24.221: Problem set #1

Please answer each of the following questions. You should aim for 2-3 double-spaced, typed, pages (around 750 words).

1. Speaking about ontological commitment on p32 of *On What There Is*, Quine writes, "We remain so committed at least until we devise some way of so paraphrasing the statement as to show that the seeming reference to [X] on the part of our bound variable was an avoidable manner of speaking." Give an example of your own of what Quine is talking about here. Then, reflect on the following challenge to Quine: if statement Y is a paraphrase of statement X, then they must mean the same, so why should their ontological commitments be different? Spell out this challenge to Quine's view here and assess how troubling you think it is for his overall view.

2. Take the following existence claim:

   (*) There are numbers.

   Suppose X believes (*) and Y does not. Explain how Quine and Carnap would characterize the disagreement between X and Y.

3. Sketch Unger's "problem of the many". Focus on one of its premises and articulate one reason to accept that premise or reject it. (This can be a reason Unger gives or one of your own – also, you don't have to assess whether you think this is a compelling reason for or against the premise)

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