

REFERENTIAL INVOLVEMENTS OF NUMBER WORDS

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*Introduction.** In recent formalistic analyses of the notion of number, philosophers tend to emphasize the falsity of the Frege-Russell doctrine that natural numbers are objects.¹ On this view number words do not have reference except to a set of numerals. Thus it is asserted that "on this view the sequence of number words is just that—a sequence of words or expressions with certain properties. There are not two kinds of things, numbers and number words, but just one, the words themselves."² It is also suggested that "what guarantees the existence of the number is the *existence* of an ordered set in which some object is the n^{th} . For any numeral, the numerals up to that one will be such a set. Then no ulterior fact beyond the generation of the numerals is needed to guarantee that they have reference."³ Now while these conclusions admittedly could be meaningful and possibly true, some of the arguments which lead to these conclusions appear to be dubious.⁴

In this paper I wish to examine two of these arguments and show that they do not warrant the conclusions indicated above. Because of this, some alternative interpretation of numbers which perhaps could be classified as conceptualistic as well as constructivist will be suggested. However, I will not attempt here to adduce evidence for the presence of a referential semantics of number words in language. Nor will I attempt to give reasons for the construction of such a referential semantics in various discourses. In fact, it will be simply maintained that for an account of the meaning of number words, the question of their having reference can be answered in the affirmative, without implying that numbers are some special sort of things in the world.

*I acknowledge stimulating discussions on the topic of this paper with Professors Carl Hempel, Paul Benacerraf, and Charles Parsons. The original version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association at Berkeley, California, December 27-29, 1967.