

PART III

Existence and Non-Existence

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What is Existence?

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I

I address here the following issue: what exactly is it that is expressed in a sentence of the form

(0) α exists

where α is a genuine singular term? There are several competing answers to this question. I shall defend one—or, at least, I shall defend an answer of a certain kind. Many accounts of individual existence attributions take their cue from the famous Kantian dictum, ‘*Existence is not a real predicate.*’ I shall compare some rival accounts. (The comparison class is not exhaustive.) The account I shall defend results directly from the flat denial of the dictum.

Kant’s thesis lies at the heart of his diagnosis of what goes wrong with the ontological argument for God:

(P1) *God* = the possible (or conceivable, etc.) individual that is actually divine.

(P2) Any possible individual that is actually divine actually exists.

(C) God actually exists.

The adjective ‘divine’ stands in here for the ontological arguer’s favored notion: *perfect in every respect*, for Descartes; *than which nothing greater is conceivable*, for

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Anselm. The argument is evidently valid. Each of the premises is alleged to be analytic, making the conclusion allegedly analytic as well. Kant's complaint focuses attention on the alleged analyticity of the second premise. He notes that only genuine properties ('predicates') may serve as defining criteria for a concept. Insofar as divinity analytically entails the non-property of existence, Kant insists, divinity cannot legitimately be included as a defining condition for the concept of *God*, nor for any other concept.

Strictly, one should distinguish two (at least) related Kantian theses—one metaphysical, the other logical.¹ The metaphysical thesis is that existence is not a property of individual things. As a Kantian might prefer to phrase it, there is no such property as the putative property of individual existence. The logical thesis is that the English verb 'exist' is not of the logical type *extensional first-order monadic predicate*, i.e. it is not a predicate logically applicable to individual things. Typically, the Kantian claims that, properly understood, 'exist'—or better, 'there exists'—is instead an English term for the logician's unrestricted existential quantifier, '∃', definable as 'not everything is not ____'.

The answer that I favor to our question is precisely the opposite of these two theses extracted from the Kantian dictum: existence is straightforwardly and obviously a property of individuals, nothing more and nothing less. Moreover, the English verb 'exist' is a term for this property, and as such, it is an ordinary, extensional, first-order, monadic predicate.² Consequently, (0) simply ascribes the particular property of existence to the individual designated by α . Furthermore, with regard to those instances of (0) that are false (there are many), this is due to the unremarkable fact that, whereas α designates, the thing designated has nonexistence, the complement of the ascribed property. Not to put too fine a point on it, (0) is false exactly where the designatum of α is something that does not exist.

In saying that (0) is falsified in cases where α designates a designatum that does not exist, I am evidently using some form of existential quantification: α designates *something or other* that does not exist. The existential quantifier in question is not restricted to individuals that exist. It includes nonexistent individuals. Specific instances will be specified shortly—indeed, instances of individuals that the Kantian fully recognizes. (Kantians typically wrongly regard these instances as existent—since they are *things*.)

Kantians are appalled. Necessarily, if a thing has nonexistence then it does not exist; and if so, then there is nothing there to have (nor, for that matter, to lack) the putative property, or any other property. Therefore it is impossible for anything to have the putative property of nonexistence. Bertrand Russell explicitly embraced both of the Kantian theses. He held furthermore that, insofar as α is a genuine singular term, and

¹ Cf. Salmon (1987), in (2005, 20).

² i.e. 'exist' may correctly be used this way. There are alternative correct uses, including a use as an existential quantifier. As Russell noted, 'Cows exist' does not mean that all cows exist; rather, it means that there exist cows.

not a disguised quantificational locution, (0) is neither true nor false but altogether meaningless:

[The] actual things that there are in the world do not exist, or, at least, that is putting it too strongly, because that is utter nonsense. To say that they do not exist is strictly nonsense, but to say that they do exist is also strictly nonsense. (1918, 99) There is not an idea [of existence] that will apply to individuals. As regards the actual things there are in the world, there is nothing at all you can say about them that corresponds to this notion of existence. It is a sheer mistake to say that there is anything analogous to existence that you can say about them. You get into confusion through language, because it is a perfectly correct thing to say 'All the things in the world exist', and it is so easy to pass from this to 'This exists because it is a thing in the world'. 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 this is the characteristic of a mistake. (1918, 108)

... there is a vast amount of philosophy that rests upon the notion that existence is, so to speak, a property that you can attribute to things, and that the things that exist have the property of existence and the things that do not exist do not. That is rubbish ... to say of [someone] that he existed would be uttering nonsense, not a falsehood but nonsense ... it is not false, but it has no meaning at all. (1918, 121)

Expanding on these thoughts in later work Russell wrote:

'Scott exists' is bad grammar. It can, at best, be interpreted as meaning, 'the person named 'Scott' exists', but 'the person named 'Scott'' is a description, not a name. Whenever a name is properly used as a name it is bad grammar to say 'that exists'. (1959, 85)

In response to all considerations that have been brought forth in favor of the logical thesis extracted from the Kantian dictum, I am sympathetic with what I call the *quack-quack reply*. According to the old adage, 'If it looks like a duck, and it walks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, it's a duck.' The verb 'exist' satisfies every reasonable syntactic and pragmatic criterion for being an extensional first-order monadic predicate of English. For example, appending it to a singular term yields a grammatical English sentence, just as with any first-order monadic predicate. It also satisfies a reasonable semantic criterion: it can fill the blanks in the following schema for Leibniz's Law:

If $x = y$, then x ____ iff y ____.

And so on with respect to any other reasonable test for first-order monadic predicatehood. If our quantifiers are both *actualist* and *presentist*—i.e. if our quantifiers range over all and only actually presently existing individuals³—the English verb

³ I note that there do not exist any individuals beyond these for quantifiers to range over. It does not follow that quantifiers *must* be actualist or presentist. There might have existed things that do not actually

‘exist’ is fully definable by means of a formal expression that unquestionably belongs to the category of *extensional first-order monadic predicate*:

$$(\lambda x)(\exists y)[x = y].^4$$

Contrary to Russell, ‘exist’ is even false of particular things. For example, it is false of . . . Russell (sad to say). The verb *was* true of Russell, of course, but it ceased to be so the moment that great philosopher drew his last breath.⁵ Although the verb ‘exist’ is presently true of the present author, and currently true of the current reader, all of us will suffer the same fate as Russell, eventually becoming a thing of which the verb is then false.

II

A variety of arguments have been offered in support of the metaphysical thesis extracted from the Kantian dictum—nearly all of them, I think, excessively weak and wide open to the quack-quack reply. One of the weakest arguments is surely Kant’s (which is possibly due to Berkeley). In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (part I, second division, book II, chapter III, section 4) Kant argued that in uttering (0) ‘we attach no new predicate to the concept’ expressed by α , ‘but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates’. And why is this so (whatever it means)? Because, according to Kant,

nothing can have been added to the concept, which expresses merely what is possible, by my thinking its object (through the expression ‘It is’) as given absolutely. In other words, the real contains no more than the merely possible. A hundred real thalers does not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers. (Kant 1965, 505)

Kant’s position appears to be that, since existence is not a property, and therefore not an aspect in which one thing might differ from another, there is therefore no difference between a hundred real dollars and a hundred merely possible dollars. Ironically, Kant goes on to state the obvious reply. As he puts it, ‘my financial position is, however, affected very differently by a hundred real thalers than it is by . . . their possibility.’ Exactly. Nevertheless, in a giant leap backward Kant stubbornly insists, ‘the conceived hundred thalers are not themselves in the least increased through . . . acquiring existence outside my concept’ (1965, 505).

Kant’s response is, characteristically, excessively murky. In fact, one of the few things that is clear concerning his position is that is incorrect. In the first place, insofar as existence genuinely adds no real property to the possibility or concept of

exist but that possibilist quantifiers actually range over. Analogously, there have existed things, and there will yet exist things, that do not presently exist but that non-presentist quantifiers presently range over. The actualist existential quantifier expresses the concept *at least one existing thing*.

⁴ Cf. ‘Existence,’ Salmon (2005, 21).

⁵ Moreover, the verb *is* true of Russell *with respect to his lifetime*. Regrettably, it is not true of him with respect to the 21st cent.

God—insofar as a real god is no more and no less worthy of worship than a merely possible god—there cannot be any harm in defining ‘God’ by invoking the concept of divinity. So what if divinity is not a genuine property of individuals? But let us set this consideration aside. It is simply and flatly wrong that a real dollar is not worth one cent more than a merely possible dollar. If one merely possible dollar is subtracted from one real dollar, the remaining amount is exactly \$1. Not much, but it is still not nothing. Nothing ventured, nothing lost.

What is true—and this is the most that can be said on behalf of the metaphysical Kantian thesis—is that a hundred existent dollars does not contain one cent more than a hundred dollars. A hundred existent dollars has greater monetary value than a hundred *merely possible* dollars; to be specific, exactly a hundred dollars worth of monetary value. But a hundred existent dollars has no more monetary value than a hundred dollars. An existent dollar is simply a dollar, no less and (what is potentially significant) no more. The existence of the dollar, *per se*, evidently does not add to its monetary value, any more than, for example, its history of previous ownership does. (Indeed the latter might, whereas the former cannot.) One might conclude from this that existence is not a feature that affects the value of a dollar, but it does not follow that existence is no feature at all.

In fact, even the weaker conclusion is incorrect. Among the things that affect the real value of a dollar is its existence. To illustrate, remove a particular dollar bill from your wallet. Let us call it ‘Georgie’. Now light one corner of Georgie with a match. Now let the note burn into smoke and ash. If the experiment is properly performed, Georgie no longer exists. Now go out and spend Georgie on a Hershey bar. One will thereby obtain empirical confirmation that Georgie no longer has its former monetary value. Now it is not worth one dollar, not twenty-five cents, not one cent. The only significant change that has taken place in Georgie that can account for its sudden loss in value is that Georgie has been rendered nonexistent. In fact, Georgie is not only no longer existent; it is also no longer a dollar bill. It is now, as John Cleese would observe, an *ex-dollar-bill*.⁶ Why is that? Because Georgie has lost a former feature that was essential both to its former worth and to its being what it formerly was, a dollar bill. That feature was its existence.

Saul Kripke rejects Russell’s theory that (0) is meaningless but is sympathetic to the spirit of the metaphysical Kantian thesis. In the final lecture of his famous monograph, *Reference and Existence*, Kripke (1973) said,

There may be some sense in which existence isn’t a predicate, in which one can say that ‘Napoleon exists’ doesn’t attribute a property to Napoleon. After all, you are not attributing a property to Napoleon when you say he exists; you are saying there is such a thing for properties to be attributed to. That in some rather obscure sense seems to me to be true, and it is perhaps what Kant had in mind.

⁶ From Monty Python’s famous ‘dead parrot’ sketch.

I agree with Kripke that this may be what Kant had in mind. But the ‘rather obscure’ observation seems to me to be simply false. Here again, the apparent argument for the Kantian conclusion invites the quack-quack reply. If x is something ‘for properties to be attributed to’ and y is as well, then there is at least this much that x and y have in common: being a candidate for having properties. What is this—*being a candidate for having properties*—that which x and y have in common, but a special property of x and y ?

In fact, as I have argued at length elsewhere, far from being equivalent to existence, the having of properties (let alone merely being a candidate for having properties) is not even a sufficient condition for existence. (Otherwise put, existence is not a necessary condition for having properties.) Predication precedes existence. Ironically, Kripke’s very example of Napoleon is as good an example as any. Napoleon does not exist. He once existed, of course—and as Russell noted, when he existed he saw to it that people thought about him—but Napoleon exists no longer.⁷ Even in death Napoleon has a variety of properties, e.g. being mentioned by Kripke in 1973, and by Nathan Salmon in this very sentence. While he existed Napoleon saw to it that even after his demise he would still have the property of being thought about.⁸

⁷ Russell (1919, 169–70) wrote the following: ‘[M]any logicians have been driven to the conclusion that there are unreal objects. ... In such theories, it seems to me, there is a failure of that feeling for reality which ought to be preserved even in the most abstract studies. Logic, I should maintain, must no more admit a unicorn than zoology can; for logic is concerned with the real world just as truly as zoology, though with its more abstract and general features. To say that unicorns have an existence in heraldry, or in literature, or in imagination, is a most pitiful and paltry evasion. What exists in heraldry is not an animal, made of flesh and blood, moving and breathing of its own initiative. What exists is a picture, or a description in words. Similarly, to maintain that Hamlet, for example, exists in his own world, namely in the world of Shakespeare’s imagination, just as truly as (say) Napoleon existed in the ordinary world, is to say something deliberately confusing, or else confused to a degree which is scarcely credible. There is only one world, the “real” world: Shakespeare’s imagination is part of it, and the thoughts that he had in writing *Hamlet* are real. So are the thoughts that we have in reading the play. But it is of the very essence of fiction that only the thoughts, feelings, etc., in Shakespeare and his readers are real, and that there is not, in addition to them, an objective Hamlet. When you have taken account of all the feelings roused by Napoleon in writers and readers of history, you have not touched the actual man; but in the case of Hamlet you have come to the end of him. If no one thought about Hamlet, there would be nothing left of him; if no one had thought about Napoleon, he would have soon seen to it that some one did. The sense of reality is vital in logic, and whoever juggles with it by pretending that Hamlet has another kind of reality is doing a disservice to thought. A robust sense of reality is very necessary in framing a correct analysis of propositions about unicorns, golden mountains, round squares, and other such pseudo-objects.’ Cf. Russell (1918, 87–8).

⁸ It is futile to argue that since Napoleon no longer exists, he cannot now have any properties, and therefore he does not have the property of nonexistence. It matters not for the falsity of ‘Napoleon is forgotten’ whether Napoleon is deemed to have the property of not being forgotten, as long as he is not forgotten. Likewise, ‘Napoleon exists’ is false because of something to do with Napoleon. The denial that nonexistence is a current property of Napoleon is subject to the quack-quack reply. Cf. Salmon (2005, 43–6).

III

I subscribe to the *existence-as-predicate theory*, which Kant and his followers reject and which Kripke dismisses.⁹ As we have already seen, if existence is a property, then although necessarily every individual that exists has the property, particular individuals do actually lack it—Napoleon and Russell, for example. As we have also seen, notwithstanding the solemnity with which Kant's pronouncements are sometimes received, a dollar's existence makes all the difference in the world regarding its monetary value. (Kant denied just this in arguing for his dictum.)

On the existence-as-predicate theory, a sentence of the form (0) is not semantically distinguished or unusual in any way. It is like any typical monadic-predication sentence $\lceil \Pi(\alpha) \rceil$: It expresses a proposition composed of the customary content of the subject term α together with that of the monadic predicate Π —in this case, the property or concept of existence. (More accurately, the semantic content of 'exist' with respect to a time t is existence-at- t .¹⁰ Where Π is an extensional first-order monadic predicate, an (open or closed) sentence $\lceil \Pi(\alpha) \rceil$ is true if and only if α customarily designates something that has the property P expressed by Π , and it is false if and only if α customarily designates something that has the complementary property, *non-P*. This is exactly why 'Kripke exists' is true whereas 'Napoleon exists' is false. Kripke has existence; Napoleon has nonexistence. There is nothing abnormal or out of the ordinary here. In exactly the same way, 'Kripke lives in New Jersey' is true and 'Napoleon lives in New Jersey' false, because Kripke has the property of living in New Jersey while Napoleon has the property of not living anywhere, including in New Jersey. This kind of consideration in itself provides strong reason to doubt the Kantian dictum. The burden of proof is on the side of Kant and his followers. An enormous burden it is, especially given the intuitive appeal of the quack-quack reply.

There is, however, at least one forceful consideration against the existence-as-predicate theory. Consider the particular sentence,

- (1) The present king of France exists.

This appears to have the logical form of an atomic monadic predication involving a definite description as subject. As such, it appears to be a false instance of (0). However, the falsity of (1) is not secured in the ordinary manner, by virtue of the putative predicate being false of the customary (or default) designatum of the subject term. For in this case the subject term has no customary designatum. There is no present king of France to have the property of nonexistence (or any other property), and it is precisely on *this* basis—not the ordinary basis—that (1) is false. But if the subject term occurring in an ordinary monadic predication has no designatum as occurring in that position, according to what I have said, if 'exist' really is an extensional first-order monadic predicate then the sentence as a whole should be neither

⁹ It is even more obvious that there is a concept of existence for individual things. Cf. Salmon (2005, 21–2).

¹⁰ Cf. Salmon (2003).

true nor false; it should lack truth-value. Since (1) has truth-value, the description ‘the present king of France’, although it customarily designates nothing, must designate something *as occurring in (1)*—indeed it must there designate something of which the verb ‘exists’, as it occurs in (1), is false. Otherwise (1) should be neither true nor false.¹¹ In short, ‘exist’ is a non-extensional operator.

Let us follow this line of thought. This alternative to Russell’s Kantian tack sees Napoleon’s existence as a property all right, but not as a property of Napoleon. What, then, shall the description designate as occurring in (1)? And what property shall the word ‘exist’ falsely predicate of the designatum?

IV

Frege held that (0) asserts something about the very term α itself, *to wit*, that it designates. He wrote:

We must here keep well apart two wholly different cases that are easily confused, because we speak of existence in both cases. In one case the question is whether a proper name designates, names, something; in the other whether a concept takes objects under itself. If we use the words ‘there is a—’ we have the latter case. Now a proper name that designates nothing has no logical justification, since in logic we are concerned with truth in the strictest sense of the word; it may on the other hand still be used in fiction and fable (Frege 1895, 104)

Elsewhere Frege made similar remarks about singular existentials and their negations: ‘People certainly say that Odysseus is not an historical person, and mean by this contradictory expression that the name “Odysseus” designates nothing, has no designatum (*Bedeutung*)’ (1906, 191).¹² Earlier Frege observed:

If ‘Sachse exists’ is supposed to mean ‘The word ‘Sachse’ is not an empty sound, but designates something’, then it is true that the condition ‘Sachse exists’ must be satisfied [in order for ‘There are men’ to be inferred from ‘Sachse is a man’]. But this is not a new premise, but the presupposition of all our words—a presupposition that goes without saying. (pre-1884, 60)¹³

Frege’s suggestion appears to be that the sentence ‘Kripke exists’ attributes the property of designating to Kripke’s name and nothing to Kripke himself. In general, (0) is analyzed thus:

$$(0') \quad (\exists x)[\alpha' \text{ designates}_{\text{English}} x].$$

¹¹ The astute reader will have noticed that this ‘forceful consideration’ against the existence-as-predicate theory is essentially the traditional problem of true, singular, negative existentials, but with a Fregean twist.

¹² I here render ‘*Bedeutung*’ as ‘designatum’.

¹³ Frege also suggests here that there may be an alternative reading for ‘Sachse exists’, on which it is tantamount to ‘Sachse = Sachse’, which Frege says is self-evident. He might well have said the same about ‘ $(\exists x)[\text{Sachse} = x]$ ’.

Let us call this *the semantic-ascent theory of existence*. This is very different from—indeed it is diametrically opposed to—Russell’s theory that (0) is meaningless. On the semantic-ascent theory, (0) says something fairly ordinary about a term—in some cases something true, in other cases something false.

The semantic-ascent theory of existence is (like most theories) a myth. To its credit, it does succeed in capturing information that is indeed conveyed in the uttering of (0). But to invoke a distinction I have emphasized in previous work, this concerns what is *pragmatically imparted* in (0), and not necessarily what is *semantically encoded* or *contained*.¹⁴ Semantic ascent, while capturing pragmatically imparted information, does not attain the right semantic content for (0) or even the right modal intension, i.e. the corresponding function from possible worlds to truth-values. Indeed, that the semantic-ascent interpretation of (0) by means of (0′) is incorrect is easily established by a variety of considerations. The semantic-ascent theory is analogous to Frege’s early account of identity in *Begriffsschrift* (1879). In his later masterpiece, ‘*Über Sinn und Bedeutung*’ (1892), Frege objects to the semantic-ascent theory of identity on the grounds that it semantically mischaracterizes the sentence ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’, which expresses an astronomical proposition about a particular heavenly body, as instead expressing a particular kind of semantic proposition about natural language, something that is true (at least in part) as a result of linguistic convention, stipulation, decision, or usage.¹⁵ Curiously, even as late as 1906 Frege evidently failed to see that this objection applies with equal force against the semantic-ascent theory of existence. That theory equally mischaracterizes the fact that Venus exists as (at least in part) yet another result of human activity.

Frege’s most effective apologist and defender, Alonzo Church, raised a crushing objection to semantic-ascent analyses in general.¹⁶ Translating (1) into French, one obtains:

Le roi present de France existe.

Translating the proposed analysis into French, one obtains:

‘The present king of France’ *désigne quelque chose en anglais.*

These two translations, while both true, clearly mean different things in French. So too, therefore, do what they translate.

We have just seen that the description does not designate itself in (1). Yet by the sort of consideration raised in § III, the description as occurring in (1) must designate something, something of which ‘exist’, as occurring in (1), is false. What else is there, besides itself, for the description to designate in (1)?

There is its semantic content, the individual concept *the present king of France*. A theory of singular existence statements still Fregean in spirit but vastly superior to the

¹⁴ Salmon (1986, 58–60), and elsewhere, esp. 78–9, 84–5, 100, 114–15, 127–8.

¹⁵ Cf. Salmon (1986, 50–4).

¹⁶ See Church (1950 97–9). For a defence of the Church–Langford translation argument, see (Salmon 1997) repr. in Salmon (2005, 344–64).

semantic-ascent theory takes the verb ‘exist’ as used in (0) to be an *ungerade* (indirect, ‘oblique’) device, so that (0) concerns not the term α but its English content.¹⁷ This is analogous to the semantic-ascent theory of existence except that one climbs further up to the level of intension. On the *ungerade* theory of existence, (0) is analyzed thus:

$$(0'') \quad (\exists x)\Delta(\wedge\alpha\wedge, x),$$

where ‘ Δ ’ is a dyadic predicate for the relation between a Fregean sense and that of which it is a concept (in Church’s sense) and the caret ‘ \wedge ’ is an *indirect-quotation* mark, i.e. a device for content-quotation (in the home language, in this case a standard notation for first-order logic with ‘ Δ ’ and indirect-quotation).¹⁸ On this theory, to utter ‘Kripke exists’ is not to say that the name ‘Kripke’ designates something, but that the concept $\wedge\text{Kripke}\wedge$ *determines* (i.e. is a *concept of*) something. The *ungerade* theory of existence is not refuted by the usual objections to semantic-ascent theories. Unlike the semantic-ascent theory of existence, the *ungerade* theory even obtains the correct modal intension for (0).

V

The sort of consideration described in § III provides considerable intuitive support for the *ungerade* theory as against the existence-as-predicate theory. But the consideration is erroneous. To illustrate this, let us introduce the name ‘Lou’ according to the stipulation that it is to name the present king of France, if there presently is a king of France, and is to designate nothing otherwise. Consider now the analog of (1):

(2) Lou exists.

As with (1), the subject term of (2) has no customary designatum, and it would seem that it is precisely for this reason (not the usual reason) that (2) is false. Since (2) evidently has truth-value, the name ‘Lou’ must designate something as it occurs in (2) of which ‘exists’, as it occurs in (2), is false. And there is nothing else for the name to designate but its sense.¹⁹

According to the anti-Fregean theory of direct reference, which I have defended at some considerable length, there is no sense for the name to designate.²⁰ Any nondesignating name has no semantic content. If this is correct, the name remains

¹⁷ Church cites the particular sentence ‘The present king of France does not exist’ as an example of a true sentence containing an *ungerade* occurrence of a singular term (‘name’), in (1956, 27n).

¹⁸ Cf. Salmon (2003, 69), on Fregean indirect-quotation. The idea comes from Kaplan (1969, 120–1). In English, the word ‘that’ attached to a subordinate clause (as in ‘Jones believes that φ ’ or ‘It is necessary that φ ’) typically functions in the manner of indirect-quotation marks.

¹⁹ The astute reader will have noticed that this argument is a minor variant of a standard argument against direct reference, usually made in connection with true, singular, negative existentials. See n. 11.

²⁰ Kripke ironically proposes a variant of the *ungerade* theory of existence in the final lecture of Kripke 1973. There he suggests that the negation of (2) is normally to be read as expressing that *there is no true proposition that Lou exists*. According to Kripke, this is correct not because there is a such a proposition though it is untrue, but because there is no such proposition at all. The word ‘that’ is an *ungerade* operator; see n. 18.

nondesignating as it occurs in (2) even if the English verb ‘exist’ is an *ungerade* operator. Many arguments have been made against the Fregean theory of senses, several of which are very well known. It is not to my purpose to rehearse those arguments, but to focus attention on a less widely used form of argument, which Kripke has exploited against the semantic-ascent theory of identity (analogous to the semantic-ascent theory of existence) and also against a very radical version of direct reference—Keith Donnellan’s theory of the semantically referential use of definite descriptions. Kripke’s argument-strategy has considerable force when applied against the *ungerade* theory of existence.²¹ Ironically, the same argument-strategy applies with equal force in defense of the very theory that Kripke rejects and that I embrace—the anti-Kantian yet eminently plausible hypothesis that existence is after all nothing more than a property of individual things, and the English verb ‘exist’ is nothing more than a term for this property.

How does Kripke’s proposed argument-strategy provide a defense of the existence-as-predicate theory? He explains the argument-strategy in the following words:

I propose the following test for any alleged counterexample to a linguistic proposal: If someone alleges that a certain linguistic phenomenon in English is a counterexample to a given analysis, consider a hypothetical language which (as much as possible) is like English except that the analysis is *stipulated* to be correct. Imagine such a hypothetical language introduced into a community and spoken by it. *If the phenomenon in question would still arise in a community that spoke such a hypothetical language (which may not be English), then the fact that it arises in English cannot disprove the hypothesis that the analysis is correct for English.* An example . . . : Some have alleged that identity cannot be the relation that holds between, and only between, each thing and itself, for if so, the nontriviality of identity statements would be inexplicable. If it is conceded, however, that such a relation makes sense, and if it can be shown that a hypothetical language involving such a relation would generate the same problems, it will follow that the existence of these problems do not refute the hypothesis that ‘identical to’ stands for this same relation in English. (1979, 16)

Suppose the *ungerade* theory is correct as regards the English verb ‘exist’. Let us now expand English into a slightly enriched language—call it ‘Schmenglish’—by stipulating an artificial intransitive verb, ‘schmexist’, as an artificial term for the property of individual existence. The term may be taken as defined as a Schmenglish synonym of the formal first-order predicate ‘ $(\lambda x)(\exists y)[x = y]$ ’. Unlike the natural-language verb ‘exist’, our new term is, by stipulation, not an *ungerade* operator but an ordinary, extensional, first-order, monadic predicate, a term for the existence of an individual.

Consider now the Schmenglish analog of (2):

(3) Lou schmexists.

²¹ Cf. also Salmon (2005, 23–4).

It *feels* as if (3) is false, precisely because ‘Lou’ has no customary designatum, and not for the more ordinary reason that what ‘Lou’ designates has the complementary property. But if (3) has truth-value, the name ‘Lou’, although it customarily designates nothing, would have to designate something as it occurs in (3), something of which ‘schmexists’, as it occurs in (3), is false.

There’s the rub. For by stipulation there is nothing in (3) to induce the name to shift to a non-customary mode. On the contrary, it is stipulated, in effect, that in (3) the name remains in its customary mode, wherein it designates nothing at all. The stipulated verb ‘schmexist’ is false of Napoleon and Russell; it is not false of the designatum of the occurrence in (3) of ‘Lou’. There is no such designatum for it to be false of.

For this very reason, it is far from clear that (3) is genuinely false. It is, by stipulation, a monadic atomic predication in which the occurrence of the subject term designates nothing whatever. It is therefore most plausibly regarded as not expressing a proposition (at least not a structurally complete proposition),²² and therefore as neither true nor false.

The feature of (3) that is most significant philosophically is that, as far as can be determined, in all relevant respects (logically, semantically, even to a considerable extent syntactically) it is a replica of (2). Both *seem* false. Yet it is known by stipulation that (3), a logico-semantic replica of (2), expresses no content that can be either true or false. The correct conclusion to draw from this is that, despite appearances, there are no genuinely persuasive grounds for deeming (2) false in English. It might well instead be neither true nor false. In Kripke’s terminology, the existence of the problems with (2)—the fact that (2) *feels* false, not only despite, but indeed *in virtue of*, the fact that ‘Lou’ does not designate—and the existence of cognate problems like that of seemingly true, singular, negative existentials, do not refute the hypothesis that English verb ‘exist’ straightforwardly stands for a particular property of individuals. On the contrary, the mere possibility of (3) is in itself very strong evidence that (2) is not in fact false, its standard negation not in fact true. The overwhelming preponderance of evidence, in fact, is that (2) and its negation are both neither true nor false.

The correct conclusion is that it is dubious whether there exist false instances of (0) wherein the subject term α does not designate. This result is in perfect accord with the existence-as-predicate theory.

It is tempting to reply that even if (2) is not false, still sentences like ‘Harry Potter exists’, and even ‘Harry Potter schmexists’, are surely false. For Harry Potter is a wholly fictional character, and to say this is simply to say that Harry Potter does *not* exist. The response is erroneous. As I have argued in ‘Nonexistence,’ Harry Potter, since he is wholly fictional, is not a real person—let alone a real wizard. But the fictional

²² Cf. my discussion of *structurally challenged propositions* in Salmon (1998, 277–319); repr. in Salmon (2005, 86–7).

character exists; it is a real *thing* (and is a real cash cow for his creator, author J. K. Rowling).²³

VI

There is a potential asymmetry between (1) and (2). The former, by observation, invokes a definite description in grammatical-subject position. The latter, by stipulation, invokes a genuine singular term. The definite description is improper. As a consequence, the term ‘Lou’ does not designate. If, with Frege and contrary to Russell, definite descriptions are catalogued as singular terms, the two sentences are extensionally on a par. In this case, (1) is no more false than (2). (This is, in fact, a serious difficulty for Frege, who would have conceded that both are false.) On the other hand, if, with Russell and contrary to Frege, definite descriptions are instead deemed quantificational constructions of a certain kind, (1) may be genuinely false—precisely as Russell held—while (2) is not. Against this option, it should be acknowledged that the negation of (1),

(1′) The present king of France does not exist,

is, at best, somewhat odd. Much more natural is ‘There is no king of France at present’—or even any of Russell’s paraphrases for what he called *the secondary-occurrence* reading of (1′).

There is a remaining difficulty for the existence-as-predicate theory. We understand (1) and (2), and we are strongly inclined to deem both false, on the ground that there is at present no king of France. If (1) is instead *not* false, and on exactly that ground, and if for the same reason (2) expresses no content that can be either true or false, what is the source of the strong temptation to deem these sentences false?

The issue is complex. One immediate reason for our inclinations is that most of us, even including many philosophers of language, do not routinely distinguish sharply between a sentence being false and it being merely untrue. Once the distinction is posed, confidence that these sentences are not merely untrue but altogether false is shaken, or should be. But the verdict of falsity might persist, if somewhat less robustly, even in the face of the distinction. Why?

I submit that a judgment of falsity is typically grounded, at least partly, in an intuition of the truth of the negation. We might infer that φ is not merely untrue but false from a prior judgment that $\lceil \sim\varphi \rceil$ is assertible, therefore true. In the cases at hand, we deem (1) and (2) false partly on the basis of an intuition that, with France no longer a monarchy, the negative existentials

(1′) The present king of France does not exist

²³ This view of fictional characters stands in contrast to that of Russell, as expressed in n. 7. It may be conceded that if no one thought about Hamlet he would not exist. But Hamlet is thought about. This makes for an ‘objective Hamlet.’

and

(2') Lou does not exist

are both assertible and therefore true.

The inference in this case is hasty, and almost certainly unjustified. Again, this might be established through Kripke's stipulated-language strategy. The Schmenglish negative existential,

(3') Lou does not schmexist,

feels every bit as assertible as does (2'), and vice versa. But it is stipulated that (3) does not express anything that can be either true or false. How, then, can (3') be true? If it is not true, why does (3') *feel* correct? For that matter, why do (1') and (2')?

Insofar as (1'), (2'), and (3') are true, the negation 'not' occurring therein almost certainly expresses *exclusion* rather than *choice* negation—i.e. an intensional form of negation that yields a truth when appropriately attached to any untrue sentence, whether that operand sentence is false or not, as long as the operand sentence expresses something. This is the form of negation that is more fully expressed by the classical (bivalent) logician's phrase 'it is not the case that'. There is no present king of France. Consequently, it is not the case that the present king of France exists, and it is equally not the case that Lou exists.²⁴ We should hesitate to express these facts by uttering (1') or (2') themselves, however, precisely because the negation therein may legitimately be read instead in the sense of choice negation, which yields a truth only when appropriately attached to a false sentence. Reading the 'not' as expressing choice negation likely renders (1') and (2') neither true nor false, for the very ordinary reason that the terms occurring in grammatical-subject position lack a designatum.

VII

Contrary to Kantians, existence is an ordinary property of individuals, one that existing entities possess but Russell, Napoleon, and many others lack. Does this legitimize the ontological argument for God?

Certainly not. The ontological argument goes wrong but not because of anything unique or unusual about the property of existence. On the contrary, the argument goes wrong precisely because existence is an ordinary property. To illustrate, I hereby introduce the word 'exidollar' according to the following definition:

exidollar =_{def} a possible dollar that actually exists.

This is a definition of precisely the sort that Kant dismisses as illegitimate. But the definition is simply a stipulation concerning how the new word 'exidollar' is to

²⁴ The fact that (2') is true if 'not' is read as expressing exclusion negation raises a cluster of thorny issues, on which I have spoken elsewhere. Cf. Salmon (2005, 84–90), concerning the content of (2').

be used. Certainly there can be no legitimate prohibition against making such a stipulation. In particular, the definition does not amount to counterfeiting currency. Including the property of existence in the definition of an *F* is not a way of defining possible *F*'s into actual existence any more than including the property of being a silk purse in the definition of a *silk-purse sow's-ear* makes sow's ears into silk purses. According to the definition, any possible dollar that already exists is already an exidollar, and any merely possible dollar is not an exidollar. The monetary value of an exidollar is exactly \$1; the monetary value of a possible dollar that is not an exidollar is exactly nothing.

What follows analytically from a definition is not categorical but hypothetical, or rather what follows is universal-conditional: *If* anything satisfies the defining criteria for being an *F* (or for being *the F*), then it is an *F* (the *F*). Existence is like any other property in this respect. Consequently, premise (*PI*) of the ontological argument is not an analytic truth. The truth that validly follows from the ontological arguer's definition of 'God' is a weaker variant:

(*PI'*) If exactly one possible individual is actually divine, then God = the possible individual that is actually divine.

The atheist and the agnostic have no legitimate complaint with this premise. It is analytic, an innocuous consequence of the ontological arguer's announced use of the term 'God'. However, putting (*PI'*) into its rightful place in the ontological argument renders the argument invalid. The strongest conclusion that validly follows from the corrected set of premises is the following:

(*C'*) If exactly one possible individual is actually divine, then God actually exists.

This conclusion is also analytic.²⁵ It does not entail God's existence, but it is at least *compatible* with God's existence. Unfortunately for the theist, it is equally compatible with atheism. Indeed, (*C'*) is a straightforward consequence of the atheist's contention that no possible individual is actually divine. The ontological arguer has some more work to do. If only the antecedent of (*C'*) can be established, the ontological arguer's task will be accomplished. The ontological arguer might take some encouragement in the knowledge that, *pace* Kant and his followers, existence is a property of individuals, and might be employed as such in the remaining project

²⁵ The atheist will see the consequent of (*C'*) as exactly analogous to (1), or alternatively (depending on how the definition is taken) to (2). As such, the atheist might deem the consequent truth-valueless. Still, anyone who deems the antecedent false may also deem the conditional *ipso facto* true. Thus, by logic and the proposed definition, the conditional is true whether its antecedent is true (as the theist contends) or false (as the atheist contends).

of establishing that one possible individual is actually divine. If so, disappointment surely awaits. Existence is an ordinary property, not a magical one.

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