



# **NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND**

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE



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[newdirectionsproject.com](http://newdirectionsproject.com)

# Seminar 29

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1. Recap: mystery and magic; non-existence
2. Names
3. Quantification

# 1. Recap: mystery and magic, non-existence

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The need for an 'account' of what thoughts are about

Putnam's charge of magic and mystery

My response: one way to demystify intentionality is to examine what is supposed to create the mystery

One source of mystery: thought about the non-existent

# Non-existent objects

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Part of the mystery of intentionality: objects of thought can be indeterminate, vague, non-specific, or non-existent

Here I will focus on the non-existent

# Non-existent objects

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Whenever someone thinks, they think about something

Or in other words: whenever someone thinks, there is something they think about

Some of the things they think about exist, and some of them do not

There are truths and falsehoods about the non-existent things they think about

And yet the entire world – the real world, reality, the universe, call it what you like – does not contain more than what exists.

# Sources of our talk about non-existence

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(1) Reference

(2) Quantification

(3) Truth

## 2. Reference and names

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Does the problem of non-existence derive from the fact that we seem to have names for non-existent objects?

# G E Moore

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In saying that there is no such thing as a round square, I seem to imply that there is such a thing. It seems as if there must be such a thing, merely in order that it may have the property of not-being. It seems, therefore, that to say of anything whatever that we can mention that it absolutely is not, were to contradict ourselves: as if everything we can mention must be, must have some kind of being.

GE Moore *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (published 1953)



# Bertrand Russell

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Non-existent objects 'all have being, for if they were not entities of a kind, we could make no propositions about them'

Russell, *Principles of Mathematics* (1903)

# Direct Reference

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If the direct reference theory of names were true, then the answer would be **yes**

See:

Nathan Salmon, 'Existence' (1987) and  
'Nonexistence' (1998)

Saul Kripke, *Reference and Existence* (2012)

# Singular negative existentials

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‘Pegasus does not exist’

(see Russell again: ‘if they were not entities of a kind, we could make no propositions about them’)

# Is this really the source?

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If direct reference were the problem, then there would be no problem of nonexistence if direct reference were false

So can we dismiss the problem so quickly by dismissing direct reference?

# The problem is not just about names

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C.D. Broad compared the sentence 'cats do not bark' with 'dragons do not exist':

'it is obvious that the first is about cats. But, if the second be true, it is certain that it cannot be about dragons for there will be no such things as dragons for it to be about'

C.D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy and Psychological Research* (1939)

# And not just about existential propositions

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‘Vulcan was hypothesised by Le Verrier to explain the perturbation in the orbit of Mercury’

# Russell's assumption

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‘if they were not entities of a kind, we could make no propositions about them’

What independent reasons are there for believing this?

### 3. Quantification

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Quantifiers are words that specify the quantity of things talked about

Distinguish:

- (a) natural language quantifiers
- (b) quantifiers in logical languages



# Natural language quantifiers

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Some, all, none, a few, many, most, exactly one, etc.

Syntactically they are **determiners** (like the articles)

They combine with nouns to make **quantified noun phrases**

*Some pigs, many pigs, a few pigs* etc.

# Quantifiers in logic

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All (universal quantifier) upside down  $\forall$

Some (existential quantifier) backwards  $\exists$

Syntax and semantics of these quantifiers

# Quantification and existence

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What does the quantifier 'some' have to do with existence?

Why is it the 'existential' quantifier?

To be continued....



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