

There are arguments to be made for both positions that “not every thing exists” and “every thing exists”. Which is stronger somewhat depends on the definition for “exist” one adopts; I share David Lewis’s view that the apparent opposition found between ontological frameworks may in part be explained by linguistic and definitional differences. Notwithstanding this, I will proceed as if there is a genuine difference in opinion regarding the existence of things. In the first part of this paper I will explore aspects of the position “not every thing exists” that I find compelling, focusing specifically on Routley’s interpretation. However, in the second part of this paper I will argue why I think the opposing position “every thing exists” is ultimately persuasive.

It is proposed that the evidence of the truth of an ontological theory is its ability to resolve apparent paradoxes. I would also propose that theories which rely on fewer assumptions are more likely to approximate truth than theories requiring a large number of assumptions. Finally, I advocate that ontological theories which align with conclusions derived from other disciplines, such as conventional scientific thought, are also more likely to be correct than those that are in opposition.

In light of this, the materialistic position promoted by Routley resonates with common sense intuition, and provides the framework for an elegant ontology. It does not rely on assumptions of hidden “true” grammatical meanings by speakers. Requiring a thing to exist in space and time has the side effect of guaranteeing that the things that are deemed to exist are in potentially objective form. As a result, Routley’s framework neatly addresses the problem of individuation. This position also solves the paradox of contradictory objects, and the law of excluded middle, without resorting to Russell’s linguistic gymnastics.

The elimination of the distinction between “subsisting” and “existing” further simplifies the ontology. In my view, there is an inevitable arbitrariness in deciding the line between something that “subsists” (but not “exists”) and something that does not “subsist” (and does not “exist”). In both circumstances, we are drawing lines between intangible things all of whom arguably do not have life beyond the mind. Hence,

Routley's proposition that "not every thing exists" offers seductive simplicity and apparent objectiveness.

However, there are things that cannot be pointed to in space or time, which, at least according to conventional scientific consensus, uncontroversially exist. In the physical sciences, the existence of a phenomenon can be evidenced by the influence it exerts on things that are known to exist. For example, society has (largely) agreed that gravity exists, not through anyone being able to point to a material thing that is gravity, but rather through the observation of gravity's influence on things such as apples, structures, humans, and planets. Material things such as apples, structures, humans, and planets are typically agreed to exist. Gravity is concluded to exist because of the influence it has on things that are known to exist.

A similar claim can be made regarding energy. In fact, we know energy only through its influence on matter; divorced from its influence we are unable to define energy. Because of the influence energy has on things that exist, we conclude that energy exists. Influence, thus, is sufficient, but not necessary, to conclude that some thing exists.

If we can conclude that gravity and energy exist purely based on their influence on things that are known to exist, is there any principle reason preventing us from concluding that love exists? Much like gravity, we know love through the influence it exerts on things that are known to exist, such as animals. One can witness the power of love through the explicit behavior of those creatures under its influence. The same argument can be made about emotions like hate, jealousy, grief, as well as principles such as equality and justice.

To say that such things do not exist is to be blind to the irresistible influence these abstract things have had on the history of peoples and nations. It is difficult to discount these principles as having life solely within the human mind or imagination; it would seem unlikely that these abstract concepts would have universal appeal if this were the

case. Thus it seems an inescapable conclusion that abstract things – not just material things – can have an existence independent of the mind.

If this is agreed upon, there seems to be little principled reason to include some abstract things but not others. For example, the fictional character Harry Potter influences through inspiring many childrens' (and adults') lives. Unless we impose a minimum threshold requirement for influence, it is difficult to reject the existence of fictional characters, and in general abstract concepts. I would suggest that no arbitrary threshold be placed on quantum for influence; that is, even trivial influence should be considered sufficient influence, bearing in mind that influence is sufficient for a thing to exist.¹ It is possible that things that do not exert any influence also exist. Under this framework, a thing has exerted sufficient influence to exist if it has been thought of, counted, or referred to.

I anticipate that the reader might object to the existence of contradictory things, on the basis that such things are logical impossibilities. I would like to make the argument that the realm of logic is a subset of the realm of existence; contradictory beings exist but not in the realm of logic.

Though I have approached this problem from a different path, the view I ultimately espouse somewhat aligns with early Russell's criteria for existence (pre theory of descriptions), with the notable exception that I do not see a reason to distinguish between existence and subsistence. I query whether existence can be considered a relative rather than absolute phenomenon, but that question is outside of the scope of this paper. To conclude, between the two positions that only material things exist versus that every thing exists, I favor the latter.

¹ Note the interpretation of influence I take is likely broader than the concept of power and causation referred to in the Eleatic principle.