

EXISTENCE

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In another place¹ I analyzed in some detail statements about “imaginary objects” such as centaurs and Mr. Pickwick. In the first two Sections of this paper I shall attempt a very partial analysis of the ordinary concepts of existence. In the last Section I shall consider, in relation to this analysis, the following views: that existence is a property; that to conceive of anything as nonexistent would be to form no conception at all; and that “everything exists” or that there are no “unrealized possibles”. In relation to the last view I shall also discuss the notion of self-identity.

I

In his “Is Existence A Predicate?” Murray Kiteley distinguishes what he believes are two types of uses of ‘exists,’ a “non-excluder” and an “excluder” type of use. The first he calls “the most exiguous use of it, the use which closely corresponds to the non-locative use of the ‘there is’ idiom.”² This use (which I shall refer to as “exists₁”) he holds, “makes nonsense out of universal affirmative statements in which it appears. . .”³ Consequently “the concept of existence associated with this use of the verb. . . [is] not. . . a predicate.”⁴ The second type of use is the non-exiguous uses of the word, which he calls “excluder uses.”⁵ ‘Exists₁,’ he believes, is

¹ “About Imaginary Objects”, *Ratio*, vol. VIII, No. 1 (June, 1966), pp. 77-89.

² *Mind*, vol. 83, No. 291 (July, 1964), p. 368.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Following Roland Hall, “Excluders”, *Analysis*, Oct. 1959, pp. 1-7.

exemplified by such utterances as “Tame tigers exist” and “Horses exist,” since it makes nonsense out of *e.g.*, “All tame tigers exist” and “Some tame tigers do not exist”: in general, utterances of the form “All. . .s exist” and “Some. . .s do not exist” respectively. G. E. Moore, who considered such statements in his contribution to the Aristotelian Society Symposium in which he inquired whether existence is a predicate (1936), says that they are “queer and puzzling expressions.” Kiteley notes that “He [Moore] does not outright say that they are nonsensical, but that they do not. . .carry their meaning, if they have any, on the face of them.”⁶ He adds:

The oddness of “All tame tigers exist” is the same. . . as the oddness of “There are all tame tigers.” The oddness is somewhere in the same family with “The warmth of the temperature was. . .” and, more closely, “All the cars on the freeway were numerous.” “Exists,” when employed exiguously, tells you something about tame tigers but nothing about each and every tame tiger; it tells you something about the membership, but nothing about the members. Existence, here, is something like *full* strength of a regiment: the regiment can be at full strength, but none of the members can be.⁷

That is, ‘exists₁’ is not applied distributively. In agreement with Moore, Kiteley concludes that ‘exists₁’ does not stand for a logical predicate;⁸ and that is surely true. For in order that it may stand for a predicate, existence must be ascribable to individual things, to members of a class individually; though that does not, of course, suffice to make existence₁ a logical predicate. But if ‘exists₁’ is not used distributively, why is “Some tame tigers exist₁”[(2)] intelligible? For (2) is the expanded form of “Tame tigers exist₁”[(3)], which is

⁶ Kiteley, *Ibid.*, p. 368.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 369. Italics in original.

⁸ As I use the term ‘logical predicate’ in this paper, a “logical predicate” is a characteristic or a relation of some kind or other. This is the sense of the term which is relevant to Anselm’s ontological argument discussed later.

perfectly meaningful, since (2) *ordinarily* means “At least two or three tame tigers exist₁”[(4)].⁹ The answer appears to be that (3) does not mean *e.g.* “This, that, that, etc. tame tiger exists”[(5)], assuming that in some rather unusual contexts the latter has an intelligible meaning. But in such contexts ‘exists’ would have a different use from ‘exists₁’. “Some tame tigers exist” is normally used to *rule out* the *nonexistence* of any tame tigers; it is not used to talk about existent tame tigers individually, the way “This (that, the other) is a tame tiger” is about some individual tiger(s). So (2) and (3) do not mean the same as “This (that, the other) is a tame tiger”[(6)].

What about “All tame tigers exist₁”? Why is this sentence unintelligible? The answer is that it cannot be about the membership of existent tame tigers, unlike (2). For ‘all’ means “each and every” and so purports to refer (hence to ascribe existence₁) to every individual tame tiger —which is inconsistent with the meaning and uses of ‘exists₁’. In order to make sense out of “All tame tigers exist,” we must regard it as elliptical for “All tame tigers in the world exist in this zoo (country, etc.)”[(7)]; *i.e.* we must employ ‘exist’ in a different way, locatively, corresponding to the locative use of ‘There is (are),’ in “There are tame tigers in this zoo (country, etc.)”[(8)]. Indeed, the latter is a more natural way of talking than (7) itself, assuming that (7) is a correct way of using ‘exist’.

It is significant that the difficulties regarding “All. . .s exist” and “Some. . .s do not exist” do not arise in relation to statements of the form “There are X’s. . .” and “There are no X’s. . .”; for example, if we say: “There are no centaurs in the universe” instead of “No centaurs exist₁ (in the universe)”.¹⁰ For then the contradictory of that proposition

⁹ But they have somewhat different uses. “Some tame tigers exist” is used in response to assertions that *no* tigers are tame or that all tigers are wild. “Tame tigers exist” would mean the same as “Some tame tigers *exist*,” where ‘exist’ is emphasized.

¹⁰ Similarly if we say “There are horses *in the universe* (or, *in existence*)” instead of “Horses exist”. This disposes of a puzzle which Kiteley mentions. “If, so

would be: "There are centaurs in the universe," which is meaningful –and false. Thus if we remember that "No centaurs exist₁ (in the universe)" means "There are₁ no centaurs in the universe," any temptation to construe 'exist₁' predicatively, and to think that its contradictory is "Some centaurs de not exist₁ in the universe," would vanish or not arise at all. "There are centaurs in the universe" and "There are no centaurs in the universe" are the only two possible forms of words here: "There are some centaurs in the universe" is the same as "There are centaurs in the universe"; while "There are all centaurs in the universe" and "There aren't some centaurs in the universe" are meaningless in ordinary language. Moreover, there is no obvious temptation to construe "There is (are₁) . . ." as a predicate-term, in contrast to 'exist(s₁)'.

The pitfalls arising from the grammatical form of "No centaurs exist₁ (in the universe)" and "Centaurs exist₁ in the universe" would also be fairly well avoided if we consider that the contradictory of "No centaurs exist₁ in the universe" is "Centaurs exist₁ in the universe"; provided that the latter is not construed as meaning "All centaurs exist₁ (in the universe)." That is, if "Centaurs (no centaurs) exist₁ in the universe" is treated differently, as it should be, from such statements as "Men are mortal." For this is usually intended to be construed as elliptical for "All men are mortal." The former should also be treated differently from "Dogs bark," which is usually intended to mean that dogs generally bark or many dogs bark. In other words, "Centaurs exist₁ (do not exist₁) in the universe" should not be construed in the same

the puzzle goes, 'Horses exist' and 'There are horses' come to the same thing, then you would expect the statement 'There are horses which exist' to be redundant, the statement 'There are non-existent horses' to be self-contradictory". (*Op. cit.*, p. 369). For as I have indicated by means of the italics, "Horses exist" and "There are horses", period, do not come to the same thing. "There are horses. . ." is existence-neutral. In some contexts, the person uttering it wishes to imply that horses exist (*i. e.* "There *are* horses" or "There are horses in Sicily (China, etc.) . . ."); while in others it is used to refer to fictitious or mythical horses. Kiteley is therefore right in saying that "There are non-existent horses, *e. g.* Pegasus" is quite consistent. (*Ibid.*, p. 370.) The puzzle arises because of a misunderstanding of the logical grammar of "There are. . . s."

way as, say: "Summer nights are pleasant," which, depending on the context among other things, is normally construed to mean either "Many (the majority of, etc.) summer nights are pleasant" or "All summer nights are pleasant."

Despite these precautions, the danger in construing 'exists₁' as a predicate-term does not altogether vanish. For one might still be tempted to construe "No centaurs exist₁ in the universe" analogously to, say, "No apple trees are green in winter" or "No mountains on earth are golden."

Does 'exists' also have an "excluder" type of use, as Kiteley maintains? Kiteley, following Hall, characterizes excluders as serving "to rule out something without adding anything, and ambiguously rule out different things according to the context."¹¹ An example according to Kiteley is (9) "All the stamps in this issue still exist, but some in this one do not." He claims that even "All tame tigers exist" "can be given a setting that makes it come to life"; viz. in a context in which "Extraordinary, they all exist!" would not have the force of the absurd "None of the tigers do not exist" but rather the intelligible "None of them have died, nor escaped, nor been shipped back to India" (referring to a number of tigers brought into the country after a certain date). He concludes:

You can, then, say that All A's exist when by so saying you are denying for all the A's that there are that they are, e.g. extinct, out of production, destroyed, hallucinatory, mythical, fabulous, or fictional. Each item in this list is an attribute and as an attribute can be affirmed universally or denied particularly.¹²

Now I agree that 'exists' has other uses than its exiguous use, its use as 'exists₁'; but Hall's notion of an "excluder" type of "use," of 'exists,' e.g. (9), does not pinpoint what is charac-

¹¹ *Ibid.* Hall gives a third feature of "excluders"; viz. that they are "attributive as opposed to predicative" (*op. cit.*, p. 1). By an 'attributive adjective' he means an adjective which "cannot be understood until it is known what. . . it is being applied to in a given case." (*Ibid.*)

¹² *Ibid.*

teristic or peculiar about this use or these uses. In (9) 'exists' ('exists₂') does correspond to the locative use of "There is (are)"; but it does not have an "excluder use", since such an alleged *use* does not exist. The word 'use' here does not correspond to any ordinary or common philosophical employment of this protean word. What Hall baptizes as the "excluder use" is a small number of features rather arbitrarily selected from the large mass of features exhibited by a motley array of words. The three features he selects are not only insufficient to give "excluders" a distinct use: they are not all logically connected. Thus (a) the "ambiguous" exclusion of different things depending on the context, which Hall regards as a necessary condition of an excluder, depends on a word's (b) possession of two or more conventional uses, senses or meanings, and has nothing to do with (c) its "not adding anything" (if it does not). For instance, Hall does not show that a word cannot possess feature (a) unless it also possesses feature (c); and vice versa. Indeed, a multivocal word such as 'man' excludes different things in different contexts, though it also *adds* something—a set of characteristics and relations— or is a positive term, in such sentences as "A is a man," "A man is such-and-such," "P is a great man," etc.

Now (9) suffices to show that 'exists' *has* a second use different from use 1; since it is an intelligible sentence, though admittedly rather strained or awkward. "All the stamps in this issue are still intact, but some in this one are not" is a more natural way of expressing the proposition expressed by (9). However, I think that Kiteley is wrong regarding "All tame tigers exist"[(1)]. In providing a setting for "it," he is really thinking of some other sentence, not (1). The setting he envisages illuminates the meaning of "Extraordinary, they all exist!" which, in that setting, is elliptical for "Extraordinary! All the tame tigers brought into this country after such-and-such a date still exist (have not been shipped back, destroyed, etc.)." (Likewise with "Some tame tigers do not exist"; e.g. if in the setting Kiteley provides, the tally shows that some of the tame tigers brought into the country. . . have ceased to exist.) This is seen if the tiger canvassers were to

exclaim, "Extraordinary, all tame tigers exist!" Clearly this would have no relation to the situation Kiteley envisages, and would be as puzzling —to my mind as nonsensical— as ever. In other words, 'exists' cannot have uses one and two in the same sentence.

The essential feature of the use of 'exists₂', which distinguishes it from that of 'exists₁', appears to be that the former is spatially and temporally locative. Some of the exclusions that sentences in which it occurs effect are a direct *consequence* of this special feature of 'exists₂', while the rest of the exclusions —fictitiousness, etc., as the case may be in the particular context— stems from the use of 'exists' *in general*; *i.e.* are exclusions common to all uses of 'exist'.¹³ For instance, "All the stamps in this issue still exist" rules out the destruction of the stamps in this issue, at this time. The same is true of "Most (all) existent tigers are found in tropical countries", which rules out the present nonexistence, in tropical countries, of all tame tigers.

One other use of 'exists' must be briefly considered in this section; its use in *e.g.* (10) "The enemy exists to be killed" (from a newscast), (11) "To exist is to suffer", and (12) "Paintings exist to be enjoyed".

(C) When used in relation to persons or other living things, 'exists₃' is sometimes interchangeable with 'lives,' as in (11); but in other instances, such as (10), this would not quite do. "The enemy lives to be killed" is not quite right as a sentence. In (12) too, of course, this substitution would not do, indeed would be nonsensical. On the other hand, (12) can be rendered by using 'are' instead of 'exists'; *viz.* "Paintings are to be enjoyed" [(12)']; while (11) can be rendered as "There are

¹³ However, the point is that any or practically any word except an interjection or a proper name (even this excludes certain things in some way) excludes certain things. It does so whether it is "positive" or "negative" (*e.g.* a simple positive or a simple negative predicate), by virtue of its meaning. It cannot have a meaning unless it excludes something. But does 'exist₂' exclude without "adding" a property or relation? Or is existence₂ a logical predicate? I shall not attempt to answer this question in this paper; though the discussion in Sections II and III is not, perhaps, unrelated to it.

many people who live to suffer.” [(11’)] However, ‘There are. . . who’ here is redundant. As for (10), this cannot be rendered in the ‘There are’ idiom. “There are people (or enemies) who exist to be killed” means something rather different.

In (11) and (12) ‘exists’ is used non-exiguously; it is used in relation to individual things *qua* individuals, hence can conceivably stand for a property or relation. In (10) it is applied to the enemy as a class; nevertheless this use is distinct from its first use. “All the enemy exist to be killed” is intelligible though awkward, if ‘enemy’ is used as a plural noun, not as a collective noun;¹⁴ and ‘tame tigers’ is not a collective noun in “Tame tigers exist” (and in any other application for that matter) and so is not the reason why “All tame tigers exist” is nonsensical. Note that in “Enemy troops exist to be killed” [(13)] ‘exist’ is used distributively; and so “All (some, no) enemy troops exist to be killed” [(14)] and “Some enemy troops do not exist to be killed” [(15)] are perfectly in order.

Finally, does ‘exist’ in “I think therefore I exist” [(16)], or—since this sentence has no normal use as an *ordinary* sentence— “I exist because I think” [(16’)] have the present use? The answer appears to be “no”; since it *seems* to have use *one*. It does not seem to fit use two, since it appears to correspond to the non-locative use of ‘There is (are)’. (16’) is logically similar to “Certain (or some) things exist because they think” [(17)], which can be rendered as “There are things which exist because they think.” But is not *e.g.* “All men exist because they think” [(18)] intelligible in ordinary language, whereas, as we saw, *e.g.* “All horses exist₁” and “All tame tigers exist₁” are not? Clearly the crucial question is the precise meaning(s) which ‘because’ can or is supposed to have in (18); and so whether (a) *e.g.* “All horses exist because they neigh (gallop, etc.)” [(19)] is intelligible, and whether (b) ‘exists’ in (19) is ‘exists₁’. But I shall leave these questions for another occasion.

¹⁴ “The enemy exists to be killed” and “All the enemies exist to be killed” are I think more natural.

II

It will be recalled that in Section I I briefly argued, in agreement with Moore and Kiteley, that 'exists₁' is not a predicate word in the sense described there. In this Section I shall pursue the matter in somewhat greater detail.

[1] In Section I I argued, in agreement with these two philosophers, that because "Tame tigers exist" is meaningful and "All tame tigers exist" is meaningless in ordinary language, 'exist₁' is not a predicate term. From the same putative fact it also follows that the first part of the well-known argument by Ayer, Broad and Wisdom, which purports to show that 'exists' is not a predicate because if it is, all affirmative existential assertions would be tautologous,¹⁵ is faulty. For then such sentences as "Horses exist" cannot be properly paraphrased as "All horses exist₂", whether or not we suppose that existence is a predicate; whereas, as Nakhnikian and Salmon show,¹⁶ this part of the argument rests precisely on this paraphrase.

Kiteley rejects the above part of the argument, together with its second part —*viz.* that if existence is a predicate, all negative existential claims are self-contradictory—¹⁷ by attacking its general presupposition as a whole, that "when we ascribe an attribute to a thing, we covertly assert that it exists".¹⁸ This supposition, Kiteley rightly points out, is false. We can and do "predicate of or ascribe to, . . . make mention of, talk about, refer to, speak of, or make statements about that which fails to exist".¹⁹ I myself have argued this thesis at some length in my "About Imaginary Objects",²⁰ and refer the interested reader to it. As a concession to Ryle (*Dilemmas*), Kiteley adds that ". . . if what you are talking about is

¹⁵ The argument is quoted by Nakhnikian and Salmon in their " 'Exists' As a Predicate," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 66 (1957), p. 535. See also Kiteley, *op. cit.*, pp. 365-367.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 536-537.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See also Section III of this paper.

nonexistent, it must at least be a conversation piece in some body of legend, fable or fiction, or some passé scientific hypothesis.”²¹ This is generally true; but it is taken care of by what I think is the crucial point here; *viz.* that in order to be able to talk about something nonexistent, you must have some *concept* or *conception* of that nonexistent thing. In many or most cases, this is ensured by the nonexistent thing’s forming part of some body of legend, etc. If such a concept or conception exists, one will be able to meet Kiteley’s condition that “you must be able to make, if challenged, identifying references. . .” This does not mean that what we refer to by the word ‘centaur,’ say, is the concept or conception of centaur itself.

[2] Nakhnikian and Salmon maintain that “The proposition ‘All horses exist’ is. . . a truism, for it merely says that there are no nonexistent horses.”²² This is certainly an unusual, philosophical way of construing the meaning of the sentence “All horses exist” (17). It is perfectly possible to give it this meaning by stipulation, as Nakhnikian and Salmon in effect do; but this achieves nothing insofar as we are concerned with the question whether ‘exists’ is a predicate term in its *ordinary* uses; especially if, as I maintained earlier, (17) is meaningless in ordinary language. The fact that in the ordinary meaning of ‘refer to’ and ‘talk about’ we can and do refer to and talk about nonexistent things does not commit us to their reification, contrary to the view of some philosophers.²³ Only if we make the unwarranted assumption that we can only talk about existent things will that conclusion validly follow.

[3] Is it true, as Wisdom holds and Nakhnikian and Salmon agree, that if ‘exists’ is a predicate term “Horses do not exist” would mean “If there exists anything which is a horse, it does not exist”?²⁴ Wisdom thinks this is so because if ‘exists’ is a

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 367.

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 537.

²³ See Section III.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 537.

predicate, "Horses do not exist" would be construed as "If there exists anything which is a horse, it is not herbivorous." I think that these philosophers are wrong; because the *ordinary* sentence "Horses are not herbivorous", in which the predicate word 'herbivorous' occurs, does not mean "If there exists anything which is a horse, it is not herbivorous."²⁵ In everyday real-life contexts as opposed to contexts in which we talk about the contents of imaginative literature, myths of fables, the context makes clear that in saying "horses are not herbivorous" we *are* talking about real horses. That is, in these contexts the sentence may be regarded as elliptical for "Real (actual) horses are not herbivorous." But this sentence is categorical, and cannot be rendered by any conditional sentence. On the other hand, in a "literary context," where we may be speaking about horses depicted in some novel, "Horses are not herbivorous" may be elliptical for "The horses depicted in the novel are imagined to be nonherbivorous." Here it is understood that the horses talked about are imaginary. And once again, the sentence does not mean "If there exists anything which is a horse, it is not herbivorous."

The upshot is that even supposing 'exists' to be a predicate word, "Horses do not exist", as an ordinary sentence, cannot be properly rendered as "If there exists anything which is a horse, it does not exist."

Kiteley agrees with Nakhnikian and Salmon that "Horses exist" may be elliptical for "Some horses exist," and also with their transcription of the latter (with "E" the existential predicate) as " $(\exists x) (Hx.Ex)$," which is not a tautologous form. He then comments: "This is true enough for general existential claims, but what about singular ones? 'Pegasus exists', by their definition of 'E', ['E' is defined by them by the trivial property of self-identity] becomes 'Pegasus is self-identical', which is patently trivial. They have, thus only undercut half of what the major premise [of Ayer's etc. argument] claims. The rest stands; singular existential statements

²⁵ Though this is the way formal logicians normally render "Horses are not herbivorous."

remain trivial, and, we would have to suppose, singular existence is not a predicate.”²⁶

My only comment here (over and above the comment that the ascription of a predicate to a thing —here Pegasus— does not imply that it exists, so that “Pegasus exists” would not be tautologous if we suppose ‘exists’ to be a predicate) is this: that “E” cannot be plausibly defined by the trivial property of self-identity; since nonexisting but consistently thinkable things, e.g. centaurs, can also be said to be self-identical. The concept of a centaur is the concept of something that is “self-identical” —a centaur is half horse half man and not (also) anything else. If something exists if follows that it is self-identical; but the converse is false. Self-identity is only a necessary, not also a sufficient condition of existence. Perhaps anything conceived —or conceivable— is and must be conceived as self-identical; yet it may or may not exist. Thus I am saying more than that if a centaur *were to exist*, it would be self identical.

The laws of identity and contradiction are applicable to what is possible as well as to what is actual. This criticism presupposes that it makes sense to speak of things that do not exist but can possible exist. Since Nakhnikian and Salmon reject this view, or maintain that “all things exist,” the objection would be unacceptable to them. For their reasons, and for my criticism of them, see Section III.²⁷

Jaakko Hintikka holds that Nakhnikian and Salmon’s definition of “E” (as self-identity, $(b=b)$) is inadequate. I am not concerned with the first part of his argument, which attempts to show the *logical* undesirability of this definition.²⁸ More immediately relevant to our purposes, is what follows:

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 367.

²⁷ Nicholas Rescher, in “The Logic of Existence And Denotation” (*The Philosophical Review*, vol. 66, No. 2, April 1959, p. 163) rejects the above definition of “E” by showing that it has as its immediate consequence that $(x)(Ex)$, or that all things exist. For Rescher’s reasons for rejecting $(x)(Ex)$, see *Ibid.*, pp. 160-162, and Section III of this paper.

²⁸ “Studies in the Logic of Existence and Necessity”, *The Monist*, vol. 50, No. 1, January 1966, p. 70. Note also pp. 71-73.

If we. . . push the formula ($b=b$) into the role of a predicate of existence, difficulties will ensue. . . Do those who favour this approach want to say that 'Homer is Homer' implies that Homer existed? Or that we have to deny that Hamlet was identical with Hamlet in order to be able to deny that he really existed? I cannot associate any clear sense with these statements, and I cannot see any reasons for incorporating them into one's logical systems.²⁹

Again—

Surely we may want to assert and to deny identities between individuals without being committed to their existence. We might *e.g.* want to disprove Homer's existence by considering several possible identifications of Homer with other individuals.³⁰

Hintikka offers $(Ex) (b=x)$ as “. . . the most natural candidate [for 'b exists'] here”. “. . . What its use here amounts to is to say that whenever a and b are identical and a exists, b exists too. To this principle there do not seem to be any plausible objections.”³¹ Later he adds: “. . . What $(Ex) (x=a)$ says is that the individual referred to by a is identical with one of the values of the bound variable x ; and being identical with one of its values is obviously the same as simply *being* one of the values.”³²

It is clearly true that whenever a and b are identical and

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 74. A. N. Prior, in *Time And Modality* (Oxford, 1957), p. 32, proposes "There are facts about x ' as equivalent to ' x exists'." This would be an adequate characterization of the sentence in our *first* and *second* uses of 'exists' provided that there are no facts about nonexistent things. This latter would be true if *e.g.* the view that "everything exists" is adopted. Prior himself gives certain specific reasons for his view; though I believe he also accepts the theory that everything exists. One of his main reasons is that on the view that there are facts about nonexistent things, "some facts about x would entail x 's present existence and some would not, [but that] it is not at all clear which facts would go into which box. . ."

a exists, *b* exists too (though there are all kinds of questions relating to what the symbols '*a*' and '*b*' would refer to if *a* and *b* are identical). And as far as I am able to judge, Hintikka argues very persuasively in favour of his definition of '*b* exists', so far as purely logical considerations are concerned. But his proposal is not really a definition or even a characterization of 'exists' itself, since the notion of existence [in (Ex)] is used in the formal counterpart.³³ Hall maintains that "excluders" can only be negatively defined. "Excluders must be defined by way of exhaustion. . . Consequently, excluders are not amenable to definition in any strict sense; we can only point to where and how they are actually used."³⁴ This fits both 'exists₁' and 'exists₂', whether or not we subscribe to the notion of an "excluder use". Thus 'xs exist₁' can be "paraphrased" as "xs are not hallucinatory, not fictitious, not fictional, not extinct, not. . ." However, it appears that any attempt to define or characterize each of these notions themselves must inevitably make use of the notion of existence or reality; consequently that, in the last analysis, neither they (hence 'not existing') nor existence can be strictly defined. The same observations apply to 'exists₂'. "Xs are not hallucinatory, not fictitious, etc." states the *different necessary and/or sufficient conditions* for the existence of xs, not any putative "defining features" of 'exists₁' or 'exists₂'. "Xs are not hallucinatory", or "Xs are not fictitious", etc. —or even the logical conjunction of these— does not provide the *meaning* of 'xs exist'. Different kinds of things, such as objects, events, persons, psychological phenomena, etc. satisfy different (in some cases partly overlapping) conditions of existence; and so a single all-embracing set of sufficient conditions is not forthcoming.³⁵ This would not in itself prevent our giving different sets of "defining conditions" for uses one and two of 'exists,' if these uses varied with the kinds of phenomena to which the word is applied in

³³ For Rescher's definition of "E" see *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

³⁵ See my "On Existence", *Methodos*, 1957.

each case. But this is not so. For instance, 'exists' has use *one* both in "Horses exist" and "Feelings exist". (However, I believe that 'exists' has the same meaning in at least uses one and two.)

III

It is a commonplace that Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence in its traditional, and, until recently, its only recognized form,³⁶ has been rejected partly on the ground that existence is not a predicate in the sense of an attribute (a quality or property). An assumption underlying this criticism is that the notion of perfection would be inapplicable to existence if it is not a quality or property.³⁷ Actually, in at least one important respect the supposition that existence is a property does not, as is commonly supposed, lend support to the present version of the ontological argument. I shall not defend this proposition here; since an adequate treatment of the subject as a whole requires a careful analysis of the various meanings and uses of 'perfect' and 'perfection'; to ascertain the sense or senses of the latter in which, if any, existence, if it is considered as a predicate (*e.g.* a property), can be meaningfully said to be a perfection. (For instance, in a private communication with the author, Gilbert Ryle maintained that in the ontological argument's claim that existence is a perfection, 'perfect' must be understood in the sense of 'complete' in such sentences as "He's a perfect fool!") I shall mainly comment on Nakhnikian's and Salmon's

³⁶ That is, until Norman Malcolm and other contemporary philosophers defended a putative second form of it.

³⁷ Kant argues, among other things, that since existence is not a predicate (an attribute), it cannot form part of the concept of a thing. Hence ". . . if I cogitate a being as the highest reality, without defect or imperfection, the question still remains —whether this being exists or not." (*Critique of Pure Reason* (London, 1930), translated by J. M. D. Meiklejohn, p. 369.) If this is true, it would be immaterial whether or not existence is a perfection. On the other hand, if existence forms or can form part of the concept of a thing, the question of whether it is a perfection becomes important. However, even this would not necessarily guarantee the validity of the ontological argument.

discussion of the subject in the article under consideration. They write as follows:

The treatment of “exists” as a predicate does not. . . render the ontological argument valid. If anything, it helps to clarify the invalidity of the argument. Those philosophers who have criticized the ontological argument on the ground that existence is not an attribute may have chosen an unfortunate formulation for the correct thesis that “exists” is a redundant predicate.³⁸

Although I believe that the conclusion stated in the first sentence quoted above is true, in at least one important respect, I cannot accept the reasoning which led the authors to it. For it is partly based on the supposition that “To conceive of God, or anything for that matter, as nonexistent would be to form a conception which contains no attributes whatever, and this conception would be no conception at all.”³⁹ This follows from the supposition of the authors that “If we hold, as seems reasonable, that forming a conception involves at least listing some properties [which is true], then we see that every conception involves the predicate “exists” [which is false]. Thus not only God’s essence but every essence implies existence [which is also false]”.⁴⁰

The following may be said regarding the view that to conceive of anything as nonexistent would be to form no conception at all. As they state it, what Nakhnikian and Salmon exactly hold is far from clear. They may be saying (a) that we cannot conceive (think) of anything nonexistent, period: that there are, and there can be, no concepts of anything nonexistent. We can only conceive or think of existent things. For example, that we do not and cannot have a con-

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 542. It is often a redundant predicate in uses *one* and *two* in that the context often makes clear whether or not what is being talked about is supposed to exist. It may also be redundant whenever what it excludes (Section I) is clear from the context.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 541.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

cept of what are called merely possible things. On the other hand, they may be saying (b) that we cannot conceive of anything *as nonexistent*, in the sense that if we are able to think of something nonexistent —e.g. Pegasus— we can only think of it *as existent*. That is, we can only have a logically *self-contradictory* “conception” of that thing.⁴¹

But (a) is empirically false. We do conceive —and therefore also refer to and talk about— such things as centaurs and unicorns, as well as such things as Ophelia and Hamlet. (b) too is false. The concept of Pegasus, say, is not self-contradictory; and when we say “Pegasus is a flying horse”, we do not make —in the ordinary meaning of this sentence— a self-contradictory statement. For we will not be in any sense saying or implying (*i.e.* the word ‘is’ in it does not imply) that Pegasus is a nonexistent flying horse *that nonetheless exists*. Further, suppose we said “Pegasus is not a mythical flying horse, Pegasus exists.” On the view under consideration, we would be making the tautology that “Pegasus, which exists (by virtue of existence being allegedly included in its conceptions), exists.” But “Pegasus exists” is surely an empirical —an empirically false— statement, not a tautology or an analytic statement, just as “Pegasus does not exist” is an empirically true statement.

Nakhnikian and Salmon hold that “everything exists”, or, in Quine’s phrase, there are no “unrealized possibles.” Thus they write:

“Everything exists”, it might be argued, is false because there are lots of things, such as unicorns, which do not exist. . . . “All horses exist” is not true. Pegasus, for example, is a horse which does not exist. Our answer to this kind of objection is basically that such considerations do not tend to show *there are* things which do not exist because *there are no such things* as unicorns and Pegasus.⁴²

⁴¹ If it is also held that we cannot have a genuine concept or conception of self-contradictory things, (a) above would logically follow.

⁴² *Op. cit.*, p. 539. Italics in original.

It is interesting to note the logical relation between the thesis that “everything exists” (call it thesis A) and the view that we “cannot conceive of anything nonexistent” (call it thesis B). Thesis B would lend support to thesis A if the former is interpreted to mean that we cannot form any *consistent* concept of anything nonexistent (call this thesis B₁). For something whose concept is self-contradictory is impossible. However, the concept of square circle is self-contradictory because squareness and circularity are mutually exclusive properties; whereas on the present view the concept of Pegasus is self-contradictory because it allegedly includes the notion of the existence of a flying horse together with the notion of its nonexistence. But this view (B₁) is patently false.⁴³ On the other hand, thesis B would not lend support to thesis A if the former is interpreted to mean that we cannot form *any* concept at all, whether consistent or self-contradictory, of anything nonexistent (call this thesis B₂). For on this view we cannot *think* of anything nonexistent. Thus we use words without meaning if we say: “Pegasus exists” or “Pegasus does not exist.” Although this may seem to support thesis A, a little reflection shows that it does not really do so. For what would Nakhnikian and Salmon be talking about in *denying* the existence of unrealized possibles if they (and everyone else for that matter) do not have any concept of unrealized possibles?

Quine puts thesis A in the following way:

Possibility, along with the other modalities of necessity and impossibility and contingency, raises problems. . . But we can at least limit modalities to whole statements. . . Little real advance. . . is to be hoped for in expanding our

⁴³ It may be inquired whether the alleged impossibility is logical or factual, due to some limitation of our capacity to conceive. It is, clearly, the former that primarily needs to be shown; and it is this that Nakhnikian’s and Salmon’s argument appears to be concerned to show. But what non-issue-begging reasons can be given for the view that whenever we conceive of a so-called nonexistent thing we imply its existence? It does follow from the supposition that we cannot refer to anything nonexistent. But this view I have elsewhere criticized in detail.

universe to include so-called *possible entities*. I suspect that the main motive for this expansion is simply the old notion that Pegasus, *e.g.*, must be because it would otherwise be nonsense to say that he is not.⁴⁴

It is significant that throughout the paper in which the foregoing passage occurs, Quine identifies the view that there are unrealized possibles or possibilities with the view that there are possible *entities* which do not exist, *but which in some sense are* ("subsist"); and then proceeds (rightly) to argue against the latter. The alternative view, which he also has no difficulty in disposing of, is the view that Pegasus, say, is a mental entity, the Pegasus-idea. The view which he does not consider, and against which no arguments are offered, is the view which I am here defending, and which underlies my most basic criticism of Nakhnikian and Salmon. I mean the traditional view that, say, Pegasus is a possible thing in the sense that, though it does not exist, it can (or could) possibly exist; since there is no logical contradiction in the idea of a flying horse.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the round square cupola on Berkeley College in Quine's example cannot possibly exist since it involves a contradiction. This view does not go on to hold that Pegasus has some kind of reality or "subsistence" analogous to Plato's Forms, or in the way in which Russell thinks Meinong supposed golden mountains to have some kind of reality. The view I hold is not affected by Quine's objections to the Platonic-type view, or by any other objections along the same lines.

⁴⁴ "On What There Is", *Review of Metaphysics*, vol. II (1948), p. 22. Reprinted in *Semantics and the Philosophy of Language*, edited by L. Linsky (Urbana, 1952), pp. 189-206.

⁴⁵ Quine's formulation of the main view he rejects is reflected in his use of the expression 'unrealized *possibles*'. If he had spoken instead, as we ordinarily do, of "things that do not exist but *might possibly exist*", he may have turned his attention to the view advocated here. That is, if such phrases as 'possible object', 'possible entity' are used, they should be understood as elliptical for a locution in which the word 'possibly' qualifies the word 'exist(s)'. The same applies to 'necessary', if it *makes sense* to speak of something as necessarily existing or as not necessarily existing.

But there are various positive arguments against Quine's own view that there are no "unrealized possibles," and in support of the view I am defending. A number of these arguments have been stated by Nicholas Rescher and Jaakko Hintikka.

Thus Rescher says:

It cannot reasonably be gainsaid that there are true statements to the effect that certain things are possible, though not in fact actual or extant. An example of a statement of this kind is the statement that, while unicorns do not exist, it is perfectly possible that they might. There are surely true statements which say that certain possible states of affairs might have obtained, or things might possibly have been, though these are not in fact realized or actual. Indeed to maintain the actuality of all alternative possibilities is logically untenable in view of the fact that these will mutually exclude one another.⁴⁶

Although I fully accept this position, I must say in fairness that the last statement of the quotation will not impress Quine; since what it means is that *if* unrealized possibilities are admitted, it would be true that not all possibilities can co-exist: or in Leibniz's terminology, not all possible things are compossible. For Quine rejects the whole notion of unrealized possibilities to begin with. Again, though Rescher, following Leibniz, is right if unrealized possibilities are admitted, some possibilities may remain unrealized even though they are compossible with actually existing things. Examples are centaurs, unicorns, sea serpents, golden mountains, etc.

Quine points out certain difficulties respecting the numerical identity or distinctness of the alleged unrealized possibles.⁴⁷ Rescher replies as follows:

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 161. Cf. Hintikka, *op. cit.*, p. 61, including his remarks about belief sentences. See also my "Capacity and Causation", *Ratio*, vol. V, No. 1 (June 1963), on counterfactuals.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

How many possible objects are there? As many as can be described. [We might say: as many as can be conceived with-out self-contradiction.] When are two possible objects alike? When their descriptions entail a similarity. When are two possible objects identical? When their defining descriptions are logically identical (equivalent). The doctrine of possible objects poses no profound theoretical difficulties, for everything save existence alone (and its implications) remain precisely as with objects which “really” exist.⁴⁸

We must here distinguish two things: questions regarding the identity, distinctness, etc. of (a) individual nonexistent but possible things, and questions regarding the identity, distinctness, etc. of (b) kinds of nonexistent but possible things. Quine’s questions to which Rescher replies in the foregoing passage concern (a) (*cf.* “Take. . .the possible fat man in that doorway; and, again, the possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man. . .?” And so on); while Rescher’s remarks do not make it clear whether they concern (a), or (b), or both.

(1) Rescher’s statement as to how many possible objects there are is correct with regard to kinds of possible things, if by “as many as can be described” he means “as many as can be consistently given a *different defining description*”. But it can also be extended to possible individuals of any kind that can be consistently described; *e.g.* individual unicorns, centaurs, sea serpents, etc. But here “can be described” must be understood to mean “can be given a description that, as a *whole* —comprising both defining characteristics and non-defining, individual characteristics— is not identical with any other such description”. For example, we can conceive of two or more centaurs (*i.e.* two beings that are half horse half man) as distinguished by the non-defining features of imagined size, color, strength, etc. Similarly with unicorns, and the like.

(2) Further, (a) two kinds of possible things are alike when their defining features entail a similarity; while (b) two possi-

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 173-174.

ble individuals are alike when their descriptions as a whole entail a similarity.

With regard to (1) and (2) above, Rescher's concluding statement is completely true. But an interesting difference between existing and nonexistent things arises with regard to *numerical identity*.

(3) In the case of existing things, when their descriptions as a whole are logically identical (equivalent), two distinct individuals will be qualitatively identical. But they will be two individuals and not one individual. This presupposes that the principle of identity of indiscernibles, in its logical form, is false with regard to individual existing things; and this is indeed my view.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the principle is, in a sense, *true* of *kinds* of existing things, as a little reflection will show. (Cf. below.)

On the other hand, we might say that, *in a sense*, the principle of identity of indiscernibles is true of both kinds of nonexistent things and individual nonexistent things.

(a) If the defining descriptions of "two" possible *kinds* of nonexistent things are logically identical, they will be one kind of thing and not two kinds of things. For example, if the *defining description* of some nonexistent kind of object I shall call "Swarn" is identical with the defining description of "Pegasus" (i.e. its defining description is "A flying horse") then "Swarn" and "Pegasus" are one and the same kind of thing. Stated less misleadingly, 'Pegasus' and 'Swarn' will be two names for the same kind of thing, a flying horse.

(b) In the same way, if the *descriptions* of "two" individual nonexistent things are logically identical as a whole, they will be one and the same individual and not two individuals. More correctly, two logically identical descriptions will be descriptions of one and the same nonexistent individual, not of two distinct individuals.

⁴⁹ See my *The Coherence Theory of Truth: A Critical Evaluation* (Beirut, 1961), pp. 94 ff., and "Relations", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. II, No. 3 (Fall 1964), pp. 133-142. See also my "Individuals and the Identity of Indiscernibles", *Proceedings of the International Leibniz Congress*, Hannover, 1966, Vol. III (Wiesbaden, 1969), pp. 160-172.

Again, the notion of self-identity, which I earlier maintained applies to nonexistent but possible things, is applicable in a primary sense to possible individuals of one kind or another, and only in a secondary sense to kinds of possible things; *i.e.* insofar as (self-identical) individuals are individuals of one kind or another. For example, with regard to the latter, the state of affairs “being a centaur” is identical with itself and not with something else, such as the state of affairs “being a unicorn.”

It may seem that the meaningfulness of counterfactuals demonstrates the meaningfulness of talking about, hence the intelligibility of the idea of unrealized possibilities and possibles. For counterfactuals do have an intelligible, noncontradictory meaning; indeed, are true or false.⁵⁰ When one says *e.g.* “Had Cleopatra’s nose been one inch longer the subsequent history of the world would have been different,” one seems to be saying that Cleopatra’s having a very long nose (an inch longer than the one she had) was an unrealized historical possibility; something which could have been but was not. In Leibnizian terminology, “Cleopatra-with-the-long-nose” constitutes a, or part of a “possible world”. Saul Kripke, in “Identity and Necessity”,⁵¹ maintains, among a number of important views, that the term ‘possible world’ is merely metaphorical. He interprets a “possible world” —in the same way with regard to every possible identity statement involving proper names— as designating something actual in a contrary to fact (merely possible) situation. Now Kripke limits his analysis of counterfactuals to propositions whose subjects refer to some existing thing or things. He does not deal with counterfactuals about such things as (i) Hamlet. . .

⁵⁰ But their truth —whenever they are true— cannot consist, it would seem, in their “corresponding” or “agreeing with” facts, in some sense(s) of these expressions. By the nature of the case there are no facts —at least if we mean actual facts— to which they can “correspond”. But then, the advocate of correspondence who posits “possible ‘facts’ ”; *viz.* “unrealized but possible states of affairs” *in order to preserve correspondence*, is forced into some form of logical realism. The problems with that are quite familiar.

⁵¹ In *Identity and Individuation*, edited by Milton K. Munitz (New York, 1971), pp. 135-164.

or Stephen Dedalus (“fictional things”), or (ii) Descartes’ demon or the devil (nonexistent but possible things).⁵² I have no essential quarrel with his analysis of counterfactuals about existing things; e.g. “If Nixon had given a sufficient bribe to Senator X, he would have gotten Carswell through.”⁵³ Further, I think we can analyze counterfactuals about fictional things in the same general way.⁵⁴ However, counterfactuals about such things as Descartes’ demon, which for me is a “nonexistent but possible thing”, pose special problems, and does not fit Kripke’s analysis. For in such statements as “Had Descartes’ demon existed, he would (or could) have deceived Descartes into thinking that he was a pumpkin and not a man!”, “we are talking about something nonexistent *qua* nonexistent (merely possible), in counterfactual situations which are the very opposite of those in Kripke’s paradigms. For the latter are about existing things (e.g. Richard Nixon) in counterfactual situations”.⁵⁵ If this is true, it appears to show one major need for talk about (hence the concepts of) “merely possible things”, over and above talk about (hence concepts of) existing things. In fact, insofar as Kripke’s (and my) analysis of counterfactuals about existing things involves reference to “counterfactual”, i.e. merely possible situations, there appears to be no escape from talk about some kind of possibles or other, in their explication. For example, Kripke says: “If we say ‘If Nixon had bribed such and such a Senator, Nixon would have gotten Carswell through’, what is *given* in the very description of that situation is that it is a situation in which we are speaking of Nixon, and of Carswell, and of

⁵² See my “Kripke and Frege on Identity Statements”, *Studies on Frege*, edited by Matthias Schirn (Friedrich Frommann Verlag, Günther Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt), Vol. II, 1976, p. 272.

⁵³ See *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ For example, we can analyze “If Chiron had not been (imagined to be) a centaur, he would have behaved (would have been imagined by the ancient Greeks as behaving) differently from the way he does (is imagined by the ancient Greeks to behave) in Greek Mythology” (S), “as really elliptical for counterfactuals about certain actual persons: in this case the ancient Greeks, the ‘creators’ of centaurs.” (*Op. cit.*, p. 272.)

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, and *passim*.

such and such a Senator”.⁵⁶ That situation Kripke calls “counterfactual situation”.⁵⁷

Finally, “. . . the problem of defining a ‘possible world’ in a *literal* sense, *e.g.*, a Leibnizian possible world, and so, stipulating criteria of identity in a particular possible world or across possible worlds, can be distinguished from the problem of the correct analysis of counterfactuals.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ “Identity and Necessity”, p. 148.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* For my reasons in support of Kripke’s contention that in such counterfactuals as the above, are about *actual people*, etc. in counterfactual situations, see “Kripke and Frege on Identity Statements”, pp. 272 ff.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 273. Note that in talking about merely possible things we are not committed to talking about a plurality of “possible worlds”, in some literal sense of this expression. As I stated in *op. cit.*, p. 272, footnote 9, “we can—and I think we often do—talk about possible things even if we envisage a single possible world, embracing all possible things”. It is true, nevertheless, that may perhaps reduce, and reduce drastically, the kinds of things that can be said to be possible. This would be so if Leibniz’s notion of “compossibility” is or can be given a coherent content. In any event, “compossibility” must not be confused with the concept of actual coexistence.

RESUMEN

En la Sección I hago un análisis parcial de los conceptos normales de existencia, en parte para hacer una evaluación de la posición de Murray Kiteley sobre la existencia en "Is Existence a Predicate?". Él correctamente argumenta que 'existencia' tiene dos usos importantes, uno de los cuales —el uso llamado "no excluyente" ('existencia₁')— no es un predicado lógico. Pero yo sostengo que, siguiendo a Leonard Hall en "Excluders", Kiteley da una versión equivocada de la naturaleza del segundo uso de 'existencia', al que llama el uso "excluyente" ('existencia₂'). La característica esencial que creo que distingue al segundo uso del primero consiste en el hecho de que aquél es espacial y temporalmente locativo. Algunas de las exclusiones de las oraciones en que aparece 'existencia₂' son una *consecuencia* directa de esta característica especial.

En la Sección II sigue presente el intento por mostrar que 'existe' no es un predicado en el sentido importante, especialmente en relación con la posición de George Nakhnikian y Wesley Salmon sobre el tema en "Exists as a Predicate". También argumento, mostrando mi acuerdo con Jaakko Hintikka (en "Studies in the Logic of Existence and Necessity"), que la definición que ellos dan de "E" como autoidentidad ($b=b$) es inadecuada. Pero $(\exists x)(b=x)$, que Hintikka propone como "el candidato más natural" para 'b existe', tampoco constituye una definición, ni siquiera una caracterización, de 'existe₁'; yo sostengo, de hecho, que tanto 'existe₁' como 'existe₂' parecen ser incapaces de ser definidos estrictamente, en el sentido de ser parafraseados.

En la última sección argumento contra la posición (1) de Nakhnikian y Salmon —y de Quine— de que "todo existe" o de que no hay "posibles no actualizados", parcialmente en términos de la crítica que de ello hacen Hintikka y Nicholas Rescher. También argumento contra la posición (2) de que "no podemos concebir ningún no existente".

[H. K.]

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