

Name _____

Date _____

Class Sec. _____

Homework – Quine’s Pegasus

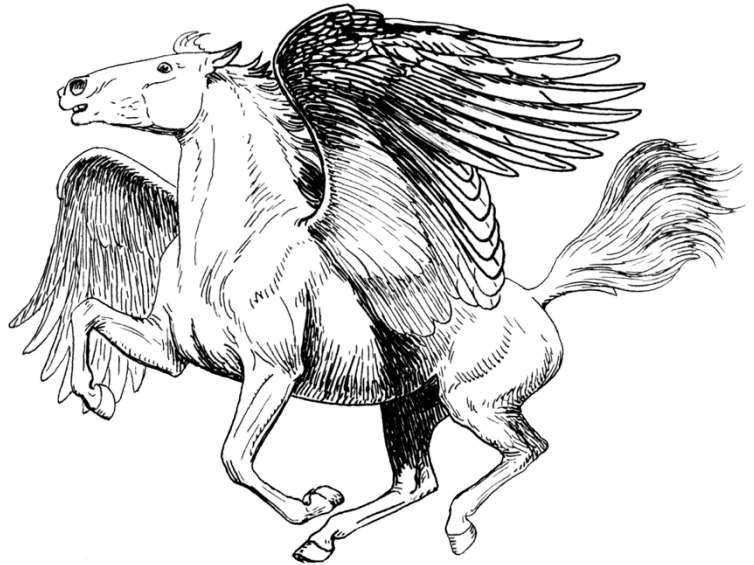
Instructions: Read the thought experiment attached to this assignment. Then, please answer the questions in complete sentences. Make sure to **explain** your answer for full credit.

1. Explain the problem some philosophers face when they say, “Pegasus does not exist”?
2. Explain to me the differences between Quine’s Nominalism and the other ones we’ve learned about in class.
3. If a word has no real-world physical reference, does that mean it has no meaning? How does Quine’s view on language help answer this question?
4. If scientists discovered a real winged horse tomorrow, how would that change how we talk about Pegasus? Would we still consider Pegasus a fictional character?

READING ON THE NEXT PAGE

Quine and the Case of Pegasus: Why We Shouldn't Worry About Mythical Horses

In philosophy, one tricky problem is how to talk about things that don't exist. Imagine someone saying, "*Pegasus does not exist.*" Pegasus is the famous winged horse from Greek mythology. But if he doesn't exist, then how can we even talk about him? This is a question that puzzled many philosophers before W.V.O. Quine, an important 20th-century thinker, gave his own answer.



Others, such as 19th century Austrian philosopher **Alexius Meinong**, believed that even things that don't exist must have some kind of reality to them. He thought that when we say, "*Pegasus does not exist,*" we are still somehow referring to a thing called Pegasus, meaning Pegasus does "exist in some way".

Quine disagreed. He argued that we don't need to believe in nonexistent things just to talk about them. Instead, we should change the way we phrase our sentences. For example, instead of saying "*Pegasus does not exist,*" which seems to treat Pegasus like a real thing, we can say "*There is no such thing as Pegasus.*" This way, we avoid the problem of making it sound like Pegasus is somehow real.



This idea is part of Quine's **nominalism**, a belief that we should only accept things that actually exist in the real world. More specifically, Quine believed in **Predicate Nominalism**, the idea that instead of universals existing as abstract entities, they are merely linguistic inventions (byproducts of how we use language). In this view, statements about kinds, properties, or categories do not refer to real abstract entities but are just ways we use language to describe the world. For Quine, saying that "*Pegasus is a horse*" does not mean there is some universal category of "*horseness*" that Pegasus belongs to; it simply means we use the word "*horse*" in a way that applies to Pegasus as a fictional character.

His approach is important because it helps us be more careful about the way we use language. Instead of imagining that words must always refer to real objects, Quine suggests that some words are just useful tools in language without needing to point to actual things. This means that talking about unicorns, dragons, or fictional characters doesn't mean they exist—it just means we are using words in a way that people understand.