

JS Katz

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#12

FALL RESERVE 96

EMPTY REFERENCE

Notes of S. Kripke's first Shearman lecture, U.C.L., Nov. 8, 1973.

These lectures will take up questions left over by "Naming and Necessity" (Semantics of Natural Languages, ed. Davidson & Harman; henceforth, NN). Those earlier lectures did not discuss names that lack reference. These include the names of fictional characters, and, for example, Vulcan, the name given to a supposed planet which, like Neptune, was inferred from certain delicate perturbations in the solar system. In fact, it turned out that Vulcan does not exist, and the perturbations are explained by the special theory of relativity.

Mill maintained that names have denotation and no connotation. This position, which is advocated in NN, is the opposite of the doctrine of Frege and Russell, that the meaning of names is given by associated (definite) descriptions. It is held that names denote in a way different from definit~~ions~~ descriptions.

One strong argument against Mill's theory, and the theory of NN, arises from empty names. We do want to say that Vulcan does not exist, but on Mill's theory it seems that we cannot do this. For if the name has no denotation (as is the case with Vulcan) and no connotation, it has no "meaning" at all. We also want to ask whether Moses really did exist. This too seems inexplicable on the Millian theory.

Frege and Russell held that existence is a second order concept. (There are purple cows, there are rich Americans: these sentences apply existence to concepts, and the form of the sentence is, "such & such a concept is instantiated.") It is nonsense, on this view, to apply existence to particulars.

Russell's essay on logical atomism is quoted here.

Russell held that the only possible answer to the question, "Which things exist?" is, "Everything." Hence existence, as applying to particulars, would have to be a trivial property. But assertions of existence are in general non-trivial, so we ought not to apply existence to particulars, but attempt a different analysis.

Frege & Russell argue that every name is defined by some description, as in, Napoleon = the loser of Waterloo. So to ask if Napoleon did exist is to ask if "the loser of Waterloo" is instantiated, uniquely. Bishop Whateley did in fact raise this very question about Napoleon.

What do we mean when we read a work, such that we do not know whether it is fiction, legend, or truth? On the Frege-Russell view we want to know whether the majority of descriptions given of questionable personage are in fact true of one person.

Wittgenstein on Moses is quoted here (as in NN).

One is supposed to mean by Moses, that person, if any, of whom most of the things that the Bible says about Moses are in fact true.

In NN reference is made to the essential function of naming. A proper name, according to NN, is a rigid designator which refers to one actual man in the real world. Names contrast with definite descriptions. Consider "the man who corrupted Hadleyburg." If there is such a man, it still might have been the case that someone else filled the same role as Hadleyburg's unique corrupter. On the other hand (according to NN) no one else could have been Moses. One of the arguments in support of this view is that even in a case of gross misdescription of some object in the distant past -- Jonah, ~~for~~ say -- we may simply not have any true description of the man at all, and yet we use the word Jonah to refer to a particular figure.

The contrast between Russell and Mill is in certain respects misleading, for Russell did agree with Mill about (logically) proper names. It was only ordinary names that, in Russell's opinion, do not have reference or denotation as their sole function. But there do exist real names. They have to name objects that are independent of, not subject to, Cartesian doubt, as to their existence. Russell did think we could find such objects. The best candidates are my own immediate sense perceptions. If I see a yellow spot or a red patch, I cannot doubt its existence as sense-datum. Descartes did not doubt the existence of sense data (and so by definition these are immune from Cartesian doubt).

In the Tractatus Wittgenstein also had a class of what he called objects for his names. There are the furniture of all possible worlds. The objects are not things like pieces of chalk, for they might not have existed. Wittgenstein's objects are in all possible worlds. This is in part a consequence of the analysis of existence as a second order concept: we cannot ask of an object given by a name, whether it exists. This question is ruled out of order, by making the objects occur in all possible worlds, so they do not "exist contingently."

Some people say that Wittgenstein's objects are Russellian sense data. But there is no worse candidate. My sense data are just about the most precarious items there are in the world. Had I not come into this room tonight, or had I come in wearing a blindfold, my sense data would have been different.

Russell's proper names are picked out by a criterion of certainty, Wittgenstein's criterion is logical or metaphysical. It is very unlikely that anything can satisfy both criteria.

and even then, presumably, only if you keep your head very still!

Let us suppose that Russell is right about proper names. Even so; logically proper names could occur in a fictional discourse. Russell himself wrote fiction. Suppose he wrote a story in which a certain (imaginary) sensory impression, a yellow speck, is called Mathilda. Now if in fact there is no yellow speck in his sensory field, Mathilda does not, did not, exist. Mathilda contrasts with Aloysius, the name I give to my impression of the clock in the back of this room. Aloysius does exist. We can make this contrast just as we can say that Napoleon existed but Dracula didn't.

Russell claimed that a logically proper name had to denote something: that is of its very essence. But here we see that logically proper names can be used in fictions, not denoting anything real.

Q We should perhaps say that Mathilda is a pretended name, used as if it were a name. We cannot make the move, claiming that Mathilda is a concealed definite description, for Mathilda ≠ the unique yellow thing speck in front of me. For when Russell was writing his story, there might well have been a real unique yellow speck in front of him, but it is not that yellow speck that he meant by the fictional Mathilda.

"Mathilda does not exist" Could this mean just that there is no object that I call Mathilda? No, because there may very well be a real object that I call Mathilda (a cat, say) but that is not the Mathilda in my story.

Could we specify Mathilda as "the very one mentioned in this very story"? That leads at once into the perils of self-reference and is best dropped.

Fiction was supposed to present a problem for the Millian theory, that names only have denotation. For in fiction the names do not in fact denote anything. However this argument is shown, by the above considerations, to be worthless. Fiction presents no problem for any point of view. Let a theory be given, such that no name can fail to denote (as in Russell, with name = logically proper name). Then it will be part of the pretence of the fiction that the narrator stands in the correct relation to a definite object, and that the appropriate conditions for naming have been met. It does not matter here what the "appropriate conditions" are -- they can be Kripke's history that begins with a baptism, or it can be Russell's acquaintance.

It is no good inventing a special semantic character for names that do not denote anything, and names that do. E.g., we can't tell, just by looking at sentences about Moses, in which category Moses falls. We must abandon the prejudice that if we understand a piece of discourse, we will be able to tell all its semantic features just by looking ~~understanding~~ *the sentence*.

What about Sherlock Holmes? If this is a pretend name, it is part of the pretence of the story that one is saying of a man that he is fat, when one says, "S H is fat." In fact, the story expresses no proposition by these words, although it does pretend to. Note that for Russell, "S H is happy" does express a false proposition.

Thus there is no special problem ^{for any particular theory of names} about the reference of fictional names. But of course even if Frege & Russell were right in their theory of reference, one should not take a proper name in fiction as meaning, "the thing satisfying most of the descriptions given in this story." For say there is a minor character of whom it is said, only, "Jack Smith walked by at a brisk pace." It is not even said when he did it. It would be nonsense to contend that since this is all we are told about Jack, Jack Smith = "the man, if any, who walked by at a brisk pace (sometimes or other)". On the contrary, the pretence of the story is that the narrator has satisfied the conditions that would (if Frege & Russell, or whoever, are right) enable one to identify Jack Smith (say, by acquaintance).

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The Frege-Russell view fails to distinguish myth from historically based legend. For Moses really to exist, according to FR, there must be a person satisfying the descriptions. ~~think of the descriptions~~ But of Jonah in NN.

(real)
It is argued that if a unique/person satisfies the description in a story then he is that person named in the story. But consider the waiver with which some novels are prefaced: "All the characters in this story are fictional: any resemblance to any person living or dead is purely coincidental." On Frege-Russell theory, this does not make much sense. In the U.S. (though possibly not in the U.K.?) the author, accused of libel, can make this the basis of his plea. If the defence can show it is a real coincidence, the judge will rule against the plaintiff (and hence against Frege & Russell).

Modal contexts and counterfactual situations make the matter worse for Frege-Russell. Moses might never have existed & yet there still have been a unique person who led the Israelites out of Egypt -- Aaron might have done it instead. Conversely, ~~Moses~~ might have existed and ^{done} the things he did in fact do. (Cf remarks on Carlyle's theory of history in NN).

Some people (Dummett) have argued that the facts about Moses just mentioned are a matter of scope, thus:

E-R 5 5

$\Diamond \sim LIOE(\text{Moses})$

is not

$\Diamond(\exists x) LIOE(x) \wedge \sim L(x)$

is no good, but we have

$(\exists x) LIOE(x) \wedge \Diamond \sim L(x)$

LIOE = Led the Israelites out of Egypt.

! = uniqueness

This is all very well, but what about the description of the counterfactual situation itself? Describing the possible world we just say, "Moses did not lead the Israelites out of Egypt." Here there is no modal context to fiddle scopes around.

Moreover the scope argument is especially weak for Existence claims, "It is possible that Moses might not have existed." - with the doctrine that existence is a 2nd order predicate, the scope game fails completely.

So I think that the existence of an individual is all right. I still must answer, in the next lecture, the objection that this makes existence apply to everything. In a sense that is right, but it does not trivialize claims to existence in the way that Russell thought.

Nov. 8

(Notes by IMH)

Existence as a property of particulars, is alright.
Existence as a property of all particulars, is not alright.
Existence as a modal property, is not alright.

These notes of Kripke's 2nd lecture cover the same material as those of BJH. They are intended to supplement her notes and I have tried to compress points covered in those notes.

TRB

Saul Kripke Shearman Lecutre II November 12 1973

the view
On Frege-Russell existence is only properly applicable to properties, and to say of particular things that they exist, might not have existed, etc. is muddled.

But it is obviously true that this thing (a piece of chalk that I point to) might not have existed. This is not just to say that some set of properties it might not have been instantiated.

Russell's own notation provides a formula, $(\exists x)(\exists y)(\forall z)(y=x)$ which might be taken to symbolise "x exists". But Russell rejected this as a symbolisation. He disliked the idea of "existence" as a predicate mainly because he thought it would be impossible for a thing not to have the property of existing and hence attributing it to a thing would be empty. We can say in Russell's notation $(\exists x)(\exists y)(y=x)$ and this is a truth of quantification theory.

But taking "E" to represent the predicate "exists" we must distinguish $(A) \cup (x) E(x)$ (necessarily everything exists) from $(B) (x) \cup E(x)$ (everything exists necessarily).

Only a few things (God, spacetime) have ever been thought to exist necessarily.

Some systems of modal logic allow us to derive (B) from (A) but they are unsatisfactory (See Kripke's article in Philosophica Fennica 1965).

So it is correct to say of many particular things that they might not have existed.

One might object: we can't ever say truly "Harry does not exist" where "Harry" refers to some particular - because if Harry did not exist he wouldn't be there to be named.

But we can identify and name definite unactualised possibles (e.g. the statue I might have made from this clay, the person who might have grown from this sperm and this egg), so we can say of one of these "it does not exist".

More generally, we must distinguish (i) what persons in a certain possible situation can say (ii) what we can say about that situation from outside it. Our situation and theirs may give rise to different languages. E.g. in certain circumstances Moses would not have existed and people would not have been able to use "Moses" to refer to Moses. Even if we say that in such situations the proposition "Moses exists" does not itself exist (and hence is not true or false) it may still be true that the proposition (which does in fact exist) is such that it is false of that counterfactual situation.

is that it has to say "Sherlock Holmes might have existed".

But none of what has gone so far implies that fictional names, e.g. "Sherlock Holmes" name unactualised possibles. Of course that are (many) possible worlds in which there is a person who does (some of) what Sh. H. is represented as doing. ~~Significantly children watchmen; in this world~~ ~~where definite possibilities in the world are~~ ~~mentioned.~~ But which of these unactualised possibles is Sh. H.?

There is a possible world in which Charles Darwin has Sh. H.'s career. Could this mean that Charles Darwin ~~was~~ might have had Sherlock Holmes? bca:

To deny "Sh. H. might have existed" is not to deny that there is at least one unactualised possible detective, called "Sherlock Holmes" who does just what Holmes does. But if Conan Doyle had discovered ~~that~~ that ~~this~~ this possibility was actualised, he could have said "The resemblance is entirely coincidental": he need not have said "This is (my) Sherlock Holmes".

isn't it
on possible
worlds

Similar things hold of fictional and mythical animals (unicorn, dragons etc.) although it seems ~~inexplicable~~ ~~at first sight~~ plausible to say that there could be such animals.

We must distinguish two questions:

(1) Under what conditions would we find out that there ~~are~~ were unicorns?

(2) Given that there aren't unicorns, can there be counterfactual situations such that in them there would have been unicorns?

Although the conditions asked for in (1) can be sensibly specified, the answer to (2) is "No".

Consider the dictionary definition of "tiger" - "cat-like animal of such and such a colour, having four legs, etc." Does this definition give ~~the~~ necessary or sufficient conditions for being a tiger? No, because, (i) ~~an~~ an animal looking just like a tiger in these external respects could have a different internal structure (e.g. that of a reptile) and hence would not be part of the same species as the animals called "tiger". ~~our~~ ~~zoo~~ and (ii) we might discover that it was only an optical illusion which made us think that tigers had 4 legs.

A species term always has ~~some~~ reference to some specimen (or roughly defined group of specimens). Thus "tiger" ~~is~~ "the species of animal of which this and this and this are examples".

"Unicorn" is a mythical name of a species. Therefore the surface characteristics (horse-shape, white, one horn) are not sufficient to identify that species. So, which of the unactualised possible species is the species of unicorn?

There is no real unicorn to give us an actual internal structure

hence no full concept which might have been instantiated.

In talking of Sherlock Holmes and unicorns we ~~xxxxxxx~~ only pretend to express propositions.

Epistemically it could turn out that there were unicorns. We can imagine ~~xxxxxxx~~ a future situation in which we say "unicorns exist". But this is not the situation in which we find animals locking just as unicorns are said to lock, but the situation in which we find that those who first talked of unicorns were talking of a real species of animal (however unlike that species was to what we think of as a unicorn).

Lecture 2: Monday, November 12, 5.30

Existence as a second level concept.

It was the view of Frege and of Russell that existence is a 2nd level concept. The view is also ascribed to Kant. But the ascription to Kant is dubious. Kant only says that existence is not a predicate, etc.; he never says that existence doesn't apply to particulars, only to concepts. So it is best to separate Kant's views from the Frege-Russell view.

Criticisms of the Frege-Russell thesis:

(i) (Boole's point) We can make substantive judgements of the form "This might not have existed".

(ii) We can introduce the predicate "...exists", and construe it in predicate logic as " $(\exists y)(... = y)$ ". What is wrong with this?

(a) It would be absolutely impossible for it not to apply to everything; hence it would not serve any function (Russell).

Well, it's true that we get a theorem of pred. logic

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

and its denial would be something like "There exists something which doesn't exist" (nor would it be profitable to introduce some ambiguity in "exists" to remove the contradiction here (cf. Meinong & Russell on him)).

But when we turn to modal logic we must distinguish between

- (A) $\text{Nec } (x)(\exists y)(x = y)$
- &
- (B) $(x) \text{ Nec } (\exists y)(x = y)$

(A) is obviously true; (B) is obviously false. Now, it's only if (B) were true that all existence claims would be trivial.

In some systems of modal logic (A) entails (B). But there's no need to accept this (cf. Kripke: "Semantical Considerations in Modal Logic" in Phil. Review 1963)

((note TRB: here we have disputes about the Barcan formula. cf. Names & Cresswell Ch.10 for a good review)).

(b) Someone might say: how can you name something which doesn't exist? So how can you have empty names and raise questions of existence?

We can query the hypothesis here by supposing that we can name possible entities - e.g. I might call the statue which I never get round to making "Ophelia"; or one might give names to foetuses, as names of definite future persons (who are not yet persons, and who may never become such).

But, anyway, the conclusion doesn't follow: we must distinguish between (i) what people in a given situation could have said, and (ii) what we (not in that situation) can say about a given situation. (i) and (ii) are not the same.

name for Moses. So we can say that "Moses exists" is a sensible thing to say, and that it expresses a contingent truth. //

What now of "Sherlock Holmes" ?

Does this name a possible fictional entity who doesn't exist in this world ? This appears to have been the view of the author of "Semantical Considerations in Modal Logic".

This view is false.

(i) There certainly could be things which do not exist. But do we refer to such things by "Sherlock Holmes" ? In particular, to which one do we refer ? Lots of people (e.g. Charles Darwin) might have done the deeds of Sherlock Holmes; which would have been SH himself ?

Don't say that SM to be SH is to be the detective who... ; for then it is much too easy to say that SM might have existed.

(ii) Compare this view with the view of the predicate "...is a unicorn". Unicorns don't exist; but could there have been some ?

Separate here the epistemic issue: could we find out that there were unicorns ? (Yes, we could)

no unicorns, ^{could} ~~are~~ there ^{from the 'metaphysical' issue:} situations in which there would have been ? (No).

"Unicorn" occurs in a myth: it is part of the pretence of the myth that there are such things. In order to see what this involves, look at some non-mythical creatures - e.g. tigers. The ODD def of "tiger" ; "catlike animal with four legs, black stripes etc..". Does this defn. give either necessary or sufficient conditions for sm something's being a tiger ? No.

It's not sufficient because there might be things with all these properties which weren't tigers (cf. 'Fools gold').

It's not necessary because it might be that tigers are only seen under special optical conditions which give the impression that they have four legs, while in fact they have only two (again, cf. the alleged yellowness of gold; some scientists now deny that gold is yellow).

What is it to be a tiger, then ? It is to be that kind of thing, where there is implicit reference to some sample of things. We might be wrong in thinking that our sample correctly identifies any kind of thing (though they all look the same, they might have quite different internal structures, and it's internal structure that is crucial to questions about kinds of thing - and thus to counterfactual suppositions). ((for more on this topic, cf. "Naming & Necessity")).

Look back now at "unicorn": let's take as a defn. "white horse with a single horn". Now, though this is the defn. it doesn't give us either nec. or sufficient conditions (as long as "unicorn" is used as a name of a kind of thing). In particular, even if in some situations there were white horses with single horns, it would not follow that these were situations in which there were unicorns. There might be 'fools' unicorns' ! Many hypothetical species

of a kind of thing. But because there aren't any such things, we can't appeal to the internal structure of unicorns to rule out 'fools' unicorns'. Still it's part of the pretence that we should be able to do so.

So, in this way we can justify the counterfactual judgement that, given that there aren't any unicorns, there couldn't have been any; nevertheless, we can hold on to the epistemic judgement that we could discover unicorns.

cf. another example: Lewis Carroll's Bandersnatches: all we are told here is that these are frumious, and it's strongly implied that they are dangerous. These creatures are epistemicly possible, but counterfactually impossible.

The fact that we can always add to a myth, story etc.. the rider: "any resemblance to any species etc.. is entirely coincidental" shows that we can't treat the descriptions in the myth as telling us what it is to be a so-and-so. Otherwise, what ever satisfied the description (e.g. whatever is frumious and dangerous) would inso facto belong to the species in question.

What about people for whom it's not clear whether or not unicorns are mythical? (e.g. some medieval people). Such people will then treat the defn. of "unicorn" just as we treat the defn. of "tiger"; ie. they won't treat the defn. as giving nec. and suff. conditions. So even for them, the counterfactual possibility of unicorns doesn't arise.

Suppose we find a skeleton of a horse-like animal with a single horn: have we found the skeleton of a unicorn?

Maybe. But we don't need to say this - especially if the propagation of the myth cannot be correlated historically with the presence of animals of this kind.

Q: Suppose a myth contains enough ~~in~~ about the internal structure (and evolutionary origin etc..) of unicorns? Would this make them counterfactually possible?

A: Well, it depends how you understand "unicorn" here. Is it tied to the defn. of internal structure etc.. or not? If not, then unicorns are still counterfactually impossible. If yes, then unicorns are counterfactually possible. But now we are not using "unicorn" as a name of a species: instead we are now using it as a name of a possible thing, analogous to "the child who would have been born, but for..." or "the chemical substance with formula so-and-so which would have been made but for...". We must distinguish between names of possible things of this kind and fictional names, such as "Sherlock Holmes" and "Unicorn".

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(i) There is a particular sloop which I want

(ii) I want to be free from sloppiness.

i.e. there is scope ambiguity here. One way in which we can see this is that we can add "any old sloop" to our original sentence (this gives reading (ii) of it).

quine implies that we can apply this elsewhere: but can we? Is "The Greeks worshipped a god" similarly ambiguous? The reading as (i) is obvious: but we cannot here sensibly add "any old god" to get the reading analogous to (ii). And the same applies to other verbs, such as "admire", "condemn" etc..

The fact that scope ambiguity does not arise in these cases is connected with another point - that there is no way here of introducing a subordinate clause.

(b) Church

In the introduction to Introduction to Mathematical Logic Church says that in "Schliemann sought the site of Troy", the phrase of "the site of Troy" denotes its sense (cf. Frege). And he implies that this should be applied elsewhere.

This view implies that these verbs - "seek", "worship" etc.. are opaque. But they are not. e.g. we can surely argue

The Romans worshipped Caligula
Caligula was the nastiest of all Romans
so: The Romans worshipped the nastiest of all Romans.

(of course the Romans wouldn't agree that this was what they were doing, but this doesn't matter here)

Don't try and introduce scope ambiguities or differences of sense in these cases; if you want to make distinctions, introduce "worship as..." etc..

This point about the absence of opacity applies equally when there is an empty name: e.g. we can argue

The Greeks worshipped Zeus
Zeus is the god most frequently discussed by Livy
so: The Greeks worshipped the god most frequently discussed by Livy.

(c) Kripke

The only way to get a grip on this sort of discourse is to ascribe to ordinary language an ontology of fictional characters. This is not a recommendation about canonical idioms etc.; just a feature of ordinary language. The fictional characters whom one must suppose to exist are Meinongian half-entities; they are abstract entities whose existence is just as empirical and contingent as the existence of anything else.

Consider the issue in Biblical scholarship of whether Moloch really existed. We normally take Moloch to be a deity; but Biblical

the conclusion of this kind of criticism is that there's no such god as Moloch. But, it may be objected, we never thought that there was.

In order to see what's going on here, we have to distinguish between the questions: is there a real divine being - Moloch? was there a pagan god - Moloch?

It's this second question which modern Biblical scholarship deals with, and tells us to answer in the negative. It's this question which requires an ontology of fictional characters, pagan gods etc. - all regarded as abstract entities.

The same point can be made about fictional characters. We can ask "Was there a fictional character who lived on all 9 planets at once"? Clearly this is an empirical question. A fictional character of this kind exists only if appropriate works have been written. A fictional character is a bit like a nation: a nation exists only if people ~~xxx~~ stand in the proper relations with each other. Like fictional characters, nations are ~~xxx~~ abstract objects, but as real as everything else.

This ontology of fictional characters in ordinary language belongs to it as an extended usage. "Hamlet" is introduced first as a pretended ordinary person; then we move to infer the existence of a pretence - of the fictional character.

Once one admits this ontology, all the supposed counterexamples above - "This literary critic admires Desdemona" etc - are easy to handle.

Questions of the identity of fictional characters - e.g. is Marlowe's Faust the same as Goethe's? - are handled in just the same way as ordinary questions of identity. One can simply look at history and see if there's a historical derivation. There will certainly be borderline cases, but these arise for ordinary questions as well.

It's very important to keep this 'fictional character' usage distinct from the 'in the story' usage discussed earlier. e.g.

"Hamlet exists" is true in the former (where, if Biblical scholarship is right, "Moloch exists" is false); in addition "Hamlet exists" is also true in the latter.

Often the predicates used will show what the intended usage is: e.g. "...soliloquizes" goes with 'in the story' usage, and "...has been discussed by literary critics" goes with the 'fict. character' usage. But sometimes there can be ambiguity, as in

"In what year was the fictional character Frankenstein's monster created"?

Clearly, this is ambiguous between: in what year was the book written? and : in what year, in the story, was the monster created?

The fact that there is this kind of ambiguity shows that both usages exist.

In the sense in which a fictional character soliloquizes, a fictional character is not a fictional character!

In Hamlet, the character Gonzago from the play The story of

One might compare the phrase 'fictional character' with 'toy duck'. Just because you can contrast (fictional characters (toy ducks) with real persons (real ducks), it doesn't follow that fictional characters (toy ducks) have only some twilight existence.

This is just the ontology of ordinary language: we construct abstract entities to provide referents for otherwise empty names. If a name in a story isn't empty (e.g. Napoleon) we don't invent a new abstract entity - we just give the name its ordinary referent (as long as this is appropriate, at any rate).

BUT none of this solves the most difficult problem of all, that of saying in what sense it is true to say

"Sherlock Holmes never existed"

We have so far given two senses in which this is false: (i) in the story ... (ii) as a fictional character.....

This problem also arises for "There are no unicorns": in what sense in this true ?

Up to now we have said that these sentences may just pretend to express propositions.

Consider, by contrast, an existential claim with a genuine name - e.g. "Moses exists". Clearly this is true about Moses: and "Moses does not exist" is false of Moses etc.. Here there is no problem at all. But we cannot say the same about "SH does not exist".

It's tempting here to try a meta-linguistic analysis:

- "SH" has no referent.

Handwritten: This certainly seems to give the right truth-conditions, but we should be wary of meta-linguistic analyses. Would we say the same about "Moses does not exist"? We wouldn't want to, but we don't want the analysis of existential sentences to depend on their truth or falsity.

Indeed, even in the fictional case, the meta-linguistic analysis doesn't seem quite right: e.g. what if my dog is called "SH"? One can try to get out of this by treating names as context-dependent. But this isn't satisfying; for how are contexts individuated...

Other objections: " "SH" has no referent" can be understood by someone who doesn't understand "SH"; the same is not true of "SH does not exist". cf. (4) also translation argument.

Again, in ind. contexts, a meta-linguistic analysis seems silly: The Greeks believed that Zeus existed clearly doesn't mean the same as

The Greeks believed that "Zeus" had a referent.

The trouble with this is that it would make our account of "Hamlet doesn't exist" etc.. contingent upon the ontology of fictional persons. But this doesn't seem right. Suppose I walk out of a restaurant, saying to the waiter "Sam Jones will pay the bill"; Sam Jones doesn't exist, but has one casual remark created a fictional character? This seems extravagant. And even in the case of "Hamlet", one doesn't want to make the truth of "Hamlet doesn't exist" contingent on the existence of the fictional character.

A tentative proposal (not really an analysis):

Suppose we are reading about SH and we don't know whether or not SH exists. We can still pick up some facts about SH, whether or not he existed. e.g. It's true to say "SH is not now in this room". Here no definite proposition is asserted. Instead we understand the necessary conditions for the truth of a sentence "SH is in the room" to express a true proposition, and we can see that these conditions are not satisfied.

More carefully expressed, what we should say is:

"There isn't a true proposition that SH is in this room", but we are careless, and say instead: SH isn't in this room. If this is right, the predicate "...exists" will be a limiting case:

"SH doesn't exist" becomes -

"There is no true proposition that SH exists"

Why is there no true proposition? Because SH doesn't exist.

TRB.