

Plato's beard, and some varieties of shaving

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PES = Problematic Existential Sentences

SNE = Singular Negative Existentials, e.g. "the king of France doesn't exist" or "Pegasus doesn't exist"

QNE = Quantified Negative Existentials, e.g. "some of my possible siblings don't exist"

1. Plato's Beard

- (PES) Pegasus doesn't exist
- (P) If Pegasus doesn't exist, then there is something that doesn't exist
- (C) there is something that doesn't exist

A paradox for every solution :

Meinong's Paradox : Plato's Beard , things that don't exist.

Quine's Paradox : a conjunctive claim very similar to necessarily false claims.

"Everything exists but Pegasus doesn't." // "All cars are blue but my car isn't."

Meinongian motivation : linguistic sense

Quinean motivation : ontological sense

Some varieties of shaving :

(P1) If Pegasus doesn't exist, then *Pegasus* doesn't exist.

(P2) If *Pegasus* doesn't exist, then *Pegasus* is predicated the property non-existence.

(P3) If *Pegasus* is predicated non-existence, then *there is* something that doesn't exist.

Quine refusing (P1) :

"'Pegasus' is now a general term which, like 'centaur', is true of no objects."¹

Plantinga accepting (P1) and refusing (P2) :

"Many have denied that a sentence like 'Socrates exists' expresses a singular proposition – one that is about Socrates [...] This view of proper names, however, suffers from at least one defect: it is clearly false. [...] So there is such a thing as a singular negative existential proposition."

But "[singular propositions] come in two varieties: those that *predicate* a property of their subject [= *predicative*], and those that *deny* a property of it [= *impredicative*]."²

Salmon accepting (P2) and refusing (P3) :

"Nonexistent possible individuals such as Noman, have properties – for example, the property of non-existence."

But "By contrast with Meinongians, I am not claiming that there are individuals that do not exist. If the quantifier 'there is' is actualist, that Meinongian claim is simply contradictory."³

¹ Quine, Word and Object, §37.

² Plantinga, The Nature of Necessity, ch. VII, §8 & 11, ch. VIII, §1.

³ Salmon, "Existence", in Philosophical Perspectives, 1, Metaphysics, 1987.

2. Trouble with Quantified Negative Existentials

- (1) Some Mandated Records Don't Exist.⁴
- (2) Some of my possible siblings don't exist.
- (3) Some reptilian species don't exist anymore.
- (4) All Tolstoian statesmen exist.
- (5) All numbers exist.

(QP) "exist" and "there is" have the same meaning, namely the quantifier $\exists x.F(x)$

(QP) makes wrong predictions for QNE's truth-conditions

(1-3) $\exists x.[F(x) \wedge \neg \exists y.y = x] \equiv \perp$

(4-5) $\neg \exists x.[F(x) \wedge \neg \exists y.y = x] \equiv T$

(QP) makes wrong predictions for QNE's grammaticality conditions

(4') *There are all Tolstoian statesmen.

(5') *There are all numbers.

"Are TESs equivalent to corresponding **exist** sentences ? The answer to this question is clearly no."⁵

3. Saving ontology with no shaving : non literal discourse

Interpretive Structure : the structure on which a representation gets its meaning

- (1) There are true grammatical QNEs.
- (2) In order to be grammatical and true, a QNE requires that its Interpretive Structure contain a non empty domain corresponding to the predicate "do/does not exist".
- (3) *The Interpretive Structure of NL is the external world itself.*
- (c) The external world contains a non empty domain of non-existents.

Referential Semantics: Language \rightarrow World

Cognitive Semantics: Language \rightarrow Mental Model \rightarrow World

Literally true \Rightarrow true on an *ultimate* model (a model whose entities are in a one-one relation with entities in reality).

Non-literally true \Leftarrow true on an *intermediate* model (a non ultimate model).

(1) Ulysses doesn't exist.	(1) Look at your sleeve, that's a new hole!
(2) There is someone who doesn't exist in the Odyssey.	(2) There is a hole in your sleeve.
(c) There are things that don't exist.	(c) There are holes

Conclusion : *S1* "Pegasus doesn't exist" vs *S2* "Bucephale doesn't fly".

homogeneity : *S1* and *S2* are related to their Mental Models exactly in the same way.

heterogeneity : their Mental Models are related to the world in very different ways.

⁴ Los Angels Times, August 10, 1997.

⁵ Jon Gajewski, L-Triviality and Grammar, UConn Logic Group, 2/27/09.