

# **Metaphysics and Ontology**

Philosophy Lecture 5

# Defining metaphysics

- Metaphysics is the study of ultimate/fundamental reality.
- In what sense metaphysics is an enquiry into the fundamental or ultimate reality?
- “Fundamentality”
- “Being ultimate”
- “Reality”

# Ontology

- Onto = existence/being
- Logia = science/study
- Ontology as part of Metaphysics is specifically concerned with the question of existence/being.
- Ontology as the set of entities which a theory requires for its theoretical enterprise.
  - Ontological/existential commitment
  - **Entailment**: A set **S** of sentences *entails* a sentence P if and only if it is not possible for every member of **S** is true and P is false.

- Some dogs are white.
  - “Some dogs are white” assume that dogs exist.
- Some dogs are white entails There are/exists dogs.
- Tajmahal is made of white marble entails There is/exists Taj Mahal, There is/exists marbles that are white.
- Distinction between term and the meaning of the term
- Meaning of the term Taj Mahal and the entity Taj Mahal
  - The term Taj Mahal is about the entity Taj Mahal
- Meaning of the term dog and the entity dog.
  - The term dog is about the entity dog.

# Referential Theory of Meaning

- Reference is the meaning.
- A term is meaningful just in case, that term refers something.
- All meaningful expressions refer something.
- Sentence and the constituents of the sentence
- Taj Mahal doesn't exist.
- The Mount Everest doesn't exist.
- Negative existential statement
- Form of the Negative existential statement  
**“X doesn't exist”**

**Existence** is denied to an entity or an object.

# Paradox?

“X” in “X doesn’t exist” is occupied by a term and that term is about an entity or an object.

- Pegasus doesn’t exist,
- The Golden Mountain doesn’t exist,
- Unicorn doesn’t exist
- The term *Pegasus* in the sentence “Pegasus doesn’t exist” is about an entity.
- They are regarded as meaningful and true.

- If the negative existential statement is true and meaningful then there must be an entity which this statement is about.
- The sentence “Pegasus doesn’t exist” is true and meaningful and if so, then this sentence is about Pegasus and cannot be about something else.

## **Paradox**

In order to truly claim of an object that it doesn’t exist, one has to presuppose that it exists.

**If so then non-existing thing exists.**

# The problem of reference

There are terms that don't refer anything and nonetheless, those terms are meaningful.

e.g., the Golden Mountain, Pegasus, sky-lotus

- **Can a referential theorist say that these expressions are not meaningful?**



# Restatement of the paradox of negative existentials

Pegasus doesn't exist.

The Golden Mountain doesn't exist.

Unicorn doesn't exist.

## **The paradox of negative existentials**

(P1) If  $X$  is denied of existence, then  $X$  is referred.

(P2) If  $X$  is referred, then  $X$  must exist.

(C) If  $X$  is denied of existence, then  $X$  must exist.

# More on the Paradox

- Non-existent object is something that does not exist
- Pegasus, Sherlock Holmes
- In order to truly claim of an object that it doesn't exist, it seems that one has to presuppose that it exists.
- The assumption here is that, **if we need to make a true claim about a particular thing then that thing has to exist.**

“To deny the existence of something – of unicorns, for example – we must indicate what it is the existence of which is being denied; and this requires that unicorns be referred to.....; the negative existential must be about them. But things which do not exist cannot be referred to.....; no statement can be about them. So, given that we have denied their existence, unicorns must after all exist. The apparently true negative existential is thus either false or not really a statement at all; and, since the argument applies as well in any other case, we seem forced to conclude that there are no true negative existentials.” (R. Cartwright [1960], “Negative Existentials”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 57, p. 630)

# On resolution

## Strategy 1

**Retain the 1<sup>st</sup> premise, while rejecting the 2<sup>nd</sup> premise** (one can only refer to things that exist).

- **Somethings don't exist, yet reference can be made to them.**

- (P1) If X is denied of existence, then X is referred.
- (P2) If X is referred, then X must exist.
- (C) ~~If X is denied of existence, then X must exist.~~

# Strategy 2

**Retain the 2<sup>nd</sup> premise, while rejecting the 1<sup>st</sup> premise** (to deny the existence of something, one has to refer to that thing).

- **One does not need to refer to something by names or descriptions or singular terms to deny the existence of something.**

(P1) If X is denied of existence, then X is referred.

(P2) If X is referred, then X must exist.

(C) ~~If X is denied of existence, then X must exist.~~

# Two Ontological frameworks to respond to this paradox

## The Meinongian Strategy (Alexius Meinong)

- Accepts the 1<sup>st</sup> premise and Rejects the 2<sup>nd</sup> premise of the argument

(P1) If X is denied of existence, then X is referred.

(P2) If X is referred, then X must exist.

## The Russellian Strategy (Bertrand Russell)

- Accepts the 2<sup>nd</sup> premise and rejecting the 1<sup>st</sup> premise

(P1) If X is denied of existence, then X is referred.

(P2) If X is referred, then X must exist.

# The Meinongian Strategy

- Two realms of reality
- **Existence and Subsistence**
- Newly introduced entities (intentional entities) are called as subsisting entities.  
e.g. Objects of dream, fictional entities
- Golden Mountain doesn't exist but it subsists. The term Golden Mountain refers an entity that subsists.
- One can refer to non-existents, and truly ascribe properties to them.

# Meinongian Restatement of the argument

(P1) If X is denied of existence, then X is referred.

(P2) If X is referred, then **X need not exist.**

(C) If X is denied of existence, then **X subsists.**



# The Russellian Strategy

- **real = existence**
- Reference is made only to existing entities and the reality consists of existing entities alone.
- Reference is not made to non-existents, and one cannot truly ascribe properties to them.
- **Removal of the burden of reference** from names or descriptions or singular terms
- One does not need to refer to something to deny the existence of that thing.

# Method of Quantification

Idioms of quantification in natural language

**“there are something”, “there exist things” “something”**

The quantifier variable idiom (Q-V-I) of the first-order-quantificational/predicate logic.

1) Existential quantifier = **“( $\exists$ )”** \_

2) Variable = **“ $x$ ”**

3) Predicate expressions.

• **( $\exists x$ ) (Px)**

## Method of quantification:

the expressions are rewritten to reveal its logical form by using Quantifier-Variable-Idioms.

“The Golden-mountain”

- There exists an ***x*** such that (***x*** is Gold and ***x*** is a mountain) or  $(\exists x) (Gx \ \& \ Mx)$

“The Golden-mountain exists”



There exists an ***x*** such that (***x*** is Gold and ***x*** is Mountain)

$(\exists \mathbf{x}) (G\mathbf{x} \ \& \ M\mathbf{x})$

## Names and other linguistic expressions

- turns out to be predicate expressions.
- not meaningful by autonomously referring to an object.

## Bound variable

- Referring device
- **The sole vehicle of reference.**

# Russellian restatement of the argument

(P1) If X is denied of existence, then X need not be referred.

(P2) If X is referred, then **X exist**.

(C) If X is denied of existence, then X exists.