Potential Things

Source: http://sci.tech−archive.net/Archive/sci.logic/2006−06/msg00667.html

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- *Date*: 25 Jun 2006 15:07:27 −0700

Torkel Franzen wrote:

> Logic students do not very often
> confuse (Ex)(P(x)&Q(x)) and (x)(P(x)−>Q(x)).
> But they very often
> indeed confuse
> (Ex)(P(x)−>Q(x)) and (Ex)(P(x)&Q(x))
> and
> (x)(P(x)&Q(x)) and (x)(P(x)−>Q(x))
>
> In the first case, indeed, a simple explanation for why the
> corresponding confusion isn't encountered outside formal logic is that
> there is no ordinary form of expression corresponding to
> (Ex)(P(x)−>Q(x)).

Torkel's explanation doesn't hold up. People are perfectly capable of imagining, encountering, calculating, and reasoning about existents of which Ex(Px −> Qx) is non−vacuously true, and it's ludicrous to think for no reason that they would be unable to come up with words to talk about them.

For example: Six men decide to form a pool. They each ante up $10; they each draw a ticket numbered 1 through 6 from a hat; and they decide who gets the pot by rolling a die.

Until the die is cast, it is true of each ticket that, if its number corresponds to the number of pips on the die (P), it is the winning ticket (Q); IOW, Ex(Px −> Qx) is true of it; and Ex(Px −> Qx) is still true of all the losing tickets even after the die is cast. But not vacuously true; it is not true anything else in the room that could satisfy Ex(Px), such as any blank paper lying around.

One word used to designate such a state of affairs is 'potential': Each ticket is a potential winner, while the pieces of blank paper are not potential winners.

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