

Who Would Have Thought that Nothing Could Be So Much Fun
An Analysis and Critique of Three Accounts of Singular Negative Existentials

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TO GRANDMA STREIFFER AND MY MOM, IN LOVING MEMORY

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CONTENTS

- ONE — INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF SINGULAR NEGATIVE EXISTENTIALS
Communicative Do's and Dont's 1
An Unexpected Failure 5
Three Alternative Semantics 6
- TWO — BERTRAND RUSSELL: PROPOSITIONAL FUNCTIONS AND QUANTIFIERS
Introduction 9
Russell's Proposal 9
Evidence from Ordinary Language 12
Names Are Not Disguised Definite Descriptions 13
Existence Is a First-Order Property 15
Kripke on Uninstantiated Properties 25
Conclusion 28
- THREE — SAUL KRIPKE: PROPOSITIONS ABOUT PROPOSITIONS
Introduction 29
Kripke's Proposal 29
Using, as Opposed to Mentioning, Names 32
How Singular Negative Existentials Get Their Use 34
Unsolved Problems 37
Conclusion 39
- FOUR — GARETH EVANS: GAMES OF MAKE-BELIEVE
Introduction 41
The General Idea behind Games of Make-Believe 41
The Three Kinds of Games 44
'Really' and Singular Negative Existentials 48
Evidence for Evans' Proposal 50
Problems with a Make-Believe Ontology 52
Conclusion 57
- FIVE — CONCLUSION 59
BIBLIOGRAPHY 63

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I pose the following question: What is it that we communicate when we utter a singular negative existential? I examine the accounts of singular negative existentials given by Russell, Kripke, and Evans. I primarily use three criteria to judge the adequacy of the answer: (1) Is the account reflected in ordinary language; (2) Can the account plausibly differentiate between the truth conditions of different singular negative existentials; and (3) Does the account itself avoid a recurrence of the question? I find that none of the accounts are fully satisfactory.

ONE — INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM OF SINGULAR NEGATIVE EXISTENTIALS

COMMUNICATIVE DO'S AND DONT'S

Given a sentence and the context of its utterance, a competent speaker can determine the proposition expressed by that sentence in much the same way that a cook uses a recipe to produce a dish. In most cases, determining the proposition expressed is as easy as boiling a pot of water. For example, finding the proposition expressed by an utterance of ‘Tibbles is on the mat’ requires the completion of just three simple steps:

- (1) Determine which object is referred to by ‘Tibbles’.
- (2) Determine which property is expressed by ‘is on the mat’.
- (3) Ascribe the property to the object.

Indeed, it seems obvious that to figure out what proposition is expressed by any similar sentence ‘*Fa*’ one just finds the object to which ‘*a*’ refers, finds the property which ‘*F*’ expresses, and ascribes the property to the object; so obvious that it is reasonable to suppose this is a semantic principle all speakers of English must implicitly grasp. I shall call this principle P.

If a speaker wishes to communicate some proposition, then, she must encode the proposition in a way amenable to the process of decoding just outlined. And if a listener wishes to understand some sentence, then she must be able to decode the sentence according to the process outlined. If either fails in her task, then communication between the speaker and listener is blocked.

Let's examine the ways in which this failure can occur, beginning with the ways in which the listener can fail to grasp the proposition expressed. There are three sorts of circumstances in which failure can occur, and each one can be traced to a failure in performing the operations specified by P.

First, consider a case in which the speaker uttered 'Ralph is hungry' but the listener did not know to whom the speaker is referring. If asked what the speaker had said, the listener might respond 'Oh, the speaker said that someone named 'Ralph' is hungry, but I don't understand who she means'. Someone who does know who Ralph is understands something which the listener in our example does not understand. So long as the listener has failed to identify the referent of 'Ralph', she really does not know what exactly has been said. She has failed to complete step (1).

Second, consider a case in which the speaker uttered 'Water condenses' when the listener did not know what 'condenses' means. Again, the listener could know that the speaker had said something about water, but not exactly what. In this case, the listener has failed to complete step (2).

Finally, consider a case in which the speaker has said 'The English language is an institution'. If the listener was unable to see how to ascribe the property to something like a language, she could respond 'I don't know what you mean. How could a language be an institution? That doesn't make any sense'. In this case, step (3) has not been completed. When the listener finally saw how language could be an institution, she could say 'Ah! Now I see what you mean.'

In these three cases, the listener could, if more knowledgeable or imaginative, come to understand the proposition which the speaker is attempting to communicate. But there are some cases where, no matter how knowledgeable or imaginative the listener, the speaker can still guarantee that communication will be blocked. First, consider a case in which the speaker said 'Vulcan is close to the sun'. Since the speaker's utterance of 'Vulcan' did not

refer to anything, it is impossible for the listener to determine what the referent of ‘Vulcan’ is. No matter how knowledgeable the listener, she will still not be able to determine what ‘Vulcan’ refers to since it has no referent. Second, suppose the speaker said ‘Burning wood emits phlogiston’. Since there is no such substance as phlogiston, it seems true that there is no such property as emitting phlogiston. Hence, there would seem to be no property expressed by the predicate ‘emits phlogiston’, and no way for the listener to know what ‘emits phlogiston’ means. Finally, suppose that the speaker uttered ‘The number 2 has a refraction index of 1.9’. Since the property expressed by ‘has a refraction index of 1.9’ cannot be ascribed to the number 2, the listener certainly cannot ascribe the property to the object.

In the first set of cases, I pointed out that it was the listener who prevented communication from taking place. The speaker had fulfilled her role by uttering a sentence which encoded a proposition according to the directions specified by P. In the second set of cases, however, it is clear that the problem is due to the speaker, not the listener. No listener, no matter how knowledgeable or creative, could know to what object ‘Vulcan’ refers, or what property ‘emits phlogiston’ expresses, or how to ascribe the property of having a refraction index of 1.9 to the number 2. The problem, then, must be that the speaker has failed to encode a proposition in these sentences. In the first two cases, where the name does not refer and the predicate does not express a property, this failure is a contingent one. If things had been different, all would have gone well. If Vulcan had existed, or if burning wood really did emit phlogiston, then communication could have been successful. Sentences like these, then, could have encoded a proposition, and it just so happens that they didn’t. But the last case is different. It is simply impossible that the number 2 has the property of having a refraction index of 1.9. It isn’t even possible that a sentence like this could have encoded a proposition.

On the basis of these observations, the recipe analogy seems very useful. The author of the recipe has a dish and she wants to communicate to the cook how to make it. Suppose the recipe calls for steaming two stalks of broccoli. If the cook uses asparagus instead of broccoli, or doesn't know how to use a steamer, or can't fit the stalks of broccoli into the steamer, then the cook will not be able to complete the dish. In these three cases, all the resources needed to make the dish are available to the cook, the cook just does not know how to use them. Now consider that if the author of the recipe tells the cook to use an ingredient that the cook does not have, or to use a utensil which the cook doesn't have, or to sauté a cup of water, then the cook will not be able to complete the dish. In the first two of this last set of three cases, the problem is a contingent one, namely that the cook's kitchen lacks ingredients or utensils. But notice that in the last case, just like the refraction index example, no matter how knowledgeable the cook or how well stocked the kitchen, the dish cannot be made. You just can't sauté water. It doesn't even make sense to ask someone to do such a thing.

Let me summarize what I have tried to show so far. I have tried to show that P yields intuitive results on a variety of cases:

Successful communication (Proposition encoded and decoded)

(1) 'Tibbles is on the mat': successful completion of each step.

Failure due to listener (Proposition encoded but not decoded)

(2) 'Ralph is hungry': unknown referent.

(3) 'Water condenses': unknown property.

(4) 'The English language is an institution': inability to ascribe the property to the referent.

Failure due to speaker (No proposition encoded)

(5) 'Vulcan is close to the sun': vacuous name (contingent).

(6) 'Burning wood emits phlogiston': unexpressed property (contingent).

(7) 'The number 2 has a refraction index of 1.9': property is not ascribable to the referent (necessary).

In each of these cases, P explains why communication was successful if it was, why it was unsuccessful if it wasn't, and if it was unsuccessful, whether the failure was contingent

or necessary. These examples, then, provide strong support for believing that P is indeed the method we follow for determining the proposition expressed by a sentence.

AN UNEXPECTED FAILURE

Unfortunately, a problem arises with this entire picture when we introduce singular negative existentials. These are sentences which we use to deny that a particular object exists. To illustrate, suppose V is a particular utterance of ‘Vulcan does not exist’.

According to P, to find out the proposition expressed by V we need to:

- (1) Determine which object is referred to by ‘Vulcan’.
- (2) Determine which property is expressed by ‘does not exist’.
- (3) Ascribe the property to the object.

But, just by looking at this recipe, we can see that step (3) can not be completed. In the very act of applying the property expressed by the predicate, the object itself is taken away and we are left with nothing to which we can ascribe the predicate. To ascribe the property of being non-existent to a thing is just to ascribe to it the property of not being available as a subject for predication. On the one hand, there must be an object to which we ascribe the property, but on the other hand the ascription of the property of not-being implies that there is no such object. The speaker has put the listener in an awkward position by giving her directions which cannot be consistently followed. Hence, step (3) cannot be completed. According to the picture I have sketched, it is impossible for singular negative existentials to express a proposition, and hence, any attempt made at communication using singular negative existentials must fail.

But we saw in the previous examples that if directions for determining the proposition were problematic, and this is a case where they are impossible to follow, communication would be blocked. If the listener could not understand how to ascribe the property to the object, then the listener would fail to understand what the speaker was trying to convey. And if the speaker was trying incorrectly to ascribe a property to an object, then she would

fail to convey anything understandable. But is it true to say that uttering ‘Vulcan does not exist’ fails to communicate anything? Haven’t astronomers used it to communicate in journals, papers, and lectures? Don’t we know that Vulcan does not exist? And don’t we know it because it was communicated to us?

It cannot be denied that there are a lot of singular negative existentials, just like V, which we use to successfully communicate with other people. Sometimes we communicate truths, as when a parent tells a child ‘Big Foot does not exist’. Sometimes we communicate falsehoods, as when a philosopher is told ‘Truth does not exist’. Since P implies that these are necessarily unsuccessful attempts at communication, P must be rejected.

THREE ALTERNATIVE SEMANTICS

If P does not provide the semantics by which speakers encode and listeners decode propositions, what does? Philosophers of language have given numerous and varied accounts of the semantics for singular negative existentials. I shall examine three of these accounts. The first is given by Bertrand Russell. According to Russell’s theory of quantifiers and definite descriptions, existence is a property which is applied to a uniquely identifying set of general properties. It falls neatly out of his theory that a singular negative existential, although it has the grammatical form of a singular subject-predicate statement, is analyzed unproblematically as saying of a uniquely identifying set of properties that it is not true of anything.

The other two accounts, one given by Saul Kripke, the other by Gareth Evans, differ from Russell in three noteworthy ways. First, they are aimed at being congenial to theories of direct reference. The basic tenet of a direct reference theory of proper names is that a proper name does nothing other than refer to an individual. In particular, proper names do not describe their referents in any way, as Russell thought they did. Second, they treat existence as a first-order predicate which is applied to individuals. Finally, they offer a

bifurcated analysis of singular negative existentials depending upon whether they are true or not. Russell did not accept this admittedly counter-intuitive position and Kripke himself says that it “seems in and of itself absolutely intolerable: the analysis of a statement should not depend on its truth value” (Kripke 1973, VI.18). Evans, however, provides an argument which shows that not only is this position tolerable, it is desirable.

Kripke’s account is guided by the fact that he is persuaded by Russell that “every constituent [of a proposition] has got to be there as one of the things in the world” (Russell 1985, 109). and yet he is also persuaded that existence is a first-order property of individuals. Hence, he accepts that true singular negative existentials like \forall cannot express a proposition which has a nonexistent object as a constituent. Kripke’s idea is to analyze negative existentials as just stating the fact that there are no such propositions. Negative existentials talk about the nonexistence of certain propositions.

Gareth Evans provides a very sophisticated account of singular negative existentials based on his theory of games of make-believe. Evans attempts to give the truth conditions of singular negative existentials in terms of the information received in the context of such games. In Evans’ account, make-belief reference turns into real reference just when the information one is utilizing within the game turns out to be veridical. A singular negative existential is true just in case the information that one was acting on within the game does not turn out to be veridical.

Let us now turn to these accounts.

TWO — BERTRAND RUSSELL

PROPOSITIONAL FUNCTIONS
AND
QUANTIFIERS

INTRODUCTION

Theories which attempt to analyze singular negative existentials in terms of uniquely identifying concepts or uniquely identifying sets of properties have been given by such thinkers as Kant, Frege, and Russell. I will examine Russell's theory, which has perhaps been the most persuasive.

RUSSELL'S PROPOSAL

The two key tenets of Russell's proposal are that names are reducible to purely general descriptions and that existence is a second-order property. I left it open as to how the listener was supposed to determine the referent of the name. Russell, by asserting that for a name there is a set of general properties which uniquely identify the referent, provided a mechanism for this determination. Russell further held that this set of properties was the meaning of the name. The meaning of a name, then, is the set of general properties which are associated with the name.

The reduction of names proceeds in two steps. A name is reduced to a definite description which is then analyzed in terms of a purely general set of properties. Russell says

Suppose you try to make out what you do mean by that proposition [that Romulus did not exist]. You can take, say, all the things that Livy has to say about Romulus, all the properties he ascribed to him, including the only one probably that most of us remember, namely, the fact that he was called 'Romulus'. You can put all this together, and make a propositional function saying 'x has such-and-such properties', the properties being those you find enumerated in Livy. (Russell 1985, 110)

A propositional function is "any expression containing an undetermined constituent, or several undetermined constituents, and becoming a proposition as soon as the undetermined constituents are determined" (Russell 1985, 96). In modern logic, a propositional function is what is expressed by a sentence with free variables, such as 'x is a person'. The term 'x' is a variable or an "undetermined constituent" in that it does not refer to any particular individual but is instead used to range over individuals. When an object, an actual instance of the variable, is substituted for the variable, the result is a proposition. A propositional function is a function which maps individuals onto propositions via the individuals satisfying a set of general properties.

Russell links propositional functions and names through a particular kind of set of general properties. The name 'Romulus' is really a truncated definite description, something like 'The founder of Rome'. 'The founder of Rome' introduces two propositional functions, something like 'x is a founder of Rome' and 'for all y, if y is a founder of Rome, then $y = x$ '. If no one had founded Rome then the *founder of Rome* would not exist and if two people had founded Rome, *the* founder of Rome would not exist. Thus, the definite description introduced by the name has been eliminated in favor of a purely general description not referring to any particular person: a founder of Rome.

At the linguistic level, the case of ordinary names reduces to the case of definite descriptions, and the case of definite descriptions reduces to the case of general descriptions. At the propositional level, the meaning of a name reduces to a certain kind of propositional function as would be expressed by a general description.

Russell's theory of propositional functions goes hand in hand with his theory of quantifiers. Quantifiers are used to attribute properties to propositional functions. Russell says that "the only thing you can really do with a propositional function is to assert either that it is always true, or that it is sometimes true, or that it is never true" (Russell 1985, 96). The quantifier 'All' is used to attribute the property of mapping all objects in the domain onto true propositions. The quantifier 'some' is used to attribute the property of mapping some object in the domain onto a true proposition. The quantifier 'none' is used to attribute the property of not mapping any object onto a true proposition. In Russell's terminology, 'all' is used to attribute the property of being *necessary*, or true in all instances, to a propositional function. 'Some' is used to attribute the property of being true *sometimes*, or true in at least one instance, to a propositional function. 'None' is used to attribute the property of being *impossible*, or true in no instances, to a propositional function.

For example, the general proposition 'All people are mortal' means that the propositional function expressed by 'if x is a person then x is mortal' maps all the objects in the domain onto some true proposition. No matter what individual is substituted for ' x ', the result is a true proposition. The general proposition 'Some people exist' is analyzed as there is some object which the propositional function expressed by ' x is a person' maps onto a true proposition. There is some individual which, when substituted for ' x ', results in a true proposition. Finally, the general proposition 'No unicorns exist' means that the propositional function expressed by ' x is a unicorn' does not map any objects onto a true proposition. No matter what individual is substituted for ' x ' the result is not a true proposition.

With Russell's theory outlined, let us return to the case of V: 'Vulcan does not exist'. In order to determine the proposition expressed by V, the listener must first find the set of uniquely identifying general properties associated with the name 'Vulcan'. In the case of 'Vulcan' the set will probably be something simple like 'a planet between Mercury and the

Sun'. Let's call the property of being a planet between Mercury and the Sun 'G'. V means the same thing as 'No Gs exist'. This is analyzed as the propositional function expressed by 'x is G' is impossible. There are no objects which the propositional function maps onto a true proposition.

Russell's idea is that, even in cases where Vulcan does not exist, we can still find the properties which we associated with the name 'Vulcan'. And once those properties have been identified, it only takes a little effort to ascribe to them the second-order property of not being true of any objects. In this way, Russell seeks to avoid the problem of singular negative existentials.

EVIDENCE FROM ORDINARY LANGUAGE

A number of questions need to be asked at this point. First, since it must be granted that Russell's account deviates drastically from ordinary usage, the question of why this is so requires an answer. Grammatically speaking, proper names have a different form than definite descriptions and purely general sentences. Further, existence functions as a grammatical first-order predicate. That is, it takes an individual as its grammatical subject. Russell needs to explain why, then, his account differs. I believe that an answer is not hard to find.

We saw that Russell's account provides a mechanism for determining a referent via the description associated with the name. That people usually have a description in mind when they use a name to refer to something can be illustrated by asking "To whom do you refer?" after they have used the name. The answer elicited will usually be a list of properties. This is evidence that names usually do have an associated description. The abbreviation of this description as a name is plausible enough as well. Instead of saying something long-winded like "The pupil of Plato who taught Alexander the Great and was head of the Academy", I can just say 'Aristotle'. Given, then, that a name is a disguised definite description, Russell

can maintain that the predicate ‘exists’ really takes a set of properties as its grammatical object, not an individual at all.

NAMES ARE NOT DISGUISED DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS

The next, and more philosophically interesting question, is whether a name really is reducible to a purely general description? In other words, and as it is more commonly expressed in the literature, is the meaning of a name really given by a definite description? Saul Kripke has persuasively argued that the answer is no.

If the meaning of a name were given by a set of properties as expressed by some definite description, then in any proposition in which the name occurred substituting the definite description for the name would not result in a change of modality, truth, or epistemological status. However, consider the propositions that

- (A) Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander
- (B) Aristotle was Aristotle.

(A) is a contingent truth whereas (B) is a necessary truth. Further, (A) can only be known *a posteriori* whereas (B) can be known *a priori*. Finally, (A) is a synthetic statement whereas (B) is analytic. Therefore ‘the teacher of Alexander’ cannot give the meaning of ‘Aristotle’. These differences cannot be accounted for using Russell’s theory of descriptions (Kripke 1980, 10-12).

David Pears has suggested that a form of essentialism will preserve modality in these sorts of examples (Russell 1985, 15). Suppose that Aristotle was the product of the fertilization of egg *n* by sperm *m*. Suppose further that from which egg and sperm a person came is essential to that person’s identity. There is no possible world in which Aristotle existed where he was not the product of the fertilization of egg *n* by sperm *m*. So, necessarily Aristotle was the product of the fertilization of egg *n* by sperm *m*. This definite description preserves modality when it is substituted for the name ‘Aristotle’.

Unfortunately, it does not preserve the epistemological status of the proposition. Whereas that Aristotle was Aristotle is an analytic proposition which can be known *a priori*, that Aristotle was the product of the fertilization of egg *n* by sperm *m* is a synthetic proposition which can only be known *a posteriori*.

Perhaps another sort of description will work. Quine has suggested that ‘the socratizer’, or ‘the thing that is-Socrates’, will do (Quine 1953, 8). As Kripke has pointed out, however, all of the same problems will arise in the reformed language (Kripke 1980, 29). The question ‘How is the reference of “Socrates” determined?’ will be replaced by the equally problematic question of ‘How is the extension of “is-Socrates” determined?’ Is the extension of ‘is-Socrates’ to be determined by taking the class of things that are identical to Socrates? If so, then we have reintroduced the name of Socrates, and must once again be able to determine its referent? Or, is the extension of ‘is-Socrates’ going to be determined by taking the class of things that have certain properties? If so, which properties? We have already seen the problems that Russell had with finding such a set. It seems, then, that this Quinean response only postpones the problem, but doesn’t eliminate it.

EXISTENCE IS A FIRST-ORDER PROPERTY

Finally, is the occurrence of ‘exists’ in singular negative existentials really expressing the property of not mapping any objects onto a true proposition? In other words, and again as it is more commonly put, is existence really a second-order property? G. E. Moore has persuasively argued that the answer is no. I will first disarm Russell’s arguments which purport to show that to treat existence as a property of individuals is mistaken, fallacious, and leads to insurmountable difficulties. Then I will offer an argument originally given by G. E. Moore which shows there is a property of existence which is a property of individuals. Finally, I will give an explanation of the seeming paradox generated by treating existence as a property of individuals in terms of David Kaplan’s distinctions between (1)

the character and content of a sentence, and (2) a context of utterance and a circumstance of evaluation.

The first argument that I will examine is an attempt by Russell to expand his analysis of plural existential statements to encompass singular existential statements. He says

If you say that ‘Men exist, and Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates exists’, that is exactly the same sort of fallacy as it would be if you said ‘Men are numerous, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is numerous’, because existence is a predicate of a propositional function, or derivatively of a class. (Russell 1985, 99)

Why is it fallacious? Russell’s basic idea is that the fundamental meaning of ‘existence’ is given by the existential quantifier ‘some’ which says of a propositional function that there is at least one value of x for which that propositional function is true.

The argument can be formalized in the following way:

- (1) Existence is the property of being a propositional function which maps at least one object onto a true proposition.
- (2) It is nonsensical to say of an individual that it has the property of being a propositional function which maps at least one object onto a true proposition.
- (3) Therefore, it is nonsensical to say of an individual that it has the property of existence.

It is clear that, using Russell’s analysis of general statements, existence is not a first-order predicate which applies to individuals, but is rather a second-order predicate which applies to propositional functions. Individuals are not propositional functions, nor are individuals the sorts of things which can be said to “map objects onto propositions.”

The main problem with this line of reasoning is that no support has yet been given for the claim that “the fundamental meaning of existence” is given by the existential quantifier. If we grant that the existential quantifier does capture the meaning of ‘existence’ then it does follow that existence is not a property of individuals. But it has yet to be established that there is not another property, one equally suitable to the title ‘existence’ which does apply to individuals. Perhaps the word ‘existence’ is used for two different properties, one a second-order property which can be applied to propositional functions and one a first-order

property which can be applied to individuals. The fact that there is a property called ‘existence’ which is a second-order property does not imply that there is *no* property called ‘existence’ which is a first-order property. Thus, this argument is unpersuasive without further arguments which show that there is *no* first-order property of existence. The possibility that there are two senses of ‘existence’ is raised in the discussion session at the end of Russell’s Lecture V. The questioner asks:

Is there any word you would substitute for ‘existence’ which would give existence to individuals? Are you applying the word ‘existence’ to two ideas, or do you deny that there are two ideas? (Russell 1985, 108)

Russell steadfastly denies that there is any sense which can be given to the notion that existence is a property of individuals (Russell 1985, 108).

The second argument which I will examine is a modified version of the paradox of singular negative existentials. Russell examines general existential statements and argues that they cannot be predicating a property of individuals.

It is perfectly clear that when you say ‘Unicorns exist’, you are not saying anything that would apply to any individual unicorns there might happen to be, because as a matter of fact there are not any, and therefore if what you had to say had any application to the actual individual, it could not possibly be significant unless it were true. You can consider the proposition ‘Unicorns exist’ and can see that it is false. It is not nonsense. (Russell 1985, 99)

Here, Russell is saying that when you assert a general existential statement, such as ‘Unicorns exist’ or ‘Greeks exist’, you are not applying a predicate to individuals such as unicorns or Greeks. The argument could be formalized as follows:

- (1) If the statement ‘Unicorns exist’ predicated a property of individuals, then it could not be significant unless it were true.
- (2) The statement ‘Unicorns exist’ is false and significant.
- (3) Therefore, the statement ‘Unicorns exist’ does not predicate a property of individuals.

The idea behind (1) is that the statement ‘Unicorns exist’ might be viewed as, say, a disjunction of many singular existential statements, each saying of some particular unicorn

that it exists. But, there are no unicorns to which the singular statements can refer. Hence, we must treat 'Unicorns exist' as not being about any particular unicorns.

(3) says that the statement 'Unicorns exist' does not predicate *any* property of individuals. In particular, therefore, the statement 'Unicorns exist' does not predicate existence of individuals.

Unfortunately, this argument is too strong for the conclusion in which I am currently interested. Consider the following argument:

- (1') If the statement 'Unicorns are five-legged' predicated a property of an individual, then it could not be significant unless it were true.
- (2') The statement 'Unicorns are five-legged' is false (we will suppose) and significant.
- (3') Therefore, the statement 'Unicorns are five-legged' does not predicate a property of individuals; in particular, it does not predicate the property of 'being five-legged'.

That Russell uses 'existence' in his examples is only incidental to his conclusion that sentences where the subject does not exist are not about the ostensible subject. The problem that interferes with applying a property to an object is not the nature of the property, rather it is that objects which do not exist cannot be constituents of propositions. Hence, if we use this argument to conclude that existence is not a property of individuals, neither are any ordinary, uncontroversial properties. But this is unacceptable.

The next two arguments that I will examine come from Russell's response to the discussion question at the end of Lecture V. Russell says

There is no sort of point in a predicate which could not conceivably be false. I mean, it is perfectly clear that, if there were such a thing as this existence of individuals that we talk of, it would be absolutely impossible for it not to apply, and that is the characteristic of a mistake. (Russell 1985, 108)

When Russell says that there is no point in a predicate which could not conceivably be false, he seems to be making the pragmatic point that a predicate which does not demarcate one class of objects from another does not serve any useful purpose. Since the domain consisting of all and only nonexistent objects contains nothing and the domain consisting of

all and only existing objects contains everything, one does not exclude anything, or rather one excludes nothing, by saying ‘Consider only and all those objects which exist. .One may as well say ‘Consider the class of objects’, for the two classes are identical.

Is a predicate which does not demarcate one class of objects from another useless? There seem to be many counterexamples to thinking that it is. First, consider the property of being self-identical. Everything is identical to itself and there are no objects which are not identical to themselves. Yet, this predicate used in conjunction with Leibniz’s law can function as a valuable resource in first-order logic.

Second, consider that discussions of realism often revolve around questions of bivalence: everything either has a property or it does not have that property: the realist holds that necessarily, P or not P. One very plausible way to characterize the realist position is to say that the realist maintains that every object in the disputed realm has the property of being-either-P-or-not-P. By denying that P-or-not-P is a property, Russell would be crippling the realism dialogue unfairly.

Russell then claims that if existence were a property of individuals, it would be impossible for it not to apply. Strictly speaking, this is incorrect. Take any ordinary individual (excluding problematic entities like God and the least prime number). It is possible that it does not exist. There is a possible world in which that object does not exist. The actual object, of course, has the property of existence, but there are worlds in which the actual object does not have that property. Therefore, there are objects in the actual world to which it is possible for existence not to apply.

I take it that the truth the Russell is attempting to elucidate here is that there *are* no individuals which lack the property of existence when it is construed as a property of individuals. Or, perhaps that, necessarily, there *are* no individuals which lack the property of existence when it is construed as a property of individuals. Consider what sort of a counterexample a disproof of the first, weaker, thesis would require. One would need to

show that there *is* some individual which lacks the property of existence. Since the italicized 'is' is the 'is' of existence, this cannot be done. Consider now that, necessarily, there are no individuals which lack the property of existence when it is construed as a property of individuals. To disprove this, one would need to find a possible world in which there *was* an object in that world which lacked the property of existence in that world. Again, this cannot be done.

Along these same lines, R. M. Sainsbury argues that Russell confuses "strong necessity" with "weak necessity" (Sainsbury 1979, 80). If P is a strong necessity, then P is true in every possible world. If P is a weak necessity, then P is true in every possible world in which the bearers of any names in 'P' exist. So, that $2 + 2 = 4$ is a strong necessity, but that 'Robert is human' (granting that this is one of my essential properties) is only weakly necessary, for that is only true in worlds where I exist. And of course, that every object exists is a weak necessity. There is no world in which an object exists where it is false that that object exists. But it is not a strong necessity that every object exists.

Suppose Russell conceded this objection in response to his claim that it would be impossible for existence to fail to apply to an individual if existence were a property of individuals. He could then utilize the distinction between weak and strong necessity as a rebuttal to the other objection. Properties which are weakly necessary are pointless, useless, and mistaken. Self-identity is not a weakly necessary property. The weakly necessary property of existence differs, then, both from purely contingent properties like redness and from strongly necessary properties like self-identity. Existence lacks the *actual content* that redness has and it lacks the *modal reliability* that self-identity has. Consider that 'The bachelor is an unmarried male' does not tell us anything new about the bachelor (after all, we did refer to him as 'The bachelor') nor does it guarantee that the bachelor is an unmarried male, for there are possible worlds in which the bachelor is married even though there is no

possible world in which the bachelor is a bachelor and is married. Existence is the same way except that it applies to a broader category of objects: everything.

I think that this response is unsuccessful, however. One plausible stance in the realism debate is that bivalence is a weakly necessary property. To use Strawson's example (Strawson 1985, 226) it is incorrect to say either that the present king of France is bald or that the present king of France is not bald, since there is no present king of France. So, necessarily, if an object *a* exists, then either *a* has the property or *a* does not have the property. By denying that this stance can be plausibly maintained, Russell would be disallowing from the start what seems to be a plausible position in the realism debate. Admittedly, Russell holds that bivalence is a strongly necessary property. Nevertheless, it is unfair for Russell to disallow someone who believes that bivalence is a weakly necessary property to articulate their position.

We have examined Russell's arguments for the thesis that existence is not a property of individuals and found them inconclusive. Let us now look at a positive argument given by G. E. Moore. In his paper "Is Existence a Predicate?" he gives an argument that when something can be pointed at, when one uses demonstratives, or in Russell's terminology, when one uses a logically proper name, existence is *required* to be a property of individuals. I quote the argument at length:

My reason for thinking [that to point at something and say 'This exists' is significant] is that it seems to me that you can clearly say *with truth* of any such object "This *might* not have existed," "It is *logically possible* that this should not have existed;" and I do not see how it is possible that "This might not have existed" should be true, unless "This does in fact exist" is true, and therefore also significant. The statement "it is logically possible that this should not have existed" seems to *mean* "The sentence 'This does not exist' is significant;" and if "This does not exist" is significant, "This does exist" must be significant too. (Moore 1936, 82-83)

It is always true and significant to say 'It is logically possible that this should not have existed'. But this could not be significant unless 'This exists' is significant. To say that it is logically possible that this should not have existed is just to say that it is logically possible

that it was not the case that this exists. This complex phrase could not be significant unless its component ‘this exists’ is as well. The truth of ‘This might not have existed’ entails that this in fact exists. ‘This exists’ is a clear-cut example of a singular predicative statement. Hence, exists does act like a first-order predicate.

Russell could respond to this particular argument by treating the demonstrative ‘this’ as he does names. He could maintain that the meaning of a demonstrative is given by a definite description, which is then reducible to a general existential statement where “the fundamental meaning of existence is given by the existential quantifier” (Russell 1985, 98). As I stated before in my discussion of this tactic, it is not persuasive apart from further evidence that the fundamental, i.e., the correct, meaning of existence is given by the existential quantifier. Further, we have seen that his theory of definite descriptions yields incorrect results for names, and it does not work any better for demonstratives.

I have argued against Russell’s reasons for thinking that a sense of the word ‘existence’ which would apply to individuals is mistaken, useless, and incoherent. Further, we have a persuasive argument from Moore that in some cases existence is a property of individuals. Nevertheless, as Moore himself notes, there is still something paradoxical about existence (Moore 1936, 84). On the one hand, it is admitted that it is always true and significant to say ‘It is logically possible that this should not have existed’. And yet it seems that ‘This does not exist’ is a contradiction. If I successfully demonstrate to something, then that something must exist. If I can demonstrate to something, then I can literally point at it. I could not do this if the object did not exist. So, whenever someone demonstrates to something and asserts of it that it does not exist, it amounts to a contradiction. But a contradiction is necessarily false. What is going on here?

Thomas Baldwin (Baldwin 1990, 182) proposes that an explanation of the apparent necessity of ‘This exists’ can be given in terms of David Kaplan’s distinction between character and content (Kaplan 1977, 25).

The content of a sentence uttered in a context is just the proposition expressed by that sentence in that context. So the content of the sentence ‘I am writing this now’ is just the proposition that Robert Streiffer is writing the chapter of his thesis entitled “Bertrand Russell” on April 20, 1993. The character of a sentence is a function from contexts of utterance to propositions. The character of a sentence can be viewed as a recipe for deciding what proposition is expressed by that sentence in different contexts of utterances. The character of ‘I am writing this now’ is a function which maps the speaker S , the time of utterance T , and the demonstrated object O onto the proposition that S is writing O at time T .

When what proposition a sentence expresses is only minimally context dependent, the character of the sentence can usually be ignored in favor of the content. The content is relatively stable. But when a sentence has highly context dependent factors, such as indexical terms or demonstratives, the character becomes important. As P was outlined in Chapter One, it was a statement of the character of singular subject-predicate sentences whose subject term was a name. These sentences are only minimally context dependent. For the sake of simplicity, I left out any specific account of how the context affected the proposition expressed.

Let’s proceed with the explanation of the paradox created by singular negative existentials using demonstratives. The character of ‘This exists’ is a function from contexts of utterance to propositions. The character maps the context of utterance consisting of a time T and a demonstrated object O onto the proposition that O exists at time T . Since the character only determines a proposition if there is a context of utterance, and that context of utterance consists of the demonstrated object O , in every context of utterance ‘This exists’ expresses a truth, and in no context of utterance does ‘This does not exist’ express a truth. The very fact that there is a context of utterance consisting of a time and a demonstrated object implies that the object referred to by the demonstration exists. The

character of 'This exists' is such that 'This exists' expresses no proposition unless it expresses a true proposition.

Consider a similar case where a speaker utters the sentence 'The utterer of this sentence is uttering a sentence'. The apparent necessity in this case is even stronger than 'This exists'. An utterance of 'This exists' could fail to express a proposition, if 'This' did not refer to anything, and hence could fail to express a true proposition. But 'The utterer of this sentence is uttering a sentence' always expresses a proposition, and it always expresses a true proposition.

To see exactly why these apparent necessities can be false, we need to make another distinction between, using Kaplan's terminology, a sentence's context of utterance and its *circumstance of evaluation*. Let's suppose that a proposition Q has been expressed in a context of utterance U using a sentence S which has character C . If C is similar to the cases explained above, then Q will be true in the actual world. But, whether or not Q is necessarily true is dependent upon not just whether Q is true in the actual world, but also whether it is true in other possible worlds. These other possible worlds are circumstances of evaluation. Even though each context of utterance has a speaker, there are circumstances of evaluation in which there are no speakers. Likewise, even though each context of utterance consists of the objects to which demonstratives refer, there are circumstances in which those objects do not exist. Hence, there are circumstances, or possible worlds, in which Q is false. Hence, Q is only contingently true.

So, to briefly summarize, certain sentences have a character such that in any context of utterance in which they express a proposition, they express a true proposition. But there are many circumstances of evaluation which cannot be contexts of utterance because, for example, there would no speakers in those circumstances. If Q is false in any of these circumstances of evaluation, it is not a necessary truth, even though it could not have been uttered in such a circumstance.

KRIPKER ON UNINSTANTIATED PROPERTIES

Supposing that Russell could have reduced names to definite descriptions and treated existence as a second-order property of individuals, Kripke has shown that a problem analogous to that of singular negative existentials would still arise.

Suppose U is 'Unicorns do not exist'. U, ostensibly about non-existent unicorns, can be analyzed as saying 'x is a unicorn' expresses a propositional function, and there is no object which the propositional function maps onto a true proposition.

Saul Kripke finds this answer to the problems caused by plural negative existentials unsatisfactory.

The reason the problem [of negative existentials] becomes more acute on my view is that it is universally regarded in the literature as unproblematic to make a negative existential statement using a predicate. 'There are no unicorns': that's absolutely fine. Not according to me, because what I say is that, just as there is no definite person Sherlock Holmes to whom non-existence is being attributed, so there is no definite property, that of being a unicorn, which is being asserted to have empty extension in the statement 'There are no unicorns'. (Kripke 1973, VI.16)

Why is there no definite property expressed by 'is a unicorn'? Kripke's idea is that the meaning of a natural kind term is indexically linked to the internal structure of the actual samples to which the term was originally applied. The common example used in the literature is that of a tiger. We normally identify tigers by their surface characteristics: striped, four-legged, furry things with fangs (let us suppose). But these surface characteristics are neither necessary nor sufficient for belonging to the species of tigers. They are not necessary because it could be that we have been mistaken about the surface characteristics all along. It could have been the bizarre case that whenever tigers were seen, there was some atmospheric condition that made it seem as if tigers had four legs when in fact they only had two. If we discovered that this atmospheric condition did in fact occur, we would not claim that there were no tigers as we would do if being four-legged was a necessary condition of being a tiger. Rather we would claim that tigers were two-legged.

Neither are these conditions sufficient for being a tiger. We could discover animals that looked exactly like tigers yet with a different internal structure and with an unconnected evolutionary development from what we originally took to be tigers. These things would not be tigers. They would be “fool tigers,” things that looked like tigers but were not.

If these surface qualities do not give necessary and sufficient conditions for belonging to the tiger species, what does? Kripke’s suggestion is that something is a tiger if and only if it belongs to the same biological species as that of the original sample actually used to introduce the term ‘tiger’.

Consider again now the example of unicorns. We could encounter animals which looked just like myths say unicorns look. We could encounter horse-like animals with a horn in the center of their forehead, but as we saw in the case of tigers, this surface similarity is not sufficient for being unicorns. For these horse-like animals to be unicorns, they must have the same internal structure as mythical unicorns. But the myth does not specify any internal structure. Without this specification, there can be no determinate property of being a unicorn. Put into Russellian terms, there is no determinate propositional function expressed by ‘ x is a unicorn’. The problem of singular negative existentials reappears in some general negative existentials.

Russell could respond by saying that, just as when we seem to be predicating existence of objects we are really predicating existence of properties, so to when we seem to be predicating existence of properties, we are really predicating existence of some other higher-level entity. Invoking a Tarski-like hierarchy of existence predicates would prevent the paradoxes. Unfortunately, this also requires that the terms which we took to be naming properties are really not doing so. Rather, we must be picking out properties on the basis of some description of properties. But I have a hard time fathoming what sort of a description this is. It is easy to see that we can pick out an object according to its properties: mineral, bigger than a bread box, etc. But what sorts of properties would we use to describe

properties themselves? Further, this response, like Tarski's response to the Liar paradox, would burden ordinary people with a language which had an infinite number of 'existence' predicates.

So even if Russell could have reduced singular negative existentials to general negative existentials, there would be no guarantee that he would have avoided the general problem since some of the general negative existentials are problematic as well.

CONCLUSION

What should we conclude from all of this? First and foremost, we should conclude that names can not be reduced to general descriptions and that existence is not a second-order property. Thus we should conclude that Russell's attempt to provide an account of how we determine the proposition expressed by singular negative existentials fails. Second, even if Russell's reduction was successful and his interpretation of existence correct, the problem still arises in the case of uninstantiated natural kind terms. Finally, even though Russell's account seems on the surface very different from ordinary language usage, there is some evidence for believing that Russell's theory is reflected in ordinary language.

THREE — SAUL KRIPKE

PROPOSITIONS ABOUT PROPOSITIONS

INTRODUCTION

In the last seven pages of the *John Locke Lectures* (1973), Kripke offers an analysis of sentences containing vacuous names which he extends to cover both singular and plural negative existentials. I will begin by outlining his account and detailing how his account handles the problem of negative existentials. I will then examine his explanation of why his account is not reflected in ordinary language. Finally, I will explain why I do not find his explanation satisfactory and why I think that his analysis does not solve the problems posed by negative existentials.

KRIPKE'S PROPOSAL

Kripke first proposes that a different analysis be given for existential statements according to whether they are true or false.

It seems to me that in some sense the analysis of a singular existence statement will depend on whether that statement is true. And this, of course, seems in and of itself absolutely intolerable: the analysis of a statement should not depend on its truth value; or so at any rate might be our prejudice. (Kripke 1973, VI.18)

Even though in this quote Kripke is talking about singular existentials, it is clear from his examples later in the lecture that his analysis of all statements will depend upon whether the referents of the names or natural kind terms exist.

This division is required because the objects available as building blocks for propositions depend upon what exists in the world. Kripke holds that all the constituents of a proposition must exist. Hence, if *a* does not exist, there can be no singular proposition *Fa*. So in cases where a referent for a term does not exist, the sentence '*a* is *F*' cannot express a straightforward singular proposition: some other alternative must be found. Clearly, though, if there are no such problematic terms in the sentence, a simple, straightforward analysis is best. What this means is that if an object exists, there are two ways to falsely deny its existence. The first is to negate a straightforward singular proposition and the second is to assert the proposition expressed by a singular negative existential, whatever that proposition turns out to be. Let us now examine Kripke's account in detail.

Kripke begins by considering the case of the vacuous name 'Vulcan':

An astronomer who thought that Vulcan was red would believe, first, that there is an object Vulcan (I guess the one causing the perturbations of Mercury), which he uses the name 'Vulcan' to mention; and second, there is a proposition, which I would call a proposition *about* Vulcan, namely the proposition about Vulcan that it is red. (Kripke 1973, VI.27)

Someone who wants to deny what the astronomer believed has two options. It could be that the proposition that Vulcan is red is actually false, or it could be that there are no true propositions about Vulcan. Since Vulcan does not exist, Kripke says that "[The astronomer] is wrong, not because the proposition is false, but because there is no such true proposition" (Kripke 1973, VI.28).

Kripke uses this analysis of vacuous names to account for positive and negative existential statements:

Nevertheless, it is natural, extending our usage, so to speak, to use 'There are no bandersnatches' to say 'The proposition that there are bandersnatches isn't true' or 'There is no true proposition that there are bandersnatches (in the Arctic, or even on the whole earth).' (Kripke 1973, VI.29)

So there are two ways of denying that there are bandersnatches: one could assert that the proposition that there are bandersnatches is false or one could assert that there is no

true proposition that there are bandersnatches. In the first case, there exists a proposition which one is then denying, but in the second there is no such proposition.

It will be helpful to list the possibilities.

- (i) There is a true proposition that *a* exists;
- (ii) There is a false proposition that *a* exists;
- (iii) There is no true proposition that *a* exists;
- (iv) There is no false proposition that *a* exists.

Suppose that *a* does exist. Unsurprisingly, (i) and (iv) both obtain. Suppose that *a* does not exist. The traditional answer as to what obtains under these conditions is that (ii) and (iii) obtain. Kripke rejects this and holds rather that (iii) and (iv) obtain. It is neither the case that there is a true proposition that *a* exists or the case that there is a false proposition that *a* exists. Kripke says that in the case of true negative existentials, “if there’s no such true proposition that Sherlock Holmes exists, we know that there is no such proposition” (Kripke 1973, VI.29).

Kripke’s proposal can be summarized as follows:

- (A) In the case of false negative existentials, ‘*a* does not exist’ is analyzed as either denying the proposition that *a* does exist or as denying that there is a true proposition that *a* exists.
- (B) In the case of true negative existentials, ‘*a* does not exist’ is analyzed as denying that there is a true proposition that *a* exists, that is, that there is no such proposition at all that *a* exists.

Kripke’s analysis has the virtue of providing a systematic account of vacuous names in both general and negative existentials. Nevertheless, several questions must be answered before endorsing Kripke’s view.

USING, AS OPPOSED TO MENTIONING, NAMES

Drawing from his analysis of fiction Kripke says that in fictional discourse “it is being pretended that a more mundane referent [than a Russellian sense-datum], say a person, really exists, and propositions are being stated about him. Since there is no such person, there are

no such propositions” (Kripke 1973, I.22). One is merely pretending that there are such propositions.

In the case of vacuous names, Kripke says that parallel to the categories of pretend propositions and pretend names, “we also have to allow a category of mistakes that such and such is a name, and a category of mistakes that such and such a sentence genuinely expresses a proposition” (Kripke 1973, II.2). Kripke analyzes talk of Vulcan by claiming that the astronomers were mistaken that they had named a planet when they introduced the name, and that they were mistaken that the sentences they used to talk about Vulcan expressed propositions.

It may be asked at this point why Kripke does not analyze vacuous names in terms of the sentences we use to talk about them? Why not respond to the astronomers by saying that the sentences they used do not really express any propositions?

Kripke’s answer is that this sort of response suffers from the numerous defects characteristic of a metalinguistic response. A metalinguistic account at the level of names analyses (1) as meaning the same thing as (2):

- (1) Vulcan does not exist.
- (2) The name ‘Vulcan’ does not have a referent.

but there are possible worlds in which it is true that Vulcan does not exist even though the name ‘Vulcan’ does have a referent. And consider the following true singular existentials:

- (3) Moses exists.
- (4) The name ‘Moses’ does have a referent.

There are possible worlds in which Moses exists even though he was not called ‘Moses’. It is not one of Moses essential properties that he be called ‘Moses’. What name Moses has is not an essential property of Moses.

A metalinguistic account which operates at the sentence level analyses (1’) as meaning the same thing as (2’):

- (1’) Vulcan does not exist.
- (2’) The sentence ‘Vulcan does not exist’ does not express a proposition.

But again, there are possible worlds in which it is true that Vulcan does not exist, yet the sentence ‘Vulcan does not exist’ express a proposition. To see that this is so, consider that there is some possible world in which the sentence ‘Vulcan does not exist’ means the same thing as what we mean when we say ‘Snow is cold’. And again, consider the following:

- (3') Moses exists.
- (4') The sentence ‘Moses exists’ does express a proposition.

There are possible worlds in which it is true that Moses exists even though the sentence ‘Moses exists’ doesn’t even count as a sentence in any of the languages of that world.

Kripke does not go into any detail about how this propositional theory avoids the above sorts of counterexamples, but presumably the idea is that whether a proposition exists or not is independent of our naming practices. There is no proposition that Sherlock Holmes exists even in a possible world where the sentence ‘Sherlock Holmes exists’ does express a proposition, say because someone is named ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in that world. The sentences which we use to express the two propositions are identical, but the propositions expressed are distinct, for the Sherlock Holmes that does not exist is not identical to the person named ‘Sherlock Holmes’. Further, there is a true proposition that Moses exists even in cases where Moses was not called ‘Moses’. The proposition would not be expressed by people in that world by a sentence containing the word ‘Moses’, but that is irrelevant. For these reasons, Kripke opts instead for an analysis that relies on the words being used rather than mentioned. His analysis in terms of propositions accomplishes this.

HOW SINGULAR NEGATIVE EXISTENTIALS GET THEIR USE

If Kripke’s analysis is correct, then why are we not more careful when we speak? Why does our normal usage not reflect Kripke’s distinction between the two ways in which a statement can be false? If we believe that an object does not exist, why do we persist in putting our statements in paradoxical singular form?

Kripke answers by saying that the negative existential gains its use because sometimes we do not know whether or not an object exists. Kripke uses the example of the natural kind term ‘bandersnatches’ to illustrate a case in which we cannot tell whether there are false propositions concerning bandersnatches or if there are no propositions at all about bandersnatches. Kripke says the following:

Sometimes, though, as in the case of ‘There are bandersnatches in the Arctic’, we may not know which is the case. There may either be no true proposition that there are bandersnatches, or there may be such an animal as a bandersnatch, but none of them in the Arctic in which case the proposition in question would be false. (Kripke 1973, VI.30)

Suppose, as Kripke says earlier in the lecture, that someone denies that there are bandersnatches in the Arctic on the grounds that he has been everywhere in the Arctic and knows that there isn’t anything there which could conceivably be a bandersnatch. In this case he does not have in mind any particular kind of animal or even know whether there is such a kind of animal. He just knows that there isn’t anything at all in the Arctic. Due to an exhaustive exploration of the Arctic, he knows to deny any sentence of the form ‘... is in the Arctic’ or ‘... are in the Arctic’. In this case, the speaker does not know and does not care whether he is asserting that there are no bandersnatches in the Arctic or that there is no true proposition that there are no bandersnatches in the Arctic. Kripke’s analysis offers the two ways in which statements of this form can be denied and the speaker, not knowing which is correct, can say both in one breath.

Let us look at Kripke’s example in more detail. Kripke asserts that an assertion can be denied solely on the grounds of our knowledge of the predicate without knowing anything about the subject, even whether the subject term refers to anything. In the example above, the predicate is ‘is in the Arctic’.

I do not think that Kripke’s Arctic example really illustrates a situation in which one has no knowledge of the subject. It is almost inconceivable that someone could explore the

Arctic and come to know that *nothing whatsoever* is there. Perhaps, by ‘bandersnatches’ the speaker meant to refer to snow or air.

There must be some information that is contained within the name, perhaps contained analytically within the name or assumed to be true because of our antecedent knowledge about the intentions and beliefs of whomever passed the name on to the speaker. In the bandersnatch example, presumably this information would be that a bandersnatch is a kind of dangerous animal. The fact that Vulcan could not be, for example, a planet which had no influence on the orbit of Mercury also illustrates this transfer of information.

What would be an example which did illustrate a situation in which the denial of the existence of something was based solely on the basis of the predicate? Even such a strong example as ‘There is nothing wholly within and wholly outside of the Arctic’ fails, for ‘bandersnatch’ could refer to a universal. It would seem that only an example in which a self-contradictory predicate were applied would suit these purposes, something like ‘is red and not red’ or ‘is round and square’.

I do not think that these considerations threaten Kripke’s main point. The extra information about the subject can just be tacked on to the predicate. Thus, a modified Kripkean example would be that one can deny that there are bandersnatches in the Arctic on the grounds that one has searched the Arctic and discovered no *dangerous animals of any kind* in the Arctic. In this case, the predicate is ‘is a dangerous animal of some kind in the Arctic’. Thus there are still examples of denials which can be made without knowing whether the subject exists or whether the natural kind term really expresses a predicate. These examples, then, would still be cases where the denial is made on the grounds of knowledge that one has about the suitably modified predicate. In these cases, one would not know whether one is denying a true proposition which exists or denying that there is any such proposition at all. And this is all Kripke is trying to show here.

However, there are clearly some sentences, such as ‘Pegasus is in the Arctic’, which are denied because we know something about the subject itself, namely that the subject does not exist. We know that Pegasus is not in the Arctic because Pegasus is a non-existent mythical creature, not because we have performed an exhaustive search of the Arctic and found nothing that could conceivably be Pegasus. So, the question remains as to why, in cases where we are aware that there is no singular proposition that Pegasus is in the Arctic, we nevertheless do not say ‘There is no proposition that Pegasus is in the Arctic’. We merely say ‘Pegasus is not in the Arctic’ evidently making no reference to propositions whatsoever. Kripke offers the following explanation.

I suppose because we are not philosophical... and wish to have a convenient way of subsuming these two cases together under the same idiom, rather than saying something as complicated as my analysis. We do seem to say ‘Look, there aren’t any bandersnatches in the Arctic’, though it may turn out that there is no such kind of animal as a bandersnatch at all. (Kripke 1973, VI.31)

It seems to me that this attempt at explaining away the discrepancies between Kripke’s analysis and our ordinary usage of language is weak. First, in the name of conceptual simplicity we could always say there is no true proposition that there are bandersnatches in the Arctic. This would cover both cases by implying the falsity of both the proposition that there are bandersnatches in the Arctic, if such a proposition exists, and the proposition that there is a true proposition that there are bandersnatches in the Arctic. If we are really desire convenience as much as Kripke thinks, we would use this analysis in every case and always be talking in terms of the existence of propositions. Second, Kripke’s explanation misses the mark, for the analysis is supposed to be an analysis of ordinary language. Kripke’s explanation concedes the point that ordinary language does not embody the distinction which his analysis requires by saying that we *would* hold it if we were more philosophically minded.

There may be other ways to motivate Kripke’s analysis, but Kripke’s explanation seems to fail.

UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

The most obvious, and perhaps the most natural way to interpret Kripke's theory is that it implies 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' means the same thing, i.e., expresses the same proposition, as 'The proposition that Sherlock Holmes exists does not exist'. It should be noted that these two sentences have a remarkable similarity of form. The only difference is that the first uses the name 'Sherlock Holmes' and the second uses the definite description 'The proposition that Sherlock Holmes exists'. In Chapter Two, I illustrated how to reduce a definite description to a purely general description using Russell's theory of descriptions. In the discussion of uninstantiated kind terms, however, I discussed Kripke's challenge to the usefulness of such reductions. In that section, I illustrated that there is no determinate propositional function expressed by ' x is a unicorn'. The question I now wish to raise is whether there is a determinate propositional function expressed by ' x is a proposition that Sherlock Holmes exists'. It cannot be the case that there is simply no propositional function so expressed, for, clearly, we do differentiate between the truth conditions of, for example, 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' and 'Vulcan does not exist'. We know, intuitively, that the following entailment does not hold: The truth of 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' entails the truth of 'Vulcan does not exist'. (Compare with: The truth of 'Dr. Jekyll does not exist' entails the truth of 'Mr. Hyde does not exist'.)

It also cannot be the case that the truth conditions are differentiated by the objects to which they refer: one referring to Sherlock Holmes and the other to Vulcan. The whole point of shifting to the level of propositions is to move away from statements which seem to make reference to non-existent objects. Having the name be the only possible source of specification, then, seems unacceptable.

And Kripke himself mounts a persuasive attack, similar to his attack against Russell's account of the general negative existential 'Unicorns do not exist', against looking to the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for the specification of truth conditions (Kripke 1973,

I.24). Consider that Doyle, we can suppose, put at the beginning of his work the standard disclaimer that ‘The names used in this story are fictional, and any resemblance to characters living or dead is purely coincidental’. Further, suppose that the story of Sherlock Holmes was perfectly replicated in reality, that some one man had really done all the deeds of which Doyle wrote, even though Doyle had never heard, nor seen, nor knew, of this man. In this case, we would still not say that this amazing man really is Sherlock Holmes. So, satisfying the description that Doyle gives in his works is not sufficient for being Sherlock Holmes.

And Kripke has also argued that it is not necessary either (Kripke 1973, I.25). Suppose someone wrote a story about Napoleon in which Napoleon had a dog named ‘Fido’. Does the fact that Napoleon did not really have a dog named ‘Fido’ mean that the real Napoleon was not identical with the one talked about in the story? Certainly not. So, satisfying the description of a character given in a story is also not necessary. It seems, then, that Kripke has no readily available way to differentiate between the truth conditions of different negative existentials.

Kripke’s analysis has a further problem: it’s not at all clear that it avoids the paradox. If a proposition *that a is F* presupposes the existence of *a*, as Kripke thinks it does, then it seems plausible that any sentence in which the proposition that *a is F* has a transparent (i.e., non-oblique) occurrence also presupposes the existence of *a*. Is the occurrence of *a is F* transparent in ‘there is no proposition that *a is F*? Suppose that *a* is identical to *b*. If the occurrence were transparent, then substituting *b* for *a* should preserve truth. And it does: If there is no proposition that *a is F*, then there is no proposition that *b is F*. This gives us grounds for thinking that it is a transparent context. Hence, the proposition that there is no proposition that *a is F* presupposes the existence of *a* just as much as the proposition that *a is F* does.

CONCLUSION

These objections to Kripke make explicit three issues which any theory of negative existentials must address. The first is that adequate grounds should be presented for believing that people do, in fact, use the analysis provided. As I said in the introduction, the question we are asking is what principle, other than P, are people *actually* using which leads them to the conclusion the singular negative existentials are true and express a proposition? Clearly, singular negative existentials, being singular subject-predicate sentences, have a grammatical form amenable to P. Any account, then, which analyses them differently owes an explanation of this difference. I have shown that Kripke's explanation seems *ad hoc* and unpersuasive, although I have not shown that there couldn't be some other explanation.

The second, and more philosophically interesting, issue is that some method must be provided for differentiating between the truth conditions of different singular negative existentials. Kripke's analysis had no obvious answer to the question 'What is it that makes the proposition that there is no proposition that Sherlock Holmes exists different from the proposition that there is no proposition that Vulcan exists?' Upon reflection, we can see that Russell had a clear answer: the different general properties which were associated with the name. The problem was, of course, that it was an incorrect answer. We shall see in the next chapter that Evans gives a much better account of how this question can be answered.

Finally, we have seen that there is what might be termed 'A Revenge Problem'. Kripke's formulation seems to presuppose the existence of non-existent objects just as the singular negative existentials did.

FOUR — GARETH EVANS

GAMES OF MAKE-BELIEVE

INTRODUCTION

In *The Varieties of Reference*, Gareth Evans gives a detailed theory of games of make-believe upon which he bases his analysis of singular negative existentials. After presenting Evans' account in some detail, I will show that how his account nicely handles many of the problems which we encountered with Russell and Kripke. I will then show how it runs into some problems of its own.

THE GENERAL IDEA BEHIND GAMES OF MAKE-BELIEVE

Evans bases much of his account of make-believe on the work of Kendall Walton. Beginning with Walton's example of a children's mud-pie game, Evans goes on to examine a children's game of Cowboys and Indians and then examines a game in which two people pretend that they see a little green man even though they are merely suffering from a shared perceptual illusion. Following Evans and Walton I will use the expression **P** as shorthand for 'It is make-believedly the case that *P*'. I will first look at the idea of a make-believe game in general, and then examine each of Evans' three games.

Walton defines a game of make-believe as a game whose truth

rests upon a foundation of actual fact, other than someone's having expressly imagined or stipulated that it is to be so. Thus it is a characteristic of games of make-believe that one can discover such-and-such to be make-believedly the case. (Evans 1982, 353)

Let me compare and contrast a player within a game of make-believe with the author of a fictional story. Both the author and the player have the ability to generate and be a source of truth. By stipulating certain things to be the case within the story, the author can be the source of a set of truths within the story. Similarly, by performing certain make-believe actions, a player can be the source of a set of make-believe truths. But the player and the author differ in that the author is almost unlimited and unrestrained in what he or she can stipulate to be true within the story whereas the player is not. If the author stipulates that player A has one-hundred mud-pies, then it is true within the story that player A has one-hundred mud-pies. But a player in a game of make-believe is much more restrained and limited in his or her ability to generate make-believe truths. What make-believe actions the player can perform are limited by the other players and by the actual circumstances under which the game takes place. In a make-believe game of mud-pie, how many pies a player can have depends upon the amount of mud that there is to play with and how much mud has already been used by the other people playing the game.

The following five principles determine how reality and the players determine make-believe truth:

BASIC STIPULATIVE PRINCIPLES:

A (possibly infinite) set of bridge principles stipulated to hold between the actual world and the world of make-believe.

THE INCORPORATION PRINCIPLE:

If B is true, and there is no set $A_1 \dots A_n$ of make-believe truths such that the counterfactual 'If $A_1 \dots A_n$ were true, B would be not true' is true, then B is make-believedly true.

THE RECURSIVE PRINCIPLE:

If $A_1 \dots A_n$ is a set of make-believe truths, and the counterfactual 'If $A_1 \dots A_n$ were true, then B would be true' is true, and there is no set of make-believe truths $A'_1 \dots A'_n$ such that the counterfactual 'If $A'_1 \dots A'_n$ were true, then B would not be true' is true, then B is make-believedly true.

THE PRINCIPLE OF BELIEF:

$(x)(\text{If } x \text{ believes that } *P^* \text{ then } *x \text{ believes that } P^*)$

THE PRINCIPLE OF INTENTION:

(x)(If x intends that $*P*$ then $*x$ intends that $P*$)

The basic principles allow for the stipulation of bridge principles between the truths of the actual world and the truths of the make-believe world. In the mud-pie example, the basic principles would be something like the following:

(x)(If x is a blob of mud & x is pie-shaped then $*x$ is a pie*)

(x)(If x is a small pebble then $*x$ is a raisin*)

This metal object is a hot oven

The incorporation principle allows make-believers to incorporate into the game any truth that is not explicitly ruled out by the initial pretence.

If it is true that Harry put these objects into this metal object twenty minutes ago, then *Harry put these objects into this metal object twenty minutes ago*.

The recursive principle allows us to infer further make-believe truths from already accepted ones.

Since *Harry put these objects into this metal object twenty minutes ago*,
these pies have been in the oven for twenty minutes.

The principle of belief along with the principle of intention provide for the attribution of *propositional attitudes* based on propositional attitudes.

Since Harry believes *these are pies*, *Harry believes these are pies*.
Since Harry intends to *bake a pie*, *Harry intends to bake a pie*.

Through combining these principles common to all make-believe games, we get *communication*, *understanding*, and *reference*. One child can *communicate* with another in virtue of the fact that, had the pretence of communication been actual, they would have actually communicated. Applying the recursive principle to this fact implies that *one child communicated with another*. And of course whatever intentions or beliefs that are required for communication to take place are also *required* and these can be spelled out in terms of *intentions* and *beliefs*. Likewise, one child can *understand*

another child's utterances because, had the pretence been actual, the one would have actually understood the other.

The ways in which it is possible for *someone to refer to an object* depends upon the kind of make-believe game being played and this, in turn, depends crucially on the way things actually are. Evans outlines three different kinds of games each of which places different restraints upon the sort of make-believe reference which can occur: existentially conservative games, existentially creative games with no shared informational backdrop, and existentially creative games with a shared informational backdrop. Evans finds that the final kind of game is the only one which will provide an adequate model for the use of vacuous names. Let us examine each in turn.

THE THREE KINDS OF GAMES

A game of mud-pie is an example of an existentially conservative game. The make-believe reference to pies which takes place is always based upon the actual reference to pie-shaped globs of mud. Whenever we have $*(Ex)A(x)*$, we also have $(Ex)*A(x)*$. For everything that make-believedly exists, there is something that really does exist. In these games, $*x$ refers to the object y because x refers to the object y . Combining the fact that there is actual reference with the incorporation principle yields *reference*. Because *reference* is grounded upon actual reference, this sort of game cannot be used to account for singular negative existentials or vacuous names: in these cases no reference takes place.

In order to explain vacuous names and negative existentials, we need to examine an “existentially creative” game. In an existentially creative game, “the pretence is not that something which there is is other than it is, but that there is something which in fact there isn't” (Evans 1982, 358). An existentially creative game allows for $*(Ex)(A(x))*$ even if it is false that $(Ex)*A(x)*$. In these sorts of games we can *refer* without referring. Whether there is a backdrop of information shared by the players determines what kind of *referring*

can take place. A backdrop of shared information consists of a stream of perceptual data being received by the players. Some obvious examples are cases in which the two players are perceiving a hologram or a mirage or other such perceptual illusion which looks real.

Evans' example of a case in which there is no backdrop of shared information is two children playing Cowboys and Indians where no one plays the role of the Indian. Evans explains how one of the children *refers to an Indian* by saying 'He's gone'.

Make-believe communication can take place because *the audience knows which person the speaker is referring to*. But in this case, this is because *the audience knows that the speaker is referring to *the Indian attacking them**. In other words, what makes make-believe communication possible in this case is the fact that it is part of the initial pretence that just one Indian is attacking them. So their thoughts can focus on the same (empty) place *in virtue of containing the same description*. Referential communication within games of this kind must always depend upon a common description; consequently it would become very much more difficult if the pretence were to include several different Indians. (Evans 1982, 360-361)

In these sorts of games *reference* takes place when the speaker says 'He's gone' because 'he' is analyzed as 'the Indian attacking us'. There is no shared backdrop of information because there is not really anything which is being referred to when the children *refer to the Indian*. It is in virtue of the knowledge of the basic stipulative principle which says *there is only one Indian attacking us* that *reference* occurs. Had there really been only one Indian attacking the children, then the speaker's utterance of 'He's gone' would have made reference to the Indian attacking them.

While Evans' does illustrate how descriptive reference could take place in this sort of a game, he merely asserts at the end of the passage above that "referential communication within games of this kind must always depend upon a common description". Why is it, then, that *demonstrative reference* or any *direct reference* cannot take place in this sort of a game? To see why, let us alter the example slightly. First, suppose the child says 'That Indian is tall' instead of saying 'He's gone' and, second, that *there are many attacking Indians*. It cannot be that *demonstrative reference* is brought in through the

incorporation principle because then demonstrative reference would really have to take place. But, since there are not any Indians attacking the children, there can be no demonstration. If the *demonstrative reference* were brought in via the recursive principle, a counterfactual conditional like ‘If the pretence were actual, then demonstrative reference would have taken place’ would have to be true. The only way to spell out the antecedent clause for the requisite counterfactual conditional is ‘the children are being attacked by Indians and the child uttered “That Indian is tall” intending to demonstratively refer to an Indian’ and this does not imply that demonstrative reference would have taken place. For consider that it might have been that *none of the Indians causally interacted with the child who uttered ‘That Indian is tall’*. Then that child did not demonstratively refer to any of the Indians.

Because direct reference cannot be incorporated into this sort of game, it cannot provide a complete model for vacuous names or singular negative existentials. In order to account for these sorts of statements, Evans turns to existentially creative games which have a backdrop of shared information. Evans says

A backdrop of shared information permits the make-believe occurrence of a kind of referential communication which is secured by the normal information-invoking use of singular terms. (Evans 1982, 361)

Evans uses an example in which two people seem to be seeing a little green man on the wall. The backdrop of perceptual data combined with the basic stipulation that things are the way they seem generates a stock of given make-believe truths.

In this example, just as in the Indian example, it is possible for the people to *refer to the little green man* even though there is not anything to which anyone refers. Unlike the Indian example, however, in this case it is possible to *demonstratively refer to that little green man* even though there is nothing to which anyone demonstrates. In allowing themselves to be drawn into the make-believe game, the players respond to the information they are receiving as if it were veridical. In this example, it seems as if they are receiving

perceptual information from a little green man. Thus, the following make-believe truth is available for use with the recursion principle: ‘I am causally related to the little green man’. Hence, the problem encountered with the Indian example cannot arise. If the pretence is actual, then the player would stand in a causal relation to the little green man. Evans says

In order to see [that this counterfactual conditional is true], let us switch to the other version of the story, in which the subject and his companion are *mistaken* in believing that their senses deceive them—there *is* a little green man on the wall. It seems clear that a subject in this situation, thinking within the scope of the pretence in the way I have outlined, would actually be thinking of that little green man—entertaining various thoughts concerning him. In allowing his thoughts to be controlled by the information, he is in fact responding to the properties of the little green man. (I call this phenomenon ‘the game-to-reality shift’.) (Evans 1982, 362)

‘REALLY’ AND SINGULAR NEGATIVE EXISTENTIALS

Now that Evans has a structure for a game of make-believe in which use may be made of empty singular terms in make-believely referring to things (a usage which mimics ordinary usage in all the important ways) he proceeds to account for how these make-believe references are related to sincerely asserted negative existentials via the game-to-reality shift.

Evans begins linking negative existentials to make-believe reference by pointing out that one can *make a statement* while intending that what one does be up for assessment as correct or incorrect according to whether or not *the statement one makes is correct or incorrect*. “Thus the speaker says something absolutely true or false by *saying something true* or *saying something false*” (Evans 1982, 363-364). Evans gives the following illustrative example:

The general idea is that someone who utters such a sentence should be likened to someone who makes a move within a pretence in order to express the fact that it is a pretence. He is not like someone who tries to prevent a theatre audience from being too carried away by jumping up on stage and saying: ‘Look, these men are only actors, and there is no scaffold or buildings here—there are only props.’ Rather he is like someone who jumps up on the

stage and says: 'Look, Suzanne and the thief over there are only characters in a play, and this scaffold and these buildings are just props.' The audience must be engaged, or be prepared to engage, in the make-believe, in order to understand what he is saying. (Evans 1982, 369)

Let us examine this example in detail and then examine the little green man example. Since *the speaker refers to this scaffold*, *demonstrative reference* takes place as outlined previously. This is due to the fact that information is being received and the speaker is allowing his or her thoughts to be controlled by the information. And since the real prop is the causal source of the information, there is a game-to-reality shift and demonstrative reference takes place. Notice that what is being asserted is not merely *This scaffold is a prop* for this is false and the assertion made by the speaker who jumps upon the stage is true. Evans accounts for this difference in truth-value by claiming that we are to understand the speaker as saying 'This scaffold is really a prop'.

In the case of a singular negative existential, again, it must be noticed that the truth conditions are not going to be the same as a statement made in the context of an existentially creative game of make-believe. Within the context of the game, the negative existential is false, not true. Even though it is true that the little green man does not exist, it is false that *the little green man does not exist*. Again, Evans' claim is that the speaker is to be understood as saying 'That little green man does not really exist'.

So in order to account for these differences in truth conditions, Evans utilizes the concept of 'really'. His claim is that either implicitly or explicitly, 'really' is prefixed to all sincere singular negative existentials. Thus, within the context of make-believe, it is not 'that little green man does not exist' that is equivalent to 'that little green man does not exist', but rather 'Really, that little green man does not exist'. Evans gives the truth conditions for sentences which contain 'Really' as follows:

'Really' is a word which, when prefixed to a sentence, produces a sentence such that an utterance of it is true (absolutely) iff the sentence preceded by 'really' is itself such that there is a proposition expressed by it when it is uttered as a move in the relevant language game of make-believe and this proposition is true (absolutely)—not merely *true*. (Evans 1982, 370)

Let us examine this quote in the context of the following sentences:

- S: that little green man does exist
 R: 'Really' \cap S
 \sim R: Not('Really,' \cap S)

In the case where we suppose that the little green man does exist, the truth conditions are relatively unproblematic. A proposition is expressed by S when it is uttered in a game of make-believe (that is, *S* expresses a proposition). There is a proposition expressed by S because of the game-to-reality shift. The speaker really is referring to that little green man and saying things about him because the speaker is allowing his thoughts to be controlled by the perceptual information that he is receiving from the little green man. Evans says

'Really (That little green man exists)' is therefore true if and only if the information is not hallucinatory, and in receiving it, the subjects are seeing a little green man. (Evans 1982, 371)

Since S expresses a true proposition, R is true and \sim R is false.

Suppose that the little green man does not exist, even though it seems as if he does. In this case, S fails to express a proposition when it is uttered in a game of make-believe, although it does *express a proposition*. Hence, R is false and \sim R is true.

EVIDENCE FOR EVAN'S PROPOSAL

Now Evans' account has a number of things in its favor. First, Evans' can provide an answer to the question 'What is the difference between Sherlock Holmes not existing and Vulcan not existing'. The difference can be spelled out in terms of different make-believe characters, and this, in turn, can be spelled out in terms of the information (primarily the causal origin thereof) which the players are receiving and acting upon. The transition from thinking of Sherlock Holmes as a fictional character to a make-believe character is relatively straightforward. Thinking of Vulcan as a make-believe planet is only slightly more difficult. The astronomers who measured the perturbations in the orbit of Mercury were allowing

themselves to be controlled by certain streams of information. They acted as if there was a planet between the Sun and Mercury. This is what provided the shared informational backdrop. It seemed as if there was a planet Vulcan.

Second, there is a large amount of independent support for Evans' approach. It gives a unified account of vacuous names, singular negative existentials, and fictional discourse. There is also evidence for Evans' account in ordinary language. First, the referring expressions are being used, and it seems clear that they are being used in ordinary usage. Thus, Evans avoids the problems which we saw are associated with a metalinguistic account. And this complies with ordinary usage. It certainly does not seem as if we are merely talking about a name or a sentence when we utter singular negative existentials.

Second, Evans' account treats existence as a first-order predicate and this corresponds to how it functions grammatically. In the chapter on Russell, we also saw that there are positive reasons for thinking that existence should be treated as a first-order predicate.

Third, Evans' account explains the following phenomena while at the same time provides a justification for treating true singular negative existentials differently from false ones. Consider again a case in which a speaker mistakenly believes that the perceptual information he is receiving is deceptive. The speaker utters the sentence 'That little green man does not really exist'. In Evans' account, the speaker does indeed refer to that little green man. But is the speaker denying the same statement which would be made by someone who was referring to that little green man in the ordinary way and saying of him that he exists? To see that the answer is no, consider someone who realized that that little green man did really exist. This person utters 'Had that little green man's parents never met, he would not have existed.' Now, clearly the consequent of this counterfactual, 'he would not have existed', is very different from saying 'he would not have been real'.

Evans' accounts explains why 'he would not have existed' and 'he would not have been real' are so different. Evans says

One cannot understand ‘really’ in the latter sentence without knowing what game of make-believe or pretence one would have to play in order to quasi [make-believable]-understand the embedded sentence. In the case of a demonstrative quasi [make-believe]-reference (and possibly reference), it is clear that the background is some shared perceptual information, in whose veridicality the truth of the claim ‘Really (this exists)’ ultimately consists. But it cannot be said that the truth of the basic existential statement ‘E(this)’ consists in the veridicality of some shared perceptual information. (Evans 1982, 371-372)

There are two ways to assert of an existing object that it exists. One is the basic existential subject-predicate statement ‘E(this)’. The second is the more complicated ‘Really (this exists)’. Understanding of the latter requires that someone be participating within the game of make-believe, whereas understanding the former does not. Evans’ analysis of ‘really’ explains the difference between these two assertions.

Any account, then, which provides the same analysis for both true and false singular negative existentials is going to encounter a problem explaining why a sincere but mistaken utterance of a singular negative existential has different truth conditions than an insincere but false utterance of a singular negative existential.

PROBLEMS WITH A MAKE-BELIEVE ONTOLOGY

Gareth Evans’ solution, at core, presupposes that there is an ontology of make-believe characters to which we refer. To see this, we need merely notice that for every true utterance of ‘That x does not (really) exist’, there is a make-believe character x . Suppose that an utterance of ‘That little green man does not (really) exist’ is true. We saw in the outline of the three different types of make-believe games, the truth of such an utterance can only be generated by applying the recursion principle to the fact that the players are allowing themselves to be controlled by the deceptive perceptual information. That is, the counterfactual ‘If this information had been veridical, then ‘that little green man’ would have referred to the real little green man’ must be true. In order for the counterfactual to be true, the players must allow their thoughts and actions to be controlled by the perceptual

information they are receiving. That is, they must act as if there were a little green man; they must play a game of make-believe in which there is a little green man.

If there is a game of make-believe in which there is a little green man, then it follows that there is a make-believe little green man (Kripke 1973, III.16). Just as I could disprove the truth of someone's utterance 'There is no fictional character Sherlock Holmes' by pointing to the works of Arthur Conan Doyle, so too could I disprove the truth of someone's utterance 'There is no make-believe little green man' by pointing to the game described above.

Gareth Evans' solution then supposes that there is an ontology of make-believe characters, and a singular negative existential is true just in case that character is *merely* a make-believe character, and false if it is not. The game-to-reality shift is what determines whether a character is *merely* make-believe. If there is no shift, then it is only make-believe. Saying 'That little green man really does not exist', in Evans' account, is the same as saying 'That little green man is merely make-believe'. Using an example from Kripke, analyzing 'That duck does not (really) exist' according to Evans' account is like saying 'that's a toy duck, not a real duck'.

It seems to me that 'Merely' is another example, somewhat the opposite of 'really', by which "the speaker says something absolutely true or false by *saying something true* or *saying something false*" (Evans 1982, 363-364). Just as 'really' combined with a make-believe demonstrative reference can yield a sentence which is absolutely true just in case there is a game-to-reality shift, so too can 'merely' combined with a make-believe demonstrative reference yield a sentence which is absolutely true just in case there is *no* game-to-reality shift.

Kripke offers three criticisms of this sort of an account (Kripke 1973, VI.21-22).

The first is that one is merely distinguishing between kinds of entities: make-believe entities on the one hand and real entities on the other. But both kinds of entities can be said

equally well to exist in the ordinary sense, i.e., without any implicit usage of the word 'really'. And, clearly, we do have this usage of the word 'exist'. If one doubts this, let me remedy the situation by stipulating that the word 'dexist' is to be used just like Evans uses the word 'exist', except that its extension is the class of all entities, regardless of their kind. Now, even though it's true to say that Sherlock Holmes *dexists*, it is false to say that his second cousin, twice-removed *dexists*. And, so the objection runs, Evans will not be able to account for the truth of this sort of sentence since it can only account for the non-existence of entities on the basis of their make-believe existence (Hodges, 1971, 15).

The second criticism is that even if we grant that ordinary language does presuppose an ontology of make-believe characters, it seems that singular negative existentials could have been truly uttered without such a presupposition. Kripke gives the example of someone who leaves a restaurant without paying her bill and lies to the waiter by saying 'Sam Jones will pay the check'. In this case, even though there is no make-believe character of Sam Jones, the police can still aptly comment by saying that 'Sam Jones does not exist'.

I think that the response which Evans could make to these objections is to stand firm and say that, in both cases, there is a make-believe character. The second case is clearer. There is a story being told, and in that story, Sam Jones is the main (and only) character. Both the waiter and the restaurant-goer are being controlled by the pretence that someone is going to come and pay the check. The waiter just does not realize that it is a pretence.

In the first example, Evans will have to maintain the more difficult position that the very sentence 'Sherlock Holmes' second cousin twice-removed does not *dexist*' is itself a very short story in which Sherlock Holmes' second cousin twice-removed is the main character. In this case, any utterance of the form '*a* does not *dexist*' will be false. While these responses seem implausible to me, I can see no telling objections against them.

The third of Kripke's criticisms is that when one says 'Suppose that Napoleon had never existed', one is definitely not saying 'Suppose that Napoleon had merely been a make-

believe character'. Napoleon, the very man, could not have been a make-believe character any more than he could have been a prime number. Given that I am actually talking about a real person, it is impossible that Napoleon was merely a make-believe character. It is no good to object that it might turn out that all the stories about Napoleon were based on false lies and propaganda. For, if that were the case, then my utterance of 'Suppose that Napoleon had merely been a make-believe character' would have been talking about someone different than my actual utterance. Given that Napoleon did exist and that I am talking about him, it is impossible that he should have been merely a make-believe character.

We have already seen what Evans' response to this objection will be. When we are talking about an existing object and suppose of it that it had never existed, we are not implicitly using the word 'really'. Rather, we are supposing that the basic existential statement 'E(this)' had never been true. And this does not involve asserting that the referent of 'this' is a make-believe character.

There is a related objection against which Evans' account does not fare so well. Evans' account divides up all entities according to whether they are real or make-believe. But, he then relies on the truth of a counterfactual in which one and the same entity must play the role of a make-believe character and a real entity. The thrust of Kripke's third objection was that no entity can play such a role. Recall that the recursion principle must be applied to the true counterfactual 'If this information had been veridical (i.e., if this object had really existed), then 'that little green man' would have referred to the real little green man'. But if the information that I am receiving is not veridical, then that very same information couldn't have been veridical. If it had come from a different source, it would have been different information.

Evans acknowledges that this is a wrinkle in his account. He says

The initial supposition generating the game of make-believe within which we make conniving use of empty singular terms is that certain information,

which is in fact deceptive, is information from actual objects and events. And I would argue that there are no possible worlds in which just that information is veridical; as we observed in 5.2, information is individuated by causal origin, which makes it impossible to understand how the same bit of information might have had a different origin. (Evans 1982, 355-356)

Evans' solution to this problem is to repudiate the possible worlds analysis of counterfactuals. He says

I should say that it is important for my purposes that counterfactuals such as the one I formulated at the end of the last paragraph can be *true*, and this probably means a rejection of the popular 'possible-worlds' analysis of counterfactuals. (Evans 1982, 355)

But it is unclear to me how rejecting a possible-worlds analysis of counterfactuals will help Evans' account. As I presented the objection above, no mention of possible-worlds was made. It just seems that, intuitively, it is impossible that Napoleon could have been merely a make-believe character and that this is not what we are saying when we say 'Suppose Napoleon had never existed'. It is hard to resist the idea that being human is an essential property of Napoleon, and that if that property were taken away, Napoleon would not exist anymore. Any sort of counterfactual analysis is going to have to accommodate these intuitions, not just ones involving possible-worlds.

Finally, consider the following make-believe game (Hodges 1971, 15). The main character in this make-believe game is a round square named 'Bill'. The details of the game can be filled in as you see fit. Now it is true that there is a make-believe round square. It is pretty much agreed upon that there can be no real round squares, but is it acceptable that there be make-believe round squares? It seems to me that there cannot be round squares *in any sense*. How is Evans to avoid the existential generalization from 'There are make-believe round squares' to 'There are round squares'? I think that Evans is on very weak ground here, just as Meinong was in allowing round squares to subsist. This last objection is one which any theory which presupposes a fictional or make-believe ontology will have to handle.

CONCLUSION

I find Gareth Evans' account very appealing. I have shown that there are good reasons for thinking that ordinary language does embody something close to Evans' theory and that his theory offers a way to differentiate between the truth conditions of different singular negative existentials.

There are two problems, however, which arise for Evans' theory due to the fact that it merely divides entities up as either make-believe or real. The first is that both being make-believe and being real seem to be essential properties. Hence, it is impossible for a make-believe object to be the same as a real one, and vice versa. Yet, Evans' account relies on the possibility that a counterfactual such as 'If this little green man, who is actually make-believe, were real, then ...' can have a true antecedent. Secondly, allowing make-believe entities into one's ontology means that one accepts objects which could not possibly be instantiated into one's ontology, for make-believe need not be consistent.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis, I offered P as the obvious and plausible semantics for singular subject-predicate sentences. This principle, which yields correct results and provides intuitive explanations on a large number of cases, fails when it is applied to singular negative existentials. According to P, singular negative existentials should not express a proposition and hence, be neither informative nor true. Since we do judge singular negative existentials to be both informative and true, I argued that there must be some other principle which we apply to singular negative existentials. The rest of the thesis was devoted to examining attempts to specify this principle.

I then proceeded to examine three proposed alternatives to P. It came to light in the course of the discussion that any alternative should satisfy four desiderata. First, there should be evidence for the alternative in ordinary language. Second, it should be able to differentiate between the truth conditions of different singular negative existentials. Third, it should avoid any sort of revenge problem in which the alternative itself raised a problem analogous to that of singular negative existentials themselves. Finally, I gave Evans' argument that the alternative should handle true singular negative existentials differently from false ones.

I first examined Russell's theory of propositional functions and quantifiers. It had in its favor that there was some evidence it was embodied in ordinary language usage. There is also quite a bit of independent motivation for Russell's account. Russell developed it with an eye to many semantical problems, including informative identity statements, vacuous names, and substitutivity failures. The solution to singular negative existentials just falls out

of his overall theory of definite descriptions and quantifiers. However, I also showed that Russell's theory had serious philosophical difficulties. It floundered on three points. First, it is false that the meaning of a name can be given by a purely general description. Second, existence is most plausibly treated as the first-order predicate that its grammatical role predicts. Finally, a problem concerning general negative existentials seems to be unable to be accommodated by Russell's view.

I then turned to a discussion of two contemporary approaches, those of Saul Kripke and Gareth Evans. I first noted that Kripke's explanation of why his analysis was not embodied in ordinary language seemed weak. I then showed that Kripke's approach ran into a problem similar to one he himself raised for Russell's account: the inability to specify the truth conditions for singular negative existentials and being unable to differentiate between the truth conditions of different singular negative existentials. Even more troublesome, however, was the objection that his analysis seemed to presuppose the existence of the object which the singular negative existential was supposed to deny.

Finally, I looked at Evans' account. I showed that it was reflected to a large extent in ordinary language and that it differentiated nicely between different singular negative existentials. Unfortunately, it seemed to do so at the expense of positing an ontology of make-believe characters. This undermines our intuition that, in some sense it is true to say that make-believe characters don't exist (*simpliciter*). His account also encountered difficulties because it relied on the possibility of a make-believe character being a real person. But it seems that whether a person is real or a character is make-believe is an essential property of that entity. Hence, the counterfactuals cannot be true. Finally, as with any account which presupposes an ontology of fictional or make-believe characters, it ran into problems with the law of non-contradiction. There is no guarantee that the tales told and the games played will be consistent.

I do not consider that I have given conclusive arguments against any of the views I examined. Rather, I have tried to raise questions and indicate which theories have answers more or less readily available. The problem of singular negative existentials is far from being adequately solved, and I must agree with Russell when, at the end of “On Denoting,” he says “whatever the true theory may be, it cannot have such a simplicity as one might have expected beforehand.”

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