined. But before we leave realism behind, let's look at Michael Devitt's strategy for saving realism. He claims to have an "inference to the best explanation" style argument for realism. Let's look at Devitt's defense of realism to see if it can escape Moser's agnosticism.

**Devitt's Argument for Realism**

Devitt's positive argument for realism is as follows:

1) My perceptual experiences of common-sense objects are of the sort: "it is as if there is a blue cup in front of me."

2) What is the best explanation of 1?

3) The best explanation of 1 is that there is a blue cup in front of me.

4) Therefore, realism is correct.42

Premise 1 aims to capture what it is like to have an experience of a common-sense object, rendered in such a way so as not to presuppose the existence of the object. Premise 2 calls for the "best explanation" of 1. Premise 3 gives us the answer to 2, i.e., realism about blue cups, thus providing support for realism generally.

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42Devitt *Realism and Truth*, 74-75.
Devitt calls the argument an “inference to the best explanation.” He seems occasionally willing, however, to settle for a merely “good” explanation. Although the criterion for a best explanation can plausibly be considered to be higher than that for a merely good explanation, let’s not quarrel with that issue. The argument is not, however, without problems.

First of all, not all of one’s perceptual experiences of common-sense objects are equally well explained by realism. For example, perceptual experiences of apparent puddles of water on the road are not always explained by there being water on the road. One may, in fact, be having a sensory illusion. Nevertheless, puddles of water surely count as common-sense objects. It may be that the sensory illusion has external causes of the sort specified by realism, namely, physical heat waves causing one’s retinas to be irradiated in a certain way. One may be unable, however, to infer the existence of these sorts of causes just from perceptual experience alone. It takes experimental investigation and a good portion of scientific theory to affirm a good explanation of illusory perceptual experiences. In cases of illusion then, the explanation is not inferred as directly as Devitt seems to imply.

Assuming, however, that we can say what will count as the appropriate common-sense objects, a more pressing problem threatens. We can reasonably ask of Devitt, what will count as a good explanation of our experiences of common-sense objects? If something is a good explanation for our experiences of common-sense objects, there must

\[ \text{43Ibid., 74, my emphasis.} \]

\[ \text{44Ibid., 74–75.} \]
be some reason why it is good and not bad, some criterion whereby we can affirm the goodness or badness of various explanations. Notice, this is different from the question of what is meant by the term ‘good’. We can assume that the term ‘good’ means something like, ‘theoretically or cognitively useful,’ or any other notion of ‘good’ that Devitt might want to propose. The question is rather one concerning the reasons for thinking that some explanation is good, whatever Devitt might happen to mean by the term ‘good’. Furthermore, we aren’t asking for a general criterion for abduction, one that will do for any and all cases of abduction. The criterion we are seeking is one for this particular abduction; one that will enable us to say when we have a good explanation of our experiences of common-sense objects.

The question then is this: in virtue of what is realism itself a good explanation? Or, asking the question posed earlier, on what criterion does realism count as a good explanation of our experiences of common-sense objects? The only reasons for thinking that realism is a good explanation of these experiences all make assumptions about such things as the nature of physical entities, light waves and the irradiation of retinas, nerves and nerve impulses, etc. In other words, assuming the scientific views about how we form impressions of apparent common-sense objects, realism is a good explanation. It is good because it best satisfies the constraints put on good explanations by scientific views about how we perceive common-sense objects. And those scientific views employ theories about light waves, physiology, nervous systems, etc. Thus, realism is a good explanation in virtue of various scientific theories about perception, visual imaging, etc., and all the other factors involved in what we take to be a correct account of our sensory
Devitt admits up front that the argument for realism "starts from folk theory and scientific theory." 45 This starting point is, specifically, an assumption about the entities posited by these theories: "These theories posit many observable physical entities. By and large we are confident of these posits." 46 What is assumed here is the entities posited by science. This is something quite different from the theories explaining the nature, behavior and interactions describing these entities. But it is just such theories that Devitt must assume in order to get the needed criterion, since mere posits alone are insufficient for determining a criterion of goodness for realism. For it is these very posits that are in need of the explanation that realism purportedly supplies. What is problematic is that the theories he needs to assume that supply the criterion of goodness about which we are inquiring are theories that constitute, at least in part, a "naturalized epistemology." In other words, assuming at least a portion of naturalized epistemology as the criterion for goodness of explanation, realism is a good explanation of our experiences of common-sense objects.

Naturalized epistemology, for Devitt, is the "scientific explanation of our knowing science." 47 It is composed of "a descriptive part and a normative part. The descriptive part explains how, as a matter of fact, we form our opinions. The normative part

45Ibid., 73.

46Ibid.

47Ibid., 76.
explains what makes these opinions knowledge (in so far as they are)."48 The first part is "a psychological task....It is simply descriptive of how people do infer and form beliefs."49 The normative part addresses the question of how we "should infer and form beliefs."50 So far, this is Quine's program, as Devitt admits, but with the exception that "this normative part of the task seems to be a departure from Quine, who thinks that all epistemology is psychology."51

The naturalized view of how we do infer and form beliefs will employ scientific notions of how retinas are irradiated, how the retinal image is converted and transported through the optic nerve to the brain, etc. If realism is to count as a good explanation of our experiences of common-sense objects, it seems these sorts of theories must be assumed. For example, the mere existence of trees is not sufficient explanation of why some of my perceptions have the particular qualities they have of browning, leafiness, woodiness, etc. We require some theory of how trees contribute to my perceptions of them, one that takes into consideration such factors as the transmission of light waves and the irradiation of my retina, etc. Since these theories constitute a part of a naturalized epistemology, Devitt must already assume portions of naturalized epistemology in order for realism to count as a good explanation of our experiences of common-sense objects.

Devitt urges, however, in his Maxim 3, that we "settle the realism issue before

48Ibid.
49Ibid., 77.
50Ibid.
51Ibid.
any epistemic or semantic issue." Maxim 3 does allow that realism has some minimal semantic and epistemic content, for the two cannot be entirely separated. What it urges is twofold: first, qua metaphysical thesis, the truth of realism ought to be decided on metaphysical rather than epistemic or semantic grounds, and second, we ought to decide the truth of realism without having to first settle any substantive semantic or epistemic questions. Devitt has in mind here the strategy of someone like Dummett, for example, who thinks that metaphysical problems generally can only be solved by employing a theory of meaning. The problem for Devitt is that, by appealing to the portions of naturalized epistemology just discussed in order to explain why realism is a good explanation of much of our common-sense experience, it looks as though he must abandon Maxim 3 in order to answer the question being posed, for surely the amount of naturalized epistemology that needs to be assumed is substantial. Suppose, however, that we abandon Maxim 3—will the argument then go through?

If we make this move, and employ a naturalized epistemology as the needed criterion of goodness, then a further question can be raised: why should we use naturalized epistemology as the needed criterion, rather than, say, a non-naturalized epistemology? That is, we will want an argument for why we should accept a naturalized epistemology as the required criterion. And Devitt does provide just such an argument, even claiming at one point that the "positive argument for realism...requires that epistemology be naturalized." Devitt's argument for naturalizing epistemology,

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52 Ibid., 5.

53 Ibid., 61.
takes science, and hence its posits pretty much for granted. And an obvious starting assumption is the aforementioned one that these posits exist objectively and independently of the mental. So it approaches epistemology from a Realist standpoint; it is in accord with Maxim 3.\textsuperscript{54}

We might of course reasonably wonder just which science is to be employed here. But let's just assume for the sake of argument that it is our current "best science," however that is decided. The argument for naturalized epistemology now appears to assume realism at the outset. We see now that the specifics of the argument for naturalizing epistemology are irrelevant, since if Devitt must assume naturalized epistemology in order to argue for realism he is caught in a circle. Specifically, he seems to argue that,

1) The argument for realism is correct, given a naturalized epistemology, and

2) The argument for naturalized epistemology is correct, given realism.

Clearly, this strategy will fail to convince, since no circular strategy will convince either the skeptic, or a theorist employing a different circle. Devitt might, however, make the following reply. Some scientific theories are indeed assumed as the criterion whereby realism is a good explanation of our experiences of apparent common-sense objects. A naturalized epistemology might make use of these same theories. It does not follow, however, that since naturalized epistemology assumes realism that the argument for realism is thereby circular. It would only be circular if these theories are assumed by realism in their role as part of a naturalized epistemology. If they are not serving such a role, then the argument is not circular. We can employ such theories in their non-epistemic roles, and thereby avoid the charge of circularity.

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 76.
On the contrary, the theories in question are being employed in an epistemic way. What makes such scientific theories seem like plausible candidates for the needed criterion is the assumption that they do in fact describe our cognitive access to the external world, and such cognitive access is precisely that feature of these theories that is exploited by naturalized epistemology. Considering these theories on a purely ontological level, there is no reason why such theories would, or even could, serve as the needed criterion. For why should we think that, ontologically, an external object is anything at all like our experience of it? It seems quite possible that external objects could be quite different from how we perceive them, and that because of the consistency of our experience, together with the lack of anything neutral to our experience with which we can compare it, we assume that it is the way we perceive it. The reason why we assume that apparent blue cups resemble real blue cups is that we make some implicit assumptions about our cognitive access to real blue cups, e.g., assumptions about image-forming processes. For this reason, it seems that the needed scientific theories are serving just this epistemic role. For if they are not serving this epistemic role it is not at all clear how they could serve as the needed criterion.

Devitt does seem to be aware of the circle created by the interdependence of realism and naturalized epistemology. He admits that naturalized epistemology "approaches epistemology from a Realist standpoint; it is in accord with Maxim 3. However, naturalism does not prevent a reconsideration of realism." The

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55Ibid.
reconsideration appeals to the "Neurath's boat" metaphor as the way out of the circle.\textsuperscript{56} Having rejected "foundationalist and Kantian arguments for anti-realism," Devitt claims that "if there is a good argument against realism, it must be from the perspective of epistemology naturalized."\textsuperscript{57} If Devitt's intent here is to alleviate worries about a circle between realism and naturalized epistemology it isn't clear see how this requirement at the outset of his reconsideration of realism belays the worry of a threatening circle. Quite the contrary, it seems to reinstantiate it at the very outset. But, for the sake of argument, let's leave this point aside in order to look at how Devitt employ's Neurath's boat as a way of sailing out of the circle.

On a naturalized view, "science and common sense for the most part supply knowledge," and we cannot discard them altogether, "for they constitute the boat on which we must stay afloat."\textsuperscript{58} We can, however, use "some parts of the boat to look critically at others."\textsuperscript{59} So, "an anti-realist argument would show that the boat will float best without any realist planks."\textsuperscript{60} But immediately the anti-realist faces a problem, for, "the whole boat is built of realist planks."\textsuperscript{61} And how do we know this? Because, "We talk of stones, trees, and cats, not of sense data. Naturalized epistemology confirms that

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 79–80.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid.
these objects have the independence and objectivity that is definitive of common-sense realism. If anti-realism is to get started, our theory must be revised."\textsuperscript{62} Devitt then proceeds to argue that there are no good reasons for accepting a sense-datum theory, or any other alternative to realism about such objects. Consequently, realism "has no rivals that can be taken seriously."\textsuperscript{63}

This Neurathian boat metaphor needs some cashing out in order to do the work Devitt wants it to do. The intent of the metaphor is to show how we can we save knowledge from an infinite regress of inferential chains of justification. On a foundationalist view of justification these regresses come to an end at some point. Having rejected foundationalism—"The foundationalist programme is hopeless"—the boat metaphor aims to show that we do not need foundations of this sort, thus avoiding the infinite regress problem.\textsuperscript{64} We can, instead, employ a coherentist strategy whereby we justify parts of our knowledge by appeal to other parts, the whole project being justified by all of its individual parts cohering with each other.

We can, however, reasonably require of Devitt an answer to the following question: In virtue of what is it the case that coherence gives us justification of our scientific and common-sense beliefs? That is, in virtue of what is it true that our scientific and common-sense beliefs are justified in this way, and not some other? The aim of this question is not epistemic; it is not a question about how we can have good

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 79–80.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 71.
reasons for using coherence rather than some other principle of justification. The question does not seek a causal explanation of why some people do use coherence rather than some other means of justification. Rather, the question asks what makes it true that we must use coherentist styles of justification.\footnote{This question is similar to one that Paul Moser asks regarding some of Quine’s epistemic principles, e.g., the “maxim of minimum mutilation.” Since Devitt is subscribing to a Quinean sort of naturalized epistemology, the question is particularly apt. See Paul Moser, “Analyticity and Epistemology,” \textit{Dialectica} 46 (1992): 14–15.}

Devitt might reply here that scientific practice supports the use of coherence. That is, when we see how actual scientists theorize, we observe that they employ a criterion of coherence in decisions about what to accept as theoretically sound, what to reject as unsound, and what parts of existing theory to emend. Coherence as an epistemic principle is adopted on grounds that this is in fact the principle that is being used in practice by working scientists.

This strategy will not work, however, since, as Moser points out, “we can grant this proposal now, if only for the sake of argument, and then ask: In virtue of what is it true—or the case—that actual scientific practice constrains epistemically warranted theory revision?”\footnote{Moser, \textit{Philosophy After Objectivity}, 148.} This objection is not the same as the sort of objection that can be generated merely by asking “Why?” at each point in the argument. Afterall, there must be \textit{something} in virtue of which it is true that actual scientific practice constrains theory revision. The question is not meaningless, and so cannot be dismissed on grounds that we don’t understand it. The question could be ignored just on the more general grounds...
that Devitt uses of rejecting skepticism outright; recall his claim that scepticism “throws the baby out with the bath water.”  

But as we saw earlier, it is at least questionable as to whether the realist actually has a real baby. Furthermore, there is a possible answer to this question that will preclude any further why-style questions. As Moser suggests, it may just be analytically true for the naturalized epistemologist that coherence is epistemically justificatory. Analytic truths are not susceptible to why-style questions of the sort above, since for the person asserting such a truth it is just the case that the analytic truth expresses what is meant by the concept in question. To question these sorts of claims would be like asking questioning a tautology, e.g., why is it true that all apples are apples? The truth of these sorts of claims is just part of what is required in order to use the relevant terms of the language in the way that one uses them in some particular language. Why-style questions here are not substantive, but rather inquisitive about the nature of the language itself.

It seems doubtful, however, that Devitt will want to appeal to analyticity as justification of a principle so central to epistemic endeavors. Following Quine, he is willing only to “recognize the notion of analyticity in its obvious and useful but epistemologically insignificant applications.”  

Furthermore, although the appeal here is to analyticity, it still smacks of an a priori sort of solution, and, as we have already seen, Devitt will not stand for anything epistemological being decided a priori.  

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67 Devitt, Realism and Truth, 75.


69 Devitt, Realism and Truth, 73.
there is what would appear to be a satisfactory answer to this question, it does not seem to be one that Devitt would very likely employ. It looks then as though Devitt’s reconsideration is not helpful in extricating his position from a threatening circularity. Consequently, Devitt does not appear to have a viable strategy for avoiding the outcome of Moser’s argument for agnosticism. The question facing us now is, given this version of agnosticism, is there any work left to do for philosophers?

**Philosophical Agnosticism**

Metaphysical agnosticism shows that we can meaningfully discuss realist claims, but that we can no longer justify metaphysical knowledge claims with non-questionbegging reasons. What we can meaningfully talk about exceeds what is justifiable with non-questionbegging reasons. Agnosticism does not claim that philosophical talk is devoid of sense. Its aim rather is “to curb the philosophical pretensions of realists and idealists aspiring to challenge or to defend against agnostics.”

Philosophical agnosticism does not spell the end of philosophy as we know it. Rudolf Carnap, for example, took his own work to be neutral with respect to various realist views. He claims that, for his own theories, “the metaphysical components, concerned with whether the essence of the world is material or spiritual, are completely excluded from our consideration.” In chapter two develop a procedure will be

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70 Moser, *Philosophy After Objectivity*, 57.

developed for philosophical theorizing based on some work of Carnap’s and Quine’s that is agnostic about realism. This procedure can be used specifically to develop methods of doing ontology, although the resulting ontologies arrived at by such methods are non-realist.

This view will, no doubt, meet with the immediate objection that ontology is, by definition, realist. This is, of course, true, but it is only a problem if this is the only definition in circulation. The view that all ontology is, or at least ought to be, realist requires a defense stronger than the mere assertion that anything else doesn’t deserve to be called ontology. In fact, it is factually false that all previous ontology is realist. There are at least two notions of ontology that are non-realist. One of them is empirical and the other is rationalist. Let’s look briefly at each of them.

Non-Realist, Empirical Ontology

Throughout his career Carnap consistently maintains that the thesis of realism is a “pseudostatement, i.e., devoid of cognitive content.” On Carnap’s view, metaphysical theses generally, e.g., idealism, phenomenalism, dualism, materialism, all lack cognitive content. Early on in his career we find him claiming that he and the other members of the Vienna Circle “are not a philosophical school and that we put forward no philosophical theses whatsoever.” Consequently, the members of the Circle “pursue

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73 Carnap, “Physical Language,” 393.
logical analysis, but no philosophy." As late as his "Replies" in the Schilpp volume we find him remarking that he does "not know of any refutation or even a thorough critical discussion of my arguments." The arguments referred to here are from his *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*.

This position of treating metaphysical theses as lacking in cognitive content smacks of a verificationist theory of meaning. Since verificationism was one of the official doctrines of the Vienna Circle it would be quite natural to assume that it is what motivates Carnap's stance with respect to metaphysical theses. And we know from other of his works that Carnap did in fact embrace some version of verificationism, hence his attempts at patching it up when problems were discovered, e.g., *Testability and Meaning*. This would also explain the lack of critical discussion of his specific arguments in *Pseudoproblems*. Namely, given the critical discussion of verificationism, of which there has been plenty, the arguments in *Pseudoproblems* have been ignored. The arguments there are not, however, verificationist.

Carnap tells the following story as an illustration of how we can settle an ontological dispute without being verificationist about meaning, and while remaining

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74 Ibid., 396.

75 Carnap "Replies," 870.


neutral about both realism and idealism:

Two geographers, a realist and an idealist, who are sent out in order to find out if a mountain that is supposed to be somewhere in Africa is only legendary or if it really exists, will come to the same (positive or negative) result. The two geographers will come to the same result not only about the existence of the mountain, but also about its other characteristics, namely position, shape, height, etc. In all empirical questions there is unanimity. Hence the choice of a philosophical viewpoint has no influence upon the content of natural science; (this does not mean that it could not have some practical influence upon the activity of the scientist). 78

The point of the story to emphasize for present purposes is that some questions that can usefully be called ontological are answerable without appeal to realism, or any other metaphysical position for that matter. Questions about the existence of some things can be meaningfully posed, answered and agreed on by persons holding outright contradictory philosophical positions.

While one may take issue with other points of the story, this point seems sound, with some limitations. Namely, we should restrict instances of agreement to possible cases rather than all cases. To say that in all cases there will be such agreement is perhaps too strong. This assumes that the realist and the idealist agree on the conditions for what counts as "empirically real." But whereas a realist might say that what is empirically real is so in virtue of its independence of our cognitive abilities, an idealist will surely object. This would lead them to possible cases in which they could dispute whether something is empirically real, even though they both perceive something that is presumably the object about which they disagree. For present purposes, there need only be possible agreement in order to show that at least some ontological questions can be

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settled with no appeal to any metaphysical position.

The realist might object that the question of whether there is or is not some particular sensory object is not a properly ontological question. Rather, this is at best a matter of what we might call "regional ontology." That is, these sorts of questions are merely a matter of deciding on particular cases rather than kinds of entities. Decisions about the former are decided by practitioners of the various disciplines, many of which are sciences, which take some particular kind of thing as their subject. Their "ontological" work is merely a matter of listing the various instances of the kind which they study. Only decisions about the latter are strictly ontological, and even here it is only questions of the most general kind that interest philosophers, for example, whether there are material or immaterial kinds of things. This latter sort of issue is the one that is strictly ontological in the philosophical sense.

This objection is unconvincing. We can use the same example with the following modification. Consider two mathematicians, a realist and a nominalist, debating the issue of the existence of numbers. We can imagine the possibility of their both agreeing about the existence of numbers, while remaining committed to their particular metaphysical views. Here then would be a case in which they agree on an issue of the existence of some kind of entity, and yet disagree on their respective analyses of the nature of that kind, where these analyses are metaphysical positions.

This illustrates the point that we can usefully distinguish between issues of ontology and various distinct, but related, metaphysical issues. One need not necessarily be committed to some particular metaphysical view in order to correctly say that one is
doing ontology in something like the traditional sense of that term. Although Carnap himself took the view that we cannot seriously be committed to any metaphysical view, since all of them lack significant semantic content, we need not follow him this far just to make use of the lesson of the above example. But while this example shows that ontology can be metaphysically neutral, there are cases of ontological views that are avowedly anti-realist. Let’s look at some examples.

**Anti-Realist Ontologies**

Examples of anti-realist ontologies are actually quite easy to come by. Insofar as they can be considered to have any ontological views at all, pragmatists like James and Dewey seem not to have endorsed realism. Contemporary pragmatists such as Rorty, however, are ambivalent about ontology and metaphysics generally. It is no longer clear whether Rorty thinks there is anything useful at all to say about ontology that cannot be said by science. More clear-cut cases are easy to come by once we give up a commitment to empiricism. One need only adopt a rationalist stance, and anti-realist ontologies abound, in particular, the absolute idealist versions of philosophers such as Hegel, Green and Bradley. It is not hard at all to do ontology that is explicitly anti-realist once one gives up empiricism.

The problem with this strategy, of course, is that it requires a defense of rationalism, the demise of which in the early part of this century, chiefly at the hands of Russell and Moore, is well known. More recent versions, such as the views of Brand Blanshard, require a coherence theory of truth that is problematic for other reasons well
known in the literature.\textsuperscript{79}

Although one might wish to construct an anti-realist, rationalist ontology, the burden of defending rationalism is heavy indeed. The point of these examples is only to show that an anti-realist ontology cannot be ruled out simply by definition. One might, however, attempt to defend a realist ontology that is rationalist. That is, we might get a defense of realism by means of rationalism, thus preserving realism, and consequently preserving a realist ontology. This sort of strategy would have the benefit of making realism necessarily true, rather than, as Devitt's view suggests, merely a good explanation of our ordinary sense experience. Let's look briefly at one such attempt at a rationalist realism.

**Rationalist Realism**

The 1960's and 70's, saw numerous attempts to run various Kantian-style transcendental arguments aiming to support various metaphysical views. The general aim of these arguments was to show that we can know what the world is like by means of our

\textsuperscript{79}Ralph Walker states the chief objection to such theories quite nicely: "The objection is that in the last resort no such theory can give an adequate account of what it is for a proposition to be believed and hence to be a candidate for determining what the coherent system is. For it is essential that the coherent system be a system of beliefs, and not just a system of propositions in the abstract. There is no difficulty in generating plenty of rival alternative systems of propositions; and if this were not so, as perhaps Hegel thought, to drop the requirement that they be believed would be to render them indistinguishable from facts that obtain in their own right. It would be to abandon the coherence of truth in favour of the thesis that the world is in fact a rational system to which there are no coherently thinkable alternatives; and that is no longer a thesis about the nature of truth, but a thesis (and one without very much appeal) about the way the independent world is." [Ralph C. S. Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 210.]
knowledge of the necessary conditions for its being the way it appears, where such conditions are a function of our epistemic capacities. As an example of this approach I’ll look briefly at some arguments of Ross Harrison.

Harrison argues that a philosopher “with pure reason alone and independently of particular experiences or observations could properly claim to be discovering the nature of the world.” Harrison’s basic strategy is to employ a transcendental argument. Such arguments, however, face many well-known objections, not the least of which is that they seem to be circular. This point aside, it is perhaps instructive to look at a particular attempt to run such an argument in defense of realism.

Harrison argues that in order to establish philosophy as “a separate and justifiable means of describing the world, independent of science and particular observations, then it must be the case that its results are immune from subsequent discoveries based on science and observations.” In order to justify such claims the philosopher must have a priori knowledge that his claims are so immune. The only way to know this is “if he

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82 Harrison, *On What There Must Be*, 9.
knows that they are necessarily so." Thus, philosophical knowledge of the world is not just knowledge of how the world is, "but, rather, a study of how the world must be." Harrison’s claim is not just that we can have conceiver-independent knowledge of what the world is like, but that we can have necessary knowledge de re.

We might distinguish here between what I’ll call “Weak Rationalism,” and “Strong Rationalism,” defined as follows:

Weak Rationalism: We can have knowledge of what the world is like by means of pure reason alone.

Strong Rationalism: We can have knowledge of what the world is necessarily like, or, what it must be like, by means of pure reason alone.

Strong rationalism implies weak rationalism, but the reverse does not hold. So, if we know what the world is necessarily like, then we know what the world is like. Clearly, Harrison endorses strong rationalism. Consequently, he needs an account of necessity that is not merely logical, i.e., the sort of necessity that obtains between concepts in claims such as ‘all apples are apples’ but de re. It is relatively easy to get logical necessity among relations between concepts. Analytic statements and definitions, for example, are one way of getting necessity. The problem with logical, or conceptual necessity, as Harrison points out, is that “from the relations between concepts no conclusions can be validly derived about existents, about how things actually are in the world.”

Kant’s solution to this problem, as is well-known, is his notion of synthetic a

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83 Ibid., 10.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
priori knowledge. The problems with this strategy are equally well-known.\(^{86}\) Harrison avoids this strategy, arguing that we might get the required necessity "by means of a hypothetical, showing that something is necessary if something else is to be the case or is to be achieved."\(^{87}\) The style of such hypotheticals takes the form, 'if the world is like \(X\), then it is like \(Y\)', where \(Y\) is necessarily the case given \(X\). For example, "if there are circular things in the world then there are round things in it."\(^{88}\)

Harrison realizes that "no categorial conclusions about how the world actually is could be derived from this kind of hypothetical statement unless it was known that the state of affairs described in the protasis of the hypothetical actually obtained in the world."\(^{89}\) Taking the above example, "it would have to be known...that there actually were circular things in the world in order to make use of the hypothetical conclusion that there are round things in the world."\(^{90}\) The problem is that we require some minimal knowledge of what the world is like before we can employ this hypothetical method. His solution is that if the required knowledge is "extremely obvious or agreed, then we can show that these obvious or agreed facts involve certain other interesting or important


\(^{87}\) Harrison, 14.

\(^{88}\) Ibid.

\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.
things being true about the world."\textsuperscript{91} What sort of "extremely obvious" facts does Harrison have in mind?

The obvious fact he has in mind is "that there exists a world which can be thought about, or that there exists a world which can be comprehended."\textsuperscript{92} This is a two-fold claim that Harrison is making. First, he is assuming what we earlier labelled weak realism: the view that there is \textit{something} that exists conceiver-independently. Second, he is assuming that this world is understandable, that it is capable of being cognitively grasped by conceivers. Once we make this assumption, we find out "which things must be the case about a world if it is to be comprehensible and so find...what the world is like," and in so doing we are "operating with pure reason alone."\textsuperscript{93} Harrison then proceeds to find out a good deal about what the world is necessarily like on the basis of the assumption that it is understandable.

What are Harrison's reasons for making this two-fold assumption? In both cases he gives the same general reason. For the existence of a conceiver-independent world he claims that

\begin{itemize}
  \item if nothing existed we could have no interest at all in the situation. The possibility that nothing exists, that is, can neither be considered nor referred to in any way unless it does not occur. So even though it is logically possible that nothing exists, it is justifiable to assume, purely \textit{a priori} and independently of observation, that something does exist. For we could have no interest whatsoever in the situation in which this assumption does not hold.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{91}\textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textsuperscript{92}\textit{Ibid.}, 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{93}\textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textsuperscript{94}\textit{Ibid.}, 20.
\end{itemize}
And for the assumption of understandability he says,

although it is logically possible that what exists is such that we could not judge or describe it, it would be impossible for us to consider or describe any situation for which this assumption did not apply. Again, we are either left with a situation in which we could have no possible interest, or else the assumption must be made. 95

In both cases Harrison’s point is that, failing these assumptions, we could not have any interest in the situation. But since we are in fact interested, there must actually be an understandable, conceiver-independent world.

It is not at all clear what Harrison means by ‘interest’. It would be quite unconvincing if he just means something like personal preference, as when someone is interested, for example, in oriental sculpture. For it is just not true that all humans are necessarily interested in the same things. Furthermore, this sort of interest seems to be irrelevant to metaphysics. Why should we think that failure to be interested in this sort of way has any bearing at all on the issue of the existence of an intelligible world? Perhaps the notion of interest at work here is like having a stake in something, as, for example, when one is a shareholder in some business. In this case what is meant is that one has something at stake in what one is interested in such that one’s own fortunes are at least in part contingent on the fortunes of what one has an interest in. But here again, there seems to be no relevant connection between this sort of interest and the possibility of an intelligible, conceiver-independent world.

We could consider numerous other concepts of interest, but rather than examine them individually, perhaps we can say what seems to be required for a concept of interest

95 Ibid., 21.
that is relevant to metaphysical concerns. It seems that the relevant concept must be epistemic, rather than merely personal or even cognitive. For as we have seen, personal concepts of taste or fortune seem irrelevant. As for a merely cognitive concept, Harrison concedes that there is no problem in conceiving of the possibility of there not being an intelligible, conceiver-independent world: "We can, of course, consider what might actually be the case" and "it is logically possible that what exists is such that we could not judge or describe it." Our interest then would seem to be epistemic in some way if it is to be relevant to metaphysics.

But if interest is epistemic then Harrison's argument will be subject to the same sorts of objections levelled against realist positions generally by the agnostic. Specifically, such epistemic relations to conceiver-independent reality either beg questions against the sceptic, or more specifically in Harrison's case, they assume the very rationalism that is in need of defense. Failing answers to these objections, Harrison's strategy will fail to convince not only the skeptic, but also the non-rationalist. Furthermore, it seems ill-advised generally to attempt to support realism with rationalism, given that the latter is in even stronger disfavor than the former, and for good reason. At the very least, if Harrison is right in his assumption that what needs defending is strong rationalism, and not just weak rationalism, this task alone at least shifts a sizable portion of the burden onto the realist. Moreover, the most thorough-going contemporary realists all seem to be strongly empiricist, probably because many of them aim to support some version of scientific realism as well as just realism generally. And

96 Ibid., 20–21.
a rationalist defense of scientific realism might well nigh be impossible.

Meta-Ontology

We have seen that there are various non-realist ontologies, principally, rationalist versions of an idealistic stripe. This lead to a consideration of the possibility of a rationalist defense of realism. After some examination of this strategy we concluded that such a defense is fraught with difficulties, and that, while it may be possible, the burden of argument is shifted back onto the realist. Since full-blown rationalism seems unreliable as a philosophical method generally, the issue now is whether there is available the possibility of a non-realist, non-rationalist method of doing ontology.

There is such a possibility, and it is not entirely new. The strategy to be developed is inspired by some work of Carnap and Quine. Chapter two develops the basis for just such a strategy for doing ontology. Briefly, this will require two connected projects. First, a view about the nature of ontological commitment, i.e., what it is that certain of our expressions commit us to countenancing in our ontology. Second, an account of analyticity that can meet all of Quine's qualms. Chapter three develops the actual method using the basis developed in chapter two. Finally, chapter four defends a version of physicalist ontology using the method developed in chapter three.

The aim of the next chapter is to say something about the traditional ontological question—what is there? Following Quine, we can divide this question in two: (1) What, according to some statement, exists? and (2) Which statements ought we to believe? Question (1) is the issue of ontological commitment. This question asks what in particular some sentence commits us to in the way of existing entities. One way to answer this
question is to answer another one: (3) For some statement that says something exists, in virtue of what does it do so? Question (3) asks just about the linguistic mechanism whereby we make ontological claims. Knowledge of this mechanism will allow us to determine the ontological commitments of any statement that has such commitments.

But merely knowing what some statement says there is is insufficient for an ontology. Granted that we are able to determine what any statement says there is, we will want to know which statements to believe; we want to know which statements we have reason to think are true. This is the aim of question (2). This is also the point at which we will part with Quine's solution and adopt a more Carnapian approach. While, for Quine, question (1) is a matter of linguistics, question (2) is a matter of evidence, and Quine's answer to it is found in his naturalism, the view that we get our ontology from the natural sciences. Carnap, on the other hand, takes a linguistic approach to question (2), relying on his distinction between what he calls "external" and "internal" questions. Defense of this view requires an account of analytic truth, and so, we part ways with Quine and his naturalism.
CHAPTER II

ONTOLOGY, LANGUAGE AND ANALYTICITY

Introduction

When we ask about someone’s ontology, we generally are understood to be asking what there is, or what sorts of things there are, according to that person. Exceptions to this understanding of ontology can be found. Heidegger and Sartre, for example, are concerned with “modes of being” rather than entities or kinds of entities. Their concern is with the manner or way in which things exist rather than with what kinds of things there are. Consider, for example, the difference between thinking of a hammer as a tool for hanging a picture, and as a physical object. Being a tool is a way of existing, whereas being a physical object is a kind of thing. We will be concerned with ontology in the sense of an inquiry into what there is.

We might begin doing ontology by posing a single question: What is there? This question, however, is not very useful without some qualification, for it can be answered in a word— everything. But as Quine points out, “everyone will accept this answer as true.”¹ Such an answer fails to take into account differences between various views of what there is. The nominalist and the Platonic realist, for example, differ over the

existence of universals. Both, however, assert that their respective ontologies specify every kind of thing that exists. Indeed, any ontology that does not specify every kind of thing that exists can rightly be said to be incomplete. What we want is some way of formulating our ontologies such that our disagreements over what there is are made evident.

Suppose then that Edgar and I differ in our respective ontological claims about what there is. Specifically, Edgar claims there is something which I claim does not exist. In order for us to engage in a meaningful dispute over the item(s) at issue there must be some way for both of us to state our differences. Edgar can state our differences by saying that there is something he claims exists, but which I do not. I, on the other hand, cannot say there is something Edgar claims exists, but which I claim does not, since, “in admitting that there are such things I should be contradicting my own rejection of them.”

Hence, Edgar and I cannot even begin to settle our ontological dispute until we have some way of stating our differences which statement does not itself force one of us into a contradiction. It might of course turn out after some investigation that one of us does countenance a contradiction. What we require is some way of stating our differences where the statement itself does not form the contradiction. For without such a contradiction-free statement of our differences, there will be no way of telling precisely to what our alleged differences amount.

The problem in such situations is that we seem bound to give some sort of being to things that do not exist, since otherwise we wouldn’t be able to talk about them. Quine

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2Ibid.
calls this "Plato's beard." Many philosophers have tried to solve this problem by giving such entities some sort of existence. Alexius Meinong’s ontology is perhaps the most well-known, recent attempt at this strategy. On his view, everything we can speak of, or think about, has some sort of existence, including impossible objects such as round squares. The result of such a generous ontological method has come to be known as “Meinong’s jungle.” We can, however, avoid such densely populated ontologies by taking advantage of Russell’s theory of descriptions. As we will see, it is via Russell that we get to Quine’s theory of ontological commitment.

Russell’s Theory of Description

Russell’s theory of descriptions is first set out in his 1905 paper “On Denoting.” His aim is to give an analysis of “denoting phrases” such as, ‘a man’, ‘any man’ and ‘the present King of France’. One of the problems with such phrases is that, on one analysis, we are lead into an overly abundant ontology. Meinong, for instance, holds that in order to preserve the meaningfulness of the statements in which such phrases occur, these phrases must be understood as names for some object. Russell shows, however, that the statements in which they occur can be made quite meaningful without our being committed to the existence of any entities so named.

A phrase is distinguished as denoting, on Russell’s view, “solely in virtue of its form.” In other words, we reckon those phrases as denoting in virtue of some

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3Ibid., 2.


5Ibid., 479.
grammatical or syntactic rule of the language in which they occur. Russell distinguishes between three sorts of denoting phrases:

(1) A phrase may be denoting, and yet not denote anything; e.g., ‘the present King of France’. (2) A phrase may denote one definite object; e.g., ‘the present King of England’ denotes a certain man. (3) A phrase may denote ambiguously; e.g., ‘a man’ denotes not many men, but an ambiguous man.6

Russell’s analysis is simple and elegant in statement, but powerful in its application. He states the theory in a paragraph:

I take the notion of the variable as fundamental; I use “C (x)” to mean a proposition in which x is a constituent, where x, the variable, is essentially and wholly undetermined. Then we can consider the two notions “C (x) is always true” and “C (x) is sometime true”. Then everything and nothing and something (which are the most primitive of denoting phrases) are to be interpreted as follows:-

C (everything) means “C (x) is always true”;
C (nothing) means “‘C (x) is false’ is always true”;
C (something) means “It is false that ‘C (x) is false’ is always true.”7

The key to the analysis is treat the primitives ‘everything’, ‘nothing’ and ‘something’ as having no meaning in themselves. Rather, only those propositions, or sentences, in which they occur are said to be meaningful. So, for example, the sentence, ‘I talked to a woman’, if true, is analyzed as, “‘I talked to x, and x is an adult human female’ is not always false”. Thus, “the principle of the theory of denoting I wish to advocate: that denoting phrases never have any meaning in themselves, but that every proposition in whose verbal expression they occur has a meaning.”8

6Ibid., 479.
7Ibid.
8Ibid., 480.
The virtue of the theory that we are particularly interested in is that we need not posit any entities named by denoting phrases in order to preserve the meaning of the sentences in which they occur. We are mistaken if we think that 'the author of Waverley was a poet' contains a denoting phrase, or name, which requires some actual entity so named in order to preserve the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs.

We can apply the same analysis to statements of non-being as well. We can then resolve the dispute discussed above between Edgar’s ontology and my own, in which his ontology contains something mine does not. Recall that the problem is that Edgar posits the existence of some entity that I do not recognize as existing. I, however, end up in a contradiction when I assert that the alleged entity does not exist, for just in virtue of speaking about it, I appear to be attributing some sort of being to a non-existent entity. But if Edgar says, ‘Pegasus exists’, I am not committed to postulating some sort of being to a non-existent, mythical horse-type creature in my assertion that it does not exist. Notice that in this case, we have a word, ‘Pegasus’, instead of a denoting phrase. What we must do first is substitute some phrase which gives us the meaning of ‘Pegasus’. This substitution does not pose a problem, since, as Quine points out,

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 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.’

I then interpret the sentence ‘Pegasus does not exist’ by, first, substituting some description for ‘Pegasus’, say, ‘Bellerophon’s winged horse’, and then analyzing this statement as “‘It is false that some x is owned by Bellerophon, is a horse and is winged’ is always true.” In this way, I am no longer bound to predicate being of a non-existent entity, and I have some way of stating the differences between my ontology and Edgar’s conflicting ontology without my lapsing into contradiction in the very statement of the difference between us.

What we have thus far then is a way of stating difference between our ontological views that does not force us into an immediate contradiction. What we want now is some way of stating our ontologies in order to see where the conflicts may lie. What we need is some way of making explicit what Quine calls our ontological commitments.

**Ontological Commitment**

Quine’s doctrine of ontological commitment can first be found explicitly in his 1939 essay “Designation and Existence.”¹⁰ There are suggestions of this view as early as his dissertation, as evidenced by his use of the term ‘ontology’—an odd choice of term in a strictly logical work, the main purpose of which was to modify some key portions of Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica*. Note also the use of ‘ontology’ in his 1934 “Ontological remarks on the Propositional Calculus.”¹¹

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¹⁰W. V. Quine, “Designation and Existence,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 36 (1939): 708. It is here that we find the now famous aphorism: “To be is to be the value of a variable.”

We have already seen that denoting phrases, or names, are not indicators of what we take to exist. For we can substitute a description for any name, and then “Russell away” the description, so as to avoid commitment to any named entities. This treatment of descriptions depends on the notion of a variable, and it is here that we get the needed requirement for ontological commitment. Namely,

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 pronouns. 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.  

Here we have a concise statement of Quine’s doctrine of ontological commitment. This doctrine can now be seen as an extension of Russell’s theory of descriptions. The basic idea is that we can determine what there is for any statement by means of the variables over which the statement quantifies when we recast the statement into logical form.

Quine is not implying that objects exist because we say they do. He is not endorsing linguistic idealism, the view that something exists in virtue of our saying that it exists. (Some such view may be what Goodman and the constructivists are up to, but it is not Quine’s view.) As he has said on several occasions, “it has been objected that what there is is a question of fact and not of language. True enough. Saying or implying

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what there is, however, is a matter of language."\textsuperscript{13} Hence, his oft-made statement that "to be is to be the value of a variable" is somewhat misleading.\textsuperscript{14} Since this statement is merely an aphorism, however, it should not be taken as a precise statement of the doctrine. A clearer formulation would be, "what one takes there to be are what one admits as values of one's bound variables."\textsuperscript{15}

Two points need emphasis. First, the doctrine of ontological commitment is a bit of logical or grammatical analysis. Specifically, the aim of the doctrine is to establish the specific grammatical feature of a sentence in virtue of which we can tell what exists according to that sentence. One view for example, the view that Russell was arguing against in "On Denoting," claims that what a sentence says there is is a function of what the sentence names. On Quine's view, by contrast, it is a matter of what the sentence quantifies over when we translate the sentence into logical form. Second, there is no implicit belief on the part of the speaker as to the existence of anything just in virtue of ontological commitment. Belief in the existence of unicorns is not required by a speaker just in order to make a sentence in which the word 'unicorn' occurs meaningful. Quine is, afterall, a naturalist about what there is. On his view, as we will see later, we get our ontology from the natural sciences, and not just from ways of speaking.


\textsuperscript{15}Quine, \textit{Pursuit of Truth}, 26.
Given its reliance on quantificational logic, ontological commitment is relative to a particular logical analysis of language. Given that there are other non-quantificational analyses of language, how do we explain the ontological commitments of such languages? For example, consider a language with a predicate-functor logic which employs predicates rather than variables. Does this relativization to quantificational logic make ontological commitment somewhat arbitrary?

If quantificational logic expresses in symbolic form what we want the relevant portions of our natural language to express, then insofar as our language is sufficiently rich enough to enable us to express our beliefs about what there is, relativizing ontological commitment to quantificational logic is not a problem. As for languages employing a predicate-functor logic, Quine says, ontological commitment as the criterion for deciding what there is “is transferable to any alternative language, insofar as we are agreed on how to translate quantification into it.”16 For a predicate-functor logic, “the equivalent principle is that what one takes to be are what one takes one’s monadic predicates (complements included) to be true of.”17 The same strategy can be applied to ordinary English, where “what one takes there to be are what one takes one’s relative pronouns to refer to.”18 So, although the standard is relative to quantificational logic, this does not appear to be a problem.

We will, however, want to know, what the term “exist” means in this context. We


17Ibid.

18Ibid.
can, for example, imagine a realist maintaining that when he says something exists, he means that such a thing is objective and independent of anyone’s cognitive grasp of it. Do we thereby get realism just in case we accept Quine’s doctrine of ontological commitment? This seems a bit hasty, for surely the skeptic will want an argument for realism. Furthermore, ontological commitment is a logical doctrine, whereas realism is a metaphysical doctrine.

In defining the term ‘exist’ we must keep in mind that the relevant context in which the term occurs is that of the existential quantifier ‘(∃x)’, which is, for Quine, “the distilled essence of existential talk.” Thus, the question of the meaning of ‘exist’ is just the question of the meaning of the existential quantifier. Or, put another way, we want to know just what is being imputed to a variable by the expression ‘(∃x)’, where this expression is understood by Quine “to mean precisely ‘there is something x such that’.”

It should be clear now that realism as a metaphysical doctrine is not implied just in case we want to employ this notion of ontological commitment. For the realist will quantify over such things as head-colds, numbers and beliefs, even if he holds that such things do not actually exist in his realist way of existing. Thus, the concept of ‘existence’ that Quine is operating with is meant to be taken in “the broadest sense of ‘being’ that the user of the variables is to be seen as accepting.” The question, then, is somewhat

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20 Ibid., 92.

21 Ibid., 91; See also his Word and Object (Cambridge, MA.: The M.I.T. Press, 1960), 176; Ontological Relativity and Other Essays (New York: Columbia University
misguided, since the relevant notion of existence is meant to cover any and all cases in which we say something like ‘there are $x$’s.’

The existential quantifier then, understood as expressing in the broadest possible sense what we mean by saying ‘there are $x$’s’ can be used to express what may actually be different senses of the word ‘exist’ as used in a natural language. We aren’t required to give the term ‘exist’ a univocal meaning just in case we want to use the existential quantifier to formally express existence statements. We can, however, anticipate the following objection. Quine himself says that “Existence is absolute, and those who talk of existence can say so.” 22 This seems to imply a realist notion of existence, whereby all uses of the locution ‘there are $x$’s’ assert that $x$’s exist objectively and independently. Is this an endorsement of realism on Quine’s part?

The problem with the objection is that it imputes to Quine much more than he is saying. He says “those who talk of existence can say so.” 23 The point is that, insofar as we are free to use words in a way we see fit, we could use ‘existence’ to mean that the entities we countenance in our ontology exist absolutely, i.e., independently of whether we say they exist. In other words, we can allow the realist his notion of existence, while maintaining a different one ourselves. The point at issue is whether what exists for the speaker of one language can be said to exist regardless of any cultural, or culturally

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23 Ibid., 92-93, my emphasis.
influenced, cognitive features of the speaker. Surely we would want to say that it could. For just because we take the view that what we say there is is determined by language—a trivial truth—it does not follow that the actual existence of the object spoken of is also a feature of the language.

The feature of some entity such that it exists absolutely is a feature of what Quine calls the "ideology" of a theory. As he puts it: "The ideology of a theory is a question of what the symbols mean; the ontology of a theory is a question of what the assertions say or imply that there is." This is why the realist as well as the idealist can both agree on the truth of the statement 'there is a dog in front of me' when uttered under appropriate conditions. Where they disagree is in their interpretation of the notion of 'existence' as applied to the dog. The realist will say that it exists objectively and independently of his perceiving it; the idealist will say that its existence is a function just of his mental activity. Both, however, will include something referred to by the term 'dog' in their respective ontologies. Quine's point is that the operative issue in their respective uses of the term is in the ideology and not the ontology.

If the doctrine of ontological commitment is clear, and well-defended, we have an answer to the question of what, according to some statement, exists. We can turn now to the issue of which statements we ought to believe. Two strategies for settling this issue will be considered: Quine's naturalistic strategy and Carnap's linguistic strategy. The strategy offered here will draw on elements of both, but will favor a Carnapian approach.

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Quine's Naturalized Ontology

Quine's view of how we happen to come by our implicit ontologies is avowedly naturalistic. That is, his explanation employs the vocabulary of the natural sciences. One should not, however, infer from this that we ought to do ontology in this way. That is, we should not infer that, given Quine's story of how we do in fact come by our pre-philosophical, or naive views about what there is, we thereby should construct our philosophical, or critical ontologies in the same way. This would amount to conflating a normative with a factual issue. The accounts we find in *Word and Object*, *Ontological Relativity* and *Roots of Reference*, among other places, begin with descriptions of how we acquire our implicit ontologies. So, these accounts of how we acquire our pre-philosophical ontology of bodies, i.e. the medium-sized objects of everyday experience, should not be taken as accounts of how we ought to do ontology; these accounts are purely descriptive and by themselves provide no reasons why we ought to accept them as true.

Quine's ontology is "naturalistic," in the same way as his epistemology. Briefly, this means that epistemology is construed as the scientific understanding of the human being as knower. On this naturalized view, epistemology becomes a branch of the natural sciences, along with philosophy generally. Roger Gibson has argued that naturalism is at the very center of Quine's philosophy, and that it constitutes "a key to unlocking a correct interpretation of Quine."\(^{25}\) Although Gibson is correct here the claim needs some

unpacking. Specifically, what we want is, first, an account of how Quine thinks we come by our pre-philosophical ontology, and second, reasons for thinking that a naturalistic strategy ought to be employed in constructing a philosophical ontology, i.e., one which we can defend with reasoned argument. If it turns out that our pre-philosophical ontology is one that can be defended on philosophical grounds, that is fine, so long as Quine does indeed defend it. Afterall, a description of something may actually be a correct description, but as philosophers engaged in doing ontology, we will fail to be persuaded of its correctness in the absence of good reasons for believing it is correct.

Let's turn now to a brief account of Quine's approach to ontology. The defense of this ontology will rest, as Gibson claims, on naturalism. Unlike Gibson however, an account is given of why Quine embraces naturalism. One problem we will need to address is that of Quine's commitment to realism, for he has said that he is a realist about knowledge of the external world. We will need to see how his realism is related to his ontology. Briefly, the problem to be addressed is that of explaining how Quine can be a realist and yet embrace an ontology consisting of nothing more than "pure sets." While Quine can perhaps consistently maintain a commitment to realism and an ontology of pure sets, his naturalism cannot be satisfactorily defended. Consequently, we must turn to a different strategy for constructing an ontology. The strategy employed will use some of Quine's methods, but is not committed to his naturalism.

On Quine's view, epistemology is logically prior to ontology. That is, the

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ontology of some theory is, at least partially, determined by our epistemology. Epistemology is naturalized, i.e., it is a branch of the natural sciences. Thus, the subject of epistemology is the human being considered in her role as knower or theorizer. The details of naturalized epistemology are well-known. Briefly, the story goes like this. We begin with observation sentences. These are sentences that "are directly and firmly associated with our stimulations." Examples of such sentences are, 'it is snowing', and 'there is a dog'. In seeking to understand the world spoken of with these observation sentences we devise theories. In order to test these theories we devise special kinds of observation sentences that can serve as tests for these theories. Quine calls these special kind of observation sentences "observation categoricals." They take the form, 'whenever this, that'. So, for example, in testing a hypothesis about some chemical we might construct the observation categorical, 'whenever litholite heated to at least 100 degrees centigrade, blue smoke'. Now recall that ontological commitment gives us the linguistic mechanism for determining what we are ontologically committed to. The referents of our bound variables give us the actual entities. But due to the indeterminacy of reference,


28It is a matter of some debate as to what precisely such sentences are about: are they about sensations or external objects? This bears directly on the further question of what is to count as evidence. The most recent answer we get from Quine is that observation, as well as evidence, both drop out of the account in favor of observation sentences, where these are defined in terms of how we assent to their truth: "The sentence should command the subject's assent or dissent outright, on the occasion of a stimulation in the appropriate range, without further investigation and independently of what he may have been engaged in at the time. A further requirement is intersubjectivity: unlike a report of a feeling, the sentence must command the same verdict from all linguistically competent witnesses of the occasion." [Ibid.]
there will always be the possibility of equally correct, alternative interpretations of our referring terms. Since we have no direct epistemic contact with the referents themselves, hence the use of observations sentences, the nature of the referents themselves will be a matter of dispute as well. Focussing on the referents themselves we get a kind of indeterminacy as well—ontological relativity. Quine suggests that, at the furthest extreme, the referents of observation sentences can even be construed as nothing but pure sets.

We end up with this view as a result of construing physical objects as the material content of portions of space-time. Current physics, however, has given up the concept of matter for field theories, and consequently we are left just with the space-time regions. But if we are willing to tolerate the ontology of set-theory, and this is advisable as a way of integrating all of mathematics, we can dispense with the space-time regions, “for, now that we have the full mathematical apparatus, we can invoke Cartesian coordinates and identify each space-time point with a mere quadruple of real numbers. Predicates that formerly attributed states to points or regions will now apply rather to quadruples of numbers, or to sets of quadruples.” Set theory itself does not even require any ground elements, for “since Fraenkel and von Neumann, a set theory without ground elements has even been pretty much in vogue.” And this just means that we end up with an ontology of pure sets. This is entirely consistent with science, thus showing that ontology, for Quine, is merely neutral with respect to science. As he puts it,

Reference and ontology recede thus to the status of mere auxiliaries. True

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30Ibid.
sentences, observational and theoretical, are the alpha and omega of the scientific enterprise. They are related by structure, and objects figure as mere nodes of the structure. What particular objects there may be is indifferent to the truth of observation sentences, indifferent to the support they lend to the theoretical sentences, indifferent to the success of the theory in its predictions.\textsuperscript{31}

On this view, the correctness of ontology is not a function of whether it says what the external world is actually like; this would be a realist notion of ontology. Rather, correctness of an ontology is determined by considerations of the interpretation of true sentences. Such considerations will appeal to principles of parsimony. That is, when considering whether some ontology is a good ontology, we consider whether it is the simplest interpretation of our best scientific theory. Since more than one correct interpretation is possible, we will have several to choose from. The way to choose between competing ontologies is on the basis of our interpretive heuristics, and not on the basis of whether one ontology accurately states the way things are. In a sense, they all state the way things are, insofar as they are all accurate interpretations of true sentences which themselves are true of the world. We can see then how to reconcile Quine’s realism with his suggested ontology of pure sets. For if ontology is just a matter of interpreting our best science, being realist about ontology just means believing our best science. The issue now is, why should we be committed to the underlying naturalism on which this strategy rests?

Quine’s naturalism can usefully be construed as the endorsement of two theses: first, there is no “first philosophy”; second, science identifies what there is. One could, perhaps, be committed to the first thesis, yet be uncommitted to the second. One might,

\textsuperscript{31}Quine, \textit{Pursuit of Truth}, 31.
for example, take the view that some revealed religion embodies all knowledge of what there is, where this religion subsumes both philosophy and science. One could not, however, be committed to the second thesis without being committed to the first as well. It is principally his arguments for the first thesis that motivate Quine's commitment to the second. I'm only going to be concerned with the first thesis, call this NFP, for 'no first philosophy', since, if the defense of NFP fails, then this at least leaves open the possibility of constructing a first philosophy. And if first philosophy is possible, then the second thesis, call it SIE, for 'science identifies everything' is false, for if there is first philosophy, then science does not identify everything.

NFP is "a comment on the failure of traditional epistemologists to find a foundation outside of science upon which science—our best theory of the world—can be justified."32 Gibson defends NFP by using Quine's strategy of distinguishing between the "doctrinal" and "conceptual" tasks of epistemology, the former being concerned with meaning and the latter with truth.33 On the doctrinal side, Quine argues that both rationalist and empiricist attempts at finding such a foundation have all been unsuccessful. This should come as no surprise, since the chief motivation for the "linguistic turn" was the rejection of these sorts of projects. This takes us to the conceptual task. On Quine's reading, the conceptual task of defending NFP reached its zenith in Carnap's Aufbau project in which he attempted to "reduce the theoretical discourse of science to discourse consisting only of experiential terms, formal logic and

32Gibson, "The Key to Interpreting Quine," 17.

33Quine, Ontological Relativity, 69 ff.
Quine takes issue with the way in which the reductions were made: "theoretical sentence by theoretical sentence." On Quine's view,

Holism is the reason Carnap's project fails: not every sentence of scientific theories has its own unique experiential evidence. It is only holistically, and not sentence by sentence, that scientific theories confront experience. Consequently, that reductionist project of the sort envisioned by Carnap cannot work. This Carnapian collapse forces traditional epistemologists to recognize that their conceptual goal of defining the notion of body in sensory terms must be abandoned. Thus read, the history of epistemology from Descartes to Carnap is a history of reluctant retreats, but in the final analysis, epistemologists must surrender first philosophy.

So the rejection of the conceptual task rests on the commitment to holism. Having argued that both the doctrinal and conceptual tasks cannot be completed, NFP is now offered as an alternative.

That a commitment to holism motivates abandonment of the conceptual task seems correct. But we can challenge holism itself, since commitment to holism requires commitment to two other theses of Quine's: one, the view that there is no theoretically useful analytic/synthetic distinction, and two, that verificationism is false. Holism, for Quine at least, is the view that "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body." This aspect of holism militates against verificationism. But, as Quine points out, "the two dogmas are,

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34 Ibid., 18.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
indeed, at root identical.”

Consequently, another aspect of holism is that “it is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement.” The reasons for rejecting verificationism are well-known, and so we won’t rehearse them. We will take issue, however, with Quine’s rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction, for he rejects too easily a promising way of making the distinction. Later in this chapter an account of analyticity is offered that is immune to Quine’s criticisms, and can serve a role in constructing a method of doing ontology. Briefly, the account rests on the view that what is crucial to analyticity is our ability to choose to hold some sentences as true, regardless of any alleged evidence to the contrary. With this account in hand, we have good reason to reject holism, and so can plausibly reject Quine’s NFP. Having rejected NFP we have at least the possibility of first philosophy, and so we can also reject SIE. Since these two claims constitute Quine’s naturalism, we have good reason for not embracing that view.

The Collapse of Analyticity

One of the theses of Quine’s “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” is that there is no epistemologically useful distinction between analytic and synthetic sentences. Quine did not always hold this view; he came to it after some years of debate with Carnap. Early on, Quine held a roughly Carnapian view about the role of analyticity in philosophy.

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38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 42.

Since “Two Dogmas” he has, at least by his own admission, remained committed to the rejection of analyticity, at least insofar as it has any philosophical value.

The strategy of his attack on analyticity is two-pronged: first, he examines various accounts of analyticity and finds them lacking, and second, he proposes holism as a substitute that will do all of the work analyticity was employed for, and do it as well or better. Whether the second strategy is convincing will, to some degree, depend on whether one is convinced by the first. A problem with the first strategy is that of leaving some possible view unexamined. This aside, Quine has at least put the ball back in the court of anyone who wants to preserve analyticity. Even this much is a significant move since, prior to Quine’s opening the debate, analyticity had become a dogma among empiricists, and philosophers generally, and as such went unquestioned. At the very least, Quine has shifted the burden onto anyone employing an analytic/synthetic distinction to first give some account of the distinction that meets Quine’s strictures, and that is sufficient to the task for which it is constructed.

Much of Quine’s attack on analyticity is directed at Carnap, since it is Carnap who, perhaps more than any other philosopher of his day, employed an account of analyticity at the very foundations of his epistemology. A look at the debate between Quine and Carnap on this issue will prove useful as background, since the account of analyticity offered here employs elements of Carnap’s own view.

Analyticity: Quine versus Carnap

The debate between Carnap and Quine began in their conversations at Harvard during the academic year 1940–41. As Quine notes, “you don’t write when you can meet
and talk. 41 While this much of the debate is unknown to us, a significant amount of correspondence between the two has survived, as well as their published books and articles on the issue. 42 The correspondence is particularly useful in that it shows precisely what motivates, in many cases, much of their published work. No doubt, the most well-known, and subsequently the most influential, of the papers on this issue is Quine's "Two Dogmas." Carnap's replies to this paper seem not to have had as much influence.

There is a hint of an objection by Quine to accounts of analyticity as early as his "Truth by Convention." He says there, in the opening paragraph,

but whereas the physical sciences are generally recognized as capable only of incomplete evolution in this direction, and as destined to retain always a non-conventional kernel of doctrine, developments of the past few decades have led to a widespread conviction that logic and mathematics are purely analytic or conventional. It is less the purpose of the present inquiry to question the validity of this contrast than to question its sense. 43

Quine intends in this paper to examine precisely what is going on when we say that logic and mathematics are purely conventional. He is not, at this point, abandoning the idea that they are conventional, and so in principle distinct from empirical science generally. His aim is only to call for clarification of the claim that logic and math are wholly conventional. As he says in the concluding paragraph,

The more restricted thesis discussed in the first section, viz., that mathematics is a conventional transcription of logic, is far from trivial;.... But as to the larger

41 Quine, "Two Dogmas in Retrospect," 267.

42 See W. V. Quine and Rudolf Carnap, Dear Carnap, Dear Van: The Quine-Carnap Correspondence, ed. Richard Creath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) for the exchange of letters between Carnap and Quine, as well as other valuable information.

43 Quine, "Truth by Convention," 77.
thesis that mathematics and logic proceed wholly from linguistic conventions, only further clarification can assure us that this asserts anything at all.\footnote{Ibid., 106.}

As we will see, Quine comes to think that no such clarification \textit{could} be given, and that we therefore ought to give up this claim. At this point, however, he is merely calling for clarification.

Quine himself dates his rejection of analyticity to the year 1941 during his discussions with Carnap over the manuscript for Carnap's \textit{Introduction to Semantics}. In his letter \#97, dated January 5, 1943 we see some of the objections he raises later in "Two Dogmas."\footnote{Letter numbers, e.g., letter \#106, are from Creath's enumeration in Quine, \textit{Dear Carnap}.} The argument goes as follows. Suppose that we accept as given some logical notation together with a general notion of truth. We can then "define \textit{logical truth}, simply as truth which survives all uniform changes of component expressions other than the enumerated logical signs."\footnote{Ibid., 296.} We then identify the set of all \textit{analytic} statements as the set of all logical truths for the language in question. But suppose we take something like the language of science, i.e., the physical language. We will have sentences in this language such as,

\begin{quote}
\textit{SI} 'No spinster is married.'
\end{quote}

that we will want to say are analytic, but that are not \textit{logical} truths in our specified sense. We could perhaps say that \textit{SI} is just a \textit{definitional abbreviation} of a \textit{logical truth}, e.g.,

\begin{quote}
\textit{S2} 'No woman not married is married.'
\end{quote}
With this move we get “to the root of the difficulty.” The problem is in our “assumption of a thoroughgoing constitution system, with fixed primitives and fixed definitions of all other expressions, despite the fact that no such constitution system exists.” Consequently, whether $S1$ is analytic or synthetic will be a function of how ‘spinster’ is defined for the language system in question. But, “little progress is made toward clarifying the term ‘analytic’ in any of its preexisting usage, if in the face of every statement which is not explicitly a logical truth (like ‘No woman not married is married’) we have to conclude, ‘Whether this is analytic or not depends on what constitution system we adopt, and we aren’t going in fact to adopt any’.”

By a “constitution system” Quine means any formal language constructed for some particular purpose. This is precisely what Carnap does in his Syntax with his languages $L1$ and $L2$. On Carnap’s view, the language of science is a constitution system insofar as it can be constructed explicitly out of pre-existing terms we find in our natural languages. Such constructive system-building proceeds as a sort of conceptual experiment in that there is no need to actually adopt the language being built; we want only to see if such a language can be built. Quine’s worry seems to be that it will be wholly arbitrary whether the statements in question, e.g., $S1$ and $S2$, are analytic or synthetic, since it is merely a matter of choosing some construction system, where all

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid., 297.}

\footnote{Rudolf Carnap, The Logical Syntax of Language (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1925).}
such systems can be constructed merely at will.

The underlying worry for Quine is that "there is false security in the common appeal to definition."\textsuperscript{51} As used in logic, Quine restricts definitions to "indications of how to paraphrase a rich logical language into a meager logical language, proving that certain metalogical conclusions established more easily in application to the meager language apply equally to the richer, more convenient language."\textsuperscript{52} This procedure whereby we "paraphrase the whole into the part" can be used outside of logic as well, for instance, in showing that "certain philosophical consequences thought to follow from the whole are groundless, not being applicable to the part."\textsuperscript{53} What is crucial here for the appeal to definition in the clarification of the notion of analyticity is that this use of definition "makes no use of the idea of linguistic revision or fiat, nor accords to definition any integral status within a language."\textsuperscript{54} Quine is apparently skeptical here about how much philosophical work can be done by mere verbal stipulation of how we use our terms. He proposes instead that we might make some progress by avoiding the appeal to definition altogether, and appeal instead to "the relation of synonymity or sameness of meaning."\textsuperscript{55} Together with logical truth, "we could explain analyticity as follows: a statement is analytic if it can be turned into a logical truth by putting

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{52}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{53}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{54}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{55}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
synonyms for synonyms."\textsuperscript{56}

But even this strategy will not work, since, "the problem remains...to explain this basic synonymy relation."\textsuperscript{57} Quine thinks that synonymy, like designation, must be explained by use of empirical and behavioral criteria, and so would come under the heading of pragmatics. He does not, however, think that this cannot be done. At this point in their debate Quine is still willing to allow for the possibility that such an explanation could be given, even though he himself has "never succeeded in giving one."\textsuperscript{58}

Carnap’s reply to this first round of objections comes in his letter #100. He begins with some terminological clarification, showing that some of Quine’s objections rest on nothing more than verbal disagreement. The most important of these terminological clarifications for present purposes are for the terms ‘analytic’ and ‘designation’. Carnap takes Quine to use ‘analytic’ where he would use ‘L-true’. For Carnap, L-terms are defined only for some constructed language system, and have no meaning whatsoever outside the narrow confines of the language in which they are defined. Carnap uses ‘designate’ to mean "the relation between an expression and its meaning," whereas Quine is using the term to signify the object referred to by some term.\textsuperscript{59} Thus, for Carnap \textit{SI} “would be L-true in a suitable system even if ‘spinster’ and

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 298. \\
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 307.
'married' are primitive predicates.” Furthermore, the L-truth of $S'$ does not rest on a
definition by linguistic fiat. Rather, “In this example the L-truth would be based…on the
semantical rules of designation: ‘spinster’ designates the property of being a non-married
woman.”

This much will not, however, satisfy Quine. He will raise the same objection to
semantical rules as he raises for definitions, namely, that they are merely arbitrary. But
Carnap’s view is that it is a mistake to think that we can “construct an exact and
‘compatible’ etc. if we refer merely to the actually used language of science.” These
concepts must instead be made more precise by replacing “the given language by a
system of rules; in other words, we have to go from pragmatics and descriptive
semantics to pure semantics.” Carnap agrees that it is left to pragmatics to define
‘synonymous’; “but this holds likewise for the other concepts mentioned: ‘true’, etc. in
a certain sense.” The crucial point for Carnap is that “the pragmatical definition cannot
be taken as the basis for the semantical theory. If the concept ‘synonymous’ is to be used
at all in pure semantics, you have to state rules for it.”

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60 Ibid., 305.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 309.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
It is this appeal to language systems constructed by rules that, in the end, will be the crucial issue. Carnap is willing to tolerate semantics and even modalities in his generally austere approach to philosophical problems. But he never gives up the view that philosophical problems can only by solved within some constructed language system, and that terms in such systems are made clear by means of rules for their use, and not by appeal to ordinary use in a natural language. He steadfastly rejects the view that we are required to give behavioral/empirical criteria for the use of terms in a language system, although, as we will see later, he thinks such criteria can be given. The important point to keep in mind here is that such criteria are given for the explanation of a concept as used in a natural language and not as used in a constructed language system. Carnap maintains that “problems of explicating concepts of this kind for natural languages are of an entirely different nature.”

In his letter #106 Quine uses the concept ‘sentence’ by way of analogy to clarify his skepticism about Carnap’s appeal to semantical rules as explicative of analyticity. He considers the case of an empirical linguist studying an unknown language. When the linguist proceeds to study this language he has at least a working idea “of sentence in general, say in the form of a relation; x (sound pattern) is a sentence for y (person).” He will then formulate by empirical means the set of sound patterns which constitute sentences for the speakers he is studying. Much of his specification of this set will

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67Quine, Dear Carnap, 337.
employ concepts the speakers themselves do not have, e.g., declensions, participles, etc. Such concepts need have no analogues in any other languages, as for example the "der-words used in German to denote articles such as 'dieser', 'der', etc. The concept of a sentence, however, *does* have its analogues in other languages, and it is this concept that the linguist had in mind at the start to guide his research."

Quine's point here is that we can indeed specify by means of pure syntax for any language what will count as the sentences of the language. The concept of sentence itself, however, can only be gotten from pragmatic, and thus empirical, investigation. The same argument will hold for the concept of analyticity. Namely,

> It is only by having some general, pragmatically grounded, essentially behavioristic explanation of what it means in general to say that a given sound-or script-pattern is analytic for a given individual, that we can understand what is intended when you tell us (via semantical rules, say) "the following are to be analytic in my new language." Otherwise your specification of what is analytic for a given language dangles in midair, as the specification of the der-words would do in abstraction from the pragmatic notion of sentence. 89

It is for this reason that the appeal to the semantical rules of the language will not help. Recall that Carnap agrees with Quine that mere definition is not what is wanted here, but that instead we need semantical rules. Quine is now arguing that it will not help any to say that analytic statements are true in virtue of the semantical rules of the language, any more than it would help to say "that a sentence is anything that is a sentence by virtue of the grammatical rules of a language." 70 In this respect, there is no difference between

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68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., 338.

70 Ibid.
artificial and natural languages. Both, according to Quine, require an empirical, pragmatical foundation.

This argument, or some form of it, has persisted in Quine’s thinking even to the present day. We can already see at this early stage in his development hints at his later doctrines of holism and indeterminacy as following from some form of this argument. But there is much that needs sorting out here, and it isn’t clear that Quine ever really sorts it out sufficiently himself. For example, this claim that talk of analyticity “dangles in midair” without some pragmatical correlate is ambiguous. Is Quine saying that it is completely without any meaning at all, or, merely not understood by speakers of other languages? Carnap would claim that lacking meaning is not necessarily troublesome, since he would say that mathematics and logic lack just this sort of meaning, i.e., empirically grounded meaning. It does not follow from this lack of empirically grounded meaning that such claims are cognitively useless. Quite the contrary; they are quite useful, especially in the empirical sciences. It is hard, if not impossible, for example, to imagine the empirical sciences as we have them today without mathematics. As for the alternative, the fact that speakers of other languages do not understand my concepts does not entail that they could not understand them. It shows only that they do not in fact possess those concepts. But why should that be a problem? Clearly there are any number of concepts that I do not, as a speaker of English, possess, that a speaker of, say, Inuit or Hindi might possess. But there does not seem to be anything preventing me from acquiring those concepts, or, at the very least, workable translations precise enough for whatever purposes I may have.
Quine’s basic problem with the concept of analyticity is that nobody has given a sufficiently clear formulation of it, or rather, a formulation sufficiently clear so as to bear the weight of some ensuing theory, or portion of theory, that we might want to hang on the concept. In “Two Dogmas” he gives two distinct arguments against Carnap’s strategy of explicating analyticity in terms of semantical rules. The scope of those arguments is, however, much broader, since, “the extension to other forms [of semantical rules] is not hard to see.”  

Quine says that when we consider certain allegedly analytic sentences stated in our ordinary language, for example, the sentence ‘everything green is extended,’ we hesitate over whether they are indeed analytic. The hesitation is due, not to our misunderstanding of the terms ‘green’ and ‘extended’ as we ordinarily understand them, but rather to our misunderstanding of the term ‘analytic’. Some have argued that such hesitation is due to the vagueness of ordinary language, and that we can clear up this sort of vagueness in an artificial language with semantical rules. This strategy, Quine says, “is a confusion.”

He has in mind here a particular “notion of analyticity about which we are worrying.” It is perhaps more accurate to call it a “schema” rather than a notion. A notion implies some semantic content, whereas a schema, as that term is used here, is a formal or necessary condition for something’s counting as having semantic content.

71 Quine, “Two Dogmas,” 36.
72 Ibid., 32.
73 Ibid., 33.
This is how, for example, Tarski's distinction between a concept or a definition and a schema. For example, Tarski's well-known "Schema-T"—S is true iff P—tells us nothing whatsoever about the semantic content of the term 'true'. What it does is give us a rule, or criterion, or necessary condition for judging the goodness of any semantic content we might give to the term 'true'. Quine's schema for analyticity, call this "Schema-A" is, "S is said to be analytic for a language L." Although he calls this a notion, we can avoid some immediate objections to Quine's arguments against analyticity by characterizing it as a schema. Consider the objection that Quine himself employs a notion of analyticity, and hence, his objections are self-defeating. Such objections do not apply to a schema, since the only semantic content of the schema we need to understand is what we require in order to understand the logical relations between the terms of the schema. Namely, we don't need to understand the term 'analytic' in Schema-A; we need only understand what it means to say some sentence is said to have some feature we happen to call 'analyticity' for some language. The term 'analytic' here is only being mentioned and not used, hence, we are not required to define it just in order for it to be part of the schema.

Quine's objection then is not merely that analyticity lacks sufficiently clear content. Rather, "the problem is to make sense of this relation generally, that is, for variables 'S' and 'L'" in Schema-A. Having set the problem up this way, it follows that, granted Schema-A,

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.
the gravity of this problem is not perceptibly less for artificial languages than for natural ones. The problem of making sense of the idiom 'S is analytic for L', with variables 'S' and 'L', retains its stubbornness even if we limit the range of the variable 'L' to artificial languages.\textsuperscript{76}

Quine's point here is that we face the problem of giving an analysis of analyticity in both natural and artificial languages. The move from a natural to an artificial language alone cannot help us achieve clearer understanding of analyticity. For even in an artificial language, we still must satisfy Schema-A. We can now clarify Quine's rather vague claim that analyticity is too unclear to bear any theoretical weight. The specific claim is that we cannot, with sufficient clarity for theoretical purposes, satisfy Schema-A.

Since we are considering here arguments directed against analyses of analyticity in terms of artificial languages, we need some general idea of what constitutes an artificial language. Broadly speaking, an artificial language is any language constructed according to explicitly formulated semantic rules. Quine's arguments against solutions employing artificial languages are directed against the type of semantic rules used to explain analyticity. Since there are different ways of constructing semantic rules, there will be correspondingly different arguments for each such formulation. The first argument is directed against an artificial language, call it $L_o$, in which the semantic rules specify explicitly all of the analytic statements in $L_o$. On this formulation "the rules tell us that such and such statements, and only those, are the analytic statements of $L_o".\textsuperscript{77} The argument is straightforward: the rules themselves contain the very term in need of

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.
explanation. So, even though we can identify the analytic sentences by means of the rule, we have no idea what analyticity itself is. These sorts of semantic rules fail to fulfill Schema-A, hence, they fail to explain analyticity.

Quine's second argument is directed against a different sort of semantic rule, one "which says not that such and such statements are analytic but simply that such and such statements are included among the truths." We can grant, at least for the sake of argument, an understanding of truth. These sorts of semantic rules do not specify all the truths of the language. They only specify a particular set of statements that will count as true. We can then explain analyticity thus: "a statement is analytic if it is (not merely true but) true according to the semantical rule."

But while we now have a clear enough understanding of the term 'analytic', he says, we are appealing for our explanation to the mysterious term 'semantical rule'. The problem now is that in an artificial language all the truths are true according to some rule. That is just part of what it means to be a statement of an artificial language. But we then get the result that all the truths of the language are analytic. The question then is, which of the truths count as semantic rules? Quine's answer is that "semantical rules are distinguishable, apparently, only by the fact of appearing on a page under the heading 'Semantical Rules'; and this heading is itself then meaningless." Appeal to this sort of semantic rule does not help any since, while we have an understanding of analyticity, we

78Ibid., 34.
79Ibid.
80Ibid.
have no understanding of what it is for something to be a semantic rule.

Although these arguments are directed specifically against analyticity, it is clear that Quine has a broader agenda, for he wants to abandon, not only analyticity, but the distinction between natural and artificial languages altogether. His analysis of the motivation behind drawing the analytic/synthetic distinction is useful here. An artificial language, on his view, is one conceived as being entirely a constructed system with no necessary reference to anything non-linguistic. Since we can in fact construct artificial languages, it seems almost absurd to suggest that we have no clear idea of analyticity, since the analytic truths are just the ones of the artificial language which are true solely on non-empirical grounds. Quine rejects this view, on grounds that

Appeal to hypothetical languages of an artificially simple kind could conceivably be useful in clarifying analyticity, if the mental or behavioral or cultural factors relevant to analyticity—whatever they may be—were somehow sketched into the simplified model. But a model which takes analyticity merely as an irreducible character is unlikely to throw light on the problem of explicating analyticity. 81

The explicit claim here is that no artificial language could ever be used to explain analyticity unless it incorporates the relevant features of whatever it is that makes our use of the notion meaningful in ordinary language. The implied claim is that there is no principled distinction between artificial languages and natural languages generally. 82 But if all analytic truths are truths in an artificial language, then without a distinction between

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81 Ibid., 36.

82 Quine is apparently willing here to allow for mental as distinct from behavioral factors as relevant to meaning. He later requires only empirical/behavioral factors as relevant for the explication of analyticity, and rejects mental notions of meaning altogether.
artificial and natural languages, all truths are of the same sort. Thus, we get the sort of holism Quine endorses as a consequence of the rejection of analyticity (via the underlying skepticism about artificial languages), and not just as a consequence of the rejection of reductionism. Let's look now at Carnap's response to Quine.

It is interesting to note that in his letter #145 Quine says that he had not accurately understood Carnap's position on several points, until they held a joint seminar at the University of Chicago on the issue of analyticity shortly after the publication of Quine's "Two Dogmas." He thinks that Carnap ought to explain their disagreement in a paper of his own. Carnap did write such a response, however it was not published until Richard Creath included it in his volume of their correspondence. 83

In this response Carnap undercuts Quine's objections to semantic rules by rejecting Quine's Schema-A. Specifically, he wonders whether Quine "is asking about the elucidation explicandum, 'analytic', or about an explicatum." 84 In other words, Carnap claims that Schema-A is ambiguous between whether it pertains to 'analytic' as used in some ordinary way as a term of natural language, or whether it pertains to 'analytic' as used precisely in some artificial language. If he is asking about the explicatum, i.e., the term 'analytic' as used precisely in an artificial language, this is given by the rules of the system. As we have seen, the rules specify how some term is understood for some particular system. Quine suggests that there be "one definition

83 See "Quine on Analyticity" in Quine, Dear Carnap, 427-432.

84 Ibid., 430.
applicable to all systems.”\textsuperscript{85} Such a request Carnap finds “manifestly unreasonable; it is certainly neither fulfilled nor fullfillable for semantic and syntactic concepts, as Quine knows.”\textsuperscript{86} The point here is that, given the very idea of an artificial language, namely, that the builder of the language is free to construct the language any way he sees fit, there could not, by definition, be a single explicatum for all such language systems. Carnap concludes that Schema-A must be referring to a single definition of the explicandum ‘analytic’, i.e., to the term ‘analytic’ as used in an ordinary way in natural language. If this is correct, then Carnap will readily concede that all explicandums are vague and in need of clarification. But that is precisely why we must give an explication of the explicandum.\textsuperscript{87} If the explicandum were sufficiently clear there would be no need of an explication and hence, no objection on Quine’s part regarding the unclarity of the concept. Such explications are given by means of rules constructed just for such purposes within some artificial language.

On Carnap’s view, we get a precise definition of analyticity \textit{only} within a constructed language system. But whereas Quine thinks the problem with analyticity is with analyticity itself, Carnap locates the problem in the vagueness of ordinary language. Taking Quine’s example of ‘everything green is extended’, Carnap says “it seems completely clear to me, however, that the difficulty here lies in the unclarity of the word ‘green’, namely, in an indecision over whether one should use the word for something

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{87} For a good discussion of the notion of explication see Rudolf Carnap, \textit{Logical Foundations of Probability} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), chap. 1.
unextended, i.e., for a single space-time point."\textsuperscript{88} The issue for Carnap is one of hesitation over how to use a term in ordinary language. The problem in this specific case is that we just don't apply color terms to single space-time points in our use of the term in ordinary language. By analogy, consider whether we would use the term 'mouse' to name an animal that looks for all appearances like what we usually call a mouse, but is as large as an elephant. The problem here is that we just don't ever stop to even consider such possibilities since we never encounter them in experience. This shows that the unclarity is in the meaning of the term as ordinarily used in a natural language. This sort of unclarity is irrelevant to the notion of analyticity as used in a constructed language system, for here such unclarity "cannot be tolerated."\textsuperscript{89}

If in constructing such a language system the builder wants to introduce a predicate term 'g' and states that it will be used in the same way as the term 'green' in ordinary language, we must object, since the term 'green' as used in a natural language is unclear, as the above example shows. What is required is a postulate, a rule for the correct use of the term which states precisely how the term is to be used, e.g., whether it is to apply to extended, unextended, or both sorts of entities. The key point is that the builder of the system is free to choose how the term is going to be employed. If he wants to accurately reflect the meaning of the term as ordinarily employed in the natural language, that will require some empirical investigation. But even this decision is a choice; he is not bound by any constraint whatsoever requiring him to reflect the

\textsuperscript{88}Quine, \textit{Dear Carnap}, 428.

\textsuperscript{89}Ibid.
meanings of terms as employed in a natural language.

Decisions as to how terms are to be used in the language system are made explicit by laying down a postulate. In the case of the term 'g', if we decide that the term will not apply to unextended space-time points, we stipulate this as a postulate by stating it as a sentence, i.e., 'nothing green is unextended'. By so doing, the sentence 'everything green is extended' is analytic. In this way we decide whether the sentence 'everything green is extended' is analytic. But notice that this is decided only for the sentence considered as a sentence of a constructed language system. As for whether this sentence is analytic in a natural language, "one cannot even raise the question of whether it is analytic." At this point, Carnap thinks it is not possible to give an empirical definition of analyticity; he thinks differently later on.

Although Carnap does not argue it in this paper, we can formulate a response here to Quine's objection that we do not know what meaning postulates are, except insofar as they appear on a page under the heading "meaning postulates." Quine implies here that we must make a distinction between the postulates and the non-postulate sentences from among some set of pre-established sentences. This is incorrect, since there are no such pre-existing sentences. Since it is up to the builder of the system to decide by a matter of choice as to what will count as a postulate, the postulates are distinguishable as those sentences stipulated by such a decision procedure. Someone wanting to learn the system will be able to distinguish the postulates as Quine says,

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90 Ibid., 429.

91 Quine, "Two Dogmas," 34.
namely, by seeing them on the page under the heading "meaning postulates." He is to understand here that these are the rules chosen by the author for how to use the various terms of the system. The learner can then construct new sentences in the language system, and will have some way of deciding whether the sentences are analytic. If, perchance, the learner of the system comes upon an ambiguity in the system, then a new postulate will need to be laid down so as to clear up the ambiguity. This new postulate will be laid down in the same way as the original postulates, namely, by a decision made as a free choice. As for Quine's complaint that "any finite...selection of statements...is as much a set of postulates as any other,"92 this assumes that the postulates are already laid down, and that the task is one of picking them out. As we have seen, this is incorrect.

Although the postulates of a system are stipulated by a matter of choice, according to how we intend to use some term, it can still be the case that by means of these rules we can intend to clarify some term from a natural language. Carnap claims that this is precisely what he is doing for 'analyticity'. As in the case of 'green', its use in a natural language is vague, and we clarify its use in our language system by stipulating a postulate. With 'analyticity' the case is slightly different. In this case Carnap does intend to capture "what philosophers have meant, intuitively but not exactly, when they speak of 'analytic sentences' or, more specifically, of 'sentences whose truth depends on their meanings alone and is thus independent of the contingency of facts'."93

92Ibid., 35.

93Quine, Dear Carnap, 430.
But in order to clarify this concept as used in a natural language in this way, a rule must be stipulated for how it is going to be used within the language system. This rule will not be arbitrary in the way the rule specifying the use of 'green' is. Since we do aim to clarify pre-existing use, we will hold ourselves to some strictures, although the strictures are somewhat vague. But their vagueness is precisely the reason why we must stipulate a rule. Furthermore, the lack of complete arbitrariness is self-imposed, since we intend to capture something like the ordinary notion of analyticity within our language system.

The argument in Carnap’s “Meaning Postulates” is basically the same as in this unpublished paper. One particular point, however, needs stressing. Carnap consistently maintains two theses: first, that the explication of analyticity is relevant to the language for which it is being employed, and second, that the “problems of explicating concepts of this kind for natural languages are of an entirely different nature.” According to the first thesis, it is entirely possible that two persons each constructing their own artificial language will have different, and perhaps even incompatible, concepts of analyticity. The problems in giving an explication generally, however, are of the same sort for any artificial language. In other words, even though the resulting concepts of analyticity will vary, the problems faced in giving an explication of the concept of analyticity for some artificial language are the same for all artificial languages.

The second thesis follows from Carnap’s distinction between natural and artificial languages. As we have seen, Carnap is quite willing to grant that we can employ concepts from natural languages within an artificial language, so long as we clarify any

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94 Carnap, “Meaning Postulates,” 223.
ambiguities in the concept as it is used in the natural language. We do this by means of stipulating rules for the correct use of the concept. We cannot do this, however, for a natural language, since such rules are already in use, albeit perhaps implicitly. Here the task is empirical, and so, we face a different set of problems than we do in an artificial language.

Given his distinction between natural and artificial languages and the concepts of analyticity employed by each, Carnap can successfully undercut Quine's specific arguments against the strategy of employing semantic rules for giving a clear analysis of analyticity. But the issue is not resolved this easily. As suggested earlier, Quine has bigger fish to fry. His aim is to undercut Carnap's distinction between natural and artificial languages altogether. Specifically, Quine is willing to grant that there are differences between language systems and natural languages, where the former are something like the artificial languages Carnap constructs in his *Semantics*. What he is not willing to grant is a principled distinction between natural languages and artificial languages. On Quine's view, *all* languages are meaningful in the same way, that way being empirically/behaviorally. The only differences between languages on Quine's view are in terminology and concepts, e.g., French has different terms and concepts than Carnap's *LI*, however both are meaningful in precisely the same way. On this view, an artificial language can be different from a natural language in numerous ways, however, the content of the artificial language must ultimately be cashed out empirically/behaviorally if the language is to have any meaning at all.

From his letter #148 we know that Carnap had Quine's contribution to the Schilpp
volume by 1954, although the actual volume did not appear in print until 1964. His response in this letter is the same as we have already seen in their earlier exchanges. Namely, he wonders "which of your discussions are meant to refer to (a) natural languages, and which to (b) codified languages (i.e., language systems based on explicitly formulated rules)." Carnap is here still attempting to short-circuit Quine's argument by appeal to this distinction which Quine thinks "is a false dichotomy." In his reply to Carnap's letter Quine is, perhaps for the first time, explicit in his rejection of the distinction between "natural" and "artificial" languages. He says,

You ask whether I mean "(a) natural languages" or "(b) codified languages...based on explicitly formulated rules." Now here I suppose you mean codified languages to carry explicit "semantical rules" with them—i.e., outright specification of the so-called analytic sentences. If so, then (b) is not what I am talking about, as stressed in "two dogmas" (foot p. 35 and top p. 36, in From a Logical Point of View). But I do not mean to limit myself to (a) either. It is indifferent to my purpose whether the notation be traditional or artificial, so long as the artificiality is not made to exceed the scope of "language" ordinarily so-called, and beg the analyticity question itself.

If you intend (b) to include thus a packaged formulation of analyticity, then your dichotomy into (a) and (b) is a false dichotomy, acceptance of which would precisely omit my point. The languages I am talking about comprise natural languages and any (used, or interpreted) artificial notations you like, e.g. that of my Mathematical Logic plus extra-logical predicates. They are not uninterpreted notations. Each predicate has its unique extension, and correspondingly for the logical signs (except in so far as extensions may fail to exist because of gaps in the universe of classes, as needed to avoid paradox). But they are not of kind (b) if, as I suspect, "languages" of kind (b) are conceived as embodying a complement of transformation rules—a ready-made stipulation of a

95This delay in publication brought about a premature end to the debate over analyticity between Quine and Carnap. See Creath's introduction to Quine, Dear Carnap for details on the publication delay.

96Ibid., 435.

97Ibid., 438.
boundary between analytic and synthetic.  

It is clear here that analyticity is no longer the central issue for Quine. Rather, his view is that analyticity is merely symptomatic of a more widespread error. That error consists in thinking that we canmeaningfully make a principled distinction between two kinds of languages, one of which we can use to explicate a notion of analyticity. Quine claims that this is an error, since we must first appeal to a notion of analyticity in order to distinguish between the two kinds of languages. We are thus, in effect, "tugging at our bootstraps."  

As we have seen, Carnap consistently maintains a distinction between natural and artificial languages such that "the problems of explicating concepts of this kind [e.g., analyticity] for natural languages are of an entirely different nature." While it is the case that the problems of explication are different, the account of analyticity is essentially the same for the two kinds of language. The problems referred to in the explication of analyticity for the two kinds of languages have to do with explication only. These problems are not unique to analyticity; they are problems that occur for any explication of a concept. Namely, there will always be problems of a particular kind when we attempt to explicate concepts in a natural language. These particular problems do not arise in explications of concepts in artificial languages. Strictly speaking, of course, there are no explications of concepts in natural languages. An explication is the clarification

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98Ibid., 437-438.

99Quine, "Two Dogmas," 36.

100Carnap, "Meaning Postulates," 223.
of some concept that is too vague in its ordinary use in a natural language for our theoretical purposes.

Let's look first at the account of analyticity we get in "Meaning Postulates," since this is the explication proper of analyticity. The account here is, of course, for an artificial language $L$. Consider a language containing "the customary connectives, individual variables with quantifiers, and as descriptive signs individual constants ('$a$', '$b$', etc.) and primitive descriptive predicates (among them '$B'$, '$M'$, '$R$', and '$Bl$')." Assume also the customary truth-tables for the connectives. Since issues concerning the legitimacy of these notions are not at issue, Carnap assumes we can safely use them. In $L$ we have not yet given rules of designation for any of the descriptive predicates, so the meanings of the predicates "are not incorporated into the system." We define the $L$-truth of a sentence in $L$ as logical truth.

Consider the following example sentence:

$S3 \ 'B \ b \supset \neg M \ b'$

Sentence $S3$ is analytic if it is $L$-true. But we do not know whether it is $L$-true unless we give a meaning postulate for $S3$. So we stipulate the following meaning postulate:

$PI \ '(x)(Bx \supset \neg Mx)'$

Notice that in laying down $PI$ "we do not give rules of designation for '$B$' and '$M$'." The point here is that we need not appeal to any troublesome notions of "meaning" that

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101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., 224.
Quine might find objectionable in order to give an explication of analyticity. The postulate $P_1$ "states as much about the meaning of $'B'$ and $'M'$ as is essential for analyticity, viz., the incompatibility of the two properties." $^{104}$ Sentence $S_3$ is now $L$-true in virtue of postulate $P_1$. Thus, a sentence in $L$ is analytic iff it is $L$-true according to a meaning postulate.

Recall that Quine's objection to the notion of meaning postulates, is that they do not seem to be distinguishable except insofar as they are labeled as such—but the label itself is then meaningless. But this objection is readily diffused. Postulates are distinguishable because we stipulate them as such:

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Suppose that the author of a system wishes the predicates $'B'$ and $'M'$ to designate the properties Bachelor and Married, respectively. How does he know that these properties are incompatible and that therefore he has to lay down postulate $P_1$? This is not a matter of knowledge but of decision. His knowledge or belief that the English words 'bachelor' and 'married' are always or usually understood in such a way that they are incompatible may influence his decision if he has the intention to reflect in his system some of the meaning relations of English words. In this particular case, the influence would be relatively clear, but in other cases it would be much less so.$^{105}$
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On Carnap's view, meaning postulates are distinguished on the basis of choice. That is, we decide which sentences to make analytic by whether or not we intend the terms of the sentence to be understood in one way rather than another. This understanding need not extend to a stipulation of the meanings of the terms, if by that we understand that a rule of designation is required. Analyticity, for Carnap, signifies a purely logical relation between terms, not a factual one. Designation rules "are not necessary for the explication

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$^{104}$Ibid.

$^{105}$Ibid., 225.
of analyticity, but only for that of factual (synthetic) truth. " Semantics, for Carnap, is
a pure, not an empirical discipline. This does not, however, prohibit us from giving an
account of analyticity as it appears to be used in natural languages. Recall that Quine
insists that such an account is necessary if we are to make any sense at all of analyticity.

Although meaning postulates themselves are decided by our choice, and they
specify only logical relations, it does not follow that logical relations themselves are
decided just by a matter of choice. The conventionality of meaning postulates is neutral
on the issue of whether logical relations are conventional in the same way. It may well
be that our choice of how we specify meaning postulates presupposes logic. The point
at issue here, however, is just that the choice of meaning postulates is a choice from
among established logical relations. We need not specify the logical relations themselves
by convention; we need only choose from among such relations as we already find them.

While Carnap does give an account of analyticity as it is used in natural
languages, he maintains that this is not a general requirement of all semantic concepts:
"I do not think that a semantical concept, in order to be fruitful, must necessarily possess
a prior pragmatical counterpart. It is theoretically possible to demonstrate its fruitfulness
through its application in the further development of language systems." Furthermore,
the account he gives is not, strictly speaking, either an explication, or a definition. His
aim is "to give a practical vindication for the semantical intension concepts; ways for

\[\text{Ibid., 224.}\]

\[\text{Rudolf Carnap, "Meaning and Synonymy in Natural Languages," chap. in Meaning and Necessity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 235.}\]
defining them, especially analyticity, I have shown in a previous paper [Postulates].”

Strictly speaking then, what we get here is *not* an account of analyticity as it is used in natural languages. Rather, what we have is a procedure whereby we can determine when some sentence is analytic for some speaker. In other words, what we get here is the *criterion* for analyticity in natural languages; we get the *definition* in the explication of ‘analytic-for-\(L\)’ where \(L\) is an artificial language. The concept itself of analyticity employed in natural languages is entirely too vague for philosophical purposes, and perhaps the best we can do with it is to say that “a sentence is analytic if it is true by virtue of the intensions of the expressions occurring in it.”

Carnap’s criterion of analyticity is straightforward. Imagine two field-linguists investigating the language of some speaker, Karl. After some amount of investigation of Karl’s use of the term ‘\(\text{pferd}\)’ one linguist makes the following entry in his dictionary of Karl’s language:

(1) \(\text{Pferd, horse,}\)

while the other linguist writes:

(2) \(\text{Pferd, horse or unicorn.}\)

Since there are no unicorns, the extension of ‘\(\text{pferd}\)’, is the same for both linguists, even though the intension is not. Since the extension is the same, then, on Quine’s extensionalist thesis, there is no empirical way to decide between (1) and (2). No response by Karl to any actual object could enable us to favor one rather than the other.

\[108\] Ibid.

\[109\] Ibid.
But just because no response to any actual object is insufficient for determining the intension, we are not limited in empirical investigation only to actual objects. We must “take into account not only the actual cases, but also possible cases.”  

The most direct way of doing this would be for the linguist to use, in the German questions directed to Karl, modal expressions corresponding to ‘possible cases’ or the like. To be sure, these expressions are usually rather ambiguous; but this difficulty can be overcome by giving suitable explanations and examples. I do not think that there is any objection of principle against the use of modal terms. On the other hand, I think that their use is not necessary. The linguist could simply describe for Karl cases, which he knows to be possible, and leave it open whether there is anything satisfying those descriptions or not.

So, for example, the linguists might ask Karl if he would use the word ‘pferd’ to name something similar to a horse but with a single horn in the middle of the forehead. By such procedures, it seems quite plausible that we can determine the intension of some term, within the bounds of empirical investigation. With this means of determining intensions, we can employ the following criterion for analyticity:

A sentence is analytic in \( L \) for \( X \) at \( t \) if its intension (or range or truth-condition) in \( L \) for \( X \) at \( t \) comprehends all possible cases.

Although Carnap calls this a definition, this is, strictly speaking, inaccurate. It is rather a criterion for determining whether or not some sentence is analytic. Notice that on this criterion, analyticity is relativized to the speaker. If analyticity is relative to the speaker, then it is possible that, for two speakers of the same language, some sentence may be analytic for one and synthetic for the other. Whether this is Carnap’s view is not clear.

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\(^{110}\)Ibid., 238.

\(^{111}\)Ibid.

\(^{112}\)Ibid., 243.
His view seems to be that, in such a case, the speakers only appear to be speaking the same language, but in fact are speaking a different language just in virtue of this fact. If we distinguish one artificial language from another just on the basis of the meaning postulates, then different postulates result in different languages, even if they employ the same terms. This will need some further investigation, but suffice it to say at this point that analyticity is, on Carnap’s view, relative to speaker’s insofar as speakers are free to use terms as they see fit.

Although this criterion of analyticity appears not to use any mysterious terms, and can be used empirically, it still relies on a speaker’s “intending” to use words in one way rather than another. It is this intending that would seem to give the sentence its meaning, or at least the relevant portion of meaning, such that it is analytic and not synthetic. When push comes to shove, Quine will insist on a thoroughly behavioral theory of meaning. He will thus argue that such intentions cannot contribute anything at all to the meaning of a sentence, for, on his view, “there is nothing in linguistic meaning beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behavior in observable circumstances.”\(^{113}\)

Talk of intentions implies that one is, perhaps implicitly, following some rule of correct use. That is, one speaks this way rather than some other way because one takes oneself to be using the relevant terms in some particular way. This implies that there are correct and incorrect ways of using terms. Insofar as meaning is a function of use, and even Quine thinks it is, then intentions serve the role of distinguishing correct use from

\(^{113}\)Quine, Pursuit of Truth, 38.
mere noise. So the issue is whether we can preserve a notion of analyticity that employs a notion of intention that will meet Quine's objections. Recall that Quine's objections are based on his behavioristic theory of meaning.

Recently Paul Moser has constructed an account of analyticity that meets Quine's strictures. His account, like Carnap's, relativizes analyticity to the individual. It also provides for an empirical test of prospective analytic sentences. Let's look briefly at his account, since it provides a rigorous approach to the problem, and one that may be useful for philosophical purposes.

Moser's Account of Analyticity

Quine finds problems with the view that a sentence is analytic if it is true solely in virtue of the meaning of its constituent words. For one, he is leery of the appeal to some mysterious, i.e., mental, notion of meaning. The concept of meaning, it has been suggested, can be de-mystified by taking the view that meaning is use. This will, hopefully, allow us to explain meaning empirically by focussing on the behavior of speakers. Even Quine is willing to grant that this idea can be useful in an analysis of meaning.

The view that meaning is use, however, needs some clarification. Meaning is not merely use, since mere use does not seem to entail any notion of correctness. Some notion of correctness seems necessary for a concept of language use, if by 'language' we understand something more than just verbal noise. Carnap uses the notion of intention

to supply the correctness requirement. His idea is that we choose to use words in some specific way, i.e., according to some rule (either implicit or explicit), thereby supplying the needed notion of correctness. For example, some speaker can intend to use ‘swan’ to signify only white birds of a certain shape, thereby establishing a correct way to use ‘swan’.

With this notion of intention used to supply the needed notion of correctness, we can clarify our notion of meaning as use by distinguishing between use and “usage.” The latter implies some pattern or custom of use, whereas the former implies no such pattern. Intentions can now be said to imply some usage rather than a mere use. With this distinction between use and usage, we formulate the task of giving an account of analyticity as that of specifying how some sentence can be true just in virtue of some commitment to a usage of the constituent words in the sentence. The commitment requirement can then be explained empirically/behaviorally, and should not be understood as entailing any mental action, e.g., intending.

Working with the notion of usage, Paul Moser takes the view that analytic sentences are sentences true just in virtue of a speaker having “nonextraneous interpretive commitments regarding S’s constituent terms” i.e., usage commitments. He then defines analyticity as follows: “A sentence, S, is analytically true for a person, X, at time t if and only if at t X, when motivated just by her nonextraneous interpretive commitments regarding S’s constituent terms, will reject all (potential) falsifiers of S.”

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115 Moser, Philosophy After Objectivity, chap. 3.

116 Ibid., 146.
He then proposes that we test for the analyticity of a sentence by seeing if the speaker “will reject all (potential) falsifiers of S.”\textsuperscript{117} If the speaker does reject all (possible) falsifiers, then we can conclude that the sentence is analytically true. Moser claims that his notion of analyticity should be, not only acceptable to Quine, but endorsed by him for certain epistemic purposes of his own.

Notice that on Moser’s account analyticity is relativized to the individual speaker. What he offers is an account of a sentence being analytic for a speaker, rather than an account of a sentence being analytic for a language. As Moser puts it,

> What is analytic, on Carnap’s view, can vary from person to person, owing to the variability of intentions with respect to use. My intentions regarding use can make the truths of arithmetic, for example, analytic for me. Those truths need not be analytic, however, for someone lacking the relevant intentions about linguistic use. Quine does not give due recognition to such person-relativity of analyticity.\textsuperscript{118}

That Quine does not consider the person-relativity of analyticity is correct. On his view,

> The notion of analyticity about which we are worrying is a purported relation between statements and languages: a statement $S$ is said to be analytic for a language $L$, and the problem is to make sense of this relation generally, that is, for variables ‘$S$’ and ‘$L$’.\textsuperscript{119}

Recall that earlier we labelled this Schema-A for the notion of analyticity. By making analyticity person-relative it would appear that Moser has not given an account of analyticity in terms of Schema-A, and so has not met Quine’s request for an account of analyticity, at least, analyticity as he understands it according to Schema-A.

\textsuperscript{117}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., 145.

\textsuperscript{119}Quine, “Two Dogmas,” 33.
This is not necessarily a problem for Moser, however, given his thesis of "conceptual relativism," i.e., the view that "different people can, and sometimes do, have different operative constitutive standards for the correct use of such terms as 'justification' and 'warrant', at least at a level of specificity."¹²⁰ The concept 'analyticity' can then vary in the same way, and historically this does seem to be the case—witness the various concepts of analyticity Quine examines in "Two Dogmas." Philosophers, however, as Moser points out, "often talk of the notion of justification, truth, meaning, explanation, obligation, and so on."¹²¹ Such talk is misguided on Moser's view, for, "given conceptual relativism, we may diagnose such talk as laboring under a myth: the 'myth of the definite article' wherein a notion of X suitable to one's conceptual purposes is regarded as having the exclusive status of the notion of X."¹²² Given conceptual relativism then, Moser can claim that his notion of analyticity need not meet Quine's Schema-A since he, Moser, is operating with a different concept of analyticity from Quine's. Moser's concept can be seen as yet another alternative that Quine has simply failed to recognize. What we need now from Moser is an explanation of how his notion of analyticity can be put to work for philosophical purposes. He does supply just such an argument, aiming to show that Quine would do well to adopt his account of analyticity in order to answer certain questions he puts to Quine regarding the truth of certain of Quine's own heuristic principles. Notice, however, that such an argument requires that

¹²⁰Moser, Philosophy After Objectivity, 8.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.
Quine do two things: one, that he give up the view that an account of analyticity should meet Schema-A, and two, that he accept a different account of analyticity.

We won't consider the question of whether Quine should or should not adopt Moser's account of analyticity. Let's turn instead to the construction of an account of analyticity that meets Schema-A. This account will meet Quine's challenge head-on, and so won't require a separate argument for persuading Quine of the use of such an account. The fact that such an account can be constructed will alone be sufficient to meet his challenge. Having met Quine's challenge, we are then under no obligation to adopt his holism or his naturalism, and so will be free to construct an alternative strategy for doing ontology. Let's turn now to a new of account of analyticity.

**Analyticity Again**

As we have already seen, the basic idea that meaning is use is acceptable, even to Quine, although it is incomplete without a notion of *correct* use, or a notion of usage. The account to be offered makes use of some ideas of Carnap's, in particular, the notion of a "meaning postulate." Recall that Quine is skeptical about employing meaning postulates, and semantical rules generally, in an account of analyticity, claiming that "they are distinguishable, apparently, only by the fact of appearing on a page under the heading 'Semantical Rules'; and this heading is itself then meaningless." The account offered now will avoid the problem of appealing to unexplained semantical rules by clarifying the notion of a semantical rule, or meaning postulate.

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123 Quine, "Two Dogmas," 34.
Let's begin by distinguishing between two "orders" of language use. I'll use the term 'First-order use' for language use that has as its referent something non-linguistic. For example, the sentence,

*S4* 'There is a swan.'

is a use of language that is about something non-linguistic. Quine calls these "observation sentences." These sorts of sentences capture, grasp, or describe something non-linguistic, be it the speaker's sensory stimulus, or some external object. We can even allow, at this point, that such sentences have only what Quine calls "stimulus meaning." Nothing, however, hangs on this point, since the relevant feature of a First-order use of language is just that it is about something non-linguistic.

Now suppose we wish to say something in our language about First-order use of language. The referent of sentences about First-order uses of language will be linguistic. To speak about First-order use of language is to employ the strategy of what Quine has called "semantic ascent": "The strategy of semantic ascent is that it carries the discussion into a domain where both parties are better agreed on the objects (viz., words) and on the main terms concerning them." Let's call this a "Second-order use" of language, which is language use about language. One example of Second-order language use would be,

*S5* 'All swans are white.'

*S5* can be construed as a partial definition of what it is to be a swan. We can call *S5* a


125 Quine, *Word and Object*, 270.
rule for the correct use of language. On this view \textit{S5} asserts that use of the word ‘swan’ entails use of the word ‘white’. Notice, however, that \textit{S5} can also be construed as a First-order use of language. On this interpretation \textit{S5} would be the report of some speaker’s observations regarding some swans. What is still needed is some test to determine which interpretation is appropriate.

The distinction between orders of language use can be clarified by contrasting orders with levels. We can move up to an infinite number of levels of abstraction by a simple iterative procedure. For example, we can talk about our talk about language. This would be to move up to a higher level of abstraction than talk about talk. The distinction between orders and levels recognizes that we can always move to a different level just by a mechanical procedure of iteration, whereas orders cut across levels. There are only two possible orders of language use: language use about language, and language use about something non-linguistic. The levels we can generate about the latter, e.g., talk about talk about talk about talk, are all second-order uses of language since they are all talk about talk, even though they proceed to ever higher levels of abstraction. Thus, talk of ‘orders’ is meant to draw a different distinction than talk of ‘levels.’

Suppose then that \textit{S5} is understood as a second-order sentence, and is thus analytically true. Specifically, analytic sentences, on this view, are nothing but rules for correct use of words in first-order language use. So, a sentence is analytically true if it is a true, second-order sentence about a first-order use of language. Second-order sentences themselves do not have any empirical content. That is, they do not designate anything non-linguistic. Like Carnap’s meaning postulates, they specify only the logical
relations among the terms in the sentence. This is perhaps easier to see when we translate them into logical form. $S5$ then becomes,

$$S6 \Box(x)(Sx \supset Wx)$$

This can be read as, "if something is said to be an $S$, then necessarily it is $W". Where Carnap has spoken of meaning postulates, this has been replaced by talk of second-order uses of language. The latter is understood as clarifying the former. If the distinction between first and second-order use is clear enough, we can successfully reply to Quine's objection that the appeal to meaning postulates is just an appeal to yet another mysterious term. Specifically, a meaning postulate is just a rule for the correct use of some term in a second-order use of language.

The key point here is that $S5$ specifies only the logical relations between the predicates 'swan' and 'white'. This should be clear when we look at the translation of $S5$ into $S6$. So far we have not given any rules of designation for 'S' and 'W'. Rules of designation, as Carnap points out, "are not necessary for the explication of analyticity, but only for that of factual (synthetic) truth."$^{126}$ $S5$ states all that we need to know about the meanings of the predicates 'S' and 'W', namely, the logical relation of implication obtaining between the two properties. What we need now is some way of determining when any given sentence should be understood as a first-order or a second-order use of language, since, as we have seen, it is possible to interpret a sentence in either way.

The test proposed is behavioral; it is similar to the test Moser has devised for his

account of analyticity. Given some sentence, $S$, we ask a speaker to consider whether he can imagine any circumstances under which he would ever assent to $S$ being false. In other words, we ask whether there could be any situation he might imagine that would falsify $S$. Notice, the test is whether the sentence could be falsified. The test is not whether the speaker could imagine the sentence as having a different meaning. Let's consider briefly what it is for something to count as a falsifier.

A necessary, though not sufficient, condition for something being a falsifier is that it must be something that the sentence could be about. That is, for $f$ to count as a falsifier of a sentence $S$, $f$ must be something that $S$ could be said to describe, name, refer to, be about, etc. A falsifier of $S5$, ‘all swans are white’, could be an instance of a black bird of a particular shape and size that someone uttering $S5$ would count as being a swan. In other words, the instance of a particular bird that the speaker would be willing to claim $S5$ could be about or could refer to would meet this necessary requirement for it to be a falsifier. If the speaker allows that something could be a falsifier, then we can conclude that $S5$ is not being employed as a second-order sentence, since, in order to falsify $S5$ we require the possibility of something that $S5$ could be about that would falsify it. Second-order uses of language cannot have falsifiers since what they are about is first-order uses of language. The only possibility we can imagine of a second-order use of language being falsified requires imagining a situation in which the first-order use is different. But this is not a case of imagining a falsifier; it is a case of imagining a change of meaning. What is perhaps occurring here is that the speaker might be imagining a

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127Moser, *Philosophy After Objectivity*, chap. 3.
different sentence. Thus, the sentence in question is not falsified, but changed to a
different sentence due to a change of meaning. The reason we do not use a test of change
of meaning is so that we can avoid appeals to the term ‘meaning’ that Quine finds
problematic. The test for falsification is behavioral, whereas a test for change of
meaning, while it may be behavioral, is a test for something that is itself suspect on
Quine’s view.

Notice that the proposed test is one directed to a speaker, and not just to the
analysis of the sentence. Someone might object here that this account of analyticity is
indeed relativized to the speaker and so does not meet Quine’s Schema-A. The problem
with this objection is that it assumes that both the account of analyticity as well as the
test meet Schema-A. We need not make this assumption in order to comply with Schema-
A. The test is directed to a speaker because it is only speakers that are language-users.
Recall that we do want to allow for different speakers employing different uses of the
same term. The test applies to a speaker because of this apparent fact. If it were the case
that all speakers of a language always used all of the terms in the language in the same
way, there would be no need for directing the test at any particular speaker. We could
merely analyze the sentence itself. Since this is not the case, however, we direct the test
at a speaker in order to account for different uses of terms among various speakers. It
does not follow from this, however, that analyticity itself is relativized to the speaker.
It is only the test for analyticity that is directed to the speaker. We can still maintain that,
given this test, what we are testing for is analyticity in language $L$, as Schema-A
stipulates. We simply take into consideration the apparent fact that, within language $L$,
there may be multiple uses for any particular term. Thus, testing the speaker does not imply that analyticity itself is speaker-relative.

Since analytic sentences have only a logical sort of meaning, then insofar as logical sentences can be analyzed behaviorally, Quine must grant that analytic sentences of this sort can be analyzed behaviorally as well. Second-order use of language probably does not occur until one is already fluent in first-order use of a language, but that is unproblematic. It would be overly stringent to require second-order uses of language by a speaker in order for them to engage in first-order uses of language. We should adopt the general principle that first-order language use does not require second-order language use. Without this principle we would be unable to explain language use by young children and anyone learning a foreign language.

Here, then, is a general definition of analyticity:

A sentence, $S$, is analytically true for some language, $L$, if it is a rule for the correct use of words in a first-order use of language $L$, where such rules are sentences in a second-order use of language $L$.

If this account of analyticity is unobjectionable we now have an empirical account of analyticity, and a behavioral criterion for testing when some sentence is analytic, an account that accords with Quine's Schema-A. This account should meet all of Quine's qualms about analyticity and should be compatible with a fully behavioral account of meaning.

What has not been given is an account of rules of designation. Recall that on Carnap's view these sorts of rules are not necessary for an account of analyticity; they are needed only for factual (synthetic) truth. It is in establishing rules of designation that
Carnap appeals to choice:

Suppose that the author of a system wishes the predicates 'B' and 'M' to designate the properties Bachelor and Married, respectively. How does he know that these properties are incompatible and that therefore he has to lay down postulate P₁? This is not a matter of knowledge but of decision.¹²₈ The idea here is that we establish rules for designation of terms by choice and decision according to our purposes.

A more complete theory of meaning, or language use, would require an account of how we give rules of designation. Whether Carnap's suggestion that this is a matter of choice is the approach to take here is debatable. The notion of choice implies that we can, merely by an act of deciding, establish rules of designation. This sounds like an appeal to conventional stipulation, and here Quine would perhaps object that, while convention may be used to establish new uses of terms, it cannot be appealed to in order to explain existing uses.

Recall that the appeal to choice is used, not for analyticity, but for rules of designation. Quine's criticism is, therefore, not relevant to this account of analyticity. Presumably, we could construct an account whereby the rules of designation can be accounted for behaviorally. It isn't crucial to this account that we must resort to choice in order to establish such rules. We can assume that the rules of designation can be specified to Quine's satisfaction. The important point for present purposes is that an account of analyticity does not require rules of designation. Such rules will be needed in an account of synthetic or factual truth. As we will see, however, we don't need such

an account since the method of ontology being offered doesn’t make factual claims. Rather, in matters ontological, “to recognize something as a real thing or event means to succeed in incorporating it into the system of things at a particular space-time position so that it fits together with the other things recognized as real, according to the rules of the framework.”

If this account of analyticity is satisfactory, the issue now is, what use can we make of it for a theory of ontology? This will be the primary topic of chapter three.

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CHAPTER III

ONTOMETRY AND LANGUAGE

Introduction

Chapter two provided an account of analyticity that meets all of Quine's requirements. Recall, however, that Quine's most recent claim about analyticity is not so much that we cannot give a suitable account of it, but that there must be some philosophical task to which the account can be put to good use, one that will do at least as good a job as holism. I propose now to put this account to some use in constructing a method for doing ontology. This method will be non-realist and employs some ideas of both Quine and Carnap, even though they have substantial disagreements about ontology.

We saw in chapter one that Carnap rejects realism, and metaphysical doctrines generally, while allowing for intelligible talk of ontological matters. Whether one is or is not persuaded by his reasons for rejecting metaphysics, his resulting views about ontology can be put to good use in developing a non-realist ontology. In this chapter such a method is developed. The method itself is neutral on the issue of which particular ontology we should embrace, e.g., materialism/physicalism, dualism, idealism, etc. In chapter four a number of possible ontologies are considered, and then an argument for a version of physicalism is offered, albeit a physicalism that is somewhat different than
the doctrine discussed in much of the current literature. Briefly, the notion of physicalism
developed here is based in part on the original understanding of the term as it was first
coined by Otto Neurath, and adopted by Carnap. This concept of physicalism is a non-
metaphysical, semantic doctrine.

Carnap's Ontological Method

Carnap's ontological method is motivated chiefly by problems arising from our
talk of abstract entities. Specifically, the issue is whether empiricists, who "are in general
rather suspicious with respect to any kind of abstract entities like properties, classes,
relations, numbers, propositions, etc." can "avoid any reference to abstract entities and
to restrict themselves to what is sometimes called a nominalistic language, i.e., one not
containing such references." ¹ Given that we can meaningfully talk about such things, and
given that our best science would be impossible without at least some of them, e.g.,
numbers, the empiricist needs some way of resolving questions about their existence.
Carnap's aim is to show that empiricists can meaningfully use terms referring to abstract
objects without being committed to their existence in any troubling sense.

On Carnap's view, whenever we wish to speak of, or theorize about, a new sort
of entity, we need a "linguistic framework" within which we can talk about such
entities.² Once the framework is in place, "we must distinguish two kinds of questions
of existence: first, questions of the existence of certain entities of the new kind within the

¹Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology," 205.
²Ibid., 206-7.
framework; we call them internal questions; and second, questions concerning the existence or reality of the system of entities as a whole, called external questions."³

Internal questions are answered according to the type of framework. So, for example, if the framework is factual, we use empirical methods, whereas if it is logical, we use logical methods. External questions, on the other hand, are, as we shall see, problematic. We require an interpretation of these external questions, since they can be understood in more than one way. As will be shown, answers to external questions, understood correctly, are analytically true, given some linguistic framework.

This notion of a "linguistic framework" needs clarification. Carnap mentions several such frameworks, among them the "thing language with its framework for things, the frameworks of numbers, propositions, thing properties, integers and rational numbers, real numbers and the spatio-temporal coordinate system for physics."⁴ He has also stated that he is "essentially in agreement with" Quine's view of our being ontologically committed to whatever objects are within the range of values of our variables.⁵ Consequently, "the acceptance of a new kind of entities is represented in the language by the introduction of a framework of new forms of expressions to be used according to a new set of rules."⁶ Now we may already have in our language names for the new kind of entity, e.g., "the thing language contains certainly words of the type of

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³Ibid., 206.

⁴Ibid., 207–212.

⁵Carnap, Meaning and Necessity, 42.

⁶Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology," 213.
'blue' and 'house' before the framework of properties is introduced.\(^7\) This shows that the occurrence in our language of constants of the appropriate type is insufficient as an indicator of our acceptance of the existence of the kind of entity in question. What we need for that is:

First, the introduction of a general term, a predicate of higher level, for the new kind of entities, permitting us to say of any particular entity that it belongs to this kind (e.g., 'Red is a property', 'Five is a number'). Second, the introduction of variables of the new type. The new entities are values of these variable; the constants (and the closed compound expressions, if any) are substitutable for the variables. With the help of the variables, general sentences concerning the new entities can be formulated.\(^8\)

On this view we adopt some type of predicate, and some variables for talking about individual objects of the new type. We then distinguish frameworks according to their ontological commitments in Quine's sense. Ontological commitment is determined by the values of the variables in any case of existential quantification. So, something is a distinct framework in virtue of the type of predicates it employs, where each instance of a variable of that type of predicate commits us to a different kind of entity. Frameworks are distinct if they do not share the same type of predicate. We can thus create a framework for a new sort of entity by introducing a new type of predicate. On this view, types of predicates correspond to kinds of entities. For example, there are material and numerical types of predicates just as there are material and numerical types of entities. Given some type of predicate, the particular instances are determined by what we take as the values of the variable. Alternatively, frameworks for what seem to be old and

\(^7\)Ibid.

\(^8\)Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology," 213–14.
well-established entities, e.g., physical objects, minds, numbers, are not so much constructed new, but are now explicitly distinguished from each other in this particular way.

Answering ontological questions thus presumes the use of the appropriate framework with which we construct possible answers to such questions. Internal questions, therefore, are questions about the range of values of the variables of the language in question. For example, given the thing language, it is an internal question whether there are unicorns. Namely, we want to know if unicorns are in the range of values of a variable in the thing language. Since the thing language is empirical, whether or not some entity exists will be determined by empirical criteria. Thus, in order to answer the question regarding the existence of unicorns, we must go out and look for unicorns, or at least evidence of unicorns. Notice, however, that failure to find unicorns, or even evidence of unicorns, does not imply that unicorns do not exist. Rather, it implies that they do not exist for the thing language.

It can thus happen that something we believe is a member of one framework turns out to be a member of another framework. The unicorn, for example, might originally be thought to be a member of the material object framework. On investigation, however, we may find that it is instead a member of the language of ideas or abstract objects. To our concept of unicorn we still attribute the quality of materiality. What has happened, however, is that, as such it cannot correctly be said to exist. That is, we cannot say that unicorns as material things exist. What we say instead is that unicorns exist only as the idea of some material thing of a particular kind. In other words, we attribute existence
to unicorns only insofar as we say that any idea as such exists.

In answering an internal question about the existence of some entity affirmatively, we recognize it as a real thing. This sort of recognition of the reality of something just means that we succeed in incorporating it into the framework in which we speak about the entity in question. Taking a physical object, or "thing", for example, "to recognize something as a real thing or event means to succeed in incorporating it into the system of things at a particular space-time position so that it fits together with the other things as real, according to the rules of the framework." Notice that success at incorporation into the system is a criterion for our recognizing something as real, and not a requirement for its being real. When Carnap says in the paragraph following the previous quotation, "to be real in the scientific sense means to be an element of the system" we could interpret this as an endorsement of a kind of Goodmanian constructivism according to which something is real in virtue of speaking of it with certain of our words. This constructivist view is clearly a metaphysical doctrine that Carnap would reject. Furthermore, verificationism notwithstanding, one can reasonably question whether it is even intelligible.

This does, however, raise the issue of whether the concept of being real, i.e., the concept of existence, is the same or different for each framework. With respect to the thing language Carnap says, "this concept of reality occurring in these internal questions

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9Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology," 207.

10Ibid., 207.
is an empirical, scientific, non-metaphysical concept." What remains the same across frameworks is the criterion for being real, namely, that some entity is found to be a possible value of some variable of the framework. What it means to be real, however, may vary across frameworks. This requires that we give up the idea that there is a univocal concept of what it is to be real, to exist, for all the kinds of particulars that we might want to countenance in our ontology. Let’s call this the analogy of existence thesis, or AE:

The concept of existence is relative to the linguistic framework one uses in asserting the existence of any particular entity.

Notice that AE allows for multiple concepts of existence, so it does not fall prey to Moser’s myth of the definite article. AE even allows for the possibility of different users of the same framework having different concepts of existence. It would be possible, for example, for two users of the thing language to have different concepts of existence for that framework, even if their concepts are only slightly different. The point of AE is that the concept of existence for any framework will vary just in virtue of its being the concept for that particular framework.

Concepts of existence are not entirely distinct, for they do share some minimal amount of content. This minimal amount of content is whatever it is that we mean when we use the logical notation ‘∃x’. This is, admittedly, a very broad notion of existence, in that it can be used to express existence claims made in any framework. Whatever this notation expresses, so long as it is not a realist notion of existence, we can let it remain

\[11\] Ibid.
sufficiently vague so that it can be used in just this way. It is this very broad notion that is common to all framework-relative concepts of existence.

Recall that earlier we saw that Carnap agrees with Quine on the issue of ontological commitment. This logical notation is neutral on the question of what the concept of existence might mean. We can use the same logical mechanism for determining ontological commitment for all frameworks, so long as assertions in the framework can be formulated using the logic of quantification. The concept of existence itself, however, can vary across frameworks. The claim that the concept of existence is relative to the framework just amounts to the claim that what it is to be a member of one framework is different than what it is to be a member of another framework. Consider again the example of the unicorn. Whether unicorns exist is determined in part by the framework in which we posit their existence. In other words, the meaning of the concept of existence is relativized to the framework in which assertions of existence are made.

Notice that $AE$ does not relativize concepts of existence to individual users of the concept. This is Moser's thesis of conceptual relativity. As we have already seen, conceptual relativity seems basically correct. Conceptual relativity is not, however, what is at issue in $AE$. We can grant that concepts of existence may vary for individuals, for example, in cases where some individuals do not embrace the view being endorsed here that the concept of existence is relative to a linguistic framework. $AE$ asserts that concepts of existence are relative to the linguistic framework with which one is operating. Given that there can be more than one linguistic framework, some of which are not translatable or reducible to others, there will be different concepts of existence
for each such distinct framework.

This sort of conceptual relativity is not problematic. In fact, there are good reasons for taking such a view. Such a view does not exclude anything from our ontology that someone with a univocal notion of existence might want to include. Given that our ontological commitments are determined by a logical procedure that cuts across frameworks, we can be committed to the existence of anything over which we can quantify. Furthermore, it helps to explain the issue of how one can say that both material and abstract entities exist. On this view, we can be ontologically committed to both, but we can explain what it is for each of them to exist by taking the view that each exists in a different way. For example, for a material entity, to exist is to be located in spacetime, whereas for an abstract entity, to exist is to be a member of a particular logical system. To require that both exist in just the same way seems to be not only too strong, but just wrongheaded. Why should we think that both abstract and concrete entities must exist in just the same way when they are, by definition, fundamentally different kinds of things? Since we can be ontologically committed to both sorts of things without equivocation, this seems sufficient for our asserting the existence of both.

As we have seen, internal questions ask about the existence of some particular entity of the kind designated by the framework in question. As such, internal questions are of interest more to scientists than to philosophers. These sorts of questions are what we can call questions of "regional" ontology. The more general questions about particular kinds of entities, e.g., whether there are abstract objects, immaterial entities, etc., are the sorts of questions that traditionally interest philosophers. These are not
internal questions since, presumably, they ask about the status of some particular kind of entity. These sorts of questions are "conceived as propounded before the adoption of a given language." These are external questions, and it is these sorts of questions that philosophers are traditionally interested in for purposes of ontology.

External questions, on the other hand, are, according to Carnap, "raised neither by the man in the street nor by scientists, but only by philosophers." Accordingly, answers to external questions vary according to particular well-known doctrines: "Realists give an affirmative answer, subjective idealists a negative one, and the controversy goes on for centuries without ever being solved." The reason the controversy cannot be solved, according to Carnap, is that the question itself is confused.

External questions ask about the existence of some kind of entities, and not just about whether some particular entity of a specific kind exists. Since in order to talk about any kind of entity at all we require a framework, external questions can be answered in one of two ways, depending on how the question is understood. On one view, the question, 'are there physical objects?', is a metaphysical question regarding the real existence of physical objects, in the metaphysical sense of 'real' as defined earlier. On this view the question is understood as asking whether there are physical objects with conceiver-independent existence. On another view, the question 'are there physical objects?' is about whether there is some framework in place for making claims about


13 Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology," 207.

14 Ibid.
physical objects. On this view, the question is not metaphysical, but merely practical.

The problem with the metaphysical interpretation, on Carnap's view, is that statements about the reality of the thing world itself "cannot be formulated in the thing language or, it seems, in any other theoretical language" for "the alleged statement of the reality of the system of entities is a pseudo-statement without cognitive content." Whether or not Carnap is appealing to a verificationist criterion of meaning in labeling such questions mere pseudo-questions, having only an appearance of sense, is unimportant. I'm not going to take the position that external questions construed in this way are, strictly speaking, meaningless. My view is that external questions, construed metaphysically, are unverifiable given agnosticism about metaphysics generally.

On another interpretation however, an external question is just the question of whether to accept the framework itself in which we talk about a certain entity. As Carnap puts it, "those who raise the question of the reality of the thing world itself have perhaps in mind not a theoretical question as their formulation seems to suggest, but rather a practical question, a matter of a practical decision concerning the structure of our language." The answer to this sort of question concerns a matter of choice. Namely, the issue is whether one is going to talk a certain way using a certain language.

On this view, the sentence, 'there are physical objects', is understood as a rule for the correct use of the expression 'physical object' in the physical object language.

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15Ibid., 208.
16Ibid., 214.
17Ibid.
Whenever I say there are physical objects I employ some concept of existence. This concept is relative to the framework I use in order to talk about physical objects. So to ask if there are physical objects is, on this interpretation, to ask whether there is some framework with which we can make statements about this particular kind of entity, in this case, physical objects. When I assert that physical objects exist I am to be understood as saying nothing more than something about what constitutes correct use of the expression 'physical object', given the framework. This should not be confused with what counts as correct use of the expression 'concept of physical object'. Talk of concepts takes place in a different framework than talk of physical objects, since, by definition, the concept of a physical objects is not itself a physical object.

Acceptance of a framework with which we can make statements about some sort of entities does not need any theoretical justification. It needs no theoretical justification "because it does not imply any assertion of reality." Acceptance of a linguistic framework is not acceptance of any doctrine. It is nothing more than the acceptance of some way of speaking. This does not imply that we can give no reasons at all as to why we use one framework rather than another. We can indeed give such reasons, and they are of the sort that even Quine would countenance, namely, pragmatic reasons as to why one framework is to be preferred over another. The point is that, whether there is some particular kind of entity can only be answered in one of two ways. One way is by taking the view that kinds are "natural" in some metaphysical sense, and so must be discovered. The other is that kinds are conventional, that they are matters of conceptual taxonomy.

\[18\] Ibid.
Carnap and Quine, as well as myself, reject the first approach on general grounds of its being a metaphysical view. Thus, if there are no metaphysical means for justifying a framework, the issue comes down just to the question of whether or not to employ the concept of physical object—and that can only be decided on pragmatic grounds. As Quine puts it, "now Carnap has maintained that this is a question not of matters of fact but of but of choosing a 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 for scientific hypotheses generally."^{19}

Acceptance of the entities referred to by some framework is the belief in the reality of that entity, where this belief amounts to including that entity in the system of entities "recognized as real, according to the rules of the framework."^{20} Such acceptance will depend on the criteria we employ in affirming the truth of some statement about such entities. These criteria will vary according to whether the linguistic framework is factual, or logical. This is not to say that the entities themselves exist just in virtue of some feature of the framework, or the speaker. Rather, the point is that the truth of statements about the existence of some sort of entity is what is at issue in internal questions. Such questions are answered by means of the criteria that are appropriate for the type of framework. For example, for questions about physical objects, we use an empirical

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^{19}Quine, "Two Dogmas," 45. See also "Carnap's Views on Ontology," 211. Quine, of course, extends the pragmatic claim further on grounds of his rejection of analyticity. Since an account of analyticity has already been constructed that meets his objections, we can resist this extension.

^{20}Ibid., 207.
criterion, whereas for questions about abstract objects, we use a logical one.

External questions construed metaphysically implicitly assume some concept of reality, and then proceed to ask whether the entities in question are real in this sense. The problem here is that there is already a concept of real for the entities in question, and it is specified by the framework within which we make statements about the entities. Thus, to ask if some entity is real, where a different concept of reality is employed, amounts to asking if the entity can be said to exist by employing some other framework with which to make such an assertion. But what is the point of such an endeavor? We already possess a framework within which assertions of existence can be made. Perhaps the metaphysical construal of the external question is whether we can make assertions of existence in no framework at all. This, of course, cannot be done, given the notion of a framework that is here being used.

The only plausible interpretation of an external question is the one already put forth. It is the question of whether or not to adopt any particular framework. Given the agnostic position adopted about metaphysical assertions in chapter one, there does not seem to be any other plausible interpretation of such questions. We can see now why the answers to such questions are analytic. Namely, the statement 'there are physical objects' is analytically true given the physical object language. What is at issue is whether to adopt such a language. Carnap says that "we have to make the choice whether or not to accept and use the forms of expression in the framework in question."21 The issue is, how do we choose? The argument of the next chapter will be that, with respect to

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21Ibid.
concrete particulars, i.e., non-abstract objects such as numbers and sets, the physical object language is to be preferred over several alternatives, such as an idealist language or a dualist language. Let's look now at some objections to this ontological method.

**Objections To The Carnapian Method of Ontology**

One objection to this approach aims to show that it can be put to good use by the realist. If we disagree with Carnap that metaphysical questions lack sense, then we require a metaphysical framework within which such questions can at least be given some sense. This would require some variables that range over entities of every kind we think is real. We can then decide, perhaps even on pragmatic grounds, whether this framework is to be employed. At the very least, it cannot be rejected out of hand, since it seems to be required in order to give metaphysical questions the sense we require them to have.

There are two problems with this approach. First, the sense of 'exist' that the realist is operating with can be made sufficiently meaningful without the construction of a metaphysical framework. This is so because, for the realist, to exist, in this sense, is nothing more than to be framework-independent. All 'exist' means here is, not in any framework at all. We don't need yet another framework within which to give the concept 'exist' meaning. It is meaningful enough as a sort of "limit concept" discussed earlier. It gets its meaning negatively when contrasted with every other framework. So we do not seem to require yet another framework in order to give the realist his concept of existence.

But suppose we grant the realist a metaphysical framework. He now faces another problem. Given a metaphysical framework which allows for meaningful talk about "real"
objects, we need some criterion whereby we can affirm the existence of particulars of this kind. Whereas for the physical object language the criterion will be observation, and for numbers it will be a non-empirical criterion, it must be a metaphysical criterion for the metaphysical framework. But as the argument for agnosticism shows, there is no such criterion available to us that doesn’t beg questions against the skeptic. So even if we can construct such a framework, we can never affirm in a non-questionbegging way whether it contains anything. Such a framework would be of no use whatsoever, and so, can easily be put aside. Let’s look next at some objections from Quine.

Quine objects to the strategy of distinguishing between internal and external questions on grounds that “no more than the distinction between analytic and synthetic is needed in support of Carnap’s doctrine that the statements commonly thought of as ontological [external]...are analytic or contradictory given the language.” \(^{22}\) Since Quine thinks there is no such theoretically useful distinction between analytic and synthetic, there is consequently no distinction between internal and external questions. But as we saw in the previous chapter, there is a theoretically useful account of analyticity that can be employed to make just this distinction. This being Quine’s basic point of contention, we can consider the distinction satisfactory, at least for Quine’s purposes. Quine does, however, have an ontological program of his own, one that puts ontological questions “on a par with questions of natural science.” \(^{23}\) This strategy has come to be called the naturalizing of ontology.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 210.

\(^{23}\)Quine, “On Carnap’s Views on Ontology,” 211.
Over the course of his long career, Quine has held various ontological views. At one time he was an eliminativist, from which we have the verb named after him 'to quine' meaning "to deny resolutely the existence or importance of something real or significant." The following quote illustrates this early view:

If we repudiate mental entities as entities, there ceases to be an iron curtain between the private and the public; there remains only a smoke screen, a matter of varying degrees of privacy of events in the physical world. Consciousness still retains a place, as a state of a physical object, if...we construe consciousness as a faculty of responding to one's own responses. The responses here are, or can be construed as, physical behavior.

This eliminativist view is replaced a bit later by the view that we can dispense with a physicalist ontology altogether in favor of one of "pure sets." Most recently he has offered the view that "even telepathy and clairvoyance are scientific options." This latter possibility, while apparently allowing for an ontology which includes immaterial phenomena (and not merely abstract phenomena such as sets), must be considered in light of Quine's further suggestion that,

Reference and ontology recede thus to the status of mere auxiliaries. True sentences, observational and theoretical, are the alpha and omega of the scientific enterprise. They are related by structure, and objects figure as mere nodes of the structure. What particular objects there may be is indifferent to the truth of observation sentences, indifferent to the support they lend to the theoretical

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sentences, indifferent to the success of the theory in its predictions.\textsuperscript{28}

Is it possible to put these apparently conflicting claims together into a single coherent view? Perhaps what Quine is now suggesting is that we no longer need ontology since science—which tells us what there is on Quine’s view—operates quite well with any number of ontologies. Ontology, on this view, no longer serves any theoretically useful role, and is thus irrelevant. This is a considerably stronger view than the thesis of ontological relativity, which says only that multiple ontologies are compatible with science. What are we to make of this deflationary view of ontology, especially coming from a philosopher who has been largely responsible for so much discussion on the topic for the last sixty years?

This deflationary strategy is motivated chiefly by Quine’s naturalism. Ontology becomes neutral only with respect to theories of science, since on the naturalistic view, there is no first philosophy, i.e., science comes first, and then—if at all—comes ontology. Letting ontology go “neutral” in this way may not be a problem, provided Quine can give some grounds as to what counts as science, some criteria whereby some belief counts as scientific. Afterall, at one point he claims that “in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the \textit{[Homerian]} gods differ only in degree and not in kind.”\textsuperscript{29} Such loosening of the criteria for what counts as science may cost more than Quine can pay:

It would take some extraordinary evidence to enliven them \textit{[telepathy and

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 31.\textsuperscript{29}Quine, “Two Dogmas,” 44.
clairvoyance], but, if that were to happen, then empiricism itself—the crowning norm, we say, of naturalized epistemology—would go by the board. For remember that that norm, and naturalized epistemology itself, are integral to science, and science is fallible and corrigible.30

If empiricism were to be abandoned, and with it naturalized epistemology, then Quine’s own reason for deflating ontology would be undercut. That reason is that science, rather than a first philosophy, tells us what there is, and hence, ontology, as a merely philosophical pursuit, has only the task of interpreting what science tells us. This is part of Quine’s program of a naturalized epistemology. But if naturalized epistemology goes by the board, then we can reasonably ask Quine why we should think that science tells us what there is? Moreover, if telepathy and clairvoyance can be tolerated by science, is there anything at all that science will not tolerate?; are there any criteria that determine what is to count as science?

Quine’s reply is that “a sentence’s claim to scientific status rests on what it contributes to a theory whose checkpoints are in prediction.”31 This seems to provide such a weak criterion as to admit almost anything. Given Quine’s holism, we can, if we wish, so modify other portions of science as to accommodate virtually any new hypothesis. He even confirms this when he says that, in the case in which we do admit what is now deemed non-scientific, “it might be well to modify the game itself, and take on as further checkpoints the predicting of telepathic and divine input as well as of sensory input.”32 Quine seems to have so weakened the notion of science as to make it

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30Quine, Pursuit of Truth, 21.
31Ibid., 20.
32Ibid., 21.
vacuous. Science, on this view, is merely whatever it is that people who call themselves scientists do. The question of why we should believe any of them is now pointless, since virtually anything one might choose to believe could quite easily be made a scientific belief. At this point there is no theoretically useful question of what counts as science, since there seems to be almost nothing that couldn't be made to count as science.

Quine will perhaps balk, replying that "it is idle to bulwark definition against implausible contingencies." Calling this an idle exercise seems to be just a refusal to consider the consequences Quine himself takes to be very real possibilities. It is starting to look now as if Quine does indeed hold his naturalism dogmatically. If naturalism is held merely dogmatically, then issues of principle are not so much settled as ignored. Not only then is it merely possible to intelligibly raise such issues, they seem now to require answers. But before moving to a positive discussion of these issues, let's take a look at a different objection to the Carnapian strategy for doing ontology from Ernest Sosa.

Sosa distinguishes between three possible stances we can take towards realism. First, there is the absolutist view whereby "snowballs, hills, trees, planets, etc., are all

33 Ibid.

34 In the article under discussion Sosa allies Putnam with Carnap. I am not going to be concerned with the alliance and whether it is justified. For my purposes the discussion of Carnap as endorsing conceptual relativism is my chief concern. Sosa maintains however that "the deepest, most richly suggestive, and most effective way of construing Putnam's Internal Realism is as a version of Carnap's Conceptual Relativism" [Ernest Sosa, "Putnam's Pragmatic Realism," The Journal of Philosophy 65 (1993): 625]. Sosa agrees with the position in chapter one that Putnam's chief arguments for internal realism fail for various reasons.
constituted by the in-itself satisfaction of certain conditions by certain chunks of matter, and the like, and all this goes on independently of any thought or conceptualization on the part of anyone.\textsuperscript{35} This is what we have been calling metaphysical realism. Second, there is the eliminativist view whereby "our ordinary talk is so much convenient abbreviation."\textsuperscript{36} The chief proponents of this sort of view are the Churchlands. Third, there is conceptual relativism, hereafter called \textit{CR}, according to which "we recognize potential constituted objects only relative to our implicit conceptual scheme with its criteria of existence and of perdurance."\textsuperscript{37} This is the view Sosa ascribes to Carnap. Although Sosa is unhappy with all three views, it is his discussion, and consequent rejection, of \textit{CR} with which we will be primarily concerned. As will be shown, we can ease Sosa's qualms about \textit{CR}, making its acceptance not as problematic as he believes.

Sosa's problem with \textit{CR} is that it wants some spelling out in sufficient detail so as to keep it from being merely "trivially true."\textsuperscript{38} Consider a world composed of three individuals $x_1$, $x_2$ and $x_3$. Counting the objects in such a world is liable to produce different results, depending on the criterion we adopt for what will count as an individual. A "mereologist," for instance, might take the view that such a world contains at least seven entities, namely, $x_1$, $x_2$, $x_3$, $x_1 + x_2$, $x_1 + x_3$, $x_2 + x_3$ and $x_1 + x_2 + x_3$, whereas an anti-mereologist will answer that there are only three objects in such a

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 624.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 615.
world. On Carnap's view, the answer to such a question will, as we have seen, always depend on the linguistic framework within which one is operating. Sosa, however, "is puzzled by the linguistic wrapping in which it \([CR]\) is offered." Specifically, he has five problems with \(CR\):

1. None of the answers to the question of how many objects are in the imagined world "mentions any language or any piece of language."

2. None of the answers "say that we shall or shall not or should or should not use any language or bit of language."

3. It isn't clear "how our decision actually to use or not to use any or all the [answers] can settle the question of whether what these sentences say is true or false."

4. "If the point is that these sentences do not really say anything, then how can then be incompatible in the first place so that a conflict or problem can arise that requires resolution?"

5. It isn't clear "how we gain by replacing questions about atoms (or the like) with questions about sentences and our relations to some specific ones of these sentences."

Let's look at the objections in order. 1 and 2 can be settled together. We need not require the answer to a philosophical question to mention any bit of language or make any normative claims about how to use language. The claims about language are methodological claims, whereas the answers to philosophical questions are not. What the proponent of \(CR\) claims is that, given some possible answer, the way to arrive at it is to pay attention to the fact that the claim itself require interpretation relative to some conceptual framework. Recall the example William James uses of the dispute between

\[39\text{Ibid.}\]

\[40\text{Ibid.}\]
several men watching a squirrel going round on the trunk of a tree while one man goes round the tree. The issue the men are considering is whether the man goes round the squirrel. James’s solution is that “it depends on what you practically mean by ‘going round’ the squirrel.” Once this issue is decided, the possible answers are clear: a) the man goes round the squirrel, or b) the man does not go round the squirrel. Notice that the answers to the question make no mention of language, or of how to use language. But then, we shouldn’t expect that they would, since the question itself wants a factual answer.

Another sort of reply to Sosa’s qualms is to point out, as does Moser, that philosophers are often deluded by “the myth of the definite article.” Recall that this is the view that philosophers who speak of the concept of truth, meaning, justification, etc., are under the assumption that there is only one such concept. Here again, there is no mention of language or use of language in their respective claims about the concept in question. It is a methodological point that makes clear the confusion that is implicit in such claims. We shouldn’t expect to see mention made of language or normative suggestions made about how to use language in any particular philosophical answer to an ontological question, or many other sorts of questions for that matter. Sosa’s first two problems can thus be resolved.


42Ibid., 35.

43Moser, Philosophy After Objectivity, 8.
Problem three asks about how the decision to adopt one or another answers to the question of how many objects there are in the imagined world can be useful in settling the issue of the truth of the answer. Such decisions can indeed settle issues of truth if the sentence is analytically true given the conceptual framework. This is precisely how such questions are settled. As has been argued, some ontological claims are analytically true, given the language in which they are stated. The decision to employ some language commits the speaker to the analytic truth of some ontological claims, even though one may not be explicitly aware of such commitments. So Sosa's worry about the decision to adopt one or another particular answer to our question about the hypothetical world can be resolved.

This reply to Sosa's third question supplies the answer to his fourth question. Namely, the claims do say something, so long as they are understood as analytically true given the framework in question. Consequently, they can and do conflict, given that the frameworks they are true in virtue of endorse different ontologies. The only sense in which such claims are nonsensical is when we try to construe them as answers to external questions to be answered prior to the acceptance of some framework.

In order to respond to Sosa's fifth problem with CR we need to see what it is that he thinks CR actually amounts to such that we don't gain anything by adopting it. After considering several such accounts, and rejecting each of them, he arrives at the view that CR is either trivially true, or it leaves us unable to "allow the existence of such sorts at present unrecognized by our conceptual scheme."\(^{44}\) The chief problem with his

\(^{44}\)Sosa, "Putnam's Pragmatic Realism," 625.
conclusion is that it proceeds on unfounded rejections of each of the accounts he considers. Let's look at how he proceeds to his conclusion.

The first account, call it CR1, says that,

In order to say anything you must adopt a language. So you must "adopt a meaning" even for so basic a term as 'object'. And you might have adopted another. Thus you might adopt Carnap-language (CL) or you might adopt Polish-logician-language (PL). What you say, i.e., the utterances you make, the sentences you affirm, are not true or false absolutely, but are true or false only relative to a given language. Thus, if you say "There are three objects in this box" your utterance or sentence may be true understood as a statement of CL while it is false understood as a statement in PL.45

On this view, no claim is true independent of its meaning or the language in which it has its meaning, for we all must employ some language and might have just as easily employed another. So any particular claim could be true in one language and false in another. Sosa concludes that this view is merely trivially true.

There is, however, a problem with this construal. This view does not take into consideration the kinds of languages that have been considered above, e.g., material, ideal, mathematical, etc. These sorts of languages differ just in virtue of the kinds of entities over which they quantify. With these kinds of languages there may be sentences in one that are not so much false in another language as pointless. One commits a kind of category mistake if one asks of someone employing, say, the physical object language, whether there are prime numbers over 1000. If we say that it is just false that there are primes over 1000 in the physical object language, this implies that there is some state of affairs designated by this language in virtue of which this claim is false. The problem

45Ibid., 615.
here is that there is no such state of affairs. It is not merely false that there are no primes over 1000, rather, there are no such things as numbers in this language.

Given this correction, if all CR1 says is that a claim is only true relative to the language in which it is meaningful, then CR generally is trivially true. Let's consider Sosa's next construal of CR, call this CR2:

When we say 'There are 3 objects here, not 8' we are really saying: "The following is assertible as true in our CL: "There are 3 objects here, not 8"." Sosa attributes this view to Carnap's *Logical Syntax of Language*, in which he defends the following theses:

1. Philosophy, when cognitive at all, amounts to the logical syntax of scientific language.

2. But there can be alternative such languages and we are to choose between them on grounds of convenience.

3. A language is completely characterized by its formation and transformation rules. If we restrict ourselves just to discussion of this work, then these three theses are true, with some qualification. But it seems odd that Sosa appeals only to this early view of Carnap's in which he excluded the possibility of semantics from philosophy. Taking his later work in semantics into consideration, all three of these theses are false. It is not the case that philosophy is nothing but syntax, for one need only look to *Meaning and Necessity* to see this. This being the case, the languages from among which we are free to choose are not limited to syntactic constructions of scientific languages, but can be

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46 Ibid., 616

47 Ibid.
widened to include semantic constructions as well.

It is of course true that Carnap endorses a "principle of tolerance" in his *Logical Syntax*, according to which "it is possible to choose a certain form for the language of science as a whole, as well as for that of any branch of science, and to state exactly the characteristic differences between it and the other possible language-forms."\(^{48}\) This would appear to be an endorsement of our freedom to choose among the various sorts of languages that we have been discussing above, e.g., material, mathematical, etc. This would, however, be wrong. This version of the principle of tolerance applies exclusively to "the task of the construction of a general syntax" of which there are various possible such systems.\(^{49}\) Carnap gives a clearer statement of the principle as the view that "Everyone is at liberty to build up his own logic, i.e., his own form of language, as he wishes."\(^{50}\) It is quite clear here that the sort of tolerance he has in view is for different formal-logical systems only. Furthermore, in the *Syntax* he takes the view that failure to pay sufficient attention to syntax by stating one's positions in the "material mode" leads only to confusion.\(^{51}\) This is clearly in conflict with his later views on ontology discussed above. There is no problem here with material modes of speaking, so long as one is clear on the relevant semantic issues.

Thesis iii is also no longer true in light of Carnap's views about semantics. As

\(^{48}\)Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, xv.

\(^{49}\)Ibid., xv.

\(^{50}\)Ibid., 52, my emphasis.

\(^{51}\)Ibid., 298–301.
well as formation and transformation rules there are also semantic rules. These three theses can perhaps be used to explain CR2, but they are surely inadequate as an account of CR generally. For purposes of discussion, let’s see what can be made of this view.

Sosa interprets CR2 in terms of Quine’s doctrine of “semantic ascent.” That is, claims about what there is are construed as claims about what we can truly assert in some language. Quine characterizes the view as follows:

The strategy of semantic ascent is that it carries the discussion into a domain where both parties are better agreed on the objects (viz., words) and on the main terms concerning them. Words, or their inscriptions, unlike points, miles, classes, and the rest, are tangible objects of the size so popular in the marketplace, where men of unlike conceptual schemes communicate at their best.

The strategy Quine endorses is just that of resolving disputes by talking about concepts rather than what the concepts denote, for example, ‘horses’ rather than horses. Such a strategy is clearly of some benefit, as it can serve to help us locate more readily the nature of our dispute. Sosa, however, does not think we gain anything from using semantic ascent, since it,

is limited to discourse about recondite entities of controversial status. No relevant gain is to be expected from semantic ascent when the subject matter is the inventory of the marketplace itself. Tables and chairs are no more controversial than words: in fact, they seem less so, by a good margin. No internal realism, with its conceptual or linguistic relativity, can be plausibly supported by the semantic ascent strategy offered by Quine.

It is not clear as to what Sosa understands by the claim that tables and chairs are

52 Carnap, Meaning and Necessity, 18–20.


54 Sosa, “Putnam’s Pragmatic Realism,” 617.
uncontroversial. On one view, this is the claim that the criteria for determining what counts as a chair are uncontroversial. But surely this is not so; one need only look at instances of furniture from other cultures present and past to see that what different people count as a chair can vary drastically. On another interpretation, this is a claim about the existence of chairs. This is a very controversial claim, since it is precisely what divides realists and non-realists. It is precisely the existence of such mundane objects as chairs and tables that the realist is concerned about, and not merely the “recondite entities of controversial status” such as quarks, leptons, black-holes and neutron stars. These latter entities are of concern to a scientific realist perhaps, but one is not committed to scientific realism just in case one is committed to metaphysical realism.

Using semantic ascent as a way of interpreting CR is not entirely useless. Recall that it was employed in the account of analyticity offered in chapter two. On Sosa’s view, however, semantic ascent leads to a vicious regress of the following sort:

When we say something of the form ‘The following is assertible in our CL:…’ can we rest with a literal interpretation that does not require ascent and relativization? If not, where does ascent stop? Are we then really saying ‘The following is assertible in our CL: “The following is assertible in our CL:…”’? The strategy of semantic ascent need not lead to this sort of regress. By employing the account of analyticity developed earlier, and specifically the distinction drawn between levels and orders of language use, we can successfully avoid this sort of regress. Specifically, we avoid the regress by allowing that some second-order sentences are analytically true for the language in question, where analyticity can be tested for

\[\text{\textsuperscript{55}Ibid.}\]
behaviorally. With this behavioral test we do not require the ascent to yet another level of abstraction in order to clarify what we did in the lower level. Furthermore, there is no threat of a necessary regress just on grounds that the regress stops whenever we reach understanding. Since understanding may vary for individuals, the number of abstractions may vary, but there seems no reason to think it must always proceed indefinitely.

So although semantic ascent may not be all that useful in explaining CR, it can be used without falling into this sort of regress and without being "always trivially available, not just in philosophy but in science generally and even beyond."56 Such a view of semantic ascent that is not trivially available may not, however, be the view that Quine had in mind. Whether this is so is irrelevant for present purposes. We could drop the idea altogether insofar as it can be used for clarifying CR. Let's turn then to Sosa's third and final construal of CR, call it CR3.

On this view, we are best advised to remain agnostic about whether our scientific claims are metaphysically true, since we have no assurance for thinking that present science will not change. We should then settle only for what can and cannot be asserted given our present unfinished conceptual frameworks, keeping in mind that what is assertible in one framework may not be assertible in another. All in all, "we have to learn to live with our relativism."57 The positive argument for this view amounts to an argument against realism. This argument is:

1. Realism (in general) is acceptable only if scientific realism is acceptable.

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56 Ibid., 616.

57 Ibid., 617.
2. Scientific realism is unacceptable.

3. Therefore, realism is unacceptable.\textsuperscript{58}

Sosa, and rightly so it seems, is unconvinced by premise 1, although not for the same reasons as given in chapter one where we found that these two kinds of realism are distinct and need not presuppose each other. Since this argument fails, Sosa concludes that \textit{CR3} fails as well, and "there is hence reason to doubt the linguistic turn taken by Carnap."\textsuperscript{59} This leaves us with \textit{CRI}, which is trivially true, "and not something anyone would deny, not even the most hard-line metaphysical realist."\textsuperscript{60}

One might agree with Sosa in his rejection of this argument against realism, but disagree that this implies the rejection of \textit{CR} generally. Surprisingly enough, Sosa himself suggests an alternative strategy in a footnote: "to mention only one attractive possibility, one might, with Bas van Fraassen, combine both agnosticism toward theoretical science and common-sense realism toward observable reality."\textsuperscript{61} He does not, however, pursue this strategy. Instead, taking the view that there are only three possible choices: eliminativism, absolutism and conceptual relativism, Sosa finds that he "cannot decide which of these is least disastrous."\textsuperscript{62} What troubles Sosa, it seems, is that he cannot accept the agnosticism about both metaphysical reality and the as yet unrecognized

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 618.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 619.

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 618, note 12.

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., 625.
posits of some future science. As it was argued in chapter one, agnosticism about
metaphysics is the only position available that does beg any questions posed by the
skeptic. Whether one can “live with it” seems to be a psychological question. As for the
as yet unrecognized posits of a future science, there seems no reason why they could not
be so recognized at some future date. Given our present conceptual scheme, something
counts as real relative to that conceptual scheme. Even Sosa is aware of this when he
says that “existence relative to a conceptual scheme is not equivalent to existence in
virtue of that conceptual scheme.”\textsuperscript{63} The problem with as yet unrecognized entities is
“not that there could be any such entities relative to our present conceptual
scheme...[since] by hypothesis it does not recognize them.”\textsuperscript{64} The problem is that there
seems to be the possibility of kinds of objects that exist now that are not relative to our
present conceptual scheme, and this raises two questions: “what is it for there to be such
objects? Is it just the in-itself satisfaction of constitutive forms by constitutive matters?”\textsuperscript{65}

Clearly such in-itself satisfaction will not do, since this is just metaphysical
realism all over again. What then do we do? The problem here is that we can perfectly
well allow for the possibility of such a class of objects, understood as the claim that there
is always the possibility of some as yet unrecognized conceptual framework. Recall that
Carnap employs a principle of tolerance whereby it is the job of philosophers to both
allow for the possibility of yet more and different linguistic frameworks, and to actually

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., 621.

\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., 623.

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid.
construct such frameworks. This amounts to the recognition that there may well be more kinds of entities in the world than we presently are even able to recognize. Something like this is what happens, for example, in the field of taxonomy when biologists create a new category for some kind of entity, be it a species or even a kingdom. At one time there were only two kingdoms: plants and animals. There are now five kingdoms. Moreover, new species are being discovered on a regular basis. All of this sort of thing is well within the bounds of a non-realist view, and does not require anything metaphysical.

Perhaps one reason why Sosa cannot live with the agnosticism of CR is that he cannot face going without some sort of metaphysical position, even if it is linguistic (whatever this might mean). He says that we have found no way of conceiving of Carnap’s linguistic turn such that “it discloses an attractive new direction in metaphysics.” But a new direction in metaphysics is not the point; the direction in which Carnap is pointing is away from metaphysics. The agnosticism arrived at has the result that one must just learn to do without metaphysical knowledge, unless one is willing to beg some important questions against the skeptic in order to justify such knowledge.

One way of making agnosticism a bit more palatable is by taking Sosa’s own suggestion to look at a van Fraassen-style alternative. Gary Merrill has suggested just such an alternative that combines ideas of van Fraassen’s with those of Carnap. We can use some of his ideas to clarify the kind of conceptual relativism being urged, and

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66 Ibid., 619.
perhaps assuage some of Sosa’s doubts about agnosticism.

Semantic and Epistemic Realism

Merrill distinguishes between three kinds of realism as a way of sorting out the debate between realists and anti-realists. They are, metaphysical realism, or MR, semantic realism, or SR, and epistemic realism, or ER. Metaphysical realism is just the view that we have been calling ‘realism’. This is the thesis that some things exist conceiver-independently. Metaphysical realism is the view that we rejected in chapter one. Semantic realism “is a view concerning how the theories of science are to be interpreted, or what we are to understand them as saying.”67 This view contrasts with an instrumentalist view which holds that our theoretical claims are to understood only as explanatorily useful. On an instrumentalist view, theoretical terms are not to be understood as denoting terms, but serve merely as conceptual devices. We can define SR then as follows:

Semantic Realism: The theoretical terms of a theory are to be interpreted as denoting terms.

Epistemic realism, or ER for short, “is a position concerning what the acceptance of a theory means, or what having evidence for a theory implies about the relation of that theory to the world.”68 This view contrasts with the position that “acceptance of a theory does not require us to believe that the theory is true, or that it is an accurate description


68Ibid.
of reality." We can define ER then as follows:

*Epistemic Realism*: Acceptance of a theory is to be understood as believing that the theory is true.

The anti-realist need only oppose MR. He can freely embrace both SR and ER without having to beg any questions against the skeptic. As we will see, Carnap embraces both SR and ER, while van Fraassen embraces only the former.

There is a sense in which it is not useful to use the terms ‘semantic realism’ and ‘epistemic realism’ since what is really at issue for the realist is metaphysical realism. We understood realism in chapter one as a metaphysical doctrine distinct from epistemic issues on the one hand, as well as semantic construals of realism of the Dummettian sort. Recall, however, that Dummett takes himself to be talking about the metaphysical notion of realism; he simply thinks that it needs a semantic construal. As for epistemic issues, Devitt’s concern is to settle them after we settle the metaphysical issues. As we will see, semantic realism is not just Dummett all over again, and epistemic realism is not metaphysical knowledge. Let’s look first at SR and see how it applies to conceptual relativism.

Part of what it means to accept some language framework is that we use the theoretical terms of the language as denoting terms. Acceptance of the thing language, for example, means that we interpret the terms of the language, e.g., ‘chair’, ‘book’ and ‘bicycle’, as denoting objects. This view is called semantic realism so as to distinguish it from instrumentalism. It treats the entities denoted by the language as if they are real,

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69 Ibid.
insofar as the meaning of the term 'real' is relative to the framework under consideration. SR does not commit us to the metaphysical existence, i.e., 'real' in some framework independent sense, of the kinds of entities specified by the framework. It couldn't commit us to this sort of existence because it is merely a claim about how we are to understand the meanings of certain of our terms. SR is only a view about how certain terms mean; it implies nothing about the existence of any entities, or about any of our epistemic attitudes toward any of the sentences of some framework.

Epistemic realism, on the other hand, says something about our epistemic attitude toward the claims made within some framework. Specifically, it says that to accept some claim, e.g., the claim made in the thing language that there are chairs, is to be in the epistemic attitude of believing that the term 'chair' denotes some object which exists in the sense of existing for the thing language. On this view, our epistemic attitude toward claims in some framework we accept is one of belief. Another way to put it is to say that we think claims made in some framework we accept are true. The alternative to ER is the view that acceptance does not require belief. Van Fraassen, for example, takes the view that "the language of science should be literally construed, but its theories need not be true to be good." On this view, the chief task of any theory is merely that of "saving the phenomena." This is considerably weaker than the requirement that the theory be true.

One need not necessarily embrace ER just in case one accepts SR. A notable

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example of a view which accepts SR and not ER is van Fraassen's "Constructive Empiricism." Let's look as his view as a contrasting position in order to clarify the view defended here, namely, that we should embrace both SR and ER.

On van Fraassen's view,

Not every philosophical position concerning science which insists on a literal construal of the language of science is a realist position. For this insistence relates not at all to our epistemic attitudes toward theories, nor to the aim we pursue in constructing theories, but only to the correct understanding of what a theory says.... After deciding that the language of science must be literally understood, we can still say that there is no need to believe good theories to be true, not to believe ipso facto that the entities they postulate are real. Science aims to give us theories which are empirically adequate; and acceptance of a theory involves as belief only that it is empirically adequate. This is the statement of the anti-realist position I advocate; I shall call it constructive empiricism.\(^{71}\)

We see here that van Fraassen is quite willing to accept SR. This is evident from his claim that we must understand the language of science literally. He does not, however, think that we require ER. On his view, the correct epistemic attitude to have regarding theoretical claims is to resist believing that they are true and that what they posit exists, since "acceptance is not belief."\(^{72}\) Here then is an example of a view in which we can be committed to semantic realism and uncommitted to epistemic realism.\(^{73}\)


\(^{73}\)Compare this view with that of Nancy Cartwright who does "believe in theoretical entities. But not in theoretical laws," *How The Laws of Physics Lie* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 99. On her view we should make an exception for "the very special case of causal explanation" in which "truth is essential to explanatory success," with the proviso that this applies only to "the truth of low-level causal principles and
Why does van Fraassen reject epistemic realism? Because on his view, “empiricism is correct, but could not live in the linguistic form the positivists gave it.” Such linguistic forms include the doctrines of verificationism and reductionism, i.e., the dogmas, as Quine would say, of empiricism. Van Fraassen’s project consists of jettisoning the linguistic form of empiricism and, in particular “de-semanticizing” some problematic portions, e.g., the concepts of truth and existence, and reconstruing empiricism as adequacy of explanation, i.e., truth, to the phenomenal world of perception, i.e., existence. Merrill suggests that “van Fraassen takes the epistemic realist’s use of ‘exists’ to be identical to that of the metaphysical realist, and hence for him the former position goes the way of the latter.” Notice that in van Fraassen’s statement of his own position there is no mention at all of either truth or existence; constructive empiricism requires only empirical adequacy. On this view, we can distinguish between two epistemic attitudes we can take up toward a theory. We can assert it to be true...and call for belief; or we can simply assert its empirical adequacy, calling for acceptance as such. In either case we stick our necks out: empirical adequacy goes far beyond what we can know at any given time.... Nevertheless there is a difference: the assertion of truth, and the restraint to acceptance delivers us from metaphysics.

On van Fraassen’s view, if a theory is said to be true, then by definition one who believes such a theory endorses realism. This implies that there is something that the

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75Merrill, “Three Forms of Realism,” 232.

theory is about, and that the theory has stated precisely what this is. On his view, realism is the doctrine that "Science aims to give us, in its theories, a literally true story of what the world is like; and acceptance of a scientific theory involves the belief that it is true." Notice that there are two components to epistemic realism on van Fraassen's view: the existence component, i.e., belief in the existence of the posits of some theory, and the truth component, i.e., the belief that the theory is true. Carnap, on the other hand, holds that both components can be maintained, without threat from the realist, although, thus far, we have looked only at the existence component.

Epistemic realism does not commit us to any metaphysical beliefs. Recall that for Devitt, "Realism does not strictly entail any doctrine of truth at all," and furthermore, having an explanatory notion of truth does not entail Realism. We could say here that the problem with van Fraassen's view is that, contra Devitt, it does make realism semantic by construing it as a view about whether some theory is true. This is one of Devitt's criticisms: "it is a mistake to think that the view that truth is the aim of science is distinctive to Realism." This point aside, however, the problem that van Fraassen has with epistemic realism can be avoided.

Recall that for Carnap, notions of existence can vary, relative to the framework in which we are operating. Given this conceptual relativity of existence, we don't need to resist belief in the existence of the entities posited by the theory, since the belief is not

77 Ibid., 8.

78 Devitt, Realism & Truth, 41.

79 Ibid., 137.
a belief in some sort of pre-framework, i.e., metaphysical, existence. Recall that for the realist, the important question is whether some kind of entities really exist, where this notion of real is to be understood not just as the employment of some framework, but as some sort of framework-neutral notion of existence. On this view, ER is, as Merrill says, "a rather trivial position amounting to the claim that to have good reason to hold (or use) a theory is to have good reason to assert the laws and statements (including existence-claims) of the theory, and this is not to make any statements about the relation that the theory bears to reality or the world." 80 If we have good reason for thinking that concepts of existence vary, as the view about the nature of linguistic frameworks already developed says they do, then this component is unproblematic. Let's look now at how we can deal with the truth component.

The relevant problem with the truth component is not the problem of the relation between some statement that we take to be true and the external world that it is allegedly true of. This is a metaphysical problem, and one that we cannot possibly hope to solve. 81 Rather, the problem is that of "defining precisely what is meant by nomic form, that is, the form of a possible basic law" where the notion of truth is then specified in terms of what it is for a basic law to be true. 82

80Merrill, "Three Forms of Realism," 232.

81Recall that for Carnap, we cannot solve these sorts of problems because they are ill-conceived and unintelligible. On my view, we grant their intelligibility, but are lead into an agnostic position regarding our ability to answer them effectively, i.e., without begging any questions against the skeptic.

When scientists speak of basic laws of nature, "they mean something that holds in nature regardless of whether any human being is aware of it."\(^{83}\) This is quite different than, for example, Reichenbach’s or the pragmatist’s idea that a basic law is something that is only well-established or confirmed on numerous occasions. The issue is one of determining what we mean when we speak of something being a law; "the problem is only concerned with the meaning that is intended when the concept is used in the discourse of scientists."\(^{84}\) The reason some empiricists like Reichenbach and Neurath and the pragmatists shy away from talk of truth is explained by a failure to distinguish clearly between two different concepts: (1) the degree to which a law is established at a certain time and (2) the semantic concept of the truth of a law. Once this distinction is made and it is realized that, in semantics, a precise definition of truth can be provided, there is no longer any reason for hesitating to use the word ‘truth’ in defining a ‘basic law of nature.’\(^{85}\) Carnap then goes on to define a basic law as "a statement that has nomic form and is also true."\(^{86}\)

This definition need not imply anything about the nature of any correspondence between some statement and the conceiver-independent world that it is true of. Such talk would be, on Carnap’s own view, nonsensical insofar as it is meant to be understood in some framework-independent sense. The view is rather that "we may meaningfully speak of a law’s being true (or false) without being committed either to the view that the

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\(^{83}\)Ibid., 213.

\(^{84}\)Ibid.

\(^{85}\)Ibid., 214.

\(^{86}\)Ibid., 212.
theoretical terms of science denote actually existing entities or the view that evidence in support of a theory is evidence in support of the assertion that the entities it postulates really exist.” Epistemic realism, with respect to the truth component then, just comes down to the view that we can have good reasons for believing our theories, where these reasons do not require us to affirm some relation between the theory and the conceiver-independent world. It is not as though we are required to explain why our theories work, where this leads to some metaphysical view. Devitt, for example, thinks that realism gives us the best explanation of our common-sense and even scientific beliefs. ER, on the other hand, is the view that no such explanation is available, (if we wish not to beg questions against the skeptic), and that, furthermore, no such explanation is needed.

This still leaves us with the problem of defining nomic form. Carnap himself gives only a sketch of a definition. Suppose, he says, someone presents us with a statement they take to be a candidate for lawhood. We don’t yet know whether it is indeed true or false due to insufficient confirmation. We can tell, however, just by inspecting the form of the statement that it is universal since it says that for some particular event occurring at any time or place, some other particular event will follow. We can thereby say, just in virtue of its form, “whether the statement would be called a genuine law if it were true.” So, instead of classifying statements into nomological and non-nomological statements, we classify them instead into statements having nomic form and statements that do not have nomic form. In this way, the truth of the statements

87Merrill, “Three Forms of Realism,” 232.

88Carnap, Philosophical Foundations of Physics, 210.
is irrelevant, and we can usefully separate the problem of defining nomic form from the problem of defining truth.

Short of adopting some metaphysical beliefs, SR and ER are as good as it gets in the way of belief about our best theories. If this is correct, we can avoid the problems for conceptual relativism posed by Sosa, and we can usefully say that we believe our best theories without being committed to any metaphysical assertions. This position, of course, endorses a qualified agnosticism about metaphysics, but that is, as argued in chapter one, as it should be. Whether one can live with agnosticism is a psychological issue that is entirely person-relative.

Having developed a general strategy for doing ontology, and for what it means to endorse ontological claims, let's turn next to a consideration of several possible ontologies. The result of considering these possible ontologies will be a defence of a physicalist ontology.
CHAPTER IV

PHYSICALIST ONTOLOGY

Introduction

Now that we have a methodology for doing ontology, we can begin doing ontology proper. As we saw in the previous chapter, the philosophical issue we are concerned with is not that of regional ontology, where this is understood as asking whether some particular object of a certain kind exists, e.g., whether there are black swans, or whether there are unicorns. These are what Carnap calls "internal questions." Rather, our concern is with global issues of what kind of things there are in the most general sense, e.g., whether there are material things, or whether there are mental things. These are what Carnap calls "external questions." Let's call this the issue of "basic kinds."

On the method being presented here we require the construction of a linguistic framework. Given the principle of tolerance discussed in the previous chapter, there will always be the possibility of more than one such framework. So, for example, we can distinguish between the frameworks of dualism and physicalism, but we also must allow for the possibility of some new, as yet unknown, framework. Since the aim of this chapter is to defend a physicalist ontology, the task will be to construct and defend a linguistic framework for that ontology.
A problem immediately facing physicalism is the existence of abstract entities, for such entities are not usually thought to be physical. One might perhaps try to defend such a view, but it would require a highly unusual notion of what it is to be physical such that both chairs and numbers could be said to be physical entities. Among the more usual ways of dealing with abstract entities are nominalism, which simply rejects outright the existence of abstract entities, Platonism, (or realism), which says that they actually exist, and instrumentalism, which says that talk of such things has no truth value, but is merely explanatorily useful. All of these views are problematic. Hence, the view presented here aims to avoid the problems facing the traditional views while allowing for the existence—understood in a very specific way—of abstract entities without creating problems for physicalism.

Another problem for physicalism is the existence of mind. There are actually two intertwined problems here, one ontological and the other explanatory. The ontological problem has to do with the issue of what minds are, i.e., whether they are physical or some other kind of entity. The physicalism endorsed in this chapter is an ontological view. The explanatory problem is concerned with whether physicalism can adequately account for or explain mental phenomena. If, as some have argued, the explanation of mind is ontologically neutral, e.g., as functionalist accounts maintain, or if physicalism is non-reductive about mind, e.g., the view that the mental supervenes on the physical, then the second problem is not of immediate concern for the physicalist. On this view we can be physicalist ontologically without physicalism being threatened just by an inability to account for mental phenomena. In any case, the task of this chapter is the
more modest defense of physicalism just on the ontological issue. Whatever explanation of mind and mental phenomena we might embrace, if we endorse physicalism, that explanation must be at least neutral with respect to this ontological position.

Basic Kinds

What is ontology the study of? It is not the study of what exists if by this the aim is to give a list of everything that exists. Such lists can go on ad infinitum depending on what criteria we adopt for identifying individuals. Consider, for example, the set of entities designated by the terms $a$, $b$ and $c$. We could list the ontology of this set as consisting of three individuals, each one denoted by a single term. We could also list it as consisting of the set of entities denoted by $a$, $b$, $c$, $a+b$, $a+c$, $b+c$ and $a+b+c$. Creating these sorts of lists of individuals has not, traditionally at least, been conceived of as a philosophical pursuit. These sorts of lists are what we called in the previous chapter “regional ontologies.” A regional ontology is a list of what there is for some specific subject. For instance, a regional ontology for particle physics might include such things as electrons, quarks, gluons, bosons, etc., while a regional ontology for chemistry is given in the periodic table of the elements. While regional ontology is not a philosophical pursuit, it does help illustrate the interesting philosophical problem of what we take as the criterion of individuality. We will not, however, be concerned with that particular problem. We can safely assume that physicalism will be consistent with more than one principle of individuation of entities.

The primary concern here is with what kinds of things there are, where ‘kinds’ is understood in the broadest possible sense of the term. We want to inquire as to
whether, for example, there are physical kinds of things, mental kinds of things, numerical kinds of things, or some combination of kinds. Traditionally philosophers have distinguished, at the broadest level, between concrete and abstract kinds of things. Physical bodies and minds are instances of the former; numbers and centers of gravity are instances of the latter. We will be concerned primarily with the former, although a view about abstract entities is offered since it seems, at least initially, that physicalism of any kind cannot account for abstract objects. The problem here is that abstract objects do not seem to be physical, and yet, we cannot help but allow at least some abstract objects into our ontology, e.g., numbers. If this is correct, then physicalism cannot be true.

In dealing just with concrete particulars we can distinguish between various possible kinds of things. Traditionally, these kinds include materialism, dualism, neutral monism and idealism. What exactly the relationship is between the basic kind, or kinds in the case of dualism, and non-basic kinds, e.g., molecules and persons, goes beyond the task of this dissertation. Various possible solutions have been proposed, e.g., reductionism and supervenience, and the question of which of these is preferable will be left for another time. It may be the case that there is more than one way in which non-basic kinds are related to basic kinds, depending on what particular non-basic kind is being considered. It may, for example, turn out that reductionism will work for things like molecules and trees, but supervenience may be needed for thoughts and beliefs. Regardless of how this relation is specified, this isn't any issue one that only the physicalist must face, for the dualist also requires some explanation of these same
phenomena. But let's turn now to a discussion of the problem of abstract entities.

Abstract Entities

There are various ways of dealing with abstracta. One approach might be to treat them as not really anything different in kind than physical objects. Some such view seems to be what Paul Churchland has in mind when he says, "the reality of equators, centers of gravity, and rotational axes I am happy to grant. They are all places or loci of some sort that are decisively specifiable by reference to the shape or behavior of the relevant concrete object."\(^1\) On this view, the way to deal with abstracta is to concretize them, or turn them into concrete particulars. But in so doing they are no longer abstracta. Churchland does not embrace abstract entities as abstract, but only insofar as they can be redescribed as concreta. One might do this for such things as centers of gravity, but this seems not to help at all for things such as numbers, sets and other mathematical or geometrical entities. One wonders, moreover, if physical objects, on his view are only concrete as described. Afterall, if abstract entities are abstract only as described, then it seems rather ad hoc to treat concrete entities differently. The question then arises as to why we should describe abstract entities concretely rather than concrete entities abstractly.

Another approach is to treat abstract entities as fictions. On this view, abstract entities are quite useful for theoretical purposes, however, they are not real—they are fictions. This is the view that Dennett, for example, endorses: abstracta "are not idle

fantasies but hardworking theorist’s fictions.” On this approach the existence of abstracta is simply denied outright. Insofar as we can usefully say that there are abstracta we should understand this to mean nothing more than that there are, for example, certain characters in a book of fiction, albeit characters that do some theoretical work. A problem with this approach is that it does not explain what it is to be a fiction. When, for example, Charles Dickens made up certain fictional characters, we could just as well say that nothing at all was made up in any interesting sense. Rather, a certain bunch of meaningful sentences were written which expressed certain ideas Dickens had at the time. This may do for characters in a book, but it will hardly do for things such as centers of gravity and numbers. These are not just fictions in the way that some character in a story is a fiction. Moreover, saying that they are hard-working theorist’s fictions does not help. This serves only to shift the emphasis onto the theorizer rather than the objects themselves. This view seems to say that abstracta are just a function of what the theorist needs in order to make his theory work. But the theorist will now be free to create abstracta almost at will, even if only to make his favorite theory work. But surely centers of gravity, for instance, are not merely made-up items that serve some theoretical need. Although the term ‘center of gravity’ is made up by theorists, nobody seriously disputes the existence of centers of gravity.

The most widespread approach for dealing with abstract entities is some version of nominalism. This is the view that there just are no abstract objects; there are only

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words used abstractly which stand for nothing at all. Quine, for example, proposed such a view at one time, claiming straightforwardly that he and Goodman "do not believe in abstract entities." He has since given up this view, for nominalism is a difficult position to hold, and perhaps it is true that, as van Fraassen put it "one can be a nominalist only in the way Saint Paul held one could only be a Christian, namely, in the sense of trying to be one." The proposal adopted here eschews attempts to dispense with abstract entities and simply embraces them, although with some qualification.

There are a number of problems with abstract entities, but the one we are concerned with is the ontological problem: do abstract entities exist? The way to answer this question is by employing the strategy developed in the previous chapters. Roughly, the view is that we are free to speak about abstract entities and to use them in our theories without threatening physicalism, and without fear of talking nonsense, so long as we resist the view that belief in such things is a metaphysical belief. Talk of abstract entities such as numbers is quite meaningful, given the framework of numbers. Asking the external question about the real existence of numbers is construed as asking about whether or not to accept the framework of numbers. Let's look at this view in some detail.

Consider the statement:

(1) My cat is in my chair.


\(^4\)van Fraassen, "Empiricism in Philosophy of Science," 303.
Nobody objects to their being something designated by the terms 'cat' and 'chair,' even if it is only, as the phenomenalist will assert, cat-like and chair-like appearances. When uttering (1) we take ourselves to be referring only to concrete particulars. But consider the statement:

(2) There are prime numbers.

We can translate this as:

(3) (\exists x) (Nx \cdot Px)

Suppose now that someone troubled by the existence of numbers asks us whether in virtue of uttering (2) we are now committed to the existence of numbers. How do we reply?

Our reply is to show that we understand such questions as asking whether we should accept or reject the system of numbers of which (2) is a sentence. On this view, accepting the existence of numbers is nothing but the decision to use the number-language framework. As Carnap puts is, “this acceptance is not in need of a theoretical justification (except with respect to expediency and fruitfulness), because it does not imply a belief or assertion.... It is rather the practical decision to accept certain frameworks.”

The realist about numbers, however, does not mean to ask merely whether we choose to use the language of numbers. The pressing philosophical question for the realist is whether or not there actually are numbers. Likewise, the nominalist does not doubt the existence of the language of numbers, but rather, the existence of numbers.

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themselves. The realist thinks it is true that numbers exist, whereas the nominalist denies this. Both aim to determine the truth value of such claims prior to acceptance of the use of the language in question, since, on these approaches, the truth, or falsity, of whether there are numbers, is taken as support for their respective views. As Carnap puts it, both parties

... treat the question of existence as a theoretical question.... Their doubts refer rather to the system of entities itself; hence they mean the external question. They believe that only after making sure that there really is a system of entities of the kind in question are we justified in accepting the framework by incorporating the linguistic forms into our language.\textsuperscript{6}

On this view the issue is one of whether we can be justified in making such assertions, and so, justified in believing in the existence of such entities. This whole approach is, however, misguided. The issue is not one of justification, but of choice, and these sorts of choices are not theoretical, but practical. We are thus not committed to the existence of abstract entities in any troublesome sort of way. What we are committed to is certain ways of speaking, and believing that certain claims are true, given the language in which they are made.

Questions of justification are relevant only insofar as we are making internal assertions: "Whoever makes an internal assertion is certainly obliged to justify it by providing evidence, empirical evidence in the case of electrons, logical proof in the case of the prime numbers."\textsuperscript{7} Such justification is not at issue in questions about the acceptance of the kinds of entities themselves. This is a matter merely of acceptance of

\textsuperscript{6}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, 219.

\textsuperscript{7}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, 218.
the language in which assertions about such entities are made. On this view, we can preserve the meaningfulness of statements about abstract objects, and we can even be committed to the existence of such entities, when understood in the correct way. We need not deny them altogether or translate talk about them into talk about some other allegedly less troublesome kind of entity. We can preserve the existence of abstract entities as abstract, and make full use of them in our theories, so long as acceptance of them is understood in the correct way.

As we will see later, this same approach will be used in defending physicalism about concrete particulars. The reasons why commitment to numbers and sets can be tolerated by the physicalist is that the two need not be seen as conflicting. What sort of ontology of concrete particulars one accepts does not imply any particular view about the issue of abstract entities. One could be a neutral monist, and yet be a nominalist about numbers. On the view presented here, one can be committed to the existence of abstracta, in the sense specified, regardless of one's ontological view about concrete particulars. Thus, one can be a physicalist, and allow for the existence of numbers and sets, and disallow the existence of minds, (unless one thinks minds are abstract entities—a view that nobody I am aware of holds). Let's turn now to the issue of basic kinds of concrete particulars.

Possible Ontologies

The ontological issue we will be concerned with is that of specifying the basic kind(s) of concrete particulars in the broadest sense of the term. From the method already developed in the previous chapters, this amounts to specifying some kind of
language in which claims about such entities can be made. There are, traditionally, four possibilities:

Substance Dualism: There are two fundamental and equally basic kinds of things: material, e.g., tables, chairs and the objects of ordinary experience, and immaterial, i.e., minds.

Idealism: The only thing that exists is mind and its contents.

Neutral Monism: There is one neutral kind that can manifest properties of both mind and matter.

Physicalism: Everything is physical in the sense specified by the physical sciences.

I have called the first view *substance* dualism so as to distinguish this position from property dualism. The former view is about basic kinds, the latter is not a view about basic kinds. Properties are not fundamental in the sense that they do not exist except as properties of something. I take it that the ontological issue for the dualist is that, whatever minds are, they are not physical.

Idealism is the view of Berkeley. On this view there is no external world in the realist's sense; there is only mind and its contents. Although Berkeley relies on the existence of a transcendent God, one need not require that expansion of our ontology in order to be an idealist, although as we will see, something very like God seems to be required. Neutral monism is the view first espoused by Spinoza. On this monistic view there is only one kind, but it is manifested only as either mind or body. A more recent version of this view has been defended by Cornman.

Lastly, there is physicalism. This is the view that will be defended. On this view there is only one basic kind, and that is the kind that we call matter. The properties of
matter are given by the physical sciences, and the science of physics in particular. Minds, on this view, if they exist at all, are either physical entities, or some non-basic kind.

There may be some other possibility that has not been considered. After all, given the principle of tolerance, we want to allow for the possibility of the construction of other linguistic frameworks with which we make ontological claims about basic kinds. But if some alternative view is non-monistic, positing two or more basic kinds that are different than those of classical dualism, then such a view will fall prey to the same sorts of problems that face dualism. If the view is monistic, and not neutral, then I simply fail to conceive of how such a view can be made intelligible, since I take it that, by definition, idealism and physicalism are mutually exclusive and comprehensive.

Keep in mind also that, strictly speaking, talk about entities or kinds of entities always presumes that some framework for such talk has been specified. The issue of the existence of minds as a basic kind is not an issue to be settled by going out and looking for evidence of their existence. Talk about minds, as well as material objects, should be understood as talk about particulars. Talk about the existence of minds or material objects as basic kinds is only meaningful given the appropriate framework. It should be clear from the context when claims are being made about language and when claims are being made about objects. In general, claims about objects are meaningful and licit only when they are about particular objects, whereas claims about language are generally directed towards talk about the linguistic framework for some basic kind of object. Let’s look now at the possible ontological views in the order they are listed above.
Substance Dualism

Dualism has fallen on hard times. In philosophy of mind dualist accounts of the nature of mind are rare. Most of the effort of dualists is spent arguing that physicalism is false, and so, by inference, that dualism is at least plausible. On the view presented here, the task of defending dualism first requires the construction of a linguistic framework with which we can accomplish two tasks: one, we need to be able to make ontological claims about immaterial minds, and two, we need to be able to say how it is, given this framework, minds and bodies could interact. Given the method of doing ontology developed in the previous chapter, the first task is mandatory. The second task, however, may appear to be too strong. After all, the physicalism to be defended is neutral on such explanatory issues as how physicalism can account for the mental. If we do not require explanatory adequacy for physicalism, why should we require it for dualism?

For the dualist, part of what the term 'mind' means is that non-physical entity that interacts with the physical body. If there is some non-physical entity that doesn't interact with the body in the appropriate manner, then the dualist just wouldn't call it a mind. So the dualist must have a framework that at least allows for the possibility of mental-physical interaction. Hence, the issue of interaction for the dualist is not merely explanatory, but part of the very idea of dualism. We can thus reasonably require the dualist to provide a framework that is capable of providing for the possibility of interaction. This does not seem an overly strong requirement for dualism, even though it appears to be stronger than what is required of the physicalist.

What we require then is the construction of a language with which we can make
statements about the kinds of entities dualism embraces. Carnap suggests such a possibility, calling it the dualistic language: "This language consists of two interconnected parts: a reistic language for speaking about material things, and a mentalistic language for speaking about a second, autonomous, kind of basic entities, namely minds. A mind is usually assumed to be connected with a certain thing, the body of a human being or a higher animal." The idea here is that there is some one language called the dualistic language, composed of two parts, both equally basic, each part being itself a language, or perhaps a sub-language, of the more general dualist language. We distinguish between the two by their different predicate terms.

The primary reason for adopting the dualist language is as a way of speaking about minds. Since minds are quite clearly associated with bodies, we require some way of accounting for their possible interaction. And of course, this is the nub of the problem for the dualist, for how can something immaterial possibly interact with something material in any way that will satisfy our notions of how we operate psychologically? Traditionally, one of the strongest arguments against interactionism is that it violates the principle of the conservation of energy. The argument is, roughly, that if I will to move my arm by means of a mental act of willing, then we would expect some energy to flow from mind to body causing my arm to move. This energy ought to be measurable, but we do not find any such increase in energy in the body. Conversely, if I step on a nail and a mental experience of pain occurs, there ought to be some decrease in bodily energy as a result of its transmission to the mind. But again, no such decrease is detected. Thus,

\[8\] Carnap, "Replies and Expositions," 869.
any evidence for the existence of mind would seem to require a violation of the principle of the conservation of energy.

It is well known that C. D. Broad has argued that the interaction problem does not violate the principle of the conservation of energy. In his famous pendulum example he argues that no such violation occurs even in wholly physical systems:

Take the case of a weight swinging at the end of a string hung from a fixed point. The total energy of the weight is the same at all positions in its course. It is thus a conservative system. But at every moment the direction and velocity of the weight's motions are different, and the proportion between its kinetic and its potential energy is constantly changing. These changes are caused by the pull of the string, which acts in a different direction at each different moment. The string makes no difference to the total energy of the weight; but it makes all the difference in the world to the particular way in which the energy is distributed between the potential and the kinetic forms. This is evident when we remember that the weight would begin to move in an utterly different course if at any moment the string were cut.

Here, then, we have a clear case even in the physical realm where a system is conservative but is continually acted on by something which affects its movement and the distribution of its total energy. Why should not the mind act on the body in this way?

The example is clear enough, but it fails to settle the issue. On this view, mental events affect brain events, not by starting or stopping them, but by changing their course. This will suffice so long as we consider all mind-affecting-brain activity as occurring in a continuous manner, i.e., such that the plane of the pendulum remains the same. But surely there are just these sorts of changes, as for example when I am interrupted by a loud noise when in the middle of thinking through some philosophical problem (brain

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10Ibid., 97.
affecting mind), or when I stop my hand from reaching for a pencil (mind affecting brain). These sorts of changes require a change in the plane of the pendulum. But, "to change the plane of the pendulum would require the introduction of force on the pendulum, which raises the conservation of energy problem all over again!"¹¹ So even if Broad's pendulum example is roughly correct, it requires the brain-mind system to remain in a steady, continuous state. But this is entirely too simple a model, and seems plainly wrong, since it is incapable of explaining so much of what any such model ought to be able to explain.

This particular objection to interactionism is one of the traditional ways of attacking dualism. But recall that on the present view, dualism does not require this sort of defence. First, it requires the construction of some linguistic framework within which specific claims about minds can be made and tested. This is not an immediate problem, since all we need to do is employ the language specified earlier, namely, the dualist framework of physical objects and minds. The second task, however, is that of showing how it is possible for minds and bodies to interact, since it is part of what it is for something to be a mind on the dualist account such that it can interact in some way with a body.

The interaction problem then is that of showing how it is possible for there to be the required sort of interaction between the two distinct components of the dualist

framework. What is required is some way of stating claims which bridge these two sublanguages. There are, however, two problems with such bridging statements. First, they must be able to be stated without the positing of any new kind of entity in virtue of which interaction takes place. Second, they must be stronger than mere generalizations, for generalizations are compatible with non-dualist views such as epiphenomenalism, and so fail to support dualism. The kind of relations that seem to be required are lawlike relations. But, as will be argued using some ideas from Davidson, there are no lawlike relations possible between the physical and the mental. So until the dualist can offer some account as to how to formulate the relations between the physical and the mental such that they do not run afoul of either of these problems, we can take it that the burden has been shifted onto the dualist to come up with the needed account.

Notice that the problem of interaction as understood in this way is not a metaphysical problem in the traditional sense. It is not the problem of explaining how minds and bodies can interact. Rather, the problem has to do with the relation between the two sublanguages of the dualist framework. Since both systems aim to assert the existence of some equally basic ontological kind, neither of which is reducible to the other, there must be possible some account of how the two are related. One such method would be the introduction of some framework for another kind of thing in virtue of which these two are related. Another approach would be to show how it is possible to make certain kinds of statements called "laws" that have the role of "joining together"

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statements about two distinct kinds of entities. The idea here is to show how any kind of relation that can plausibly be called lawlike can be stated between the frameworks of minds and bodies such that one framework is not reducible to the other.

It would be simple to state the relation between mind and body if we could appeal to a framework for something like psychic energy. This would require us to add psychic energy to our ontology. We could do this in one of several ways. First, we could just include it as what minds do. This would just broaden the scope of the mind framework so as to include mental energy along with minds. The problem with this strategy is that it merely begs the question of how the mental interacts with the physical. The dualist needs to say something about how interaction could occur; merely stipulating that minds, by definition, interact with bodies will not settle the issue.

Another way of pursuing this strategy would be to devise some third framework for some new kind of thing in virtue of which interaction occurs. Again, we might call it psychic energy, but on this view it will require its own framework. This move just multiplies rather than decreases the problem of interaction. For now there are three frameworks, rather than two, that need to be interconnected. It looks then as though any solution to the interaction problem must be one in which no third kind of entity is introduced. Let's turn now to the second problem.

The second problem concerns the lawlike nature of bridging sentences. The view defended here is that there cannot be such laws. The argument for this position draws from Davidson's argument for "anomalous monism," which is a version of the identity
theory, i.e., the view that “mental events are identical with physical events.”

We will not, however, be concerned with this aspect of the argument. Rather, our concern will be just with the defence of the claim that there cannot be strict psychophysical laws. This thesis alone “is not quite the principle of the anomalism of the mental” although “on reasonable assumptions entails it.” The argument, as construed here, is aimed only at the ontological claim of dualism, namely, that minds, or mental events, constitute a basic kind that is ontologically on a par with bodies. One of the advantages of Davidson’s position is that it “rejects the thesis, usually considered essential to materialism, that mental phenomena can be given purely physical explanations.” In other words, anomalous monism is nonreductive about the mental.

What is at issue here is the possibility of laws of a certain kind. These laws can be understood as sentences having the function of getting other sentences about two distinct kinds of things, i.e., minds and bodies, into some kind of relationship such that we can say the interaction of the entities designated by the sentences is governed by a law. Merely saying that they are related will not make it so, thus, the mere statement ‘minds interact with bodies’ is not what we are after, since, while it may seem to have the form of a lawlike statement, we want to be able to say something about just what it is for such a statement to be a law. For it is not immediately obvious from this sentence that it is any different in kind than saying ‘mice eat cheese’. Thus, I am going to be

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13Ibid., 209.

14Ibid., 207.

15Ibid., 214.
concerned just with the formal properties of such laws, with the properties of such statements such that they can usefully be said to be laws and not mere generalizations. As we will see, there does not seem to be any theoretically useful sense in which we can make the claim that there are lawlike relations between the mental and the physical without the result of one framework being reducible to the other. In this very strict sense Davidson's argument, as construed here, is not metaphysical, but rather logical or semantic. It is concerned only with the a priori conditions on the possibility of lawlike relations between sentences about different and equally basic kinds of things.

Let's call the thesis to be argued for *Psychophysical Anomalism*, or PA, and we can define it as follows:

"*Psychophysical Anomalism*: There are no psychophysical laws, that is, laws connecting mental and physical phenomena. In fact, there cannot be such laws." 16

In line with our linguistic project, however, we perhaps ought to restate PA such that it avoids talk of mental and physical phenomena:

*Psychophysical Anomalism*: There are no psychophysical laws, that is, laws connecting statements about minds and bodies. In fact, there cannot be such laws.

It is on the basis of PA that Davidson argues for the more general thesis, *Anomalism of the Mental*, or AM, defined as follows:

*Anomalism of the Mental*: "There are no strict deterministic laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained." 17

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16 This expression is not Davidson's, but comes rather from Jaegwon Kim's "Psychophysical Laws" Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson, ed. Ernest LePore and Brian McLaughlin (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 368–86.

17 Davidson, "Mental Events," 208.
We need argue only for the more limited thesis of PA, since the upshot of the argument is that, failing such laws, the dualist can state only generalizations about the relations between the mental and the physical. But such generalizations are compatible with non-dualist positions. So, in the absence of any such view as to how to bring the mental into relation to the physical, we have a sufficient reason for rejecting dualism.

Davidson's arguments for anomalous monism, and its component theses such as PA, have been widely discussed, and, as one author has noted, sound "almost too good to be true." As Kim as noted however, "there is little agreement as to exactly how they are supposed to work." We will, in general, follow Kim's strategy for reconstructing Davidson's argument, although a few changes are made so as to handle some objections to the argument that Kim does not consider.

On Davidson's view, "an event is physical if it is describable in a purely physical vocabulary, mental if describable in mental terms" where "the distinguishing feature of the mental is not that it is private, subjective, or immaterial, but that it exhibits what Brentano called intentionality." Two points need to be made here. First, some have objected to Davidson's claim that events are only what they are in virtue of a description. If this were so, then presumably both mental as well as physical events are such just in virtue of a description. But then we wonder, what are they really?


20 Davidson, “Mental Events,” 210–11.

The view that some event of type $P$ is an event of that type just in virtue of a description employing only $P$-type vocabulary can usefully be construed as the view that has been defended already that we require some sort of framework within which we can make ontological claims. As Norman Melchert puts is,

What, then, is an intention or a thought? It is whatever we correctly call an intention or a thought. But what is it really? Here is the anomalous monist’s response to that question: if by ‘really’ you mean “apart from all descriptions,” there is not and cannot be any answer; but if you mean, What is the really correct description of it? you must specify the regulative and constitutive principles for some system of description, and then it will really be what that system describes it to be. So a certain event is really a thought (relative to the intentional principles of description), and it is really a brain process (relative to physical principles).\textsuperscript{22}

This interpretation fits nicely with some of Davidson’s other views, for example, when he argues against the idea of an uninterpreted reality distinct from all conceptual schemes.\textsuperscript{23} By employing the idea of linguistic frameworks we can, perhaps, make some sense of Davidson’s views, and make the arguments he gives for them, less opaque. It isn’t, however, my explicit aim to interpret Davidson. Hence, while it may be plausible and even preferable to read some of Davidson’s views as Carnapian, we won’t be concerned with defending this claim.

Second, descriptions of mental events, unlike descriptions of physical events, are descriptions that are intentional. For example, ‘believing that Chicago is in Illinois’, or ‘hoping that it will rain tomorrow’, are examples of such descriptions. These are quite

\textsuperscript{22}Melchert, “What’s Wrong?,” 271.

\textsuperscript{23}See, for example, Donald Davidson, “On The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” chap. in Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
unlike descriptions of physical states, such as 'being triangular', or 'being located four feet underground', which do not seem to be about anything at all. But while this feature of the mental framework is widely recognized as one of its chief characteristics, it is not the only characteristic feature of the mental. There is, for example, another widely held view that one of the characteristic features of the mental that distinguishes it from the physical is that of the subjective feel of mental states, i.e., that there is something it is like to be, say, a human being or, to use Thomas Nagel's famous example, a bat. The problem is that it is questionable as to whether the characterization of mental states as intentional is broad enough to account for the subjective feel of mental states.

The idea that what characterizes the mental as mental is the subjective feel of mental states will not do for our purposes, nor for Davidson's either. The problem with it is that it seems incapable of serving as a characteristic of the mental framework. It is, rather, an appeal to some actual feature of what some believe to be a quality of the mind itself. Intentionality, on the other hand, can be adequately captured for our purposes by a certain linguistic feature of our descriptions of certain mental states, namely, that they make essential reference to other states. Furthermore, it is precisely intentional states, rather than subjective feels, that the dualist wants to say stand in lawlike relations to physical states. Or rather, the dualist is concerned with how statements about intentional states can stand in lawlike relations to statements about non-intentional states. It is, for example, 'believing that $x$' and other such statements that embody propositional attitudes.

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that the dualist will claim stand in lawlike relations to statements like 'sitting at the desk'. So even if intentionality is not a sufficient characterization of the mental, it is precisely that feature of the mental that is required if there is even to be the possibility of psychophysical laws.

The general strategy of the argument for PA is to list various features that characterize the mental but not the physical, as well as the reverse, and then claiming that no laws can hold between the two domains, or frameworks. But why should we think this on purely a priori grounds? As Kim puts it, "the substance of the argument must show why, given just these differences, there can be no correlation laws."25

Consider, for example, some domain of objects $\mathcal{O}$ (or framework of kind of objects $\mathcal{O}$) where these objects are medium-sized material bodies, and two sets of properties, $R$ and $S$ where these are colors and shapes respectively. Suppose now that each individual in $\mathcal{O}$ has only one color in $R$ and one shape in $S$. In this situation we would not expect to find true generalizations of the form:

(A) Every object in $\mathcal{O}$ with color $t$ has shape $u$.

Nor would we expect to find true generalizations of the form:

(B) Every object in $\mathcal{O}$ with shape $u$ has color $t$.

We may however, contrary to what we might justifiably expect, find that:

(C) Every blue object in $\mathcal{O}$ is rectangular.

If we found that (C) were true, we would not consider this evidence of some sort of lawlike connection. Rather, we would account for (C) as a mere coincidence. Suppose

now we take the domain to be the set of all persons, and \( R \) and \( S \) to be, respectively, the set of mental properties and the set of physical properties. The point of Davidson’s argument is that, even if we should happen to find a true generalization of the form:

(D) All persons with mental property \( k \) have physical property \( l \),

we would not consider this a law for the same reasons. A law is distinguished from a mere generalization such that laws “are general statements that support counterfactual and subjunctive claims, and are supported by their instances.”

The sentence (C) above does not meet either of these criteria. First, it cannot back the counterfactual that ‘if apples were blue, they would be rectangular’. Second, the only way of confirming (C) is by a complete examination of every object in the domain, since there is no accumulation of confirmation as individuals are examined.

Keep in mind that the point of the argument is that there can be no psychophysical laws. The central strategy of this argument hinges on the claim that lawhood is independent of the de facto truth of any generalization. For whether some generalization like (C) or (D) is true is irrelevant for determining whether it is lawlike. Lawhood can be determined just on a priori grounds, and does not require finding out whether any proposed law is in fact true or false. (Recall that this is Carnap’s view about the nature of nomic form.) Psychophysical generalizations are thus entirely possible, although, as we will see later, they are of no use to the dualist. The general form of the argument for PA then is as follows:

The mental system has a certain essential characteristic \( X \) and the physical system

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26Davidson, “Mental Events,” 217.
a certain essential characteristic Y, where X and Y are mutually incompatible. Laws linking the two systems, if they exist, would 'transmit' these characteristics from one system to the other, leading to incoherence. Therefore, there can be no laws connecting the mental with the physical so long as the two systems are to retain their distinctive identities.  

If there were such psychophysical laws, this would result in the loss of the mental characterized as intentional. As Davidson puts it, "to allow the possibility of such laws would amount to changing the subject. By changing the subject I mean here: deciding not to accept the criterion of the mental in terms of the vocabulary of the propositional attitudes." This is precisely the sort of criteria that we would expect on the view that the argument is one in which we are considering linguistic frameworks and not mental states per se.

The essential feature of the mental framework, characterized as intentional, that cannot be transmitted to the physical framework is that of rationality. That is, "either the set of intentional states we attribute to a person satisfies certain minimal standards of rationality and coherence, or else there is no ground for attributing such a system to an agent; in fact, to consider an organism an agent is an expression of our willingness to consider it a rational psychological system." (Notice that, although Davidson seems to be talking about the ascription of qualities to agents, we should understand this as the ascription of features to some framework.) By contrast, the essential feature that characterizes the physical is just the absence of rationality. So for any system we would

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28 Davidson, "Mental Events," 216.

be willing to describe as being rational, then, necessarily, we would call that system mental. Thus, we do not call mountain ranges or oceans rational agents or mental systems, whereas we do call human beings, and perhaps certain other animal species rational agents or mental systems.

Again, notice that talk of what is essential should be understood as talk of how we characterize some predicate, and whether or not we would include some particular as having that feature. Just as we have, for the dualist language, explicitly constructed two sublanguages with definite characteristics, distinguished by their predicate terms, talk of essential features is not to be understood as talk of metaphysical essences. Furthermore, whether some particular is or is not an instance of some framework, i.e., has the characteristic that defines that framework, is an internal question that is to be settled by the criteria appropriate to the framework.

What we need to do now is show how we can formulate true generalizations, but not laws, about some mental system. Consider the following argument. Let $p$ be the statement ‘Evanston is within 10 miles of Chicago’ and $q$ be the statement ‘Evanston is within 20 miles of Chicago’. On a minimal standard of rationality, whenever we attribute the belief that $p$ to some person, we must also attribute the (standing) belief that $q$. So consider the following counterfactual:

(1) If $S$ were to believe $p$, $S$ would also believe $q$.

Now suppose that for statements about physical states $B_1$ and $B_2$ lawlike relations hold specified as follows:

(2) Necessarily, a person believes $p$ iff he is in state $B_1$. 

(3) Necessarily, a person believes \( q \) iff he is in state \( B_2 \).

Now we can assume, roughly, that (1), (2) and (3) together yield:

(4) If \( S \) were in state \( B_1 \), he would also be in state \( B_2 \).

Notice that (4) is a purely physical counterfactual which describes "a dependency relation between two physical states; it might state a lawful dependency relation between two neurophysiological states involving discharges of large groups of neurons, or something of the sort."\(^{30}\) What accounts for this dependency?

There are three possibilities: (a) the dependency is a basic law, not in need of explanation. This is implausible, for it seems unlikely that basic laws of physics operate directly at the level of something as complex as neural correlates of beliefs. (b) (4) is explained by appeal to more fundamental physical laws. Using this strategy, those same laws would provide us with a physical explanation, via (2), (3) and (4), of the psychological dependency relation in (1). But this implies that rationality is not what actually grounds that relation, and so the concept of belief is no longer intentional but physical. Such a concept of belief would no longer be a mental concept. (c) the dependency relation in (4) has no physical explanation, but can be explained psychologically in terms of (1) via (2) and (3). "But this is absurd: to ground a purely physical dependency in considerations of rationality of belief would have to be taken as an intolerable intrusion on the closedness and comprehensiveness of physical theory. Thus, none of the possibilities makes sense."\(^{31}\) Therefore, we must reject the

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 380.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., 381.
interpretation of (2) and (3) as stating laws. This does, however, leave open the possibility of true generalizations about relations between believing and being in certain physical states. So, if the argument is good, there cannot be any psychophysical laws, but there can be psychophysical generalizations. If this is right, then the dualist cannot tolerate a lawlike connection between the mental and the physical. But this leaves dualism unable to account for a sufficiently strong interaction, i.e., one that is not compatible with non-dualist views such as epiphenomenalism. Short of an account of interaction then, we have sufficient grounds for rejecting dualism.

Before moving on, however, let’s look at some well-known objections to Davidson’s argument as formulated by Patrick Suppes. He raises the objection that it is common in physics, as well as psychology, to study systems that are neither closed nor comprehensive, contrary to what Davidson, and Kim, suggest. Suppes is making an empirical point, namely, that when we observe what physicists and psychologists do we see that they both study systems that are neither closed nor comprehensive. If he is just making an empirical generalization, then it has no immediate bearing on the argument as we have construed it. But let’s suppose that it is part of the physical and psychological frameworks such that they are neither closed nor comprehensive. Suppes’s example of an open system is quantum mechanics, in which “it might be said that there may well be

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33 Ibid., 184.
closed systems in physics but we shall never be able to observe them.  34

Davidson’s view is that “there couldn’t be a closed system of the mental, observed or unobserved, because of the endless ways in which the mental interacts with the physical.”  35 His point here is that it seems to be just part of what it means for something to be a mental system such that it cannot in principle be closed in anything at all like the way a physical system could in principle be closed. For it is at least a debated topic as to whether the openness of quantum mechanics is ontological or epistemic, i.e., whether the openness is part of the system itself, or merely an aspect of our interaction with it. Until that issue is settled, we can reasonably maintain a principled distinction between physical and mental systems on the basis of how, if at all, they could be closed. As for the comprehensiveness, or lack thereof, of physical systems, this objection can be avoided just by allowing for the lack of comprehensiveness, or holism, of the mental as well. The argument for PA need not require that the mental be comprehensive in some way that the physical is not.

Suppes other objection is that “much of modern physical theory is intensional in expression.”  36 For example, although we have no concept of belief in physics, we do use a concept of probability that is similar, and if we construe probability subjectively, it will apply equally to psychology as well as physics. Furthermore, “the more important point is that in the standard accounts of physical experiments the use of intensional language

34Ibid., 185.


is widespread and, in my view, uneliminable."37 Thus, intensionality is not a characteristic just of the mental, contrary to what Davidson claims.

Once again, let's take the objection as a claim about the nature of the physical framework. In this case it seems unproblematic for it is sentences that are intensional and not objects. But there is a problem with construing probability as something like belief by construing probability subjectively. It makes perfectly good sense to say 'x holds p to be as probable as q' so long as x is some individual. The problem is that it makes no sense to say this of some claim in physics, for "whose name is to be put for 'x'? Is there a separate physics for each physicist?"38 Davidson's point here is that there is still some relation operative in the mental realm, namely, x's holding that p, that has no meaningful correlate in the physical realm. Surely we do not want to say that physics is about nothing more than what every individual physicist believes. Such beliefs are just the reports of physicists, and not statements of physics itself.

Suppes's second point, however, is that these reports themselves are necessarily intensional. If this is the case, then it will be true of all the sciences. But then, it will be true of psychology as well, namely, that the reports of experiments and findings in psychology will be intensional. But this objection misses the point. What makes psychology unique is that it, unlike the other sciences, is concerned with the study of those mental states themselves, and is unconcerned with whether the mental states of the scientist intrude on the study.

37Ibid., 187.

38Davidson, "Replies to Essays X–XII," 249.
Now if the argument for $PA$ is good, and the replies to Suppes's objections are sufficient, this leaves the dualist in a predicament. If there are no laws holding between the mental and the physical, then it is hard to see how any interaction can be said to occur that is not compatible with epiphenomenalism. But a dualism that cannot establish lawlike connections between the mental and the physical is not fit for the name. So unless the dualist can show us how to establish such laws, we have a good reason for rejecting the ontological framework of dualism. Let's turn now to the next candidate ontology—idealism.

**Idealism**

Idealism is the view that all that exists are minds and mental content. It is, as we saw in chapter one, the view that is usually contrasted with realism, since it requires that nothing exists independently of the mental. The construction of a language for idealism seems relatively unproblematic. Let's grant for now that such a language can be constructed, although later the issue will be raised concerning the very intelligibility of such a framework. Unlike dualism however, for which there seem to be at least prima facie grounds for its acceptance, namely, that the use of a mental framework is required for accounting for ontological commitment to minds, idealism faces some immediate counter-examples that seem to require for their explanation an implausible expansion of its ontology.

Let's take as the definition of idealism the claim, following Berkeley, that to be is to be perceived or conceived. The key claim here is that nothing can be said to exist independently of the mind of the conceiver. Now as Berkeley pointed out, nothing in our
sensory experience conflicts with this view, and in some sense, everything seems to accord with it. Berkeley was, after all, (somewhat paradoxically) an empiricist. What idealism does need to account for, however, are things that seem to have their existence independently of any possible human conceivers. Consider, for example, dinosaurs, the solar system, etc. The existence of these sorts of things is about as well confirmed as the existence of anything at all. And given Berkeley’s empiricism, the means of confirming the existence of these items, i.e., the way of answering these internal questions, is by means of evidence. But in this case, idealism seems incapable of saying how these sorts of things could exist, since they seem to do so prior to the existence of any conceivers. How then do we account for the existence of things that are temporally prior to conceivers? Furthermore, how do we account for the existence of things that nobody has ever conceived of? For example, there are, by all accounts, hundreds of species of insects that have never been observed by any human. What is it that maintains such entities in existence?

Notice that there is not intended any appeal to traditional sorts of objections to idealism here, for the objection is not metaphysical or epistemic. Rather, the point of the objection is, given our acceptance of the existence of these particular entities, how does the idealist framework allow us to account for them? For we usually take it that we do in fact think there are dinosaurs and a solar system. The issue of these sorts of things is well attested to, and their existence is not a philosophical issue, since these are matters that are internal to some framework. The question is, how does the idealist framework fare as an answer to the external question of why we should accept it as giving us the
As we know, for Berkeley, "God is always about in the quad." In other words, the apparent counter-examples to the claim that to be is to be perceived are handled by invoking God as the perceiver who is always perceiving. Thus, in order to preserve idealism the ontology must be expanded so as to include God. But rather than require an argument for God's existence, which is the traditional way of posing the problem, the problem of God is here construed differently. The issue of whether some particular kind of entity exists is a matter of deciding whether or not to adopt some linguistic framework with which claims about that entity are made. In the case of idealism, let's grant that we have a suitable idealist framework. The problem of God here is not the traditional one of giving arguments for God's existence. The problem rather is this: can we so expand

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39From a limerick by Ronald Knox as quoted by Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 648. The quote is from the second of a pair of limericks that make for a nice statement of the sort of objection I am posing, and Berkeley’s answer:

There was a young man who said, “God
Must find it exceedingly odd
If he finds that this tree
Continues to be
When there’s no one about in the Quad”

To which the reply is:

Dear Sir:
Your astonishment’s odd:
*I am always about in the Quad.*
And that’s why the tree
Will continue to be,
Since observed by
Yours faithfully,
God.
the idealist framework so as to include within it an entity that is sufficiently like the God that seems required by Berkeley’s version of idealism?

Given the linguistic framework of idealism, there are problems with the attempt to incorporate God into this framework. To say that God exists requires that we include God within the idealist framework. The nature of a framework is such that all the particulars countenanced by that framework are of the same kind. Recall that the way in which frameworks are distinguished from each other is by the kind of predicates we employ for describing the particular objects in the framework. This implies that all the particulars of some framework are of the same kind. If we include God as a particular in the idealist framework, this implies that God is of the same kind as human beings. This seems highly implausible since, on one very traditional view about the nature of God, the act of creation by God is nothing over and above some “cognitive” action. On this view, God brought human beings into existence by an act of thought. But this is, according to the idealist, the way that everything other than conceivers is brought into existence. Insofar then as anything is brought into existence, either by God, or by human conceivers, it is done in the same way. This makes human conceivers functionally equivalent to God in this respect. But this cannot be correct.

It seems to be only by a kind of analogy that we can say that human beings are functionally equivalent to God in the relevant respect. For it makes no literal sense to say that God “perceives” in anything at all like the way that we do. For another, God brings things into existence and maintains them in existence just by some cognitive act. Human beings, on the other hand, do not bring things into existence and maintain them so in this
way. When, for example, I am perceiving a blue flower, I do not literally create the flower. Rather, I now "take over" as it were for God, who was maintaining it in existence all along independent of my act of perception. Moreover, when I am finished perceiving it, God will "take over" for me and maintain the flower in existence. It looks as though God's powers of perception are unique to God, and are really very different from ours. It looks then as though we are better off excluding God from the same framework in which we include ourselves. In order to preserve this theistic version of idealism we need two frameworks: one for ourselves, and another for God. The former contains many individuals of the same kind; the latter contains only one individual.

But this two-framework version of idealism also faces problems. The problem is that it seems implausible to think that both frameworks are fundamental in the relevant way, i.e., both are basic kinds of concrete particulars. Given a not implausible concept of God, it seems more likely that God is what is basic, and that human beings are contingent on God in some way. This would give us an idealist monism, but what we have now is the view that what is ontologically basic is God. Moreover, not only is God ontologically basic, God is the only instance of what is ontologically basic. This view is not without problems.

Recall that we distinguished earlier between concrete particulars and abstract entities. The chief concern now is that of constructing an ontology for concrete particulars, having already made some remarks about how to deal with abstract entities. What we have now with this view that God is ontologically basic is that God is the only concrete particular. But this raises a problem. How do we distinguish between what we
commonly call concrete particulars, e.g., dogs, trees and chairs, and abstract entities, e.g., numbers and centers of gravity? The appeal to God as the only concrete particular leaves us unable to draw this distinction between these ordinary objects. But it is this very distinction between just these sorts of objects that motivates, at least in part, the ontological endeavor. We seem then to have come to a position that, while having some internal coherence, does almost none of the work that we want an ontology to do. The view that God is the only concrete particular simply fails to do any of the work that we want to do with an ontology of concrete particulars. There are, of course, other forms of idealism, most notably the versions of absolute idealism proposed by Hegel, Bradley, McTaggart. But perhaps the chief problem for idealism of any sort is that it requires that we posit some relation between cognizers and reality other than an epistemic relation as constitutive of the idealist framework. I take it that this is what Goodman, for instance, is after when he says:

> we do not make stars as we make bricks; not all making is a matter of moulding mud. The worldmaking mainly in question here is making not with hands but with minds, or rather with languages or other symbol systems. Yet when I say that worlds are made, I mean it literally; what I mean should be clear from what I have already said.”

The problem with this sort of view, as we saw in chapter one, is that, stripped of the metaphors in which it is expressed, it simply fails to make sufficient sense so as to capable of our determining whether or not it could meaningfully be predicated of some particular. We understand what it means to say that we are at least weakly epistemically related to reality, i.e., we can form beliefs about what we take to be reality, even if they

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are false.\textsuperscript{41} What is questionable is whether we have any other intelligible notion of a relation to reality such that we construct or create it in some sense. It is incumbent on the idealist to spell out that relation in some minimal detail sufficient to say that we have an intelligible framework. Short of such an account, I find idealism unacceptable as an ontology of concrete particulars, if only for the reason that it can't be formulated sufficiently well so as to be able to decide whether to accept it. Let's look now at another possible ontology.

**Neutral Monism**

The classic statement of this view comes from Spinoza. His view is called "the double aspect theory". It is primarily a reaction to Cartesian dualism. On Spinoza's view mind and body are actually one thing, but we distinguish them by conceiving of them under the categories of thought and extension, where these are "modes" of a single substance. This single substance, which Spinoza calls "God," has various attributes. These attributes are "that which the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence."\textsuperscript{42} The attributes of substance are distinct, but are not themselves either entities or different substances:

It is thus evident that, though two attributes are, in fact, conceived as

\textsuperscript{41}Contrast this weak relation to a strong one according to which we can have knowledge of reality. We may or may not have such a strong relation depending on the extent to which one finds skepticism problematic. I take it that the weak relation is unproblematic, even for the skeptic. The point is, it is merely epistemic, and not, say, constructive, or creative.

distinct—that is, one without the help of the other—yet we cannot, therefore, conclude that they constitute two entities or two different substances. For it is the nature of substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, inasmuch as all the attributes it has have always existed simultaneously in it, and none could be produced by any other; but each expresses the reality or being of substance.

Thus, we get the dual-aspect view that a single, neutral substance manifests the two properties of mind and matter.

Spinoza seems to be arguing that since we can conceive of some one substance as mind and as body we can thereby think of both mind and body as identical, in some sense, but also different. This is clearly false. Taking mind and body as properties of some third thing, it does not follow that just in virtue of their being properties of one thing that they are thereby identical in any sense at all. For example, a basketball can be both blue and round, but it does not follow that blue and round are thereby identical just in virtue of their being properties of the one basketball.

We might emend this view to say that they are only distinct "as conceived." In other words, mind and body as properties of some one substance are only distinguished by means of a description. On this view, substance is thought of always as being in some particular way given a certain description. The problem with this emendation is that if the properties of mind and body are only distinct as described, then we are left with no idea at all as to the nature of this neutral substance. If mind is conceived just as one particular description of substance, and body as another such description, the idea of this substance itself is utterly mysterious. What we want to know is, what is substance itself

\[43\] Ibid.
like such that it is amenable to being described in two such fundamentally different ways?

Since what we are after here is the construction of some linguistic framework within which we can make statements about what there is, we need at least some minimal idea of what this substance is such that it can be thought of as both mind and body, in some sense, and neither, in another sense. As we saw in the case of dualism, it is not difficult to construct a single language in which there are two kinds of predicates, such that we have two sublanguages distinguished according to which predicate terms apply to the particulars. In this case, once again, we have a physical and a mental language. The problem is, these are, for the neutral monist, not what is ontologically basic. What is ontologically basic is that neutral language of which the two sublanguages are sublanguages of. But we have no idea at all as to what the predicate terms could possibly be of such a language, and hence, no way of conceiving of it as a distinct linguistic framework.

We could, perhaps, take an Aristotelian view that what we are after here is something like a substrate thought of as that of which we predicate the various properties of some particular substance. The problem with this view, at least for our purposes, is that there is no meaningful sense in which the substrate can be said to exist, for it is only individual substances about which we can say that they exist; the substrate cannot even be meaningfully said to be an individual.

More recently, James Cornman has defended a Spinozistic view which he calls
"the neutral identity theory." On Cornman's view, there are a class of entities that "are neither purely physical nor purely mental. They are some third sort of neutral entity, because they have psychological properties which nothing purely physical has, and they have physical properties which nothing purely mental has." Cornman's view has clear similarities to Spinoza, but there are also some clear differences that make this view unacceptable for our purposes.

Cornman is aiming to give an account of mind and not an account of what there is generally, i.e., an account of basic kinds. The entities with which he is concerned are the typical sorts of mental entities like beliefs and pains. Such entities are entirely unproblematic, on the view defended here, since we can be committed to the existence of all sorts of different kinds of entities, abstract entities included, given what it means to be ontologically committed to something. Cornman is not proposing the view that everything is in some sense a neutral sort of entity, whereas this is precisely what Spinoza is claiming, as well as the sort of view that I am seeking. On Cornman's view,

For each existing mental phenomenon \( m \): (a) \( m \) is identical with some physical phenomena (presumably, a brain entity), and (b) \( m \) has both certain psychological properties and the physical properties of the physical phenomenon with which it is identical. This view aims to avoid various strategies for giving a theory of mind, e.g., substance dualism, epiphenomenalism, reductive materialism and eliminativism. As such, it is

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45 Ibid., 216.

46 Ibid., 216.
entirely compatible with non-reductive materialism, and so is entirely compatible with a physicalist ontology since these entities are, by definition, identical to some physical entity. As Cornman puts it,

It agrees that there are purely material things, but also denies that there are purely mental things or entities. One might then say that neutral things, things that are neither purely mental nor purely material, do not make up another distinct kind of thing, over and above material things. Instead, neutral things such as pain and sensations of other sorts, are indefinite as to type. That is why we say that they are neutral entities. Hence, one might say, the neutral identity theory is really a version of monism; the only distinct kinds of entities it allows for are material entities.\(^47\)

As an explanatory strategy for a theory of mind this view has much in its favor. And supposing that we could construct the appropriate linguistic framework for getting the kinds of entities the view requires into our ontology, Cornman’s neutral identity theory may well do the job. The problem is that this view is a theory of mind. Our concern is not, however, with theories of mind in particular, but with ontology generally. We can take it that Cornman’s view poses no challenge to a materialist ontology, insofar as that ontology is non-reductive and non-eliminativist, since Cornman himself says that his is a materialist view. Let’s turn then to physicalism.

**Physicalism**

We have considered several possible ontologies for concrete particulars and found all of them wanting for various reasons. And although many, if not most, philosophers consider themselves materialists in some sense, we still need to say something about just what physicalism amounts to, since it has been argued recently “that physicalism lacks

\(^{47}\)Cornman, *Philosophical Problems*, 197.
a clear and credible definition, and that in no non-vacuous interpretation is it true."\textsuperscript{48}

Historically, 'physicalism' is the name given to a group of views adopted by the Vienna Circle. The earliest statement of the position is from Neurath: "In a sense unified science is physics in its largest aspect, a tissue of laws expressing space-time linkages—let us call it: \textit{Physicalism}."\textsuperscript{49} The term was intended by Neurath, and others of the Vienna Circle who subscribed to the view, to stand for a number of inter-related views, among them, the thesis of the unity of science and the rejection of the possibility of metaphysics as traditionally conceived. It was not intended to be allied with the philosophical view of materialism, i.e., the view that everything that exists is material. As a metaphysical view, materialism was rejected by the Vienna Circle, for they were opposed to metaphysics generally. Taken as a presupposition of the empirical sciences, namely, that the empirical sciences presume the existence of matter, materialism is more palatable. For the Vienna Circle, there is no knowledge outside of the sciences; certainly there is nothing that deserves to be called "philosophical" knowledge. Hence, physicalism is the view that all possible knowledge is given by the science of physics, or is theoretically reducible to physics. Consequently, there is at least the theoretical possibility of a unity of the sciences, understood as the view that all knowledge is capable of being expressed in the language of the empirical sciences.

The unity of science thesis says that the divisions among the empirical sciences


are made "merely for the practical reason of division of labor, but are fundamentally merely parts of one comprehensive unified science."\(^{50}\) This thesis was intended as a reaction to the view, prevalent at the time, among German philosophers, that "there is a fundamental difference between the natural sciences and the Geisteswissenschaften (literally "spiritual sciences," understood as the sciences of mind, culture, and history, thus roughly corresponding to the social sciences and the humanities)."\(^{51}\) But whereas Neurath took a "naturalistic" view whereby the thesis was construed as saying "that everything that occurs is a part of nature, i.e., of the physical world" Carnap maintained the semantic position "that the total language encompassing all knowledge can be constructed on a physicalistic basis."\(^{52}\)

The rejection of any possible metaphysics as a kind of knowledge distinct from science follows from the unity of science thesis together with a theory of meaning, one consequence of which is that only science can make meaningful statements. That theory of meaning rests on the principle of verification. This is the principle that only those claims are meaningful which can in some way be empirically verified, or at least conceived of as having possible empirical verifying conditions. Science consists then of just these sorts of claims, together with claims with no meaning whatsoever, i.e., analytic and tautologous truths. The criterion for what counts as a science is then a semantic criterion, as opposed to, say, an epistemic one, which is what we get from a philosopher


\(^{51}\)Ibid., 52.

\(^{52}\)Ibid., 52.
like Kant.

By contrast with the position of the Vienna Circle, what passes for physicalism today is a diverse range of views. One such view is the ontological one that everything is physical, a view that may or may not be allied with materialism, but is opposed to dualism and idealism. Another view is that all explanation is physical explanation, e.g., eliminativism. This view is ontologically materialist, as well as explanatorily reductivist. Another view is expressed by some sort of supervenience of the mental on the physical. And yet another view is that of naturalism, a view propounded by Quine, that maintains, first, that there is no "first philosophy," or metaphysics, and second, that consequently our ontology—understood in a suitably non-metaphysical sense (although Quine does appear to be a realist)—is just whatever our best science says there is. Some of these views are semantic doctrines; some of them are empirical; some of them are metaphysical. Some physicalists support their view by appeal to realism; some do not.

The notion of physicalism presented here is an ontological view, where ontology is understood as the study of basic kinds in the sense previously specified. We have seen that ontology, as a metaphysical pursuit, is unable to assert any claims that do not beg crucial questions against the skeptic. It has already been argued that skepticism ought to be taken seriously, and so cannot be ignored if we are to be critical about our philosophical views. Hence, the method of ontology we have adopted is modelled on some non-metaphysical ideas of Carnap and Quine. In particular, we have avoided any appeals to the doctrine of realism. Using Carnap's idea of a linguistic framework, the adoption of any ontology presumes the choice of some linguistic framework within which
claims about the entity one wishes to admit are expressed. For physicalism this framework will be that of the language of physics. Physicalism can now be understood as the adoption of the following four claims:

1) The Framework Thesis: Physicalism adopts the linguistic framework of physics as expressing the ontology of what is basic, i.e., as expressing the nature of the ontologically basic kind.

2) Semantic Realism: Physicalism adopts the view that the theoretical terms of the physical language framework are to be construed as denoting terms.

3) Epistemic Realism: Physicalism adopts the view that theoretical claims made in the physical language framework are to be believed as true.

4) The Ontological Unity Thesis: Frameworks for all non-basic kinds of entities are compatible with the physical language framework.

All of these claims taken together constitute a version of physicalism. The view is indeed physicalist in something like the usual sense in that it endorses the view that the most basic kind of entity that exists in physical, although this endorsement is qualified in that it is not a metaphysical existence claim. It is also physicalist in the sense proposed by Neurath and Carnap in that it endorses a kind of unity thesis, albeit a unity limited to ontological matters only. In order then to distinguish this version of physicalism from these other notions, let’s call it Logical Physicalism, or LP, so as to emphasize the formal as well as the non-metaphysical aspects of the view. This also serves to signify the influence of some aspects of logical positivism generally, and Carnap in particular.

Let’s look at each of these claims individually in some detail. The Framework Thesis, or FT, is the view that, from among the possible language frameworks we can construct and employ with which we can say what basic kind(s) of concrete particulars exist, the language of physical objects is to be adopted. As we have seen earlier in this
chapter, dualism, idealism and neutral monism have all been considered and rejected for various internal reasons. That is, we find that all of these frameworks face problems that are internal to the interpretation or construction of the framework itself. Physicalism does not face this difficulty since it is just the formalization of the language of physics, itself a developed (and still developing) science. This allows for the possibility that the language of physics may in the future change, but this is as it should be, for there is no a priori reason why we must construct frameworks in some a priori manner. We can, and should, let the construction of frameworks be informed by empirical matters. Following Carnap's principle of tolerance, it is part of the task of philosophers to construct such frameworks. There seems to be no reason why they should not allow themselves to be influenced in this task by empirical considerations, for surely the construction of a language framework can be informed by current science. 53 Furthermore, there is no reason why we cannot allow it to change over time. Given that we have relativized our analytic claims to the acceptance of a rule for how to use some term of the framework, there seems no reason why new terms cannot at some future date be changed, while rules for their use remain analytic. Surely it is a historical truth that terms do indeed change meaning, for whatever reasons, over time. To prohibit this seems overly strong and unnecessary.

53See Michael Friedman, "The Re-Evaluation of Logical Positivism," The Journal Of Philosophy 88 (1991): 505–19. Friedman argues that, for Carnap and the other positivists, "the central problem of philosophy is not to provide an epistemological foundation for the special sciences (they already have all the foundation they need), but rather to redefine its own task in the light of the recent revolutionary scientific advances that have made all previous philosophies untenable."
Although *FT* is the acceptance of the language of physics as that language that best expresses what is ontologically most basic, *FT* is not the assertion of any belief. As Carnap puts it,

> The acceptance cannot be judged as being either true or false because it is not an assertion. It can only be judged as being more or less expedient, fruitful, conducive to the aim for which the language is intended. Judgements of this kind supply the motivation for the decision of accepting or rejecting the kind of entities.\(^{54}\)

*FT* does not say that the physicalist framework is true; frameworks themselves, unlike theories (unless one is an instrumentalist) are not the sorts of things that have truth values. *FT* is not the view that asserts metaphysical realism about the world of physical things. As we saw previously, this is an external issue that can only meaningfully be construed as the issue of whether to accept or reject the physical language framework. Again, as Carnap puts it

> To accept the thing world [or any other world constituted by a framework] 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. The acceptance of the thing language leads, on the basis of observations made, also to the acceptance, belief, and assertion of statements. But the thesis of the reality of the thing world cannot be among these statements, because it cannot be formulated in the thing language or, it seems, in any other theoretical language.\(^{55}\)

Hence, *FT* does not imply the belief in the existence of the thing world itself, although it does allow for belief in the existence of individual physical entities, where the notion of existence is relative to the framework in which assertions of existence are formulated. What this shows is that *FT* implies no metaphysical belief. And this is precisely as it

\(^{54}\)Carnap, “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology,” 214.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., 208.
should be, since we have already seen that metaphysics, if it aims to beg no questions against the skeptic, is not possible. Hence, any attempt to argue for the existence of the world of physical objects implies a refutation of skepticism—and that, as we have seen, does not appear to be possible. Thus, FT makes no metaphysical claim; it merely asserts that the language of physics is to be accepted as that language that expresses what is ontologically basic. Thus, FT makes no assertion of the truth of physicalism; it states merely that the language framework adopted by LP is that of the science of physics. It makes no judgement about the truth value of physics itself. Let's look now at semantic realism.

Recall from chapter three that semantic realism with respect to a linguistic framework is the view that the theoretical terms of that framework are to be understood as denoting terms. With respect to the physical language then, this is the view that the theoretical terms of the language are to be interpreted as denoting terms, and not merely as being instrumentally useful. We interpret our theoretical terms as if there are real entities being denoted, insofar as the meaning of term ‘real’ is understood relative to the physical language framework, and not in some metaphysical sense of real that is independent of any framework whatsoever. Semantic realism does not imply that any entities exist, for it is only a view about how we are to interpret certain portions of our terminology. It claims that we are to understand theoretical terms as denoting terms rather than as instrumentally useful terms. This does not imply any assertion of existence, for in order to say whether some entity does exist requires much more than just being able to form some grammatically correct sentence. This requires the use of whatever
criteria are relevant for affirming some answer to an internal question. In this case, it requires empirical evidence. But having already defended semantic realism earlier, we now merely apply it to the physical language framework. It thus needs no further defense. Let's look next at epistemic realism.

Epistemic realism has also been defended in chapter three, and so needs only application and not further defense. Recall that this is the view that we take the epistemic attitude of believing that our theoretical claims are true rather than merely instrumental. As applied to the physical language framework, this implies that we believe the existence claims of physics when they have the evidence that is needed for any such claim as specified by the evidential criteria for physics. As Merrill puts it, epistemic realism is "a rather trivial position amounting to the claim that to have good reason to hold (or use) a theory is to have good reason to assert the laws and statements (including existence-claims) of the theory, and this is not to make any statements about the relation that the theory bears to reality or the world."56 Thus semantic realism says, with regard to LP, that to have good reasons to assert the existence of any particular physical entity is to have a good reason to embrace the language framework of physics.

This constitutes a kind of reason we have for saying why we ought to choose the physicalist framework. Namely, that given the physicalist framework, we can make existence claims which we can justifiably believe, i.e., we can answer internal questions. This provisional acceptance of the framework allows us to justify particular existence claims, which then serve as reasons for a firmer adoption of the framework itself. This

56Merrill, “Three Forms of Realism,” 232.
strategy may seem circular, for it appears to say that we justify existence claims only by means of the criteria of justification specified by that framework, which framework is then believed on the basis of this justification. This looks, at best, like a coherentist strategy reminiscent of Neurath's boat metaphor. But the objection is misplaced.

Epistemic realism does not claim that the framework itself is to be believed as true. Rather, the framework is first provisionally adopted only for theoretical purposes. That is, we ask ourselves what sort of ontology we get by adopting some particular framework. We then provisionally, experimentally, adopt the framework in order to see what we can do with it. This first provisional adoption implies nothing at all by way of any truth claims; the adoption is purely provisional. When we find that particular existence claims can be believed for good reasons, themselves subject to the criteria specified by the framework, we take this as good reason for a firmer adoption of the framework. We do not take this as evidence of the truth of the framework. Keep in mind that the choice of framework is always subject to change at some time in the future. Again, given the principle of tolerance, we could always decide in the future to adopt some other framework. In such a case, we would adopt this framework tentatively, see what sort of ontology it provides, and then decide whether to strengthen our choice.

The critic might reply that on this strategy we can give these kind of reasons in support of any framework. If the justificatory criteria are specified by the framework itself, then there will always be these sorts of reasons available. This is precisely the sort of question-begging strategy that we examined, and rejected, in chapter one. Recall, for example, the discussion of the Snellen exam for eyesight. If there are always these sorts
of reasons available, then any framework will always have just these sorts of reasons in its favor. Thus, no framework can be excluded. But as we have already seen, not all frameworks are sufficiently internally coherent so as to be able to give these kinds of reasons. Furthermore, the issue of framework choice is not alethic; we are not giving reasons for the truth of some framework. If we were, then to give framework-independent reasons for why some framework ought to be adopted would be a refutation of skepticism, and that does not seem possible given the discussion of skepticism in chapter one. Since the issue is not alethic, the objection seems misplaced. This should serve to blunt the charge of coherentism, but it does not settle the question of whether there are any other sorts of reasons for why physicalism should be adopted. But let's put that question off for a bit, since it takes us beyond the thesis of epistemic realism. Let's look next the ontological unity thesis.

The ontological unity thesis says that all ontological frameworks for non-basic kinds are compatible with the physicalist framework. This implies that whatever else exists that is not physical is not basic. Thus, we can allow for talk of minds so long as these are not understood as constituting an ontologically basic kind, which is what dualism claims. Minds can meaningfully be said to exist, with the proviso that their existence is contingent on something physical. It of course seems doubtful that minds could be immaterial, for it isn’t clear how the existence of something immaterial could be contingent on something physical. If this were possible, then one could be a logical physicalist while simultaneously holding to a view that minds are immaterial.

The ontological unity thesis does not assert any sort of reduction from one
framework to another. It allows for other sorts of relations between basic and non-basic kinds of entities. It claims only that, for all non-basic kinds, there must be some sort of ontological relation between entities of that kind and the basic kind. The three most well-known such relations are reduction, supervenience and emergentism. There may be others, and this is to be allowed. What is prohibited is the positing of some kind of entity that has no ontological relation whatsoever to the physicalist framework. Such an entity would either be of some kind that is ontologically as basic as physical entities, or it would be non-basic but unconnected to everything else that exists. The former option is just dualism, which we have already discussed and rejected. As for the other option, presumably this would be some sort of two-world view that could be specified modally. The problem with it is that it is not an answer to the question about the ontology of this world, for the ontology of this world will still be monistic.

Furthermore, the ontological unity thesis is not unity of explanatory vocabulary; it does not require that all explanation is physical explanation. This means that it does not require that all explanation employ only the vocabulary of the physical sciences. This is, for example, what some philosophers mean by ‘naturalism’. There are explanatory strategies however, such as functionalism, that are not committed to any particular ontology. Functionalist explanation appeals to a principle of multiple realizability whereby the instantiation of some phenomenon is type-neutral. This sort of strategy is allowable since it is ontologically neutral.

All four of these claims taken together constitute logical physicalism. But all we have so far is an exposition of the view. As mentioned earlier, we can still ask whether
there are any framework-independent reasons for why we ought to adopt this view. We have already looked at two kinds of reasons. First, we have the negative approach of rejecting the alternatives on the basis of their each having internal inconsistencies. Second, we saw that there is a kind of reason that is internal to the physicalist framework itself. What we want to know now is whether there are any external reasons in favor of $LP$. If what is wanted are arguments for the truth of $LP$, then, as we have already seen, there are no such arguments, since such an argument would constitute a refutation of skepticism, and that is not in the offing. What we can offer are some pragmatic considerations of the following sort.

The best reason to accept $LP$ is that, unlike all the competitors we surveyed, it "works." That it works means the following: first, it doesn't break just in the process of trying to construct the view. All the competitors face internal problems. Dualism is perhaps the closest to $LP$, and it doesn't work either, but it also must make use of a physicalist framework. For dualism to even get started it must presume a plausible physicalist framework. If dualism is the chief competitor to physicalism, then it too must assume at least this much, so we ought not to hear any arguments from the dualist against the internal plausibility of what the dualist takes to be the purely physical aspects of physicalism. But since dualism itself breaks, this leaves only physicalism. Second, it seems to be the account that best satisfies our philosophical purposes in doing ontology as I have specified this task. That is, given the task of ontology as asking what is most basic, $LP$ seems best suited to this task. It allows for meaningful talk about every conceivable kind of thing we might want to talk about, given certain restrictions. It
accounts for our best science as well as our somewhat less than scientific notions about minds, again with certain restrictions. Taken together with Carnap's principle of tolerance, that there is always the possibility of some other framework, this is all the positive argument there is for LP. This explains Carnap's as well as Quine's suggestions that, at such a high level of generality all one can do is choose based on these sorts of considerations.

**Some Lessons**

One of the chief lessons of LP is that we ought to separate general ontological issues from issues about the nature of mind. It is not an objection to physicalism, on the view presented here, that, for example, subjective experiences avoid description by a purely physical language, or that intentionality is present in propositional attitudes but absent in brain states. This is a problem, perhaps, for the eliminativist; it is not a problem for logical physicalism, since it can allow for any account of subjective experience, so long as that view is not committed to ontologically basic, non-physical, concrete entities.

Insofar as logical physicalism is a normative position, it counsels us not to construct any future theory that is in conflict with the language of physical objects. This is not to say that it will never be the case that such theories may at some future date come into wide acceptance. But this would require some dramatic reconstruction of our present language that, without good reason, we have no need for doing. One could, perhaps, construct such a language, and Carnap's principle of tolerance allows for just such work on the part of philosophers. But short of showing how such a language would
be more useful in satisfying our ontological purposes than the physical language, such a construction is merely a conceptual exercise.

One other indirect lesson of logical physicalism is that it limits philosophers to making claims about concepts and not entities per se. Some philosophers seem to think that when they are talking about minds, for example, that they are talking about some actual entity. But unless and until they give us some account of just what it is that they are ontologically committed to by such talk, we can reject such claims as either metaphysical, or meaningless. For what is required in specifying what they are ontologically committed to is some specification of the sort of language they employ in asserting the existence of minds. Short of this, we can reject such talk as nonsense. And if such talk is metaphysical, we can, for reasons given in chapter one, reject it as mere speculation, as the description of some possible reality that we can in no way ever affirm to be true in a non-questionbegging manner.

\[57\text{Notice that I am not appealing to verificationism in support of the claim that talk of minds is nonsense. I am making only the rather trivial point that without some idea of the nature of what it is that one is ontologically committed to, claims about the nature of particular entities are completely indeterminate.}\]


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