



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



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newdirectionsproject.com

Seminar 30

1. Recap: the source of the problem of non-existence
2. Quantification ctd.
3. Being and existence

Next week's seminar

Next week's seminar will be on THURSDAY 9 MAY at 11am

Location room 326 Raised Faculty Buidling

1. Recap: the source of the problem of non-existence

One mystery of intentionality: thought about the non-existent

What is the source of this mystery?

Reference and names

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

Why is that a problem?

A Russellian principle

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)

Singular negative existentials

(1) 'Pegasus does not exist'

If Russell were right then this true proposition implies that Pegasus is an 'an entity of a kind'

If entities are things that exist, then (1) implies both that Pegasus exists and it does not exist

Cf Timothy Williamson, 'Necessary Existents' (2002)

- (1) Necessarily, if I do not exist, then the proposition that I do not exist is true
- (2) Necessarily, if the proposition that I do not exist is true, then the proposition that I do not exist exists
- (3) Necessarily, if the proposition that I do not exist exists, then I exist
- (4) Therefore: Necessarily, if I do not exist, then I exist

Direct reference

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

(Just as we can reject Williamson's argument by rejecting premise (3), analogously)

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

The problem is not just about names, but general terms too

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)

So where does the problem lie?

Is it because of reference and quantification over non-existents?

e.g. Some biblical characters existed and some did not

2. Quantification

What does the quantifier ‘some’ have to do with existence?

Why is it called the ‘existential’ quantifier?

(NB another tradition, coming from the Polish logicians, contrasts the universal quantifier with the particular quantifier: see C. Lejewski, ‘Logic and Existence’ 1954-5)

Quantification and existence, according to Quine

How do you determine what a theory is committed to? (Its 'ontological commitments')

You need to be able to state what a theory is committed to without believing it yourself

e.g. 'Le Verrier's theory of the world is committed to Vulcan'

Quine's two stage reduction

(1) Names to descriptions

- Vulcan = the F...
- Vulcan = the Vulcaniser

(2) Sentences containing descriptions analysed as quantified sentences

- The Vulcaniser is G = there exists a unique Vulcaniser which is G

Quine's criterion

The burden of objective reference is borne by the bound variables of quantification

‘To be is to be the value of a variable’

Your commitments are shown by what you are prepared to quantify over

Domains of quantification

‘For all x Fx ’ is true iff everything in the domain is F

‘For some x Tx ’ is true iff something in the domain is F

What is a domain?

The usual answer: real objects

Domains and non-existence

The standard semantics for the quantifiers seems to assume that the only things in the domain are real existing objects

3. Being and existence

What is the connection between three concepts:

- (1) Something — the natural language quantifier
- (2) 'There is...'/'There are' — and cognate idioms in other languages
- (3) Existence

Something

‘Some’ is a quantifier

‘Something’ a quantified noun phrase

‘There is...’

Does the presence of the verb ‘to be’ imply a connection here with being?

What about *il y a* and *es gibt*?

Do these imply connections with having and giving?

Existence

Is 'exists' a predicate?

How is 'there exists...' and 'there is...'

NB Not helped by linguists calling 'there is...' sentences *existential sentences*

Metaphysics of being and existence

Being, existence and subsistence

Meinong's view



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