THE EPISTEMIC CONSTRAINTS ON AN INTELLIGIBLE ONTOLOGY

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The Epistemic Constraints On An Intelligible Ontology

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Abstract

Any issue which brings into question the legitimacy of the language used to express it cannot be intelligibly raised since it brings into question its own intelligibility. Hence, we cannot answer the ontological question of whether our conception of the world is correct. Hume and Wittgenstein can be construed as arguing that the vocabulary of justification is derived from our conception of the world, and therefore, we can neither prove that the world is as we conceive it to be nor prove that the world is not as we conceive it to be.

Our lack of an ontology capable of demonstrating that our descriptions of the world correspond to brute reality does not result in an inability to ascribe truth, since 'truth' is predicated of sentences on the basis of their relationship to the appearances and not to a reality unmediated by our conceptions.

We possess two sorts of ontological beliefs; those of the one sort are fundamental, and since they underpin our linguistic practices, they are unrevisable in our current language; beliefs of the other sort have evolved with the language that we use and, are revisable given our current
language. Therefore, we could meaningfully pursue any ontology that confines itself to this second type of belief.

Any version of realism stronger than a mere assertion of commitment to the existence of the objects we commonly believe in fails since all such versions attempt to justify ontological beliefs that are not revisable. A sophisticated realism could be worked out that would not violate the above constraints. Although it does not offer much hope to the realist, the issues raised do illustrate that ontological questions can be intelligibly addressed.

Ontological issues can be pursued meaningfully within the constraints on our ability to know once the content and scope of ontology is clarified. Therefore, metaphysical questions can be raised on the grounds provided by our epistemology.
Table of Contents

APPROVAL PAGE ........................................................................................................ ii
ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................... v
INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................... 1

SECTION I
Berkeley, Hume, & Wittgenstein: Outlining an Epistemic Perspective ................. 5

SECTION II
Truth, Justification, & Ontology ................................................................. 34

SECTION III
Is Realism a Workable Ontology? ......................................................... 53

FOOTNOTES .............................................................................................................. 76

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................... 79
Introduction

It is my aim in this essay to show that one can raise ontological issues while maintaining a skeptical epistemological stance. I owe the genesis of these ideas to a distinction that Michael Devitt draws in *Realism and Truth.*

He writes:

What is realism about the external world? One of the most striking aspects of the current debate is that no clear, let alone single, answer to this question shines through. In particular it is often hard to see what is supposed to be realism and what is supposed to be an argument for it.... I think that a successful defense of realism depends upon being very clear about the difference between the constitutive and evidential issues.

Devitt recommends that we should separate the constitutive issue regarding the realist's conception of the objects we believe in from the evidential issue regarding whether the realist's conception of the world can be justified. Any epistemological questions that arise would then form a part of the evidential debate and not a part of a merely descriptive account of realism. Devitt argues that one can elaborate and defend an ontology independently of any epistemic stance. He says that supposing one must have an epistemology in place before developing an ontological theory is to "put the epistemic cart before the realist horse." Devitt argues for a naturalized epistemology which proposes to investigate the causes of our
beliefs about the world. This investigation can be pursued only from the standpoint of a realist ontological perspective and hence one needs to subscribe to the descriptive aspect of realism prior to answering any epistemological question.

Devitt argues that only epistemological questions that are approached scientifically can be answered. We can pursue only the psychological issues involved in discerning why we hold the beliefs that we do. He asserts that any sort of skeptical epistemology raises questions that are ultimately unanswerable and hence uninteresting.

Ironically, this psychological program was first proposed on the basis of epistemological considerations. Quine, and before him Hume, argued that we cannot prove that our claims about the world are veridical. On the basis of this epistemic point it was proposed that the investigation ought to turn from an attempt to establish the certainty of our beliefs about the nature of the objects in the world to an attempt to explain the causes of those beliefs.

When this skeptical framework is elaborated it can be seen to set the agenda both for naturalized epistemology and ontology. The strategy that Devitt adopts does not acknowledge that ontological questions, and questions addressed by naturalized epistemology are given content by such epistemic considerations. Devitt is correct in claiming that one can elaborate
an ontology independently of any epistemology: a merely descriptive ontology need not contain any justification. He is wrong, however, to hold that ontologies can be defended without addressing epistemological issues. To justify one's claims that the objects we believe in exist in a particular manner, requires some position on our abilities to know. If realism is to be more than a set of undefended assumptions about the world then epistemological issues must be addressed. Further, we can determine that a realist ontology must stand undefended only after weighing the different philosophic positions concerning our abilities to know. Devitt puts the realist cart before the epistemic horse.

In the first section of this essay I will elaborate these overall epistemological issues, outlining the manner in which they constrain the metaphysical issues that can be intelligibly raised. I will look to the views of Hume and Wittgenstein to illustrate these epistemic constraints. In the second section I will argue that an analysis of the relationships between truth, justification, and our ontological beliefs allow one to articulate a requirement that ontological issues must meet in order to be intelligible. In the third section I will elaborate and attempt to defend Devitt's account of realism. Ultimately his version of realism fails as does any ontology that proposes to deal with similar issues. There are ontological issues that can
be intelligibly raised and I will suggest what these might be in order to show that we can deal with metaphysical issues within the constraints of our epistemology.
In this first section I wish to discuss whether we can provide a justification of our conception of the world. I will begin the discussion by focusing on Berkeley and Hume and ask how the role that evidence played in attempts to justify an ontology changed with Hume's response to Berkeley. The change brought about by Hume gives us an epistemic grounding that leaves room to raise ontological issues. The issues that can be raised, however, are constrained by this epistemic grounding.

It is worthwhile emphasizing that we do not individually construct justifications or search for evidence that would support some particular theory regarding the constitution of the world. We do not arrive at our conception of the world as a result of a process of inference. We possess as part of our nature (rather than construct) our most fundamental beliefs about the world. Individually we are raised in a cultural and linguistic setting that shapes our opinions of the objects in the world. Deeper still, we are constrained by certain physiological characteristics that dictate a particular conception of the world. Attempting to adduce reasons or provide a justification of the belief that our conception of the world is correct is not a
necessary concomitant of having such a conception. Our nonrational sensory contact with this world is ineluctably shaped by our nature and the results that might come from such a philosophical exercise could never mold the contours of our world model.

Despite the unlikelihood that our opinions in this matter could be swayed by argument, much philosophic labour has been spent in attempting to demonstrate that our conception of the world is correct. Yet, the outcome of these demonstrations can be foretold if one has answered the general epistemological question of whether such a demonstration is possible. Epistemology is thought to serve the needs of ontologists by providing them with some procedure for generating beliefs that are certain. The issue of certainty, however, arises only if it is possible to provide some kind of proof that our conception of the world is correct. Answering this question, then, supplies the most pervasive epistemological influence on an ontology. Hence, ontological queries about the nature of the objects we believe exist need to be set against the background of a discussion of the proper domain of knowledge.

I will begin the discussion of the possibility of justifying our conception of the world by looking at the views of Berkeley and Hume since both writers deal directly with the general question of whether it is possible to justify our ontological beliefs. Hume starts from ideas that are similar to Berkeley's but
he arrives at conclusions that differ remarkably. I will start by making some brief points regarding Berkeley's position on the justification of our belief in a reality that exists independently of our conception of it. Then I will show how Hume's position on whether it is possible to provide such a justification recognizes that this ontological issue cannot be addressed.

The name 'idealism' serves to distinguish a range of philosophic theories that hold in common that the features of the world are the creation of a mind. Berkeley believed that material objects are nothing but ideas. He claimed that, "We eat and drink ideas and are clothed with ideas." The central thrust of Berkeley's idealism is not to dispute whether the objects we claim to exist really do exist, but rather to argue that their existence consists in ideas in our minds or in the mind of God. Berkeley rejected the view that the material world was independent of minds. He maintained that the material world owed its entire existence to some mental operation of either ourselves or God: he held that an analysis of the concept of the external world reveals that it must be a fabrication of some mind. A standard complaint found in critical writings on Berkeley argues that, given his conception of ideas, the most he can prove is that the world is a construct of his mind alone since the existence of other minds could not be established. After a review of Berkeley's arguments I will show that this sort of criticism of Berkeley does not go far enough; that, in fact, one can show that his arguments suffer from a more serious flaw. However, I also see insight in
Berkeley's views and I will attempt to expose the kernel of truth which lies at their heart.

One of Berkeley's arguments proceeds from the observation that we are immediately acquainted with our ideas only. Berkeley says, "When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas."\(^5\) When we experience, our experience consists in an awareness of ideas. Our acquaintance with the external world is an acquaintance with ideas. In making this point, Berkeley assumes experience to be characterized by the relationship of 'acquaintance'. Russell gives a clear statement of this relation, "The obvious characteristics of experience seem to show that experiencing is a two term relation; we call the relation acquaintance, and we give the name subject to anything which has acquaintance with objects."\(^6\) Thus, Berkeley's contention is that ideas are the only objects which the experiencer (the subject) stands in a relationship of acquaintance to. The world we experience is this mental one consisting of ideas. On reflection, what we had thought was an acquaintance with a reality independent of any mind turns out to be an acquaintance with mental phenomena.

I think that the initial plausibility of Berkeley's idealism can be traced to our intuitive appreciation of this point. This is more widely accepted today, perhaps, than in Berkeley's time. We readily adopt causal accounts of any
phenomenon, even those for which it is not clear that the language of causality is appropriate. Current physiological theory holds that sensory neurons carry information from the periphery of our bodies as electrophysiological impulses; the information contained in these impulses is then processed in the cerebral cortex. Hence, someone who subscribes to such a theory might acquiesce if it were claimed that we experience these impulses and not objects external to us. But this is a mistaken interpretation of Berkeley's point, his argument is simpler, however, and not causal. Berkeley argued that if every mental phenomenon is mediated by ideas, then ideas would be the immediate object of attention when we perceive or conceive anything. Therefore, minds are a necessary component in an analysis of the existence of objects. Berkeley asks what we mean:

...by the term 'exist' when applied to sensible things(?) The table I write on I say exists; that is, I see and feel it: and if I were out of my study I should say it existed; meaning thereby that if I were in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it....This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things, without any relation to their being perceived, that is to me perfectly unintelligible. Their esse is percipi; nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them."
Thus, Berkeley maintains that the notion of existence independent of a perceiver was a contradiction; to say that a thing exists just is to say that it is perceived.

Berkeley reasons that it is illegitimate to infer that objects exist in an independent reality external to us that both resembles and causes our mental states. He argues that we are acquainted only with our ideas and that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea." In other words, ideas can have a likeness or resemblance only to other ideas. Therefore, on the assumption that representation requires resemblance in some form, it is impossible for ideas to represent external objects since they can represent only ideas. Berkeley wishes to demonstrate that even if we suppose that there is a causal connection between objects in the world and our perceptions, it is impossible for these perceptions to resemble the objects which we believe cause them. Our hopes of justifying a belief in a mind-independent reality external to us are disappointed, Berkeley argues, since we cannot work our way backward from our ideas to an external reality as a supposed cause of those ideas. He maintains that we simply have no evidence to suggest that there is a mind-independent external reality causing our perceptions.

But then our sensations, be they ever so vivid and distinct, are nevertheless ideas, that is, they exist in the mind, or are perceived by it, as truly as the ideas of its own framing. The ideas of sense
are allowed to have more reality in them, that is, to be more strong, orderly, and coherent than the creatures of the mind....

So, the ideas of sense may be believed to be connected to reality in some direct way, yet our evidence for believing this is simply that these ideas are stronger and more orderly and coherent. It is Berkeley's contention that these characteristics of our ideas of sense do not support the conclusion that such ideas are caused by independent features of a reality distinct from our ideas. Hence, not only are we unable to say that the ideas in our minds resemble objects in the world but we are unable to infer even that there are independent objects, of whatever nature, causing our perceptions.

Berkeley's argument may go wrong here because the language of acquaintance is the language of acquaintance with external objects. It seems awkward, then, to say that our acquaintance is with our ideas and not with the external objects which we take these ideas to represent. When we speak of 'acquaintance', we mean the relationship we have to (what we take to be) external objects. The same point can be made about the use of 'evidence' in this context. Our evolved application of the concept of 'evidence' does not include a use in this case. We do not believe in an external world on the basis of evidence, and hence, asking after evidence to support this belief strains our notion of evidence. Similarly, we do not believe in our own individuality on the basis of evidence. In both cases it
seems that we should say, not that we lack evidence for these beliefs, rather, that they are not the sort of beliefs that are based upon evidence. Thus, the concept is ill-used in this context. Therefore, if Berkeley has a point, it cannot be made in the way he tries to make it.

Berkeley focuses attention on the reasons we have for saying of objects that they independently exist externally to us. He searches for evidence of a non mental reality and then argues that given his findings, we ought to mean by our claims that objects exist that their existence is mind-dependent. At the outset of *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, he says:

It is indeed an opinion strongly prevailing amongst men that houses, mountains, rivers, and, in a word, all sensible objects, have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding.\(^{10}\)

We believe in a reality external to us, yet, Berkeley argues, we do not have good reasons to support this belief.\(^{11}\) In section 93 of the *Treatise* Berkeley searches for the meaning of the term 'exist' and his answer relies on the conclusions he has reached regarding the evidence for our belief in an external reality. He argues that it cannot mean 'exists independently and objectively from our conception of it' since there is no evidence for the existence of mind-independent objects external to us; the evidence proves that the operations of a mind are a necessary component of everything's
existence. Therefore to say that an object exists is just to say that it is perceived. His conclusion would be much more plausible had he said that the operations of a mind are a necessary feature in an analysis of saying that an object exists, rather than seeing minds as a necessary feature for objects to exist. I intend the former in the non-trivial interpretation that one might give it if it were part of an argument intended to extend the claim that there are no natural kinds, to include the claim that there are no natural individuals. This latter claim would require an exploration of the role our cognitive and perceptual faculties play in determining the appearances.

Although Berkeley cannot be construed as making the following argument, there is an important sense in which it may be correct to say that to be is to be perceivable. To say of something that it exists is also to claim that it is an individual. This is not true, perhaps, for locutions such as "Given the existence of present social conditions that legislation is not favoured at this time.", or, "I can see that bad feelings exist between you two." In these uses of the word 'exist', the things referred to are not objects, strictly speaking, and hence to call such things individuals seems attenuated. It may be that the following account of existence and its relationship to perception applies in these cases as well, however it is sufficient for our purpose if a weaker claim can be made that involves only our assertions regarding the existence of objects.
In general, to apply a predicate to an object one needs to recognize the object as an individual; something that is distinct from the other objects in its quarter. Yet individuating is an activity of perceivers; it is perceivers who pick out the objects that form distinct entities. To say of an object that it exists implies that some particular way of individuating has evolved from the sundry possibilities. This holds true for kinds of objects as well.

Someone might object, pointing out that the objects we say exist just are individuals waiting, so to speak, for perceivers; the alternate view simply begs the question: to say that existence claims involve the assumption that a perceiver has individuated an object that would otherwise lie undifferentiated, just is to assume that to say of a thing that it exists is to say it is perceivable. But, those who claim that objects are individuals independent of our perceptions do not seem any better off. To say that objects exist already differentiated as individuals, without the concomittance of perceivers, just is to assume that objects do exist independently of any act of perception.

It is apparent that the world does not force one of the descriptions upon us and hence we are free to suspend judgement or say either, 1) objects are artifacts, or, 2) objects are natural individuals. Of course, we do 'see' the world as consisting of discrete objects, but pointing this out is moot since the question is not how the world appears to us, but rather, what determines that appearance. It seems that we have no evidence that would show what part, if
any, our cognitive and perceptual abilities have in determining the boundaries of objects in our environment. We just do not have anything that would count as conclusive evidence either for the claim that we perceive already existent objects, or for the counter-claim that objects are individuated through perception.

Berkeley never made the argument outlined above, but his own opinions are in accord with it insofar as he held that minds were an essential feature of an analysis of the external world. This is insightful since it includes the perceptual nature of human beings in an analysis of the shape of reality. Berkeley overstated his case, since he maintains that objects are nothing but ideas in the mind. One is always limited in what one says by the language current at the time of writing and Berkeley's arguments suffer for lack of an appropriate form of words to make his point. It is possible that in trying to express himself in the language of his day, he was led to the wrong conclusions. I do not mean he was restricted by vocabulary; this has hardly changed since Berkeley's time. In relevant respects, however, our knowledge has progressed greatly since Berkeley proclaimed that to be is to be perceived. There is currently a far more evolved language for speaking of perception and cognition, and theories have been introduced that link these elements to language in general. The insights and distinctions these new ways of speaking allow us were unavailable to Berkeley. In bringing the perceptual and cognitive abilities of
human beings into an analysis of reality, it seemed appropriate to Berkeley to conclude that objects are "nothing but ideas" in the mind. Yet, what sounds quaint to twentieth century ears was radical in Berkeley's day, at least in part because he does not try to account for the world independently of our place in it. Stated in this manner, Berkeley's point becomes modern currency.

Paradoxically, the implications of this insight lead to the downfall of his idealism. Berkeley's analysis of our conception of reality assumes that the evidence and arguments we have for the correctness of a particular conception of the world are such that in using them we can discern whether our conception of reality is correct. However, Berkeley's insight that human beings occupy a place in an analysis of the external world carries the implication that the means he uses to promote his position are inapplicable in such an analysis. Despite Berkeley's skepticism in other regards, he is not skeptical about the efficacy of appealing to evidence, or using arguments to question the nature of the world. It is in this respect that Hume is more thoroughly skeptical than Berkeley. Hume and Berkeley share many opinions, including the opinion that human beings occupy a central place in an analysis of reality. A study of Hume, however, reveals that he had a keener appreciation of the implications of such opinions. Once drawn, these implications lead one to reject, not Berkeley's ontology alone, but any
ontology that attempts to prove or disprove that our conception of reality is correct.

Hume's dispute with Berkeley's idealism begins with an alternative formulation stating that the contents of our minds are ideas but that these are caused by sense impressions. These sense impressions are the originals of our ideas; when we perceive, it is impressions that we are aware of and not ideas, which are but faint copies of impressions. Ideas and impressions are of two sorts, simple and complex; the former denote those ideas or impressions which cannot be distinguished into parts, while the latter are those which can. Hume contends that, "...all our simple ideas in their first appearance, are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent." Hume agrees with Berkeley that it is impossible to know that the world was at all like our impressions;

As to those impressions which arise from the senses, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and it will always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produced by the creative power of the mind.

There is nothing about the appearances themselves that guarantees that they are veridical. Hume did not believe that it is possible to provide a demonstration that our belief in an external world is correct. He thought that the notion of a demonstration was inappropriate in this context. Instead he
proposes a psychological account of why we hold that belief. He sought to explain why we do believe that an external world exists.

Hume's decision to seek an explanation of this belief rather than try to justify it, was based on the epistemic conclusion, noted above, that such a justification was impossible. He reasoned that, since the only evidence that could be appealed to in order to settle any question about the world was the evidence of our senses,\(^{15}\) and this evidence did not come with a guarantee of its accuracy, it was therefore impossible to judge whether the ideas we formed of the external world were correct. However, he argues that, "[w]e may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses."\(^ {16}\) Hence, when we reason using the evidence of our senses it is unimportant whether the impressions that arise from our perceptions are analogues of reality. The practice of reasoning has evolved using such impressions, and hence, the answer to the question of whether or not our perceptions are veridical has no bearing on our use of reason. Further, Hume maintains, we need not become embroiled in disputes concerning the ultimate nature of any object that features in our beliefs.

As long as we confine our speculations to the appearances of objects to our senses, without entering into disquisitions concerning their real nature and operations, we are safe from all difficulties, and can never be embarrassed by any questions.\(^ {17}\)
Berkeley argued as if proving or disproving the existence of objects in an independent reality external to us is not different in kind from proving or disproving any matter of fact. It is at this point that Hume's opinions differ radically from Berkeley's. Hume recognized that attempting to prove something about the "real nature and operations" of the things in the world would involve us in difficulties. His remarks that we can draw inferences from our perceptions suggest that he sees such inferential practices as legitimate. Further, his claim that we should confine our speculations to the appearances of objects affirms that he believed our inferential practices have a definite scope of applicability. Yet asking after the "real nature" of the objects in reality would neither be to confine one's speculations to the appearances nor to draw an inference from those appearances since it involves the nature of the appearances. He recognized that this question requires an ability to appraise not only our conception of reality, but the means we use to make this appraisal. Our normal inferential practices are ill-suited, however, to a task that involves a judgement on these same practices. Why should we suppose that the "real" nature of reality can be demonstrated by our methods of proof? Without some assurance that it can, a proof such as Berkeley imagined is impossible. Unlike Berkeley, Hume seems to notice that we cannot discover the nature of a reality distinct from the world of sensory evidence.

Our belief in the reality of the world, Hume suggests, may not be the sort of belief we are capable of altering on the basis of evidence or the use of
reason. To doubt the reality of everything is a peculiar sort of doubt, one which we are not properly equipped to engage in since any evidence we might appeal to or argument we might make is also a part of the thing we are supposed to be doubtful about. Starting from skeptical premises, Berkeley concludes that he can prove that some of the fundamental aspects of our conception of reality are wrong. Hume saw that such an inference was fallacious since it assumed that one could at once doubt everything and still appeal to whatever evidence made one's case.

If a question involves the nature of the appearances then it has a scope sufficiently broad that our nature becomes an important component of the answer. Hume may have had such a point in mind when he says that if we wish to doubt the reality of the world we may find it difficult since our "belief [in the world] is some sensation or peculiar manner of conception which it is impossible for mere ideas and reflections to destroy." Recognizing the problem here, Hume instead opts for a program that falls within the limits of what can be meaningfully discussed. He says that the question, "What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?" can be answered. Yet, we can never approach the neutral perspective necessary to answer the question, "whether there be body or not? That (Hume says) is a point we must take for granted in all our reasonings."
The importance of these points can be illustrated by looking at the different treatments of the concept 'causation' given by Berkeley and Hume. For Berkeley, an essential part of the meaning of the concept 'causation' was that there existed a necessary connection between a cause and its effect. But when he analysed the concept he could not discover evidence that would justify this usage. Instead of abandoning the necessary connection element of the concept 'causation', he appealed to God's benevolence as a justification of the belief in a necessary connection between a cause and its effect. Berkeley produces this argument because he did not appreciate that there might be questions which transcend the sort of evidence we are capable of marshaling, and hence, he saw an appeal to God's benevolence as the only manner in which he could establish this connection. Berkeley fails to recognize the possibility that the concept of a 'cause' is not completely determined by our experience; that asking after its nature might require that we include ourselves in the analysis.

Hume argued that the concept of a cause was characterized by the relations of contiguity, constant conjunction, etc., but he could not discover a necessary connection between a cause and its effect. He was much bolder than Berkeley in that he accepts the analysis and concludes that causation is simply the relation marked by contiguity, constant conjunction, etc. If there is thought to be a necessary connection between a cause and its effect,
then, Hume argued, it must stem from our nature, since nothing in the appearances of the world suggested such a connection.

This signifies a radical change in philosophic perceptions. Hume seems to have noticed, without realizing the significance of what he was noticing, that our concepts can be underdetermined by our experience. He comes close to this when he says:

Though the mind in its reasonings from causes or effects, carries its view beyond those objects which it sees or remembers, it must never lose sight of them entirely, nor reason merely upon its own ideas, without some mixture of impressions, or at least of ideas of the memory, which are equivalent to impressions.21

In this passage Hume stresses that the concept 'causation' does not arise merely from the comparison of ideas. Further, its analysis is incomplete if one makes reference to sense impressions alone. The notion that causes necessitate their effects is a result of our noticing that causes and effects are related in particular ways. The constancy of these relations leads one habitually to expect the cause to lead to the effect, and this habit gives rise to our belief that causation involves a necessary connection. But that we are habituated in this way is a fact about us; it is not an idea or any other cognitive thing. Hence, our belief that there is a necessary connection between a cause and its effect is not something that arises from experience in the broad sense that we experience both sense impressions and ideas.
Thus, experience cannot entirely determine our beliefs concerning this concept.

To suppose that Hume would have agreed that the concept causation is underdetermined by experience may be an unwarranted conjecture. However, he certainly assumes a corollary to such a conclusion when he claims that the necessary connection between a cause and its effect is the result of the psychological fact about us that we tend to form habits of thought. And this claim does imply that if the concept 'causation' involves a necessary connection between a cause and its effect, then it is underdetermined by our experience of the world. For experience to completely determine the meaning of a word or concept, that meaning must be something we learn by experience. Yet, in so far as the meaning of 'causation' is a product of our nature, it is not something that is learned. It is a usage that has developed because of a fact about us and not because of a fact about the world which we recognize and incorporate into the meaning as a result of this recognition. Therefore, in this case, reference to our nature is an essential feature in an analysis of the concept.

If some of our concepts are underdetermined by experience, then our use of some concepts can be correct or not for reasons other than that concept's agreement with some aspect of reality. Hume might have said that our use of a concept is warranted if we use it in contexts that are consistent.
with the sense impressions which underlie it and, where appropriate, the habits of thought we develop in association with these impressions. Hence, we need not be able to demonstrate that a concept is correct in the sense that we can provide an argument showing that the world is necessarily the way the concept suggests. But, if our concepts can be underdetermined in this way and we can nonetheless meaningfully use them, then arguments like Berkeley's are in error since they seek to demonstrate that we lack the evidence to assert that the world has the character assumed by ontological concepts like 'existence' and 'object'.

Hume recognized that a number of philosophic questions which taxed the minds of his contemporaries were misconceived. The problem of whether we had evidence for our conception of reality or just what we could say of this conception was misconstrued as the question of whether we could provide certain demonstration that our conception of reality matched a reality unmediated by our conceptions. Questions such as: "Did the true sentences we uttered to describe the world correctly depict reality?"; "If not, in what way did our conception differ from the true nature of reality?"; "Which aspects of reality were accurately represented in our conception of it and which were a product of our sensory constitution?" were seen by Hume as presupposing that the notion of 'reality' could be articulated independently of the sensory evidence which underlay our conception of it. His writings suggest that he realized that this presupposing could not be defended. It is
in principle impossible to say what reality is like beyond the idea of reality given to us by the information of our senses. Therefore, any attempt to say what the world really is like, or whether our senses adequately capture reality, or in what way our conception of reality differs from its true nature, is fundamentally wrongheaded.

The textual evidence cited in the preceding pages can be recast into an epistemological argument that is central to Hume's views on whether what can be known includes knowledge of the correctness of our conception of reality.

1) The practice of proving has evolved using our impressions (the evidence of our senses).

2) The appearances, conceived as our opinions regarding reality, are determined by the evidence of our senses.

3) The appearances are what must be explained by an account of the nature of our conception of reality.

4) No proof that begs the question is legitimate.

5) Therefore, any attempt to prove that the world has a particular nature is illegitimate.
On the basis of this conclusion Hume insisted that the enquiry ought to focus on the question of why we come to believe in the picture of reality we hold. An investigation of why our perceptual abilities produce the picture that they do could be pursued fruitfully within a general empirical framework. The only meaningful things that could be said regarding our conception of reality had to begin with the assumption that we gain knowledge only through our senses. From this starting point, using observations and scientific methods of systematizing these observations, we could investigate the perceptual and cognitive faculties which mediated our experience of the world. Thus, I see Hume as holding an epistemic view that does not preclude comment on our view of the nature of the world. We can profitably discuss any theory of the nature of the world that is based upon and is amenable to empirical methods. But the epistemological point Hume makes also circumscribes what can be discussed since it places questions regarding the ultimate nature of reality beyond the scope of our abilities to know.

The metaphysical issues that arise when we question the accuracy of our conception of the world currently do not proceed from the same philosophic considerations as in Hume's day. Discerning the correctness of our conception of reality involves asking whether the means we use to represent reality depict it accurately. This problem was conceived in terms of whether our ideas were veridical since ideas were thought to be the
vehicle of representation employed by the mind. But, belief that ideas fulfill this role has been supplanted by the belief that the mind represents the world through language. Yet the metaphysical problems remain despite this change. The question of whether our ideas of reality reflect its brute character remains as the question of whether our descriptions of the world are exhaustive or form an essential part of such a complete description. Thus, abandoning our belief that ideas are the means of representation employed by the mind does not dissipate our metaphysical worries regarding our conception of reality.

A modern counterpart of the Humean epistemological argument proceeds from the conception of language that Wittgenstein propounds in the *Philosophical Investigations.* In this work Wittgenstein conceives of language as being akin to a group of games. He sees language as a collection of games rather than some single game since he did not believe that the multiple functions of language could be explained by a single general account. He argued that there was no unified theory of meaning and truth that would suffice in all cases. Instead, we should view language as a collection of games, each with its own rules for using sentences meaningfully, as well as procedures for deciding which of the meaningful sentences were true. This conception of language implies that words and expressions are meaningful only when used within the context of the language game to which they belong.
One can construct an argument based on Wittgenstein's conception of language that is a strikingly similar counterpart to Hume's epistemological argument.

1) The notion of 'proof' is meaningful only when used within the context of the appropriate language game.

2) The appropriate language game that provides the context for the practice of proving is embedded in our conception of the world.

3) Therefore, to attempt to prove that our conception of the world is correct or incorrect is to use the notion of 'proof' outside the language game to which it belongs.

4) Therefore, attempts to prove that our conception of the world is correct are not meaningful.

Wittgenstein's epistemological argument is a consequence of his views on the nature of language, whereas Hume's argument stems from his conceptions of evidence and proof. Although both arrive at these epistemological conclusions from different approaches the effect of the conclusion is the same. A corollary of both arguments would be that a proof that our conception of the world is correct is not possible. There simply is no objective justification that could establish that the world as it appears to us is the correct conception of reality.
It is important to emphasize that these epistemological arguments do not claim that we lack evidence or have simply failed to find the right proof that our conception of reality is correct. They indicate instead that our normal practices of proving cannot handle questions whose scope is so broad that methods normally used to answer questions are themselves part of what is being questioned. In general, any issue that brings into doubt the legitimacy of the language used to express it, cannot be intelligibly raised.

The second premise of the Wittgensteinian argument is unclear as it stands. The notion of a language game being embedded in our conception of the world needs elaboration if we are to understand the argument. An explanation of this premise can be made by looking at Wittgenstein's views regarding the limits of doubt. Wittgenstein writes that "A doubt without an end is not even a doubt." He holds that for doubting to make any sense at all, the doubt must take something as certain. Without such a grounding doubting would be meaningless since the doubt would eventually extend back and include the practice of doubting. It would be, in effect, to say, "I doubt that 'doubting' is possible." The positive point here is that something does serve as a ground in both the practices of doubting and the practice of justifying. Wittgenstein does not intend that we know something is certain, but that we must take something as certain for this practice to be meaningful. Wittgenstein is not concerned to show what these grounds might be, but
rather to argue that such grounds are required for these practices. In

*Philosophical Investigations*, he writes:

> It is no doubt true that you could not calculate with certain sorts of paper and ink, if that is, they were subject to certain queer changes—but still the fact that they changed could in turn only be got from memory and comparison with other means of calculation. And how are these tested in their turn?24

Hence, doubting the reliability of paper and ink to perform these calculations, presupposes that there are means of calculating that are not open to the same sort of doubt and which we can compare to the results of calculating with the queer paper and ink. Generally, what I take his point to be is that judging anything at all presupposes that there is a standard to which the thing judged can be compared. More specifically, the point is that for any practice, any language game, the standards which are grounds for the practice cannot be questioned from within that practice. Hence, the sense in which the language game of proving is embedded in our conception of the world is that our conception of the world is presupposed in the practice of proving. Proving that some particular claim is true involves comparing that claim to the standards of what we accept as true of the world. Therefore, the notion of proving tacitly assumes that our conception of the world is correct since this conception serves as the standard which is appealed to by the practice of proving that claims are true or false. One can
question whether our proof practices are veridical, but one cannot use those proof practices as part of the test of whether they are veridical.

But I do not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.\(^{25}\)

This Wittgensteinian account is remarkably similar to Hume’s position. Hume argues that the activities of proving or adducing evidence appeal to the world as it appears to us; we cannot engage in these practices to doubt our conception of the world since such doubt would encompass these practices as well. Something must serve as a grounding for such activities or they could fulfill no purpose at all. Hume writes:

It is obvious all this chain of argument or connection of causes and effects, is at first founded on those characters or letters, which are seen or remembered, and that without the authority either of the memory or senses, our whole reasoning would be chimerical and without foundation. Every link of the chain would in that case hang upon another, but there would not be anything fixed to one end of it, capable of sustaining the whole; and consequently there would be no belief or evidence.\(^{26}\)

Hume’s point is that in order to make judgements regarding causes and effects, we must accept that our memory and senses operate uniformly; that they do not tell us one thing at one moment and something different later
on. In order to make such judgements we must accept something as authoritative, something which cannot be questioned in that context. Although Hume is writing of the specific case of reasoning about causes and effects, his position could be generalized to cover the same points that Wittgenstein wishes to make. First, a coherent doubt presupposes something that is not subject to the same doubt. Therefore, total skepticism is incoherent since it supposes that we can maintain an all encompassing doubt. Second, a coherent justification presupposes a fixed conception of the world. Therefore, a proof that our conception of the world is correct is incoherent since it supposes that justifications are independent of our conception of the world.

These two epistemic points define a metaphysical perspective since, if they are correct, they limit what can be known to a narrow range of metaphysical possibilities. The questions that Hume thought unanswerable, Wittgenstein places beyond the scope of enquiry; such questions are not just unanswerable, they are meaningless given the fixed points on which our current system of thought is grounded. We cannot intelligibly ask a question that casts doubt on the language we use to pose it.
Thus far the arguments that have been considered imply that our claims to know have a scope of applicability. It remains to be argued whether there are any ontological issues that can be intelligibly raised within that scope.
II

Truth, Justification, & Ontology

What we can mean by our claims to know is circumscribed by two related factors: the criteria we use in justifying empirical claims are limited to the use of sensory evidence; and these criteria are not grounded in some way that guarantees that the sentences on which they confer truth correspond to the actual unmediated character of the world. If our access to reality is mediated by our conceptions, then it seems that we cannot comment on the veracity of our methods of justification. And, if we cannot comment on the veracity of our methods of justification, then we can never discover whether we have captured the actual nature of reality in our ontological theories. If this is the case then how can we hope to argue for or against any particular ontological theory? The implication seems to be that we are unable to conclude what the world is like since both the evidence available to us and our methods of proof presuppose that the world has a particular character.

This conclusion disallows ontologies that seek to prove or disprove that our conception of the world is veridical. It might be thought that this loss affects our ability to ascribe truth to our sentences. Ontologies of this sort are not necessary, however, for the ascription of truth, and an investigation of how we do predicate truth reveals that sophisticated ontological issues can
be pursued meaningfully within the epistemic constraints on our metaphysical perspective.

In this section I will defend the position that, given our epistemic abilities, it is possible to argue intelligibly for numerous ontological issues. My strategy for accomplishing this begins with an account of the use of the predicate 'is true' for empirical claims. I will argue that this predicate is used on the basis of a correspondence between (1) the appearances appealed to as standards in the criteria appropriate to a particular sentence and (2) the relevant appearances in the context of utterance. But such criteria merely refer to appearances and, hence, there is no need to provide a demonstration which guarantees that our criteria make true only those sentences depicting the actual character of the world. Yet we can connect our criteria to our ontological beliefs in a manner that satisfies our intuition that true sentences describe the actual character of the world. This connection involves distinguishing the ontological beliefs we hold as a result of our physiology from those we hold as a result of the language we have evolved. Given the different natures of these two types of belief, it is then possible to place ontological theories among those beliefs which we are capable of altering by appeal to linguistic practices such as 'proving' and 'appealing to evidence'. But, if engaging in ontological theorizing takes place within the confines of the fixed assumptions of language, then certain
issues that ontologies have traditionally raised cannot be intelligibly addressed.

In ordinary language we conflate, "'There is a red house on the corner", is true' with, "It's true that there is a red house on the corner." Truth is a property of sentences and not of a world independent of the presence of sentence speakers. It is a human artifact and not an objective quality in the world.

It may be objected that truth is a relational property and is therefore a property of the world as well as of sentences. My contention is that sentences have truth values but the world does not. The world simply is, it cannot be true or false; only the sentences we use to express our opinions can be true or false. Further, if truth is thought of as a relational property, then the most that need be the case is that true sentences refer to some aspect of a reality mediated by our conceptions. In other words, if truth is a relational property it need not be the case that true sentences are true in virtue of some brute fact about the world that is independent of our perceptions.

Justification involves assigning truth and falsity to sentences by relating the kind of evidence we accept as appropriate to the particular claims we make about the world. Justifications are not the means we have developed to discover the truth about the world; rather, they are linguistic
standards that we use to relate what we accept in a given context as evidence, to a particular claim. And what we accept as evidence is always some aspect of how the world appears to us. To say that a particular descriptive claim is true is just to say that our criteria for uttering this sentence are satisfied and it is not to say that the perception of reality underlying this statement is the correct one in some ultimate sense. If we know that it is correct to say that there is a porcupine on the table, it is a mistake to garner more from this than that our criteria governing the correct utterance of this claim are satisfied. The truth of the claim does not imply that porcupines and tables possess some existence other than an existence in the world as we conceive it to be.

When we judge a sentence true or false, we do not have access to knowledge of the nature of the world other than the information we receive from our senses. When we speak of true sentences as those which correspond to the way the world is, we must view this correspondence as a correspondence to our perceptions of the world, for this is the only information our senses provide. Therefore, either the operation of judging a sentence's truth value involves judging the correspondence of a sentence to our perception of the world, or, we are unable to judge the truth values of sentences. But we do judge the truth values of sentences. Therefore, it is not the correspondence to unmediated reality that makes sentences true or false, but rather the correspondence to our perceptions.
The correspondence theory of truth holds that a statement is true if what it describes corresponds to reality. But, under the present account, saying that a statement is true seems to involve that 1) we have tacitly agreed upon conventions which provide rules for justifying the statement, 2) these conventions tacitly specify that the world must appear in some particular manner, and 3) the situation in question must be considered to match the conditions referred to in the criteria used for that sentence's appraisal. Thus, instead of a correspondence between our sentences and unmediated reality, truth is predicated of sentences on the basis of a correspondence to mediated reality.

Sentences are still to be regarded as true or false if they correspond to the way the world is. However, our belief that the world has the particular character we see it as having reflects a deep ontological commitment and the veracity of the conception of the world we are committed to is not an issue when appraising the truth value of sentences. Therefore, the correspondence which makes our sentences true or false does not commit us to an interpretation of the nature of the objects referred to in any sense other than that this is how the world appears to us.

However, we do possess a strong prejudice in favour of the view that true sentences correspond to the actual nature of the world. We commonly hold that the appropriate question to be asked is whether we are correct in
what we say and not whether some theoretical entity has a truth value. We are correct in what we say when the world is as we describe it to be. Any description which meets this requirement is thought to be correct whether we have evidence to prove it or not. Underlying such a position are the beliefs that there is more to be said about the truth of a sentence than is given by an account of our epistemic practices of confirmation, and the criteria that set out what evidence is relevant to confirm or disconfirm our descriptive claims do not supply the additional element.

This problem suggests the need to distinguish two senses of 'truth': first, the sense just outlined where 'truth' is a property of sentences; and second, an ontological sense of 'truth', according to which truth is something that our theories and explanations aim at. There is no way of knowing whether we ever achieve this second sort, but this sense of 'truth' is useful as a desideratum. It is, however, only metaphor because this sense of 'truth' assumes agreement between what we say of the world and the way the world really is; a determination that is beyond our abilities. It is important to recognize that this sense of 'truth' exists since it has motivated much of the debate in epistemology and metaphysics. Yet, this ontic truth is not so much unattainable as it is unrecognizable; we would never recognize it even if we had attained it, let alone whether we can say it exists at all.
But we do speak of truth in this ontological sense and we have searched for some manner of assuring ourselves that our true sentences are true in this regard. Yet, this notion of truth is inapplicable to our sentences: We can apply the predicate 'is true' to the sentences in our language but we cannot determine that the sentences in our language are the right ones; right in the sense that the true sentences describe brute reality.

Perhaps our belief that true sentences are ontologically true stems from the following confusion. If the appearances are mistakenly identified with a reality unmediated by our conceptions, then a confirmation practice that relates criteria based on the appearances to the sentences of our language could be taken to be a procedure that confers ontological truth on sentences. This failure to distinguish the world as it appears to our senses, from unmediated reality could lead to our current difficulties regarding the gap between what we can know of the world and the pervasive supposition that true sentences correspond to a reality unmediated by our conceptions. We use criteria that are based in linguistic practice, which, if satisfied, justify the assertion of the sentences they are criteria for. These criteria are grounded in something deeper than mere social convention or arbitrary linguistic practice since there are standards they must meet which reflect an ontological commitment. An understanding of the genesis of our criteria will accommodate this ontological commitment by showing that the criteria we
use to appraise the truth or falsity of sentences are constrained by certain fundamental ontological beliefs.

Two related points come out of an understanding of the genesis of our criteria. First, we can explain why it is we use the criteria that we do. Criteria codify what we accept as grounds for saying something. They act as standards which settle questions regarding the accuracy of our assertions. The function they have then in our world view is to assess descriptive claims according to whether they are consistent with the way the world appears to us; they are in effect the means we have for enforcing our conceptual picture of the world. Second, this account can illustrate the relationship between our conception of the world and our concepts of truth and justification. It will enable us to recognize that proving something true is an activity that takes place from within our language and hence those beliefs about the world which our language presupposes must be taken as beliefs which cannot be questioned meaningfully by using a justification practice that presupposes their veracity. In addition to these two points, an understanding of the genesis of our criteria suggests that there are limitations on what can be known of the ontological presuppositions of human language.

Defenders of a Wittgensteinian account of these matters have argued that we cannot justify the criteria we use to assign truth values to sentences nor was there any need to since no more needs to be said regarding a
sentence's possession of the property 'truth' than a description of the conditions under which we would ascribe that property. This position does not explain why we are satisfied with the conditions referred to in our criteria rather than some other set of conditions: such an account does not capture the pervasive impression that something compels us to accept the truth conditions we use. There is a gap between 1) our belief that the sentences of our language which we regard as true correspond to the world in such a way that it is proper to say they are correct, and 2) an account of why some sentences are regarded as true that is expressed solely in terms of our linguistic practices. If we give an account of how we assign truth and falsity to sentences and limit that discussion to a description of the conditions or context in which we use each particular sentence, then we fail to capture the full sense of our ascriptions of truth or falsity. The Wittgensteinian explanation could be enriched by a description of the fundamental ontological beliefs which determine our conception of the world and an account of how consistency with these beliefs governs what we accept as justifications for our claims. We need to explain what determines our criteria. With such an account in hand we will then be able to recognize that some ontological issues can be intelligibly raised and some cannot.

The criteria by which we assess descriptive sentences have evolved in their present form because they fit the picture of the world that we cannot help but have. Our nature as human beings dictates that we hold particular
beliefs in common; that there are discrete objects, other minds, that these exist in time and space, etc. The criteria we use for determining whether a particular sentence is true are set by appeal to such basic beliefs. To speak of an appeal is, of course, just metaphor. Consistency between these fundamental ontological beliefs and our criteria is maintained by the process of the development of our criteria from within the structure provided by these beliefs. For example, we could not have developed criteria for saying 'I am happy' that included a check on the temperature of an independent object nearest to the speaker. The criteria used in appraising the truth of this sentence are constrained by the fundamental ontological beliefs that we are individuals, that as such we are distinct from other objects in our environment, and that our mental states are something which we possess independently of the objects which are not identical to ourselves.

Some of the beliefs about the world we currently hold are ones we have been prompted to have by an evolving environment of which we form a part. Such beliefs are inescapable for human beings. In its most fundamental respects our conception of the world consists in subscription to these beliefs. This coarse-grained set of beliefs act as a conceptual filter, and our language is constructed using the material they extract. We have evolved the capacity to use language but we have not done so in a jump: there was no point at which we made the transition from the conceptual structure imposed by a common set of beliefs about the world to some
system of significant growls and squeals based upon such a conceptual structure. Further, the fact that we can now express many of our basic beliefs in language obscures this set from the larger set of beliefs that we hold as a part of the wider elaboration that language affords. Yet the two sets are distinguishable for our purposes in the following manner. Those beliefs which depend upon the more finely-grained distinctions language affords are those which can be revised more or less independently of our conception of reality. For instance, Einstein's proof that matter and energy are the same thing moving at different velocities has altered our ontological belief that matter and energy belong to distinct and irreducible categories. In this case we can speak of evidence for or against such beliefs while leaving our general conceptual scheme intact. But, it would not be possible to alter our belief that something exists, to say in effect, that actually nothing exists at all. We cannot even entertain this sort of change in our conceptual environment; there simply is nothing that could count as evidence for it. In general the beliefs that we hold as a result of our physiology are those for which it either does not make sense to speak of evidence proving or disproving them or our acceptance of the evidence required to revise such beliefs would necessitate abandoning our conceptual scheme as a whole. But since our language is bound to this sort of belief we cannot legitimately raise issues that question these beliefs without calling into doubt the very language used to pose the question.
The examples mentioned above are clear cases that fall on either side of this distinction between revisable and relatively unrevisable ontological beliefs. It is not obvious where to place other beliefs that ought also to be called ontological. First though, the question of what makes a belief an ontological belief must be addressed. Straightforwardly, the answer is that any belief that asserts the existence of something, or, that characterizes the existence of something, is an ontological belief. Examples of either sort would be, 'cats exist', and 'cats are mind-dependent objects.' Ontological beliefs that are unrevisable given our current language and those that are revisable given our current language, can be either ontological beliefs that assert the existence of something, or that characterize the existence of something. For example, unrevisable ontological beliefs of each sort would be, 'people other than myself exist', and 'knowers are individuals'; revisable ontological beliefs of each sort would be, 'muons exist', and 'objects are coloured.' Further, some ontological beliefs can be either factually false as in 'phlogiston exists' or false because they entail the falsity of an unrevisable ontological belief as in 'cats do not exist.'

This last example requires further explanation. The belief that cats exist is, in part, a belief that we hold as a result of the wider elaboration of beliefs afforded by language. Language enables us to name the discrete objects we come into contact with as well as allowing us to distinguish the
parts of such objects. Instead of seeing trees, we see fir trees, alder trees, etc. Instead of seeing a fir tree we see a tree trunk, branches, and foliage. Our belief in the existence of specific everyday objects consists in a learned discrimination between discrete entities and such discriminations are based upon perceptions that reflect our fundamental ontological beliefs. In the case of identifying a cat, we see it is discrete from the objects around it and recognize it by its shape, colour, etc. To assert that cats do not exist would entail either that what we call 'cats' are not discrete objects or that none of the objects that we believe to be discrete exist. But, we do believe that the objects we call 'cats' are discrete objects, and the belief that discrete objects are independent of our conception of them is an unrevisable belief since doubting it would require foresaking our current conception of reality.

These examples should help illustrate the revisable/unrevisable distinction in our ontological beliefs, yet it is likely that there are beliefs that do not clearly fall on either side of the distinction. But, to make the argument at hand, one need only establish that there are beliefs that are properly called ontological and that some of them are revisable while others are relatively unrevisable.

We could call our deep ontological beliefs ordering concepts or basic beliefs, since they constitute the firmament from which our conceptual framework is hung. These beliefs are not given to us genetically, rather our
perceptual and cognitive apparatus is given to us genetically and its structure results in our understanding the world in a particular way. We are not born then with innate ideas that help us to construct an overall conception of reality. Rather, the physical makeup of our brain and sensory perceptors uniformly produce basic beliefs about the world, given appropriate stimulation.

The explanation of these basic beliefs makes appeal to a number of theoretical notions that one might suppose we are not entitled to since it may be thought that their legitimacy is at issue. Yet, we are entitled to these notions since the explanation is being carried out on the understanding that we are operating from within our perspective. This means that we are using the language, making appeals to the evidence of our senses, and organizing the information we gather according to operations that have evolved within the strictures of language and sensory evidence. It is necessary to emphasize that what we are aiming for is an explanation, something suitable for human beings, and it is not illegitimate to operate within the bounds of what human beings take to be intelligible.

One additional clarification needs to be made. I have claimed that we possess ontological beliefs that are inescapable for us. It is not clear whether they are inescapable because we are constitutionally compelled to subscribe to such beliefs, or whether we are logically restrained from
questioning such beliefs on pain of uttering nonsense if we attempt to deny them. Both these assertions are correct and the two issues are related in the following way. The genesis of our ineluctable ontological beliefs lies in our perceptual and cognitive nature operating in concourse with the world. Therefore, we are constitutionally compelled to hold the beliefs that are produced in this manner. Such beliefs underpin our language; in its most fundamental respects, the world as it appears to us is expressed by these beliefs. To question these beliefs would be unintelligible since they provide the grounding for the meaningfulness of our language. Therefore, we are logically restrained from questioning such beliefs.

We are, then, in a position to explain why we have the criteria we possess. Making appraisals of the truth values of empirical claims is an activity that depends upon the existence of language, and language cannot be separated from some set of commonly held ontological beliefs which make language possible. We can account for the criteria we possess for assigning truth values to sentences by pointing out that this activity is based upon the application of our deep ontological beliefs in a linguistic setting.

This account also illustrates the relationship between truth, justification, and ontology by establishing a connection between our ontological presuppositions and our criteria. By explaining these two points we can say why we are satisfied with the criteria we use. We are satisfied
with them because they are consistent with our deep ontological beliefs. Our criteria for saying that a sentence is true have developed within the constraint of remaining consistent with the ontological conception of the world that we possess. This additional element dispels the expressed dissatisfaction of those who believe that there is more to a theory of truth than is given by an account of our confirmation practices.

Although there could never be such a thing as an appraisal of our deep ontological beliefs, it is possible to develop an ontological theory if one recognizes the narrow scope within which we can offer such theories. Theories in general are an activity of language users and as such are dependent upon the assumptions that language embodies. Therefore, ontological theories, such as realism or idealism, are possible only within the set of fixed assumptions that our language embraces. The beliefs that constitute this set of fixed assumptions cannot be revised without abandoning our current language, and hence, any ontology which seeks to do so is ill-conceived. There are, however, ontological beliefs which do raise ontological issues that can be intelligibly considered. We could argue for any ontology that did not question the fundamental conception of the world as expressed by current language users.
This description of the genesis and function of the criteria we use for judging the truth values of sentences suggests a general argument regarding the limitations of any language to question its presuppositions.

1. We possess inescapable, fundamental ontological beliefs that are produced by our constitution acting in concourse with the world.

2. The meaningfulness of our language has evolved from within the structure imposed by our fundamental ontological beliefs.

3. Any skeptically motivated discussion of the legitimacy of our fundamental ontological beliefs would undermine the meaningfulness of our language.

4. Any discussion that undermines the meaningfulness of our language undermines its own meaningfulness.

5. Therefore, any skeptically motivated discussion that casts doubt on our fundamental ontological beliefs is not ultimately intelligible.

It is apparent that this argument is a more general version of the arguments attributed to Hume and Wittgenstein presented in the first section. The central feature of those arguments was that our proof practices have developed from within the context of the world of appearances, and since such practices are only meaningful within the context of the appearances,
such practices cannot determine whether the appearances are veridical. This second argument maintains that our language has developed within the parameters of particular ontological beliefs, and since language is only meaningful within the context of these beliefs, our language cannot inform us regarding the accuracy of these fundamental ontological beliefs.

The conclusions reached in this section can be summed up as follows. A naive ontological realist believes that true sentences correspond to a reality unmediated by human conceptions and that the point of his ontology is to prove that our conception of the world corresponds to that reality. Such a realist's ontological ambition is to provide the link between those sentences which convey our conception of the world and brute reality. On this account, knowing the truth value of a sentence requires an ontology that is capable of demonstrating that our conception of reality is veridical. Truth, however, is a property of sentences predicated on the basis of their relationship to the appearances and not to unmediated reality; the criteria by which we decide upon the truth values of our sentences assumes only an agreement between our sentences and a reality that is dependent on our conceptions. Therefore, determining the truth values of sentences does not require subscribing to an ontology as conceived by the naive realist.

We can distinguish two types of belief that can plausibly be called 'ontological'. The first sort are unavoidably produced by the human
constitution in concourse with the world. Such beliefs are forced upon human understanding. The world as we conceive it to be in its most fundamental respects is given shape by these sorts of beliefs. Hence, they reflect those features of the world that constrain us epistemically and force upon us our metaphysical perspective. These fundamental beliefs cannot be revised within the language since these beliefs constitute the framework within which our language has evolved. Our linguistic practices are tied to this sort of belief and, hence, we cannot legitimately raise issues that question these beliefs and still imagine that we leave the rest of the language unaffected. The second sort of ontological belief has evolved with the language we use. These beliefs can be revised without altering our most fundamental conception of the world; hence, they are beliefs which can be discussed intelligibly within the parameters of our language: we can speak meaningfully of reasons for retaining or rejecting them. An ontological theory that limits itself to this second type of belief could not alter the fundamental nature of the world of appearances. Therefore, any ontology that limits the discussion to revisable ontological beliefs can be pursued meaningfully within the epistemic constraints on our metaphysical perspective.
III

Is Realism a Workable Ontology?

If our deep ontological beliefs are produced by our constitution, what purpose is served in working out an ontological theory? In particular, if these ontological beliefs are ones we cannot avoid, then what sense does it make to defend an ontological theory such as realism? If realism is construed as simply the annunciation of a commitment to the objects we commonly believe to exist, then it would neither require "working out" nor would it count as a theory. On a different construal, ontological theories give the objects we believe in a status; ontologies are not postulations of the existence of some set of entities, they are an attempt to explain the nature of the existence of some set of entities. Different ontological theories give different accounts of the nature of the entities that feature in our conception of the world: they are mental constructs; or are as they appear; or some combination of these. Ontological theories, as opposed to a set of ontological beliefs, do not give catalogues of the things in the world. In other words, ontological theories do not postulate the existence of objects; nor do ontological theories outline the empirical character of the world, that there are objects existing in space and time, that obey particular laws, and have particular properties, etc. Every ontology seeks to account for the
appearances. The appearances consist in the common view of what exists that is shared by current language users. The function of an ontological theory is then to explain the nature of the appearances and not to produce ontological beliefs; at least not those ontological beliefs whose subject is the assertion of an existential statement, such as, "Fred believes that the assertion that 'ice is water' is false." If ontological theories are seen in this light, then the fact that we cannot avoid a belief in common sense objects does not preclude an intelligible ontological enquiry. I will argue that we can elaborate and defend ontological theories if these theories are distinct from the ontological beliefs which we cannot avoid.

The problem at hand is to discover a range of issues that are of an ontological nature and that meet the constraint that they do not cast doubt on the language used to raise them. Any ontological theory that attempts to justify, or prove, that our conception of the world is correct, is thereby ruled out. A possible candidate might be a conception of ontology that sees it as an attempt to provide arguments for a particular interpretation of our ontological beliefs; Hume, for instance, identifies objects with sense impressions; Berkeley identifies objects with ideas; realists make the bold claim that objects have an existence that is independent from us that we can have, and do have, knowledge about. Each of these ontological theories shares the appearances. It is the nature and status of the objects which feature in the appearances that is at issue; ontology is not in these cases an
attempt to populate our conceptual environment, rather, the task is to explain the nature of the inhabitants we find there. On one view then, realism is a hypothesis that seeks to account for the world of appearances by characterizing the objects in the appearances as being independent from our cognitive and perceptual operations and are such that we can gain knowledge of their actual nature. In order to elaborate such a realism while remaining within the parameters set by our epistemic abilities it needs to be argued then that the conception of the world we have is not a result of our holding that realism thus characterized is true, nor is it to be identified with such a theory. To accomplish this end, one needs to explain the hypothesis, how it relates to our conception of the world, and whether it can be justified given the limitations on our justificatory practices.

Michael Devitt argues for a particular version of realism that seems a good starting point for developing an ontological theory of the sort outlined above. He says that realism is the view that tokens of most common sense physical types objectively exist independently of our mental lives. Devitt sees a correct statement of realism as involving two key elements, an independence dimension and an existence dimension. I will treat each in turn, arguing that the existence dimension is superfluous in a realist ontology. A realism that retains the independence dimension which Devitt proposes, also fails, since the justification presented for it begs the question. There are ontological issues distinct from those alluded to that we can be
right or wrong about, and within this set of issues one could work out a sophisticated realism. Ultimately such a realism also fails.

A central tenet in most statements of realism is that the nature of the objects in the world is independent of our beliefs about these objects. The independence of external objects can be characterized as an objective existence distinct from our perceptual and cognitive appreciation of the world. Devitt writes: "For an object has objective existence, in some sense, if it exists and has its nature whatever we believe, think or can discover: it is independent of the cognitive areas of the mind."\textsuperscript{28} The key point here is that the epistemological question of how much we are able to know about an object has no bearing on the actual nature of that object. So the sense in which the world is objective is that the nature of the objects in it is not constituted by our abilities to recognize these objects.

Devitt carefully qualifies this characterization of objective existence by adding that to say that an object exists objectively is not to say that we cannot have true beliefs about it or that it is unknowable. Rather, he argues:

"It is to say that its existence and nature is in no way dependent on our epistemic capacities. It is not constituted by our knowledge, by the synthesizing power of the mind, nor by any imposition of concepts or theories."\textsuperscript{29}
In other words, regardless of what we may or may not know, and regardless of what effects our cognitive and perceptual abilities might have on our understanding of the world, the objects in the world have a distinct and separate existence and nature.

Devitt argues that objectivity alone fails to establish realism since this sort of objective existence is consistent with some forms of idealism. We need to add that the objectivity is non-mental: the objects in the world are neither ideas nor sense data. Devitt says that "if an object exists independently of the mental then it can exist unobserved." The objects in the world exist independently of any operation by which we might come to know of them.

Devitt seems to be making an epistemic point here: we do not construct the world by inferring it from sense data, nor do we infer the existence of the external world from our ideas of it, rather we perceive it directly. But, this is a mistaken interpretation of his point. The independence dimension is not meant to be the epistemic thesis that we are able to perceive the world and its objects directly. It is consistent with his characterization of realism that we apprehend sense data and construct the world from these data, or, that we infer the existence of the external world from our ideas about it. The independence dimension implies that if our beliefs about the external world are generated in either of these two ways
then, in the case of sense data, the world we construct is an analogue of reality, and in the case where we infer an external reality from our ideas, our ideas exactly represent the actual nature of the world.

In this discussion of the independence of the world from our mental lives, Devitt intends to draw a distinction between the objects in the world and our apprehension of the objects in the world. He maintains that the world has the character that it does independently of our abilities to apprehend it or the beliefs we hold about it. This is an ontological claim that must be distinguished from the epistemological problem of how we can come to know this of the world. Devitt argues that constitutive and evidential issues must be kept distinct: epistemology may, in the end, tell us with what degree of certainty we ought to hold to our ontological conclusions, but it does not tell us what those conclusions are. So, the independence dimension is the thesis that how we apprehend the world is a distinct operation that does not create its character.

Devitt insists that the essential element in a statement of realism is the existence dimension. He argues that our claims about the existence of objects in the world must be robust: we ought to commit ourselves to the view that the objects we believe exist have a nature much as we perceive it to be. Merely saying that something, we-know-not-what, exists independently of us is inadequate since belief in such a world would not
make a difference to anything else we had to say. Realism should commit itself to the existence of the entities postulated by science as well as those posited by common sense.

A number of problems arise out of the fact that our scientific view of the world is an evolving one. Devitt argues that we cannot say all the entities postulated by science exist since the history of this pursuit provides numerous examples (phlogiston, the ether) of postulated entities, the existence of which have since been disproven. Realism should then commit itself to the existence of most of the entities postulated by science; we are mostly right in the existence claims made by the posits of our scientific theories. Clearly not all such posits count; we must limit them to those in which we have a high degree of confidence. "It is the entities posited by the theories we believe that the realist is interested in. He is committed to the existence of most of these confident posits." Devitt sees that this commits us heavily to current science and leaves the realist open to a meta-induction put forward by Hilary Putnam: "The entities of present theories do not exist from the perspective of some theory we shall adopt in the future. So we have no reason to suppose that these entities exist. Anti-realism is more plausible than realism." To answer Putnam, Devitt puts the distinction between our epistemic abilities and our ontological theories to work. He argues that we have some justification and hence should be committed to the entities postulated by current science and hold that most of these
confident posits exist; but, he maintains, "Realism might be wrong: it is an overarching empirical hypothesis in science." Realism does not maintain that we are correct about all of the entities we believe exist. "Realism is more cautious: it holds that most of those posits exist."34

Devitt does not elaborate on this point as I think he should: he ought to say that realism is our best theory regarding the nature of the objects postulated by common sense and science. Ontology need not postulate the existence of objects; rather, it should merely claim to be committed to the objects postulated by common sense and science. Yet, Devitt does not hold that realism consists in solely a commitment to the entities we believe exist; he sees realism as involving a statement of what exists:

... (realism) is committed (to) common sense physical or material objects, for example, stones, trees and cats. We also want realism to cover common sense stuff like water. Let us use the word 'entity' to cover objects and stuff. And let us use 'physical' to cover physical and material entities. Then we make realism much more specific by committing it to the existence of commonsense physical entities.35

If he claims that it is the business of ontology to posit the existence of things rather than to make a commitment to the existence of objects as we conceive them to be, then ontology merely becomes science. Certainly we can and do postulate the existence of entities and adduce evidence and arguments for and against the existence of such entities. These are
legitimate activities that could alter our ontological beliefs concerning what exists. It seems, however, that Devitt views realism as more than an expressed commitment to the objects which we believe exist. Devitt claims that one of the tasks in a description of realism is to state "a view of what exists--the physical entities of common sense and science." He maintains that part of the task of ontology is to identify the objects in our environment which are independent from us and external to us. So, instead of claiming that realism is a theory concerning what it is to exist, Devitt holds that realism ought to specify, or list, which particular objects do exist.

Further evidence that this is Devitt's position can be found in his argument that realism could be false. He might argue that realism can be false on other grounds, but his response to Putnam (and Putnam's argument as well) suggests that realism could be false if some of the entities which it held existed objectively and independently of us, turn out not to exist at all. Of course if all of the entities which realism characterizes as independent and objective turned out not to exist, then this would be good evidence that realism is false. This discovery would prove that realism is false, but not because realism was wrong about what existed, as Devitt supposes, but because it could not both be true that objects which feature in our ontological beliefs do not exist and that their nature is as realism describes it to be.
In his elaboration of realism, Devitt claims that tokens of most common sense and scientifically posited physical types exist objectively and independently of us. But, given that science changes through time and some postulated entities cease to appear in our theories, the statement of which entities we are specifically committed to must take the following complicated form. We could, he argues, list all of the individual statements asserting the existence of tokens of each type (bosons exist; cats exist) and then create a disjunction of every conjunction that can be created which conjoins just over half of the existential claims.

Interestingly, Devitt does not give a reason why common sense entities are included among those existential claims open to revision. Nor, does he say why he sees it as the business of ontology to make such assertions. A more plausible position is that our ontological beliefs stem from two sources; those that result from our constitution and those that result from our activity as language users. This is a difference in kind, since unlike those beliefs which are part of language, those beliefs that have arisen with our physiological constitution are more deeply entrenched and not open to the same revisionary forces. Any changes that come regarding what we hold to exist as a result of our constitution, evolve slowly. Devitt never supplies a reason why the entities postulated by common sense would alter through time, yet his formulation indicates that he thinks that this must occur. This omission flags a lacuna in Devitt's account: it is not clear by what
process he supposes we postulate the existence of what he calls common sense objects. His statement of realism in terms of a disjunction of conjunctions means that we need not take realism to be committed to the existence of types, but, he thinks nothing is lost by talking as though this commitment were made. Again, it is not clear why we understand the world as consisting of tokens of various types or how the existence of types is different from the existence of tokens. If Devitt sees it as the business of ontological theories to say what exists rather than a statement of commitment to the objects we believe to exist, then he is lacking an account of how we come to postulate, group, and revise the postulations and groupings of common sense objects.

Devitt argues that realism ought to say what properties tokens must have in order to be tokens of a particular type. He opts for Kripkean a posteriori essentialism which holds that for something to be the token of a type, it must possess the properties deemed constitutive of its nature; in the case of animals, genetic structure might be such a property. So, for the type 'tiger', a thing would not be a tiger if it did not have the genetic structure of tigers. It is then possible that science might show that tigers do not have the genetic structure we take them to have; but this would only show that we were mistaken about the genetic structure of tigers and not that tigers do not exist. Realism need not be so strong that it commits us to kinds of entities and the view that we are right about their properties. But, it must hold at
least that the entities whose existence it comments on have properties which are constitutive of their natures, although not necessarily the ones we suppose them to have. Devitt then extends these points into a treatment of the problem posed by vagueness of description and the principle of bivalence. His solution to this problem betrays the same mistaken assumption about the function of ontological theories.

He suggests a case where it is not clear whether some objects are determinately of one type or not. For instance, if evolutionary theory is true, then it must be the case that at some time there existed creatures of which it is not clear that they were or were not tigers. His comment here is interesting; he says that if there are independently existing entities that are determinately tigers then this confirms his version of Realism; but, if there are freaks or past animals for which it is not clear that they should be categorized as tigers or not, this just shows that the world is a richer place than necessary to maintain his version of Realism. If there are entities that do not belong to one of the types we hold as a result of our realist ontology, then, Devitt says, this fact reflects on that ontology by showing that the world is a richer place than a realist ontology requires, since the world contains more types than realism posits.

The reason for Devitt's mistakenly including the existence dimension is that modern realism has been developed in reaction to the attacks on
common sense mounted by idealism. Hence, formulations of realism (Moore's, for example) tend to begin with a long list of objects the realist believes exist. Realists, feeling that a consequence of idealism was that common sense objects did not exist in the familiar sense, were concerned to rescue the objects of the world from a less than robust existence. This rescue could be effected by giving an affirmative answer to the question of whether objects have natures that are as we believe them to be and are independent of our perceptual and cognitive faculties. The method they adopted instead was to assert that the objects common sense holds exist, really do exist, thinking that the issue was whether we were right to believe that such objects exist rather than whether we were right to believe that their existence is independent of us.

According to Devitt, realism, and ontology in general, seeks to discover what it is for the objects which we commonly believe in to exist. Making such a discovery, however, does not involve seeking out the properties of the objects we believe exist; that is the business of science. Nor is developing an ontological theory a matter of stating what exists; we hold such beliefs already. Ontology, done properly, cannot involve an existence dimension as Devitt wishes because the existence of the objects in our environment either is a belief we hold ineluctibly or is a belief arrived at through scientific discovery.
Perhaps, then, ontological theories concern only an account of the general properties possessed by the objects we believe to exist. In the case of realism this could be stated as "all existent objects have natures (possess specific properties) that are independent of any cognitive or perceptual activity of human beings; these objects endure through time in such a state as is consistent with their natures and the natural forces which act upon them; these things exist in this manner whether or not human beings exist." A realist who maintains such a position need not worry that objects do possess properties that consist in their having certain effects on us. Realism holds that the objects in our environment have properties that are independent of our nature. Those properties which seem to depend on our interaction with them, (colour, for instance), are, by hypothesis, the result of properties that the objects possess independently of us. The fact that our nature interacts with that of a world of independently existing objects, to produce a class of properties that stands midway, so to speak, between ourselves and such objects, does not contradict this statement of what such a realism should be seen as asserting. This general specification explains what it is we are committed to in saying we believe that particular objects exist and seems to be an alternative that does not conflate evidential and constitutive issues.

Taking the above account as our statement of realism we could then follow Devitt's justification of realism by accepting the appearances as data,
induction as our method of explaining that data, and then generate realism as the explanation of the data most easily rendered given those methods. An induction that takes the appearances as data and then seeks to explain those appearances is not question-begging; no more so at any rate than physics, which takes the behaviour of inanimate matter through time as data and develops hypotheses that account for the regularities in the behaviour of matter. In this case, we take the appearances as data and develop an explanation of the apparent regularity of the phenomena we experience that makes reference to those same appearances. This seems to be what we do in ontology; we take the world of appearances and the regularity of those appearances as data, and account for this regularity with a hypothesis that refers to those appearances. Devitt would place realism on the same footing as any of our scientific hypotheses. It is justified, he argues, in the same manner and should be held with as much confidence as are the best of our scientific theories.

There are forceful objections to realism as an inductive hypothesis. If realism is a view that we cannot help but have and there are in effect no rival hypotheses that can be taken seriously, and our language seems to operate on the basis of this hypothesis, then what is realism supposed to explain? What is the point in working up such a hypothesis? Devitt's hypothesis cannot be justified in any other than a question-begging way. It seems absurd to attempt to justify the belief that objects in our environment are as
realism contends by pointing to the objects in the world and asserting that they appear as such because they are in fact.

Devitt claims that an inductive justification of realism seems question-begging because it is difficult to pose the problem that realism solves since our language seems permeated with realist beliefs. The difficulty arises, he says, because there is no neutral language in which to frame rival hypotheses. A neutral language would need to describe the appearances since this is what realism is taken to explain. We could try to speak in what Devitt calls an 'as if' language and in that way we could neutrally express the explanans of realism. So, instead of saying, "there is a guitar in the corner", one could make the ontologically neutral claim, "it's as if there is a guitar in the corner." The hypothesis is then that realism is the best explanation of this second claim. The world appears as if there is a guitar in the corner because there is a guitar in the corner.

Devitt's attempt to overcome the putative difficulty arising from the fact that our language seems permeated by realist beliefs fails since even if the realist had a need for such a language, then this 'as if' language would not be sufficient. Saying, "It's as if there is a guitar in the corner" is only ontologically neutral with respect to the guitar's existence and not with respect to the existence of the subject of the experience. The existence of an experiencer would still be assumed. It is impossible to expunge the
realist assumptions that permeate our language. The list of such realist assumptions is long and it is inescapable that we make these assumptions when we use language. There simply is no manner of stating this sort of realism that does not appear to be trivial or question begging.

Realism is language bound: given that it is a theory, then the sorts of activities it is engaged in are only meaningful from within the context of the practices of our language. This overall perspective contains numerous ontological beliefs; and, as I have argued, only some of these beliefs can be revised from within the language. Our deeply held ontological beliefs can only be revised by shifting our perspective as a whole and this is not a change that is possible given a change in our theories.

Our ontological opinions of what existence is like for the objects we believe in are consistent with a number of more sophisticated ontological problems. A sophisticated version of realism might argue that we believe that objects have natures that are independent of any influence of our cognitive or perceptual faculties but that this claim is theoretical in nature and hence revisable given our current language. Realism, then, would be an attempt to justify this belief by producing the following arguments. First, it would need to be shown that there is a bifurcation of our beliefs into theoretical and observational categories. Second, such a realist would argue that some of our ontological beliefs (in particular, the independent
nature of objects) are theoretical in character. It could then be argued that the theoretical language we happen to have adopted is the only account that can be supported given our observational language.

Two points would then follow that would make such an overall argument a realist ontology. First, the character of the existence of objects in the world would become something that we might believe in because of reasons and hence would be an issue that we can be right or wrong about. Second, the common sense view of the world would be, in some measure, justified since, if it could be argued that the theoretical conception of the world we possess is the only conception that can be supported given our experience, then our conception of the world would be, to that degree, justifiable.

It is important to recognize that such an account would not prove that our conception of the world corresponds to a reality unmediated by our conceptions. Instead, it would show that our belief in the independence of objects can be justifiably constructed from our observations of the world. A project such as this is of an ontological nature since the claim being made is that the concept 'existence' is theoretical. We believe that particular objects exist based on observation alone. But, 'existence' gains the meaning that objects have natures that are independent of our cognitive and perceptual apprehension of them through an inference from our observations. Such an
ontological enterprise does not violate the restrictions on the issues we can meaningfully raise. In particular such an enterprise would not use our justication practices outside their applicable scope. Our fundamental conception of reality is identified with the world as it is depicted in our observational language, whereas the thesis at hand is that our theoretical language is justified given this observational language. Put another way, our theoretical language may comment upon our conception of the world but it takes this conception as given.

The claim that our theoretical language takes our conception of the world as given does not entirely relieve the tension in this account. It is asserted both that our theoretical language shapes our conception of the world and that a justification of this theoretical language does not raise the issue of the correctness of that conception. The original contention was that there are ontological beliefs of a theoretical nature that shape our conception of the world. But if 'shaping our conception of the world' is not taken to mean 'would alter the observation statements we make', then this sort of 'shaping' does not alter our conception of the world. It could be argued that these theoretical beliefs generate only other theoretical beliefs and thereby only affect such beliefs.

To make the realist's case, however, one must be able to demarcate clearly the theoretical and observational beliefs we hold. In particular, it
must place the beliefs that objects in our environment are independent of our perceptual and cognitive faculties on the side of theoretical beliefs. Our belief in the existence of common sense objects does not seem a likely candidate as a theoretical belief since we hold these beliefs on the basis of observation alone. We perceive a world of objects. But, we also perceive a world of objects whose existence is independent of our nature. Our belief that the existence of objects is independent of our cognitive and perceptual grasp is observational in the sense that no judgement is required to arrive at this belief: our constitution operating in concourse with the environment unavoidably produces this belief. Appeals to our grounds for holding a particular belief, such as 'observing' or 'inferring', seem to be an intuitively sure method of discerning observational from theoretical beliefs. It may not be the only manner of drawing this distinction; none the less, it is unlikely that one would be able to draw the observational / theoretical distinction in any way that might lead a realist to hope that the salient features of the common sense view of the world are theoretical in nature.

Hume held that our notion of causality is theoretical. We do not see causes in the world of phenomena; they amount to conjectures on our part; a habitual ordering of experience. In this regard, a concept like causality is wholly different from notions like the independence of objects. Our belief that objects are independent of our perceptual and cognitive operations seems to be forced upon us by our observations alone.
A weaker realism might opt for causality or personal identity as examples of the theoretical concepts we possess which determine, in large measure, our opinions about the world and for which we can prove that our observations support only these theoretical concepts. Yet, the evidence does not support such a weak version of realism. It seems correct to categorize such concepts as theoretical: they are not merely observed qualities of the world as objects seem to be. Theoretical notions such as causality, and personal identity, however, are underdetermined by our experience of the world: our experiences do not necessarily imply or entail these concepts. Therefore, if the realist's justification of our theoretical language is meant to be that these concepts are the only ones that can be supported given our experience of the world then his proof fails since the evidence suggests that those concepts which are clearly theoretical are underdetermined by our experience.

It seems that a sophisticated realism is unworkable as I have outlined it. Concepts that seem to be properly called theoretical either do not characterize the existence of objects in any direct way, or they are not entailed by observations and are not, thereby, justifiably held as realism requires. Our concept of 'existence' is best characterized as the belief that objects have natures that are independent of our perceptual and cognitive understanding of them. This suggests another path of intelligible ontological enquiry: although we ineluctably hold that observable objects are
independent of our conceptions of them, we cannot make the same claim about theoretical entities such as muons or spin particles. Should we say that such particles exist? Can we mean the same thing in saying they exist?

To conclude this section, I will restate my findings. Devitt's brand of realism must be abandoned. Realism should not involve itself with the existence dimension he sees as essential to it since this dimension is entirely superfluous. Further, even where realism is constrained to a characterization of what existence is like for the objects we believe in, it still fails since the justification Devitt proposes begs the question.

A sophisticated realism might attempt to prove that the theoretical language we happen to have adopted is the only account that can be supported given our observational language. Such an ontology would need to demonstrate that our theoretical account of the world of appearances can be justified; that in particular, the concept of 'existence' is given content through an inference from our observations. In such matters we can adduce reasons and provide arguments. The correctness of the sentences of our observational language are not at issue in such ontological arguments for they are not attempts to prove that the world is as we conceive it to be. And such a proof is not possible since our conception of reality is inexorably produced by our constitution operating in concourse with the world. This conception of the world consists in ontological beliefs that provide a
structure of concepts within which the meaningfulness of our language is grounded. Our language and proof practices are thereby only meaningful, and hence only applicable, within the context of this conception. Therefore, we cannot intelligibly discuss any issue that proposes to investigate the ultimate nature of these fundamental ontological beliefs.

Ontological issues can be meaningfully pursued within the outlines of our epistemic perspective once the content and scope of ontology is clarified. We can revise those ontological beliefs which do not serve as a grounding for the meaningfulness of current human language. We can intelligibly address ontological issues such as those mentioned above if we keep in mind that our language has evolved from a prelinguistic set of ontological beliefs that give it a natural ontological grammar. We should not suppose that we can intelligibly question such beliefs without violating this grammar and rendering such questions meaningless.
Footnotes


2 *Ibid.* p.3

3 *Ibid.* p.3


5 *Ibid.* Sec. 23, p. 32.


7 *Op Cit* Sec. 3, p.23.

8 *Ibid.* Sec. 8, p. 25.


18 Ibid. p. 179.

19 Ibid. p. 183.

20 Ibid. p. 183.

21 Ibid. p. 85.


26 David Hume, N.Y.: E.P. Dutton & Co., p. 86.


28 Ibid. p. 13.

29 Ibid. p. 13.


31 Ibid. p.17.

32 Ibid. p. 17.

33 Ibid. p. 18.

34 Ibid. p. 18.

35 Ibid. p. 15.
36 ibid. p. 4.


