

Kant versus Quine: Transcendentalism or Naturalism?*

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1 Introduction

Kant wrote that Hume awakened him from his dogmatic slumber (1953, preface) Kant refers to Hume's arguments to the effect that we can give no justification of the idea that there is a necessary connection between cause and effect and that this connection could be known a priori. Kant accepts this negative part of Hume's philosophy but he rejects his positive doctrine, viz., that the connection between cause and effect is nothing more than regularity and that the imposition of necessity is a projection into the world from our minds. Hume's explanation was that we are conditioned to expect the effect to follow the cause, and this conditioned expectation make us think that 'now the effect must come' when we have observed an instance of the effect. This explanation does not satisfy Kant.

Hume concluded from his association theory of the cause-effect relation that we cannot justify the belief that external objects cause our impressions of them, because the cause, i.e., the external object, is only available to us via its effect, the impression. If cause-effect relations are associations between impressions, there cannot be any such association, simply because there is only one impression. Hence we cannot give any justification for our belief in an external world, i.e., our belief in independently existing objects. In short, the entire project of giving an epistemological foundation for our empirical knowledge was put in doubt by Hume. Hume's way out, to reject the quest for ultimate justification as an illegitimate request, was not accepted by Kant.

Kant's response, in the first Critique, to Hume's challenge was to distinguish between two levels of discourse, the empirical and the transcendental. The transcendental discourse is an analysis of the conditions for the possibility of objective knowledge. He found that these conditions are of two types. One is that our mind utilizes a set of fundamental categories which are the most basic constituents of judgements, such as

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substance-accidence, cause-effect, contingency-necessity. The other type is our forms of intuition (german 'Anschauungsformen'), viz., time and space. Our minds are so construed that we cognize objects as things in space and time, and in our judgements we always utilize the fundamental categories. Hence, the forms of intuition and the categories are *in us*, i.e., constitutive elements of our mind; hence these constitutive elements determine the forms of all possible empirical knowledge, according to Kant.

From this two-level analysis follows a distinction between a *phenomenon*, a thing as cognized by us, and a *noumenon*, a thing as it is in itself. This distinction should not be thought of as a distinction between two objects, but rather two perspectives of one and the same object. The famous phrase '*Das Ding an sich selbst betrachtet*', the thing as it is in itself, is chosen so as to clearly indicate that it is ordinary physical objects we are talking about; and the conclusion from the transcendental analysis is that we cannot think of them without using our basic categories and forms of intuition.

If we would interpret Kant as saying that the phenomenon is distinct from the noumenon and thus that the phenomenon is a representation of the noumenon, we would attribute to Kant a representational theory of perception, and that was precisely what Hume had shown could not be justified; Kant's transcendentalism is thus not a theory about how we represent external objects but an attempt to do without representations.

So we cannot really say anything at all about things as they are in themselves, according to Kant. In fact, we cannot even say about them that they *cause* our perceptions; for the concept of cause is one of the categories and using it we are in the empirical discourse. It is no wonder that some of Kant's followers dismissed the notion of *things as they are in themselves* as having no theoretical role to play; thus they became full-blooded idealists. All there is are phenomena, objects as perceived. But then, we are back to Berkeley's position; physical objects are nothing but collections of perceptions. But this conclusion flies in face as an absurdity. So what are the remaining options? One is to become a metaphysical realist; another is to stick to Kantian transcendentalism; but a third option has attracted more and more philosophers the last thirty years or so; naturalism.

2 Naturalism a la Hume and Quine

One response to Hume's challenge, or rather a development of one strand of his thoughts, is to become a naturalist. In my view, the fundamental idea in epistemological naturalism is to dismiss the request for a philosophical, ultimate justification of empirical knowledge, but instead take our most basic beliefs as a starting point; not as an indubitable starting point, but as a beginning. Hume indicates his version of naturalism as follows:

Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he must

assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity. We may well ask 'What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?' but 'tis in vain to ask whether there be body or not? That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings. (1985, 238)

One could thus describe naturalism as a rejection of the Cartesian goal of establishing a first philosophy, an a priori justification of all knowledge. This is also what Quine means by naturalism (Quine 1976).

Naturalism, in the sense of Hume and Quine, thus dismisses the idea of an ultimate foundation for all knowledge, but not that specific knowledge claims must be justified. In Quine's version, as in many others, this leads to a form of restricted coherentism: a specific statement is justified by other statements, and these in turn by other, but there is no self evident basis. The coherentist trend in Quine's philosophy is restricted by taking observation sentences as starting point. Quine would not call them 'self-evident'; his view is rather that we assent, or dissent, to them directly, without much ado, and we are hardly ever prone to argue about them. Quine's view is analogous to Hume's; there are some things we simply accept without raising the question of justification. But other statements can be revised in the light of further observations and demands of coherence, simplicity etc. In Quine's earlier philosophy (Quine 1951) even logical and mathematical statements were revisable, whereas in his later writings (xxx) he has called this position 'legalism', thus indicating that strictly speaking it is true, but in practice we would hardly in any circumstances give up central beliefs in mathematics and logic when confronting problems of bringing together theory and empirical evidence.

Quine describes the relation between epistemology and empirical science as 'mutual containment': epistemology is part of science, 'a chapter of cognitive psychology'; but it is also the case that epistemology contains many parts of science, such as neuroscience, psychology and set theory. (Quine, xxx)

Another strand in Quine's philosophy is his hostility towards intensional linguistic contexts, or more precisely, his dismissal of objects of propositional attitudes; thoughts, desires, willings, beliefs, propositions etc.; they are not Quine's cup of tea. Many philosophers, while agreeing in rejecting the goal of a first philosophy, think this is wrong and against a true naturalistic view-point; It belongs to our nature to describe ourselves and others as having beliefs, thoughts, desires etc., to say that these states are directed towards objects and that they have contents. These states of affairs are just as natural as physical states of affairs. (This was certainly Hume's view.) However, Quine's rejection of intensional objects is not part of his naturalism. His reason for dismissing intentional contexts is that quantifying into them, and thus to accept intentional objects in the ontology, conflicts with the principle of extensionality and this principle is not motivated by naturalism. So dismissing mentalistic language, and intentional objects in general, is, for Quine a doctrine that is independent of naturalism. However, this

is beside the topic of the present paper. In passing it should perhaps be noted that Quine does not think that ordinary talk about thoughts, wishes, sensations etc, is illegitimate; only that these objects are not suitable for philosophical and scientific discourse.

3 Naturalism and the transcendental mind

How, then, should a naturalist respond to the Kantian ideas (i) that there are conditions for the possibility of knowledge, (ii) that these conditions are *in us*, that they can be deduced by a study of the constitution of our mind and (iii) that the mind is outside the empirical world, i.e. that the mind is transcendental.

The first two of these Kantian theses are not contrary to naturalism or empiricism. The conditions for the possibility of knowledge is, in the naturalist view, determined by a natural information process that begins in the external world and ends with an act of perception in our mind. And empirical study of our sense organs reveal that they are not passive registrators of incoming signals; the sense organs and our mind actively process incoming stimuli; some are selected, some are suppressed and the selected ones are organised into certain patterns. Hence, the activity of our mind and its constitution might very well contribute both to the structure and to the content of our perceptual knowledge. But what is contrary to naturalism is the Kantian conception of the mind as something transcendental, something outside the empirical world. The mind, no matter in what terms we analyze its operations and constitution, is, according to naturalism, part of the empirical world. So the basic invention of Kant, to distinguish between two levels of discourse, the empirical and the transcendental, conflicts with naturalism. It is precisely for this reason I prefer naturalism, since I have doubts about any a priori inquiry into our minds.

Transcendental inquiry is an a priori inquiry, a kind of introspective investigation of the operations and constitution of the mind. But what is mind? I think we have strong empirical reasons to hold that its constitution and operations are heavily dependent on what happens to our body; the mind is not something floating free above the empirical world. In fact I think the only reasonable stance is some kind of monism, i.e., that mind and body are not two different objects or substances, but fundamentally one thing, described by different kinds of concepts. Roughly, we use physical, biological or functional concepts when talking about ourselves as a body, whereas we use intentional language when talking about ourselves as minds. Accepting this does not entail reductionism, as is well known, witness Davidson's anomalous monism (Davidson, 1980). Quine fully embraces this view, see his (1990, §29) and (1995, 87-88). So the first argument against transcendentalism is that its object, i.e. the mind, is in fact not something outside the empirical world. It is something *in the world* and the naturalist view is that its exploration should be done by ordinary empirical methods.

Secondly, one may reasonably doubt the reliability of introspection; we have since

long understood that even the most honest person may completely fail to observe her mental state. This is a lesson we have learnt from the failure of 19th century empirical psychology (Watson, 1913), Freud, and modern cognitive science. Kantians may say, ok, that's correct but beside the point, for transcendental inquiry only concerns *structural* features of our mind. Then the sceptic naturalist will ask: even if we grant that the transcendentalist is correct in describing the structure of his own mind, what is the reason for saying that all minds have the same structure? Surely the transcendentalist can look only into his own.

These doubts are not only directed towards transcendentalism but to any philosophy which takes for granted that we all have direct and certain knowledge about our thoughts, perceptions and judgements. An empiricist might reasonably say: these inner things are not publicly observable. We cannot say that we have knowledge about them since private introspection is uncertain.

The linguistic turn in philosophy is a response to such concerns. For judgements, volitions, sensations etc, are only made subject for discourse by being expressed aloud, and then we have something intersubjective to begin with: statements made by people. And now we can perform something analogous to transcendental inquiry into the conditions for knowledge, viz., a logical analysis of the expressions for judgements etc., viz., declarative sentences. The naturalist may in a similar fashion as the transcendentalist say: there are conditions for knowledge, viz., the ability to use language for expressing declarative sentences and an inquiry into the general features of declarative sentences reveal those conditions.

Quine begins his discussion of these matters (1960) with language learning and describes the interaction between child and caretaker in a common environment without using any mental concepts. The child is rewarded when uttering single words in the correct circumstances. These single words may not, at the beginning, be interpreted as that the child is naming things, but rather as use of one-word sentences. For example, when the child says 'mama' in the presence of her mother, this should not be taken as proof for the the child has discerned a certain person; we could just as well interpret the word as 'it is mummying' or 'I want it to mummy'. It is only after the child has developed rather complex linguistic abilities, such as use of subjunctive clauses and so called *essential pronouns* that we have evidence enough for saying that the child refers to objects (1995, 26-27)

Maddy (2007, ch. III.5) criticizes Quine on this point. Here argument is that recent research in cognitive psychology (e.g. Spelke et.al, 1995, Xu, 1997) has obtained evidence that small children, long before they begin to talk, discern and recognize visual objects. So when the child later begins to utter one-word sentences, we may assume that the function of these words is that of naming, as signalling that the child discerns an object, even before it has developed the full referential apparatus of language.

Let's grant Maddy's point, for the sake of argument. Still, I don't think this under-

mines Quine's point, since I take it to be fundamentally epistemological; just because we hear the child using a word which adults use referentially, we are not justified in concluding that it uses it the same way. Quine's point with the discussion about child's language use is the same as with his famous gavagai example; when hearing someone saying something we cannot infer the speaker's ontology without using a translation to our own language. Maddy further argues that these results from research in child psychology give us reason to hold that the natural world in fact is composed of independently existing objects, such as animals, trees, houses, humans, etc. Here argument seems to be based on an evolutionary perspective; our human cognitive apparatus has during evolution developed by adapting to the structure of an independently existing environment. We perceive, basically, physical objects, and hence we have reason to think that these objects actually exist out there in the physical world.

Now, an adherent to Quine's philosophy may argue that already a six month's baby has developed a lot of cognitive abilities during its interaction with her caretakers; hence there are reasons to hold that the child's structuring of the environment into individual physical objects having a certain permanence in time is driven by practical needs, not by pre-existing ontological structures. Our cognitive apparatus, just like that of other animals, is basically constructed so as to be goal-driven. I'll return to these matters in the next section.

One of Quine's conclusions is that a declarative sentence in ordinary talk is composed of a general term and a singular term. We are prone to say that this structure reflects the structure of our judgments, thus assuming that first we form a judgement by applying a concept to an object and then we construe a sentence expressing this judgement. *Prima facie*, it seems reasonable to assume that judgements come first and that sentences, if they correctly express our judgement, are construed to reflect this structure. But I think there are no good reason to assume that people can make judgements before and independently of mastering a language; in fact there are good empirical reasons to hold that the ability to make judgements and the ability to use linguistic signs for communication go hand in hand. (Gärdenfors, 2000 and references therein). And Quine, who does not accept the mental as an independent realm, would agree of course.

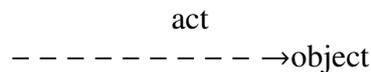
The basic epistemological point is that our utterances, whatever we talk about, are clearly and easily available, whereas the activities of the mind, at best, are inferred from publicly available evidence. This is the fundamental reason behind the linguistic turn in philosophy 100 years ago.

3.1 The relation between the cognition process and its object

Kant's position is often described as the combination of transcendental idealism and empirical realism. What does that mean? I think the best way to understand the distinction between realism and idealism is in terms of the relation between the act of cognition and the cognized object. This is how Fichte viewed the matter and it is Göran Sundholm

who brought my attention to Fichte's view-point:

"In his characterisation of the realism/idealism (antirealism) debate Fichte noted that basically there are only two epistemological options. The positions may be formulated in terms of the act/object dichotomy:



Either you determine the object of knowledge as the object of the act, and then you are an idealist, or you determine the act in terms of a prior object towards which the act is directed, and then you are a realist (or dogmatist, as Fichte said, being an idealist himself). If Fichte is right in this (and I suspect he is), the point is moot whether there is a neutral background position from which the issue between the realists and idealists can be adjudicated. For Fichte, it is clear that there is not. If this be so, it would serve to explain why the realism/idealism debate so often makes a futile impression; in place of a clear-cut decision, we find endless refinements of positions into sterile scholasticism, and conversions from one side to the other rarely takes place." (Sundholm, 2006)

This characterisation seems to me correct and informative. So Kant's transcendental idealism consists of two theses; i) the object of cognition is constituted by the cognition act; that's why we cannot say anything at all about the thing in itself, i.e, independently of our cognitive acts; ii) we are able to formulate this position only at a level of discourse where we reflect on the necessary conditions for objective knowledge, i.e., when we perform a transcendental inquiry. Empirical realism is the thesis that once the act-object is constituted, it is an empirical matter what properties it has. In the empirical process properties of the object is discovered; it is the object that determines the results of the cognitive act.

This is Kant's response to Hume's scepticism regarding the possibility of knowledge about external objects; it is possible to know about empirical objects, because the very structure of our cognitive processes, as it were, shapes them. The conclusion is that we cannot even say about the external world that it is constituted of objects with properties; it is we, in our cognitive activities, who structure the sense impressions in that way. Thus, to repeat, Kant rejects the traditional notion that we have in our mind representations, ideas, of external objects; the distinction between objects and ideas of objects is a mistake.

Now, I find it rather peculiar that one may arrive at a position quite similar to this form of idealism from a naturalistic point of departure. That is exactly what Quine did.

Quine's account of cognition and perception is entirely naturalistic; he begins by considering our empirical knowledge about sense perception, as viewed from outside;

that is, he does not avail himself of any mentalistic notions. So he considers how stimuli arrive at our sense organs (he often talks about 'triggering our receptors') and how these somehow selects salient (for us!) features in the surroundings, i.e., features that we become aware of. In this process we construct objects in the sense that we discern a part of the visual scene and focus attention on it as a unit, whereas other parts become background. This is an active process of our nervous system/mind. (Kant's counterpart to this constructive process resulted in 'the transcendental unity of apperception')

An object that we observe is a unit of perception. This step from a stream of stimuli to an object could be done in different ways, a conclusion that Quine draws from his famous discussion of the gavagai-example. The field anthropologist visiting a tribe with unknown language hears someone saying 'gavagai' when a rabbit passes the scene. How may he interpret this sentence? Quine discerns three different but equally admissible interpretations: 'Lo, a rabbit.' 'Lo, a timeslice of rabbithood', or 'Lo, a set of undetached rabbitparts.' The point is that by observing speech behaviour and being in the same environment as the speaker is not sufficient for determining the speaker's ontology. Nothing of what we can observe, including the actions of the speaker, is sufficient to determine which of these three ways of structuring the incoming stimuli is actually going on in the speaker's mind.

Quine's point is epistemological; just because we see a rabbit and hear a sentence, we cannot decide the ontological structure of another speaker's thoughts or language. But we can observe dissent or assent to something said; hence what can be observed is the attitude towards the uttered sentence and it is easy to see that the same applies to speakers of our own language. From this Quine infers that the semantic counterparts to assent and dissent, truth and falsity, are the primary notions in semantics. In contrast to the majority of semanticists, Quine does not explain truth in terms of reference, satisfaction and meaning; he reverses the direction and explains reference in terms of truth (and he endorses, of course, the deflationist view of truth). 'Meaning' he dismisses as a mentalistic notion.

A speaker can be observed to assent to a sentence. We interpret the sentence in our language, thus providing it with a structure, in the simplest case as constituted of a singular term and a general term. If the speaker assents to the sentence, it follows that he holds that the singular term of that sentence refers to an object. But which objects does he really assume? Because of the possibility to translate his sentence differently, with different ontologies, we cannot decide that independently of the chosen translation. But this is not a mere shortcoming of our ability to translate. Quine claims, again and again, that there is no fact of the matter which translation is the correct one. Translations are not uncertain, but indeterminate. It follows that ontology is theory-relative.

The ontology comprises those objects that in that theory are accepted as values of variables; the things that are assumed when using expressions like 'some time slices of rabbithood...' or 'All rabbits....' As Quine puts it, to be is to be the value of a variable.

Quine arrives at a similar conclusion about theoretical objects, i.e., objects postulated in our scientific theories. Here he uses logical arguments. Suppose a scientist states the sentence Fa , i.e., he claims there exists an object a satisfying the predicate F . Another scientist may translate his statement using so called proxy functions, i.e. mappings from one category of objects to another category, and at the same time reinterpret the predicate; so a is F becomes $proxy-a$ is $proxy-F$. Both theories have exactly the same empirical consequences, viz., they entail exactly the same set of observation categoricals (Quine, 1981,19). One may think about this as merely two different formulations of one and the same theory, in particular if the proxy functions can be explicitly given. So objects varies, but theory is the same.

Some would instead say that we have two different theories which are underdetermined by evidence, in fact by all possible evidence. For Quine this doesn't matter, it is only a matter how we chose to individuate the general term 'theory' and this is of little importance.

His conclusion is that the choice of objects has no epistemological significance, neither in theoretical science, nor in ordinary talk, contrary to what most philosophers think:

"Our talk of external things, our very notion of things, is just a conceptual apparatus that helps us to foresee and control the triggering of our sensory receptors in the light of previous triggering of our sensory receptors." (1981, p.1)

And later in the paper:

"Structure is what matters to theory and not its choice of objects.....I extend the doctrine to objects generally, for I see all objects as theoretical" (1981, p. 20)

And still later:

"We must speak from within a theory, albeit any of various. Transcendental argument, or what purports to be first philosophy, tends generally to take on rather this status of immanent epistemology, insofar as I succeed in making sense of it. What evaporates is the transcendental question of the reality of the external world - the question whether or in how far our science measures up to the *Ding an sich*. (1981, p. 22)

So I think it is quite clear from these quotations (there are many more indicating this view) that the objects we observe and talk about in science and in everyday life are, according to Quine, constructs, vehicles that help us in forming efficient expectations. The basis is assent and dissent to observation sentences. If we transform Fichte's description of the idealism/realism dispute to a linguistic framework, we can say that, for

Quine, the act of assent or dissent, which is observable, is primary to the object talked about.

Quine and Kant thus agree that questions about how the world is in itself independent of our ways of cognizing and using language cannot be asked, for such questions presuppose an impossible stance, i.e., that we can have knowledge without applying the structural features of language use and thinking. But Quine, unlike Kant, dismisses the quest for a rational basis for empirical science; none is needed according to Quine.

The quest for safe foundations is triggered by sceptical arguments and Kant wanted to rebut Hume's and others scepticism by showing it has ramifications. But Quine thinks transcendentalism, or any other foundational theory, is an overreaction to sceptical arguments. Once we realize that scepticism regarding any concrete statement is motivated by something we think is safer than the doubted statement, and that this could in turn be doubted, we are in an infinite regress.¹ But why this urge for complete certainty? In our everyday life, as in science, we are satisfied with less than certain knowledge and we are, at least in our philosophical mood, prepared to reevaluate most of our beliefs. So why not begin by the most plausible things and be prepared to reevaluate any particular statement if new evidence comes up? This is naturalism+ fallibilism. In fact, the urge for complete certainty is devastating; the chain of justification demands cannot be stopped.

So idealism, in the sense that objects of cognition are secondary to the cognition act, is (also!) a consequence of a naturalistic approach in epistemology, provided we accept that cognition and language use are two sides of the same coin. So both Kant and Quine, astonishingly, arrive at the same stance in ontology, albeit via quite different routes.

But, the reader might say, hasn't Quine often expressed what he calls 'robust and stubborn realism'; he claims to believe in sticks and stones, physical objects of various kinds. Doesn't this conflict with viewing them as theoretical constructs? No. Saying that objects are theoretical constructs doesn't entail that they do not exist, neither that they exist only in our minds, quite the opposite: for when using general terms with divided reference ('chair', 'electron', 'government' etc.) we thereby impose criteria for individuation and identity among the things the general term is true of and then we can quantify in the domain; we are entitled to use expressions like 'All governments' or 'some chairs'. Having done that we have committed ourselves to the existence of those objects we quantify over, expressed by Quine with the famous phrase, 'to be is to be the value of a variable'. And, of course, Quine's idealism is totally different from classical idealism à la Berkeley: The classical idealism presupposed a mind-body dichotomy, which is incompatible with Quine's naturalism and extensionalism.

¹Some sceptics have, from the plausible statement that any statement can be doubted, drawn the conclusion that nothing can be known. This is a logical fallacy, viz, scope inversion of the universal quantifier and the modal operator; From 'Any p can be false' it does not follow 'It is possible that for every p, p is false'. see Davidson (2001, p.194)

The difference between metaphysical realism and Quine's realism is that the metaphysical realist thinks that the natural world is composed of individual objects, with different properties, independently of us humans, whereas Quine, rejects this notion as incoherent; the splitting up of the natural world into individual objects and classifying them according to certain criteria is something *we* do for certain purposes. But once this is done, i.e., once we have learnt language, we have accepted those objects that are assumed as values of variables as real.

But, the realist may say, I grant that the only evidence we could have for the structure of the external world is empirical evidence, which does not include introspection, and I grant that our cognitive acts structure the world into relatively permanent physical objects, bodies. This is a fact about us humans. But I have an explanation of these facts, viz., that biological evolution has made us such. In other words, of the possible ways our cognitive organs may process incoming information, natural selection has chosen one as optimal, viz., that of the world consisting of relatively permanent objects moving around and changing properties and this choice is optimal in the biological sense of being beneficial for survival and reproduction. But why is it optimal? The best explanation is that that's how the world actually is. Moreover, empirical evidence from cognitive psychology, in particular studies of children before they master language, reveal that they at least from 4-6 months age, cognize bodies in their immediate environment. (Maddy, 2007, pp. 245-58). So there are good reasons to assume that there exists in the world relatively permanent physical objects independently of us.

I strongly suspect that Quine would resist any such conclusion, for his basic point remains: we can ride a proxy function from a preferred ontology to some other, never heard of set of objects, while all empirical evidence, are the same. That we humans all are alike in our cognitive interactions with our environment in cognizing visual bodies doesn't prove that this is the metaphysical structure of the world. Quine could use van Fraassen's (1980, 20) reply in the realism-antirealism debate. Scientific realists typically hold that the best explanation of the success of modern science is that our theories are approximately true. van Fraassen replies that the best explanation is that our theories are empirically adequate; nothing more could be inferred because all theories are underdetermined by all possible evidence.

4 Scientific realism and metaphysical realism

Quine and Kant insist that we cannot step outside ourselves, as it were, and look at the world from a view from nowhere, a viewpoint in which no conceptual apparatus is presupposed. To think is in Kant's view to use concepts. Quine, reluctant to talk about mental activities, instead talks about using language, holds that talking is to use predicates with criteria for satisfaction, but one may assume that thinking and talking is structurally similar activities. Asking what there is from a perspective from nowhere,

a perspective which does not presuppose things that are identified as particulars and subject to predication (Quine) or falling under concepts (Kant) is impossible.

It is strongly tempting to say that that's how the world must be like, divided into particular objects with different properties and that modern science has, in the main, revealed that there are objects, (and we know which!) and properties independently of our theories and ways of thinking. But when we express this thought we use exactly this structure of singular terms referring to objects which are subject to predication; when making this assertion we presuppose what is argued for.

We cannot, for sure, say that all theories are equally good or that all ontologies are admissible. But the only way a false theory may display its falsity is in entailing predictions that come out false. If so happens and we dismiss the theory, we were wrong about what exists, provided the better theory has a different ontology. The only way we can be proved wrong about what exists is by a mismatch between our theory and its observable consequences. There is no other way saying what there is than saying 'there are objects such and so'.

From this account of Quine's philosophy it should be clear that Quine endorses Russell's theory of definite descriptions. But this theory is not universally accepted. Adherents to non-descriptivism holds that there are at least some objects that are not identified descriptively; some objects can be directly referred to without using any description.

Direct reference theories have two aspects: one is the original baptizing of the object, the other is, to use Putnam's term 'the linguistic division of labour'. Other persons using the term refer to the same object as the baptizer and may do so without having any true beliefs about it. This seems plausible, but it is irrelevant for the present discussion. It is the other aspect that is crucial; What is involved in the original baptism, one person deciding to name an object (or a substance) by a chosen singular term?

Well, the crucial point is how this question is phrased. We observe that in non-descriptivist theories it is taken for granted that the object is there, ready to be observed in front of the baptizer before any cognitive acts have occurred. Suppose this is true and suppose the baptizer discerns it and gives it a name. But what is involved in discerning an object from the rest of the scene?

Discerning an object and giving it a name means that we have identified it as an object for predication. It can be talked about and non-descriptivists go as far as holding that it is possible that a speaker may have only false beliefs about it and still refer to it. That means that the object talked about must satisfy an identity criterion, albeit speakers using the name in general may not be aware of this criterion. It suffice, according to non-descriptivists, that speakers share the intention to talk about the *same* object. In short, non-descriptivists take for granted that objects exists out there independently of our ways of cognizing them and talking about them.

It is thus clear that non-descriptivist theorists take for granted precisely what Quine

and Kant denies, that is to say, they presuppose metaphysical realism.² Quine could simply say about this original baptizing: The same point as with 'gavagai' applies even if we speak the same language; indeterminacy begins at home and there is no escape from descriptivism, since the object you identify is constituted by a description, i.e., your choice of general term and its annexed principle of individuation. Even if you use a name for the object, you presuppose there is a fact of the matter whether it is the same thing or not you observe at another occasion and this fact must be expressed in terms of a description of the object.³

Kant held that the conditions for the possibility of knowledge are in our minds; Quine may properly be described as holding that the conditions for the possibility of knowledge lie in the use of language. (Both Kant and Quine would certainly accept that they have restricted the term 'knowledge' to mean discursive knowledge, not practical abilities.) But the ability to use language is an empirical fact about human organisms; so for Quine the conditions for the possibility of knowledge are not transcendental; they are natural.

Russell became a realist as a reaction against Hegelianism, prevalent among his teachers during his first years at Cambridge (and so did Moore). It is slightly ironical that Quine, who began his career by writing a dissertation on *Principia Mathematica* and who shares many of Russell's philosophical convictions, should end up as an idealist. Russell wrote (1956, p. 2) that Queen Victoria was 'not altogether sympathetic' when hearing from Russell's grandfather that a monarch should be dismissed if he proved unsatisfactory. I guess that Russell similarly would have been 'not altogether sympathetic' if he had lived long enough to hear that his great follower becoming an idealist as a consequence of his application of the theory of definite descriptions and a thoroughgoing empiricism and naturalism.

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²This point is intimately connected to the debate about the viability of modal logic; Quine's hostility against modal logic is based precisely on his view in ontology. This point is not very well known, but Antti Keskinen has clearly seen this, see his *Quine's Critique of Modal Logic and his Conception of Objects*

³There is one alternative for non-descriptivists, viz., to refer to 'primitive thisness', haecceity, as conferring identity to objects, but I think this is too desperate for most of them.

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