

descriptions 'entity-invoking'. The question before us is whether he is right to claim that there are such entity-invoking uses.

The phenomena associated with failures of uniqueness and failures of existence might be taken to suggest an affirmative answer; so might Donnellan's notion of referential use. We have seen that suggestions coming from these sources are not decisive against Russell. However, Peacocke (1973: 117) suggests that there are independent reasons for recognizing entity-invoking uses.

One test for entity-invoking use is the possibility of switching between 'the' and 'that', that is, 'if, in an utterance of "the *F* is *G*", what is strictly and literally said would equally appropriately be said by an utterance of "that *F* is *G*"' (Peacocke 1973: 117). The idea is that complex demonstratives of the form 'that *F*' are certainly entity-invoking (which we can accept for the present purpose), so an equivalence would make the descriptive phrase also entity-invoking.

Peacocke gives the following example:

If you and I visited the Casino at Monte Carlo yesterday, and saw a man break the bank, and on the same day saw a man break the bank at Nice, and it is common knowledge between us that this is so, then the description 'The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo yesterday' as it occurs in a particular utterance *today* of 'the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo yesterday had holes in his shoes' . . . is here entity-invoking both intuitively and by our criterion. (Peacocke 1973: 117)

However, it is unclear that we have a decisive case. First, the criterion, a willingness to say 'that' instead of 'the', may not establish equivalence. I might be as willing to say 'He died of a coronary' as I am to say 'He died of heart failure', but these claims are not equivalent. Second, it would seem that someone who overhears the utterance, but who lacks the common knowledge upon which, according to Peacocke, the claim of entity-invokingness depends, can, intuitively, understand what is said just as well as the participants.

I believe that there is no decisive case for any treatment of definite descriptions other than Russell's. This view has been elaborated and defended in great detail by Neale (1992).

FURTHER READING: Neale (1992).

3. EXISTENCE

3.1. Russell's View

Russell (1918–19, lecture 5 and pp. 248–51)

The classic problem about existence is how grammatically singular negative existential sentences can be true. Examples are 'Vulcan does not exist' or 'The

golden mountain does not exist'. The problem is that it seems that for such sentences to be meaningful, the grammatically singular expression ('Vulcan'¹⁷ or 'The golden mountain') ought to refer; but if the expression does refer, it presumably refers to something which exists, and so the sentence is false.

One response to the difficulty is to allow that there are things which do not exist. Then we can say that 'Vulcan' and 'The golden mountain' refer to such non-existents, and the sentences say truly of them that they do not exist. This response is associated with Meinong (1904).

Russell had two arguments against it. One is that it offends against 'a robust sense of reality' which is 'very necessary in framing a correct analysis of propositions about unicorns, golden mountains, round squares, and other such pseudo-objects' (1919: 170). This appears to be nothing other than the affirmation of a prejudice.

The other argument looks as if it has more bite, since it claims that Meinong's view involves contradictions. The view seems forced to allow that the round square is both round and not round, and that the existent present King of France both exists and does not exist. A general principle invoked by the argument is that it must be true to affirm of the so-and-so that it is a so-and-so.

It would be agreed on all hands that existent objects cannot be contradictory, but it is unclear why one has to suppose that this goes also for non-existent ones. The very contradictoriness of the round square could be taken as a proof of its non-existence.

Russell says that if a theory can be found which does not involve these contradictions, it is to be preferred (1905: 45). We certainly need to decide whether any logical considerations force us into Meinong's position. Russell shows that there is an alternative.

In the case where the grammatically singular expression in the negative existential sentence is a description (e.g. 'The golden mountain does not exist'), we have already seen how Russell handles the situation. He denies that the expression is really a singular one, or that its job is to refer, treating it instead as an existential quantifier. The analysis (to recall) is: It is not the case that there is exactly one thing which is both golden and a mountain. In the analysis, there is no question of referring to the non-existent, and it is no harder to understand how a sentence like this can be true than it is to understand how a sentence like 'There are no unicorns' can be true.

When the grammatically singular expression is a name (e.g. 'Vulcan'), the standard interpretation of Russell sees him as regarding it as synonymous with some one definite description, and thus reducing this case to the one just considered. This does not fit with my interpretation of Russell. Russell as I read him is forced to allow that there may be no public meaning of 'Vulcan does not

¹⁷ I am thinking not of the god of Greek mythology but of a planet postulated to explain the orbit of Mercury: it turned out that there was no such planet.

exist', and so no general analysis. Each individual will be able to use these words to make a judgement, but there is no guarantee that there is a single judgement which each will make. Thus one person might use the words to judge that there is no unique planet lying between Mercury and the sun; but if there is a prevalent theory that rays from Vulcan cause cancer, another might use the words 'Vulcan does not exist' to deny that rays from any one planet cause cancer.

In the case of some names without bearers, there is a description one must know in order to understand it. For example, one does not understand 'Santa Claus' unless one knows that he is the bearded sledge-driving Laplander who brings Christmas presents. Russell's analysis can reduce these cases to ones in which the grammatically singular expression is a definite description.

Russell expresses part of his position on this issue by saying that existence is not a predicate of individuals. By this he means that we cannot affirm or deny the concept of existence of any particular thing. His reason is that, if we did, the result would be tautology (in the case of affirmation) or contradiction (in the case of denial: it is contradictory to refer to something and go on to deny its existence). He puts the point as follows: 'To say that they [the actual things that there are in the world] do not exist is strictly nonsense, but to say that they do exist is also strictly nonsense' (Russell 1918–19: 233). 'Exists' is not a predicate of individuals, but rather of propositional functions. By a propositional function Russell means something like ' x is a unicorn'. To say that unicorns exist is to say that this propositional function is true of at least one object; to say that they do not exist is to say that it is not true of anything. Russell's analysis of sentences like 'The golden mountain does not exist' can be similarly expressed: ' x is golden and a mountain and anything which is golden and a mountain is identical to x ' is not true of anything.

However, there is some evidence that we do allow that 'exists' can be affirmed and denied of individuals. This will be reviewed in Section 3.2.

3.2. Is 'Exists' Ever a Predicate of Individuals?

If we set aside Meinong's view, then if 'exists' is a predicate of individuals, it is a predicate true of all of them. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this idea; it makes 'exists' like such predicates as 'is self-identical'.

An expression apt to express the existence of individuals is available in Russell's preferred formal language. To say that x exists is equivalent to saying that there is something it is, and this could be formalized:

$$\exists y(y = x).$$

This is true of everything (and the formula is a theorem); its denial is true of nothing. But the expression is perfectly well-formed. So Russell should not have said that the attempt to affirm or deny existence of an individual results in non-

sense. The situation, rather, is that affirmations will be inevitably successful, and denials failures. There is no reason in logic why there should not be such a predicate of individuals.

It is easy to qualify 'exists' in such a way that the result is a predicate not true of everything. Thus one can use 'currently exists' for just those things which exist at the time of utterance, so that the predicate is false of things which no longer exist or which do not yet exist. This ought to be accepted on all hands; the real issue is whether there is a completely unqualified notion of existence applicable to individuals. In favour of such an unqualified notion, one could adduce the obvious explanation of the semantics of, for example, 'currently exists': 'currently' serves to restrict the predicate 'exists', taking us to a subset of all existents, rather as 'happy' restricts 'man' in 'happy man', taking us to a subset of all men.

One might be tempted to suppose that an unqualified 'exists', as a predicate of individuals, would not have much role in our language, since it would never allow us to say anything interesting. This may be too swift, as recognition of existence as a predicate of individuals may be required in understanding more complex constructions. One putative example is given at the end of the preceding paragraph. Another is given by Moore (1936: 143–4), who claimed, correctly, that 'This might not have existed' is both intelligible, and potentially debatable. (If 'this' is used to refer to a person, then presumably what is said is true; if to a number, presumably false; and there may be unclear cases as well.) The most straightforward account of 'This might not have existed' is on the following lines:

It might have been that: this does not exist.

What follows the colon can hardly be seen as other than a denial of a predication of existence of an individual.

The other main reason for exploring the idea that 'exists' is a predicate of individuals is that otherwise we have to say something unsatisfactory about negative existential sentences using names. We must either say, with the mythical Russell, that these are synonymous with descriptions, whereas we may be hard put to find any descriptions common to all users of the language; or we must say, with the real Russell, that there is no guarantee that such sentences have any meaning in the public language. Neither option is entirely happy (though the second is hard decisively to refute); so it is worth seeing if there is an alternative.

3.3. Evans's View

Evans (1982, ch. 10)

One alternative is the metalinguistic view. It analyses sentences like 'Vulcan does not exist' as saying that the name has no bearer. The problem with this