identity holds of every entity in every possible world, and is part of our very framework of thought.[16]

I have endorsed four main theses about identity: (i) it is unitary, (ii) it is indefinable, (iii) it is fundamental, (iv) it is a genuine relation. I do not suppose that any of this is very controversial, putting aside some details of the ways I have chosen to state these theses. My aim has been to set out a general conception that will be useful later when we approach more difficult and controversial topics. This is the first instalment in a series of studies of what we might call logical ontology—the ontological character and standing of certain (broadly) logical notions. I shall be defending views of our other topics that mirror what I have said here about identity.

[16] Identity is also bound up with the apparatus of quantification, since variables are interpreted by means of it, as I noted earlier.

2. EXISTENCE

CONSIDER these sentences: 'Bill Clinton exists', 'Superman does not exist', 'Vulcan exists', 'Hillary Clinton does not exist'—the first two true, the second two false. It is extremely natural, going by surface syntax, to interpret these sentences as simple predications, having the same logical form as 'Bill Clinton runs', 'Superman does not drink', 'Vulcan spins', 'Hillary Clinton does not breathe'. Putting it in the material mode, it is natural to regard existence as a property that things may have or fail to have. Of course, this formulation is only as clear as the notion of a property, which is not altogether clear. About the best that can be said to define the relevant notion of property is that a property is something that objects have or instantiate. But if we ask what an object is we are soon driven back to the idea that an object is what has or instantiates properties.[1] The two notions are woven inextricably together. We should certainly not adopt some tendentious criterion, such as the idea that a property is what, when instantiated, makes a causal difference to how the world works, or be perceptible, or not be instantiated by everything that exists. Nor is it any help to fall back on the grammatical form of sentences, as when we say that a property is what a predicate expresses. Aside from being dubious in itself, this presupposes the notion of a predicate, which threatens to be defined as a term that expresses a property. Perhaps all we need to say, for present purposes, is that a property, in the intended sense, is what is instantiated by an object in a way analogous to the

[1] Additionally, we cannot informatively characterize the notion of property by using the notion of instantiation, since that notion is itself parasitic on the notion of property.

way in which (say) redness is instantiated by an object: that is, choose a paradigm property and declare a property to be anything that resembles this paradigm.[2] In any case, the traditional opposition to the idea that existence is a property has not relied upon the charge that the whole notion of a property is too unclear to make the claim well-formulated, or that the notion is being stretched too far when made to include existence. Indeed, it has typically been assumed that the claim is clear enough to be known to be demonstrably false: we know what it means to call existence a property; it is just that it is no such thing. Existence is nothing like redness or maleness or evenness, according to one tradition. But this, as I say, is not how statements of existence naively appear.

Assuming, then, that we have an adequate grip on the notion of property, and allied notions, we find it natural to talk in the following way. Not everything that we refer to exists: Venus does, Vulcan doesn't; horses do, unicorns don't. There are merely fictional entities as well as things that really exist. To exist is to have a property that only some of the things we refer to have—those that exist as opposed to those that are merely fictional. Thus existence is a property that is universal to entities that exist, unlike (say) the property of being blue (which is, however, universal to entities that are blue[3]). This universality is shared by certain other properties—such as self-identity and logical properties like not being blue and not blue at the same time. But despite the universality of the property of existence over existent things, the word 'exists' still does important distinguishing work, since not everything we talk about exists. Since there are objects of reference that don't exist, it is useful to have a word that ascribes the property of existence to a subset of what we refer to. This word has the logical role of a

[2] This is surely how the debate about whether existence is a property has been traditionally conceived: the question has always been whether 'exists' belongs with paradigm property terms like 'red' or 'fast' or 'prime'.

[3] In fact, there is no very clear sense in which existence is more universal than blueness: every blue thing is blue, as every existing thing exists; some existing things are not blue, as some blue things do not exist. *More* things exist than are blue, perhaps—but that is all.

predicate in statements of existence, so that 'Venus exists' and 'Venus spins' have the same logical form: they are both singular sentences involving a proper name and a property-ascribing predicate. Just as we say of Venus that it spins, so we say of it that it exists. The ontological status of existence as a property of objects has its semantic counterpart in the grammar of statements of existence: 'exists' is a predicate. It is a predicate that singles out the existent entities we talk about from those that are merely 'intentional'—fictitious, wrongly reified, hallucinatory, dreamed up, mistakenly posited. This sounds like a mere articulation of the common-sense view of existence, but of course it has been widely rejected, and its very coherence has been doubted. In this chapter I shall defend the naive view against the main rival position. The rival position, I shall argue, has severe and unfixable problems, while the naive view remains unthreatened. Let me first lay out the rival view as clearly as possible, before arguing against it.

It is extremely important to state as clearly as possible what it is that the orthodox rival view maintains, so that we fix in our minds exactly what the doctrine is. It is only too easy to miss the import of the doctrine in a formalistic haze. The thesis is that when you say that Bill Clinton exists you do not attribute to a certain *object* the property of existence, since there is no such property; what you do is say that some *property* is instantiated—where this property is not the property of existence itself but some other property to which you are alluding. Instead of attributing a property to an object you attribute a property to a property—the second-order property of having an instance. When you think of an object as existing what you are really thinking is that some property has an instance. You may try your hardest to focus on Clinton himself and ascribe to him the property of existence, but you cannot succeed in that endeavour, since the thought in question must always be to the effect that a certain property has an instance—as it might be, the property of being a US president who was once governor of Arkansas. It cannot be that two conceptual ingredients make up

your singular existential thought—the concept of Clinton and the concept of existence; rather, there must be a third ingredient, corresponding to the property to which instances are ascribed. When you think that Clinton is male you can make do with just the two ingredients, but when you attribute existence to him you are driven to introduce some further property that Clinton has. Your thought is thus really about that property, not about Clinton, though it may seem otherwise to you.[4] The same goes for general existential thoughts: when you think that tigers exist you do not think of certain feline objects that each has the property of existence; rather, you think, of the property of tigerhood, that it has instances—no mental act of predicating existence of any object takes place. The orthodox doctrine gives the very analysis of the content of your thought—what the concept of existence intrinsically involves. The concept of an object existing simply is the concept of a property having instances. To think that Clinton exists is to think that the property of being a US president who was once governor of Arkansas has an instance.

Russell is the main architect of the orthodox view, or at least its most unflinching proponent. He fully grasped exactly what the doctrine says about what he would call the structure of an existential fact; he wasn't simply offering a notational reformulation of ordinary existential sentences. His clearest statement of the view runs as follows:

> When you take any propositional function and assert of it that it is possible, that it is sometimes true, that gives you the fundamental meaning of 'existence'. . . . Existence is essentially a property of a propositional function. It means that the propositional function is true in at least one instance. . . . We have got to have some idea that we do not define, and one takes the idea of 'always true', or of 'sometimes true', as one's undefined idea in this matter. . . . It will be out of this notion of *sometimes*, which is the same as the notion of *possible*, that we get the notion of existence. To say that unicorns exist is simply to say that '(x is a unicorn) is possible'.[5]

[4] Imagine checking off a list of assertions about Bill Clinton, to the effect that he is president, that he smiles a lot, that he is intelligent, that he is imprudent, that he exists. For the first four items your thought is a subject–predicate thought about a certain concrete entity, but when it comes to the fifth item your thinking suddenly goes second-order as you mentally invoke some suitable propositional function to pin your existential thought upon. But doesn't it *seem* that you engage in the same kind of singular predication for the fifth case as for the first four? What, one wants to ask, is to *stop* you thinking singularly about Clinton when you essay an existential thought about him?

Russell goes on to compare 'exists' with 'numerous', saying that neither can be meaningfully predicated of individuals; we can only attach 'numerous' to a term expressing a propositional function, as in 'dogs are numerous'. He says: 'Exactly the same applies to existence, that is to say that the actual things that there are in the world do not exist, or, at least, that is putting it too strongly, because this is to utter nonsense.' The correct thing to say is that 'it is of propositional functions that you can assert or deny existence.'[6] It is a logical category mistake to ascribe existence to objects.

We can divide Russell's position here into three sub-theses: an ontological thesis, a semantic or logical thesis, and a definitional thesis. The ontological thesis has a negative and a positive part. Negatively, the claim is that existence is not a property that individuals instantiate. Positively, the claim is that for something to exist is for some property (propositional function) to have instances. In the metalinguistic terms Russell prefers, existence consists in a predicate yielding a truth under certain substitutions into its argument-place: there are true sentences containing that predicate and a substituted name. For example, 'tigers exist' means 'there are true sentences of the form "*a* is a tiger"', where '*a*' is a name of some tiger. So to say that an individual exists always involves a reference to some property or predicate of which it is said that it holds of something. Thus we have the semantic thesis

[5] 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', 232–3.

[6] Ibid. 233. Actually, this is a misformulation on Russell's part: it is not that you can *predicate* existence of propositional functions; rather, all statements of existence are equivalent to statements saying of propositional functions that they have instances. Propositional functions have the property of having instances, not the property of existence (there is no such property, for Russell).

that statements of existence are really higher-order statements involving reference to a property or concept or predicate or propositional function. The subject of the statement is never a term for an individual but always a term for a property, with the notion of existence being carried by a predicate that attaches to that other predicate term. Statements of existence are always and necessarily second-order statements, analogous to 'blue is delightful to the eye'. And now the definitional thesis is that 'exists' can be defined in these terms: when 'exists' occurs in a statement it can always be paraphrased in terms of the notions of a propositional function and being 'sometimes true' or 'possible'. Presumably Russell intends this definition to be non-circular, so that we are not compelled to explain the definiens by recourse to the definiendum; as he says, we 'get the notion of existence' out of these other notions. The notion of existence gets swallowed up into these other notions, no longer to masquerade as a predicate of individuals. In a perfect language the word need never occur, its job always being done by 'sometimes true' and its adjuncts.

Nowadays this Russellian position is routinely put by saying that existence is what is expressed by the existential quantifier and only by it. All natural language sentences that speak of existence can be translated into sentences that employ only the existential quantifier, with no use of 'exists' as predicative. The existential quantifier is conceived, following Frege, as a function from first-order concepts to truth-values, so that nothing corresponding to a first-order predicate is involved in its semantics.[7] So the assumption is that the Russellian conception of existence receives its canonical formulation in the thesis that 'exists' always means 'there is an x such that'. The thesis is that we can always translate existential statements into this form of words. This is how a perfect language expresses the idea that existence consists in a property having instances.

[7] For the Fregean view of quantification as a second-level function see Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, ch. 3.

I take it all this is familiar enough, even to the point of tedium. But I think that almost none of it is right: the Russellian thesis and its customary Fregean formulation are riddled with problems.

I shall consider four kinds of objection to the orthodox view. First, let us enquire into the innocent-seeming phrase 'has instances'. What does it mean? It can be taken in an objectual or a substitutional sense. In the objectual sense, the doctrine is that for something to exist is for there to be objects that are instances of some suitable predicate. Here are some objects, and they are instances of *F*. But that can only mean that these objects *exist*, so that we are saying that there exist instances of *F*, for some *F*. If they did not exist, then the existential statement would not be true after all. But how is that use of 'exists' to be analysed? Clearly it will be no help to say that they are instances of 'instances of *F*', since these will again need to be existent instances. The notion of existence is presupposed in the analysis, so the analysis does not settle what kind of notion it is. It might even be a predicate as it occurs in that use: for there to be instances of *F* is for there to be objects that exist, predicatively, and are instances of *F*. The instances have to be existent objects, so we are presupposing the notion of an existent object in our account of what an instance of a predicate is. We can put the objection this way: Consider 'planets exist' and ask whether Vulcan is an instance of 'planet'. If it is, then we have not correctly analysed existence, since Vulcan doesn't exist, and hence its planetary instancehood doesn't show that planets exist. But if it is not, then that can only be because it doesn't exist—thus demonstrating that the relevant notion of instance must import the concept of existence. If we say that 'planets exist' is true because 'Mars is a planet' is true and 'Vulcan is a planet' is not, that can only be because 'Mars' refers to an existent object while 'Vulcan' does not. The reason we get a truth in the one case and not the other is precisely that existence is ascribed to the reference of one term and not to the other. Why else would the one be true and the other not be? Nor will it help to introduce a distinction between fictional

truth or fictional instance and literal truth or literal instance in order to rule out this kind of case, since this also presupposes the notion of existence. The point is that paraphrasing existence statements into statements about the instantiation of a property does not establish that existence is not a predicate, since the notion of instantiation must be taken to have existence built into it—it must be *existent* things that instantiate the property. It is this circularity that prevents the orthodox view from claiming to have established that existence is not a predicate.

I think Russell was at least subliminally aware of this problem, which is why he tended to formulate the doctrine in more substitutional terms. He preferred to say that there are true singular propositions or sentences that are instances of the propositional function in question, rather than say that there are instancing *objects* that satisfy that function. And what he liked best of all was the formulation in terms of possibility—'(x is a dog) is possible'—because that put him as far as possible away (he thought) from the concept of existence. It makes it look as if we are analysing—non-circularly analysing—the notion of existence in terms of modal notions and propositional functions. But this does not really help with the underlying problem. In the first place, it is necessary to assert the existence of certain propositions or sentences on this analysis, and the question must arise as to what this is supposed to amount to. It had better not mean that certain propositions or sentences have the property of existence.[8] But, more obviously, there is the problem of how to analyse the singular propositions themselves: what are their truth conditions? Clearly we cannot allow 'Vulcan is a planet' to be a substitution instance corresponding to 'planets exist', but that can only be because the referent of 'Vulcan' does not exist. For a singular statement to be true in the sense needed is for there to *be* an object referred to by the singular term and for that object to satisfy the attached predicate. So, again, the

[8] I return to this later when I discuss what it means to ascribe existence to properties or propositional functions.

notion of existence is smuggled in unanalysed. It is perfectly consistent with the higher-order paraphrase that existence is actually a property of objects: we can paraphrase existential statements that way if we like, but we are tacitly assuming that existence is a property of objects, for all that the paraphrase tells us. What is really being said, according to the paraphrase, is that among the objects that have the property of existing at least one of them is F—hence F has instances. Of course, this does not yet prove that 'exists' *is* a predicate—though it might incline us to think that—but it does show that the orthodox view has not refuted that doctrine, or made it redundant, simply by providing a plausible-sounding paraphrase in terms of properties and their instances. For the question precisely is what it *is* for a property to have instances—if not for objects that exist to instantiate the property.

We must here guard against adopting a formalistic approach to the issue. Russell did not make this mistake, but those in the tradition he initiated (with others) have tended to think that the issue could be settled simply by seeing whether existence statements could be translated into statements employing the so-called existential quantifier. But that cannot be right, because it is possible to interpret the quantifier by using a predicate of existence, along the lines of 'for some x, x exists and x is F' (I will come back to this). The question is whether the fundamental notion of existence can be explained in such a way as to avoid predicating it of objects, and merely giving a quantificational paraphrase does not show this, since it depends upon how the terms in the paraphrase are to be interpreted. The question can only be settled by direct philosophical argument, not by offering some purely formal translation of existence statements. We need to know whether the concept of existence contained in the symbol for the existential quantifier is or is not the first-order concept of predicative existence.[9]

[9] It is perfectly consistent to hold that '$\exists x$' is a second-level expression, so that it forms sentences from first-level expressions, and that '$\exists x$' abbreviates a condition containing a first-level concept of existence—as is evident from the conjunctive paraphrase of '$\exists x$' that I suggest in the text and to which I will return.

The second problem has more of the character of a proof that the orthodox view cannot be a general analysis of the notion of existence, and not just a challenge to the adequacy of the account. Consider the existence of properties or propositional functions or predicates themselves. These exist in the same sense that other things exist, despite their being (presumably) abstract and non-individual. Thus we can say, 'the property of being a planet exists'—as we might if insisting (rightly or wrongly) upon the truth of realism as opposed to nominalism about universals. But how might this statement be analysed? On the orthodox view, we must make reference to some property that the entity said to exist is an instance of. It plainly cannot be the property of being a planet, since the property of being a planet isn't itself a planet. But what else could it be? We might try finding some true description of the property and inserting that into the analysis—say, the property of being currently under discussion; then for the property of being a planet to exist is for *that* property to have instances. But the difficulties now are obvious. First, there is the problem of securing uniqueness. But second, and worse, we are now launched on a vicious infinite regress, since we must ask what the existence of the higher-order property consists in, thus requiring a further property to be a property *of* that property.[10] The problem, evidently, is that to analyse the existence of a property we need another property that the first one instantiates, and so on *ad infinitum*. Not only is it doubtful that there always *are* these further properties, but also we will not succeed in getting any of them to exist without the existence of further ones that raise the same question. Intuitively,

[10] We don't avoid this regress by invoking the property of being identical to a certain property and then using this as the needed propositional function. That is, suppose we want to know what it is for property *P* to exist, and we suggest that it is for the propositional function '= *P*' to have an instance. This still refers to *P*, of course, but it jumps up a level by forming the higher-level function '= *P*', so that when we ask what it is for the referent of '= *P*' to exist we will need a function that expresses identity with that higher-order property—to wit, the property of being identical to the property of being identical with *P*. And so on up. Invoking identity in this way does not work to confine the generated properties merely to the property *P* we started out with.

the existence of a property is intrinsic to it; it is not a matter of some *relation* that the property stands in to some other property of which it is an instance. And if we construe it as such a relation, then we generate a vicious regress, as each new property raises the question of its own existence.[11]

Matters look less troublesome when we are considering the existence of individuals, since they always have properties to instantiate, and their existence doesn't require the existence of other individuals; but with properties themselves we find that we have to postulate extra properties for them to fall under, and we are then being faced with the question of *their* existence. No property will be able to exist unless a whole infinite series exists. But there is no such series, and anyway it would never get off the ground because of the regress. In effect, the orthodox view makes it impossible to attribute existence to properties; this would have to be declared ill-formed and meaningless (not merely false). And it is noteworthy that Russell never attempts to extend the analysis to this area of existence. One suspects that he (and others) simply take the existence of properties for granted, as if it needs no analysis. But this is no better than defending the thesis that existence is to be analysed as occupancy of space simply by declining to consider the existence of abstract entities like numbers. Any good theory of existence needs to be able to handle the full range of uses of 'exists'. In fact, this difficulty about property existence acts back on the analysis of individual existence, since the property the individual instantiates must itself exist, and this cannot be explained in terms of the orthodox view. Individuals cannot be said to exist if the properties (or predicates) they instantiate

[11] The problem here is not that the existence of any given property requires the existence of infinitely many other properties. There is nothing inherently objectionable about that—indeed, something like this appears to be manifestly *true* for the existence of numbers. The point I am making is rather about the analysis or explanation of what it is to exist: the viciousness comes in when we try to *analyse* or *explain* what it is for *X* to exist and find that we must presuppose that we *already* know what it is for *Y* to exist (where *X* and *Y* are both properties here). In general, regresses are only vicious in the context of some explanatory aim, not in themselves.

cannot be said to exist, since the former requires the latter: for x to exist is for there to *exist* some property (or predicate) F such that x instantiates F.

The third objection arises from a family of sentences that resist the orthodox paraphrase. Some of these have become familiar, though their polemical power has been underestimated. In view of the existence of these sentences, there has been a tendency to declare that 'exists' has two sorts of interpretation, predicative and higher-order. But this bifurcating view is unworkable and we are compelled to take all occurrences of 'exists' as predicative. Thus it has often been pointed out that singular attributions of existence are hard to slot into the orthodox schema, on pain of distorting the semantics of singular terms like demonstratives and proper names: we get pushed towards a description theory of reference for these terms that has internal problems.[12] The point I want to make is that accepting this problem about singular statements cannot but affect the way we view 'exists' in general statements. Consider 'Venus exists and is a planet' and 'at least one planet exists': the former entails the latter. But how can that be if 'exists' in the singular sentence is predicative while in the general sentence it is not? We simply have no term common to premises and conclusion if we bifurcate 'exists' in the suggested way; we must either take the singular sentence to be analysable in the orthodox style or we must revise our views of the general sentence. As I will explain below, I favour treating '*F*s exist' along the lines of 'for some x, x exists and x is F', which allows me to find the common term with the predicative 'exists' in '*a* exists'. But my point now is that the orthodox view has to do something to save the entailment—it can't just declare that 'exists' is sometimes predicative and sometimes not. And of course it is deeply unattractive to suppose that 'exists' has the kind of ambiguity the bifurcating account proposes.

[12] See Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. Kripke discussed the topic of existence and names extensively in his 1973 John Locke Lectures in Oxford, which I attended, but which have not yet been published.

The problems of analysis for the orthodox view are made vivid by the sentence 'something exists'. This is a perfectly meaningful and true sentence, which follows from such sentences as 'Venus exists', but it should itself not exist according to the orthodox view. For it is not paraphrasable within the terms of that view, there being no predicate around to pin the instances on: what property are we saying is instantiated here? The problem is worse than with proper names and demonstratives because at least in their case we could try to appeal to a description theory of singular reference; but there isn't even any reference going on with the word 'something'. If we try to translate the sentence in the standard way we get the gibberish, '$\exists x(\ x)$', with no predicate to write down. You might think we could do better with '$\exists x$(Thing$x$), but this is pleonastic, given the usual meaning of '$\exists x$'. Also, it is unclear what the predicate 'thing' is supposed to mean here if not 'exists'.[13] The natural translation is I think the right one: '$\exists x$(Exists$x$)'—'for some

[13] A tempting alternative suggestion is that 'something exists' means the same as 'something is self-identical' or 'the property of self-identity has at least one instance'. Thus the formula that captures our recalcitrant sentence is '$(\exists x)(x = x)$', where '=' plays the role of the missing predicate. But is this really what 'something exists' *says*? Where is the sign of identity in the original sentence? There is no name to extract it from, as with classic description theories, and it is hard to see how it could plausibly be taken to be expressed by 'something'. Moreover, 'something exists' follows from 'Venus exists', so presumably it will have to be held that the latter sentence means '$(\exists x)(x$ = Venus)', thus construing singular existence statements as asserting the identity of something with a named entity. The problem here, in addition to the previous objection, is that such a paraphrase looks irremediably circular, since it presupposes that we already understand what it is for Venus (say) to exist. The invoked predicate '= Venus' embeds the name 'Venus', and the condition will only work to secure existence if this term is taken to refer to an existent entity. Consider '= Vulcan': satisfying this predicate will not secure existence (Vulcan clearly satisfies it!), and the reason is simply that Vulcan does not exist. Satisfying '= Venus' secures existence only because of the existence of Venus, which we were meant to be analysing. I think Russell was aware of this point, which is why he never chose the likes of '= Venus' as the propositional function on which to pin existence. In the case of other predicates, such as 'planet next to Mars', the existence of the property does not depend upon the existence of Venus itself, and hence is not straightforwardly circular in the way '= Venus' is. And there is also the point that bringing in identity in this way undermines a central motivation for the Russellian view, since self-identity has precisely the kind of universality Russell found objectionable in a predicate of existence.

x, *x* exists' (see below for more on this view of '$\exists x$'). In any case, it is difficult to see how 'something exists' could succeed in being meaningful on the orthodox view, because it lacks the kind of reference to a property that is required for that view to get a foothold (the same goes for 'nothing exists'). I would regard such unspecific existential sentences as test cases for any theory of existence (they also block metalinguistic analyses along the lines of '"Venus" denotes', since 'something' is not a denoting term). Again, the orthodox view does not have the generality we should expect of a theory of existence.

The fourth objection focuses on the requirement that any existent thing should fall under some property or other. This implies that nothing *could* exist that failed to fall under some property—other than existence, obviously. To exist is to be an instance of a property, so necessarily whatever exists has at least one property. This rules out, as a matter of the meaning of 'exists', the possibility of what we might call 'bare existence'—a thing that exists *without* having any (further) properties. What should we think of this alleged possibility? The question seems to be a substantive metaphysical question, open to rational debate. Maybe bare existence is actually a metaphysical impossibility, though how one might argue for that is not clear.[14] But, in any case, it does not appear to be analytic or tautological to assert that bare existence is impossible—which it would have to be according to the orthodox view. It would have to be equivalent to saying, 'there could not be an instance of a property that was not an instance of a property'. That is, it would have to be *contradictory* to assert the possibility of bare existence, as in 'an instance of a property could be an instance of no property'. This is simply because existence is being analysed

[14] Again, we have the question of what to say about self-identity: is it contradictory to suppose that an object exists and lacks even the property of self-identity? This does seem to me quite impossible, but I am not convinced that it is actually formally contradictory. In any case, it is of no real help to the defender of the Russellian thesis, since this seems precisely the wrong kind of property to invoke in order to analyse what it means to say that something exists, for the reasons mentioned in the previous footnote.

as property instantiation, so we could not then go on to say that the existent thing has *no* properties. But it seems to me that there is no actual contradiction in the idea of bare existence, even though it may well be some sort of metaphysical impossibility: '*x* exists and *x* has no properties' certainly does not *appear* to be a straightforwardly self-refuting sentence. I think the idea of an object that has *only* the property of existence is not intrinsically self-defeating, but it would have to be if existence simply consisted in property instantiation.

Actually, the problem here spreads, because the orthodox view requires, not merely that every existent object have some property, but also that it have some property *unique* to it. For the existence of an individual object is said to consist in the instantiation of a property sufficient for *that object* to exist and not some other object. Thus the theory characteristically claims that some definite description or individual concept is instantiated, this serving to single out the individual in question. But this implies that in every possible world in which an individual exists that individual has some property that no other individual has. Surely that is a very strong claim, and not one that we ought to be obliged to accept just by the simple analysis of the concept of existence.[15] The analysis of existence ought to be neutral on the point. On the face of it, there seems no logical bar to a range of individuals existing in a world without there being a property that singles each of them out uniquely—as it might be, a collection of indiscernible red steel spheres. We surely don't want our theory of existence to settle the vexed question of

[15] Of course, identity with an object is always a property unique to it, as with '=Venus'; but as we have seen, this is not the right kind of property to use in characterizing existence: the individuating property must be one that does not itself presuppose the existence of the entity in question. There is also the point that if we insist on using self-identity as the property that is uniquely instantiated in the case of assertions of singular existence, then we disconnect such assertions from assertions of general existence, as with 'tigers exist'. We don't want to end up saying that the existence of each individual tiger consists in its instantiating identity with itself but that the existence of tigers in general consists in instantiating the property of being a tiger. The restriction to the self-identity property looks ad hoc, designed simply to secure uniqueness.

the necessary identity of indiscernibles. And why should existence necessarily attach to the property, if there is one, which the object happens uniquely to instantiate, instead of all the other properties the object has? It certainly does not seem contradictory to insist that an object could exist that differed in no respect from a numerically distinct object. Yet it would have to be contradictory according to the orthodox view of singular existence statements.

Taken together, these four objections imply that the orthodox view simply has not got hold of the concept of existence. It only seems to have done so for certain limited cases because it presupposes the notion of existence, as when it employs the locution 'has instances'. But the theory cannot deal with property existence, it cannot handle the full range of existential statements, and it links the possibility of existence too intimately to the idea of (uniquely) instantiating a property. In short, the concept of existence is not identical to the concept of property instantiation (even though this concept itself invokes the concept of existence). Let me now work out the first-order property view more thoroughly, responding to some questions that might be raised about it.

The property view says that every occurrence of the word 'exists' is logically predicative, just as 'man' and 'blue' are. It also says all existential statements can be analysed by means of this predicate. And this is just the semantic counterpart to the ontological thesis that existence is always and everywhere a property of objects. It is a property universal to all objects that exist, somewhat like self-identity; but it is less universal than identity because (as I noted in the previous chapter) that relation holds of all conceivable objects, not merely those that happen to exist.

What problems might be raised by this simple view? Why has it been so consistently rejected? It is surprisingly difficult to find any worked-out objections to it, despite the suspicions it arouses. The only point that Russell makes, and it is a recurrent theme, is that existence is, so to speak, too universal to be a property: 'There is no

sort of point in a predicate which could not conceivably be false. I mean, it is perfectly clear that, if there were such a thing as this existence of individuals that we talk of, it would be absolutely impossible for it not to apply, and that is the characteristic of a mistake.'[16] There are two problems with this argument. First, it proves too much, since self-identity and logical properties (such as the property of not being both red and not red at the same time) are counter-examples to it: these apply to all conceivable objects, but we should hardly wish to analyse them as higher-order properties. And why should there not be such absolutely universal predicates? Can't there be features that all objects share (such as being an object)?[17] There may not be much point in speaking of such properties, given that they have no complement class, but that is not to say that they are not true of everything: there are many truths that are not worth mentioning in ordinary contexts. Second, it is just wrong of Russell to say that 'exists' applies to all conceivable objects and hence has no utility. It precisely does *not* apply to all conceivable objects, since some of the objects we conceive do not exist. Of course, it applies to all objects that *exist*, but we have a good use for the word simply because we make mistakes about existence. The word 'exists' indeed applies to all existent objects and to nothing else, but sometimes we take it to apply when it doesn't.[18] It can be extremely useful to be told that something exists

[16] 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', 241.

[17] Or 'having properties', or 'standing in relation to something', or 'being nameable'. In fact, Russell himself has to invoke such a universal property to make his theory work, namely 'being an instance of some property or other': since existence consists in instantiating some property, he has to presuppose that every existent object has some property or other to which its existence attaches. Indeed, it is hard to see how such universality could be avoided if we are to find an analysis of existence that applies to every case.

[18] This is why it is a mistake to think that true singular statements of existence must be trivial and false ones contradictory, on the grounds that reference itself presupposes existence. The reason this is a mistake is simply that the audience for existential assertions may not *know* that a given singular term refers to something that exists, so that it is informative to couple such a term with a predication of existence. If we are discussing planets and I say, 'Venus exists but Vulcan does not', this can be informative to

when you had supposed that it does not (and vice versa). So this objection from generality fails to cut much ice.

There are two main areas in which the predicate view needs careful handling and where it might be thought to run into trouble: the interpretation of the quantifiers and the nature of non-existence. I shall deal with these in turn.

We have become accustomed to speaking of the 'existential quantifier' and to supposing that it conveys existence in a non-predicative fashion; thus we suppose that existence is not always expressed as a predicate. As I pointed out, this divided position is unstable, especially in view of the entailments that need to be captured. But, more fundamentally, the view is misconceived at root: for it may be that '$\exists x$' is rightly defined by using the existence predicate, so that it is not an *alternative* to the predicate view. And I think it is easy to show that it *can* be defined in this way; also that this is intuitively the right way to think about it. Take the formula 'for some x, x is F and x exists', and take this to translate 'Fs exist'. The point here is that the prefix 'for some x' does not itself carry existential import; it simply conveys how many things are being said to be thus and so. Now I claim that this formula conveys the sense of the existential statement, and it expresses existence predicatively. What the prefix does is indicate the *quantity* of Fs in question—it says that some are; it is left up to the predicate 'exists' to express existence. The word 'some' by itself is existentially neutral, on this view, much as 'all' is usually taken to be[19]—and I

you precisely because you do not know which of 'Venus' and 'Vulcan' is the empty term. Of course, *I* know, because I am aware of the existential facts, and so the statement is not informative to *me*—but no statement is informative to me in *that* sense, because I already know the fact I am stating. My audience may be clueless about matters of existence, so they are unapprised of the semantic status of the singular terms I use; what they learn from my existential assertions is that those terms either refer to something that exists or not, as the case may be. See David Pears, 'Is Existence a Predicate?' for a formulation of the kind of argument I am here rejecting.

[19] I mean here that it is customary to take 'all men are mortal' as existentially neutral on account of the material conditional embedded in it. It is true that in standard logic '$(\forall x)(Fx)$' implies '$(\exists x)(Fx)$', but it is deemed correct to regard typical universal statements as lacking existential import in virtue of the possible vacuous truth of the embedded conditional. What I am suggesting, then, is that a similar leniency should be applied to our use of 'some'. I will happily accept that 'all' implies 'some', as in standard logic, but I deprive 'some' of existential import: if all the gods are tyrannical, then indeed some are—but of course no gods exist.

would say the same for 'most', 'many', 'a few', as they occur in statements of existence, as in 'most superheroes exist'. To defend this view I need to suggest a plausible semantics for the conjunctive formula and to motivate this way of thinking about quantifier words.

I can think of three possible sorts of interpretation for the formula, which are not unfamiliar. First, we could introduce a Meinongian ontology, letting the variables range over subsistent as well as existent entities. Then the conjunction says of these entities that some both exist (as opposed to subsist) and are F. On this interpretation, 'for some x' has ontological import but not existential import, since not everything in our Meinongian ontology exists; 'exists' then narrows down the ontological field among all the Fs there are. Second, we could go substitutionalist and deprive 'for some x' of any objectual function: the formula then says only that 'x' can be replaced with a term 't' such that 't exists and t is F' comes out true. That is, we interpret 'some' purely substitutionally in the standard way, then we introduce existence by means of an explicit predicate. On this interpretation, '$\exists x$' simply abbreviates the substitutional quantifier plus its appended existence predicate; we thus break apart the existential and the quantitative aspects of the complex symbol '$\exists x$'. Third, we could introduce a special quantifier expression that is equivalent to 'some of the things we talk/think about' (what we might call the 'intentional quantifier') and then append existence in the usual way. Thus 'Fs exist' means: 'some of the things we talk/think about are both F and exist'; symbolically, '$\mathrm{I}x$, x is F and x exists', where '$\mathrm{I}x$' is the intentional quantifier.[20] The function of 'some', again, is purely to convey the

[20] As I have defined it here the intentional quantifier ranges only over objects of reference. If we want to include objects that exist and have not been referred to, then we can simply make the quantifier disjunctive and include in its domain both intentional objects and those ordinary objects that exist without ever being referred to. In

quantity of things that we talk about that both exist and are *F*. We could thus quite meaningfully say, 'for some *x* that we talk about, *x* does not exist': this would follow, for example, from the truth that Vulcan does not exist. On this interpretation, to be (to exist) is emphatically not to be the value of a variable. The idea here is to interpret the variable so that its values are both existent entities and merely intentional ones, where a merely intentional object does not even subsist (I shall have much more to say about non-existent intentional objects shortly). So it seems that we can assign a coherent and plausible interpretation to our formula and hence show that the 'existential quantifier' is analysable in terms of the predicate of existence. I think this is intuitively right, and it solves the problem of the univocity of existence statements. We also see that in adopting the predicate view we can preserve our usual logic of quantifiers, suitably interpreted; we don't need to go back to old-fashioned logic in which '*F*s exist' is a subject–predicate statement with '*F*s' figuring as the subject. In 'some men exist' it is not that 'some men' is the subject and 'exists' the predicate, which gives rise to notorious absurdities with 'no men exist'; we can hang on to the standard paraphrase that treats 'some' as a second-order predicate, not as a singular term.[21] Existence is always predicated of individuals, not of mysterious pluralities.

But is this a *good* way to think about 'some'? Does 'some', taken by itself, really lack existential import in ordinary language? This is quite a big question, but I think there are clear considerations in its favour—it is not merely that it is required by the correct theory of existence. To begin with, quantifier words are precisely that—they tell you how many, what proportion. But that is not an inherently

this way the universal intentional quantifier can range over real and fictional objects in 'all men are mortal'—in which case that statement turns out false by dint of immortal fictional characters. We can then rely on conversational context to convey suitable implicatures when we want to speak only of real people.

[21] Notice that 'some' is treated as second-order while 'exists' is treated as first-order; so it is wrong to reason that since 'some' is a second-order concept 'exists' must also be. The question of the semantic level of quantifier words is orthogonal to the issue of whether existence is predicative.

existential concern. We do better to call 'some' the *partial* quantifier, on analogy with the universal quantifier—neither logically implies existence. The same should be said of the non-standard quantifiers, 'most', 'many', etc. In the orthodox notion expressed by '$\exists x$' we have conflated two distinct linguistic functions into the '$\exists x$' symbol—the function of saying how many and the function of implying existence (and the name 'existential quantifier' only captures this latter aspect). But, as we have separated these functions for 'all', so we should for 'some'.[22] And this fits the linguistic data, because we do use 'some' in contexts in which existence is not implied, even conversationally. Thus we can say, 'some of the things you're talking about don't exist', 'some superheroes are entirely fictional', 'some cities are purely imaginary'. In these sentences 'some' expresses a proportion, but it does not imply that this proportion exists—quite the opposite, since the predicates negate existence. If you try to translate these uses of 'some' into the existential quantifier, so called, you get outright contradictions. Better to take 'some' neutrally and then leave it to 'exists' to do what it does best—assert existence.

On this view, 'some' only acquires existential force as a matter of conversational implicature. But this implicature can be cancelled without contradiction, as when one annoyingly says 'some of the things I've just been referring to don't exist' or (less annoyingly) 'some of the gods are tempestuous, but of course no gods exist'. A similar point can be made about the word 'object': it can seem that this word carries an implication of existence, so that speaking of non-existent objects sounds contradictory, especially when you lay stress on the word 'object'. But I think it is clear that this is a mere implicature, since we do use the word quite correctly to speak of

[22] So I am going further than free logic in stripping quantificational logic of existential assumptions. Where free logic gives up existential generalization, I give up the existential import of the sign for partial quantification itself, i.e. 'some'. We therefore can infer 'someone is a detective' from 'Sherlock Holmes is a detective', even though Sherlock Holmes does not exist. As a matter of strict logic, then, it is never possible to infer existence from anything (except existence itself, of course), not even a sentence of partial quantification.

'objects of thought'. When we use the word in this kind of context all suggestions of existence are cancelled. If I speak of the object of your search as the fountain of youth, there is no implication of existence here. It is the same with 'some': most of the time the implicature is in force, since generally we mean to be speaking of existent things, and this is common knowledge between us; but the general implicature can in principle be cancelled, and then 'some' shows its true semantic colours as a device of pure quantification, with no existential entailments.[23] This is why we can quite happily say, 'some objects (of thought) do not exist'. On this view, it is not that when 'some' occurs without existential force it is always somehow embedded in an intentional context which erases its customary existential punch; rather, it packs no such punch as a matter of its semantics (as opposed to its pragmatics) but serves purely to express quantity or proportion—just like 'all'. If you want to get existence semantically into the picture you have to say so. This is why it is not pleonastic to say 'some tame tigers exist', and not contradictory to say 'some superheroes do not exist'. In other words, the linguistic appearances are a true guide to semantic reality: 'some' does not in fact contain 'exists', implicitly or explicitly, which is just how it appears. Accordingly, we need 'exists' in the language in addition to 'some'—which is exactly what we find. What quantifier words do is abandon singularity; what 'exists' does is attribute the property of existence to objects that are either denoted or quantified over. It invites confusion to try to merge these two functions together into a single primitive symbol '$\exists x$'. The phrase 'existential quantifier' obscures this point: think how odd it sounds to call 'all' the existential quantifier just because you

[23] Imagine teaching a literature class in which various fictional characters are being discussed (I do this quite often). You say, 'some of the characters in *Lolita* are despicable', and go on to discuss their personal failings. This is perfectly good English and clearly the context excludes existential implications. Now imagine switching to a context of real criminal investigation; here it will be assumed that you are talking of real people when you say, 'some of these car thieves are pretty smart'. But surely the word 'some' does not shift its literal meaning from one context to the next; it is simply a matter of the implicatures carried by the context of utterance.

believe, as some have, that it too implies existence. To label 'some' the existential quantifier is not simply to describe its function but to impose a tendentious theory upon it, a theory that we have seen to be false to the linguistic data. Matters would be much clearer if we spoke of the universal quantifier and the partial quantifier. We can, of course, just define an expression '$\exists x$' that contains both notions, as we have in effect traditionally done; but we should be aware of what the correct semantic analysis of such a stipulated expression consists in—and we should be wary of taking this symbol to translate the natural language 'some'.

The topic of non-existence engages more purely metaphysical concerns, and it is true that the topic can quickly generate bewilderment and confusion; truisms turn into absurdities in the blink of an eye. The problem, put crudely, is to make sure that things that don't exist don't end up existing after all. The predicate 'exists' fails to apply to some things—what we have to ensure is that these things don't turn out to exist in some attenuated or second-class way: they simply *don't exist*. I think it is essential, in avoiding this danger, to acknowledge a crucial asymmetry between existence and non-existence, namely that non-existence is representation-dependent, while existence is not. That is, the complement class of 'exists' is purely intentional—its *esse* is *concipi*. The Meinongian ontology of non-existence implicitly denies this, holding that merely subsistent entities could have Being even though they have never been conceived. But I want to say that there are no mind-independent non-existent entities—though there are plenty of mind-independent existent entities. Compare a predicate like 'blue': there can be blue things we have not encountered cognitively, but there can also be non-blue things we have not encountered—and similarly for every other ordinary predicate. If we think of the complement class of 'exists' in this way, then we will hold that there could be objects that don't exist and have not been thought of, since their nature does not consist in their being conceived. But this strikes me as a fundamental misconception: there are no non-existent things that transcend our cognitive acts;

all non-existent things are objects of thoughts, as a matter of necessity.[24] And this marks a deep contrast with typical predicates. Not that this shows that 'exists' is not a predicate after all, but it does tell us something important about how the concept works. When we say that an object does not exist we are ascribing non-existence to a purely intentional object; indeed this is precisely what its non-existence consists in. If it were any other type of object, then it would have existence after all.

This raises the question of the relation between existence and possibility—in particular, whether merely possible objects exist. It seems wrong to insist that all possible objects must be conceived, because this makes possibility into a mind-dependent matter; yet in some sense merely possible objects are ontologically lacking. So are possible objects non-existent and yet mind-independent? And are not fictional objects at least possible objects? Here I side with Saul Kripke's view of non-existent entities like unicorns and Sherlock Holmes: these are not genuinely metaphysically possible objects.[25] The central problem with the possibility interpretation of talk about unicorns and Sherlock Holmes is that there are too many such possible objects, all the ones that answer to the descriptions given in the stories—and which of these is really Holmes or

[24] The fundamental reason for this is that non-existent objects are individuated only by the ideas we associate with them. If we are told that a particular something doesn't exist, we need to know *which* thing is being said not to exist—we need a suitable individual concept. The notion of an entity not existing that has no individual concept associated with it is ill-defined: *what* is it, precisely, that does not exist? Fictional characters are the paradigm here: Sherlock Holmes only comes *not* to exist because he is a character created by Arthur Conan Doyle—it is not that there was a well-defined fact of Holmes's non-existence before Conan Doyle ever created the character. As it were, thought and language are what bring non-existent objects into being. Even in the case of general statements of non-existence, such as 'tigers with ten legs do not exist', we cannot say which *particular* such tigers suffer from non-existence without invoking some conceptual individuation. In the case of unconceived existent objects the object itself operates to individuate it, but in the case of alleged unconceived non-existent particular objects there is simply nothing to give them individuation conditions—there is nothing *specific* that fails to exist in such a putative case. This is why particularized non-existent objects are always intentional objects.

[25] *Naming and Necessity*, 156–8.

the unicorns? But this only tells us that fictional entities are not metaphysically possible entities; it does not tell us whether there are *other* possible entities that are non-existent and also mind-independent, contrary to the principle I laid down earlier. To this I reply that merely possible entities, such as the younger sister I might have had, really do exist, and did exist before I ever formed the concept of them—though they do not *actually* exist. Such entities exist in the realm of the merely possible; their ontological deficiency consists just in the fact that their existence is not actual. When we think that they fail to exist we are confusing existence with actual existence, and it is their want of the latter that explains their difference from ordinary objects like the people around me. But I think that fictional entities, like Sherlock Holmes, are not correctly viewed as possible objects analogous to the possible people that would have actually existed had the reproductive facts been different. Of course, such non-existent objects are *epistemically* possible, but they are not metaphysically so. So non-existence is an essential property of Holmes and unicorns, while it is not an essential property of my possible sister. On the other hand, existence is not an essential property of Venus and Clinton. This asymmetry shows that existence, though a genuine property, is different from properties in general: generally, if *F*ness is a contingent property of objects, then so is non-*F*ness—but not so in the case of existence. In sum, then, genuinely possible objects do exist, though not actually, while genuinely non-existent objects have that status necessarily.[26]

[26] I am not intending here to persuade the reader that it is correct to view possible objects as existing; I am simply stating what I take to be a familiar view. My purpose is to indicate how the representation-dependence of non-existence can be made consistent with the mind-independence of possibilia—namely, by recognizing that possibilia exist. There may be an element of stipulation in this way of talking, but it serves to protect what otherwise seems a compelling thesis, namely the identification of non-existent with merely intentional objects. Note that none of this is directly relevant to the question of whether existence is a property; the representation-dependence of non-existence is a logically separate thesis.

It might help if I restate my position by considering three different theories of the truth conditions for 'Vulcan does not exist'. First, it might be held that 'Vulcan' stands for a possible object and that possible objects don't exist. Second, it might be held that 'Vulcan' stands for a possible object and that possible objects do exist, and what the statement is really saying is that this existent object does not *actually* exist—thus 'the existent possible object Vulcan is not actual'. Third, it might be held that 'Vulcan' stands for no possible object at all and that the predicative part of the sentence simply ascribes non-existence to this non-existent object. My proposal, then, is to go with this third view, thus cleaving to the thesis that all non-existence is representation-dependent. Possible objects are not counter-examples to this thesis since they involve existence.

But is *impossibility* a counter-example to the thesis? It might be thought both that impossible objects don't exist and that they are not representation-dependent. Round squares don't exist, it may be said, but they are not necessarily objects of thought. Didn't round squares fail to exist in the universe before thinkers ever came along to conceive of them? Aren't there many impossible objects that we have never thought about? This is a puzzling and subtle issue, but I am inclined to take the following line: impossible objects, like possible objects, *do* exist, but what they lack is the possibility of actuality—they are existent entities that *could* not be actual. They have the property of existence but they have it in such a way that they could never have this property actually. Their essence is to exist in modal limbo, necessarily closed off from actualization. This explains our sense that they are fundamentally lacking ontologically, but it is not because they have no existence—it is because their existence is necessarily non-actual. Nor could anything *like* them actually exist, whereas in the case of Holmes and the unicorns, though they lack existence entirely, at least things like them could exist. Distance from actuality, as measured by modal status or dissimilarity to actual things, is not the same as non-existence. Impossible objects are not, then, counter-examples to the thesis that non-existence is always representation-dependent.[27]

It may now be asked how we can ascribe *any* properties to purely intentional objects, including the property of non-existence. Here we need to heed carefully the way we actually talk and not impose misleading models on our concepts. For we simply *do* ascribe properties to non-existent objects—we make remarks about them. Thus we say that Pegasus is a horse not a pig, that Zeus is the senior god, that Sherlock Holmes is a brilliant detective. These statements are all true and they contain predicative expressions; so, yes, we can predicate properties of non-existent entities. Not all predication involves referring to an existent entity and ascribing a property to it; sometimes we take a non-existent entity and ascribe a property to it.[28] This, as Wittgenstein would say, is what we do. Our theories

[27] Again, I do not expect to persuade the reader of this conception of impossible objects, and the issue is certainly highly debatable. By way of nudging intuitions, think of a conversation about whether there are impossible objects as well as possible ones: no one in the conversation has ever thought of such things as round squares, and then someone says, 'yes, there are impossible objects—think of objects that are both round and square!'; there follows general agreement among the discussants that indeed there are such things, after all. Haven't they just agreed that impossible objects *do* exist, though it was hard to think of any examples for a while? These objects are certainly not merely fictional, since the impossibility of round squares obtained independently of anyone conceiving of them or telling a story about them.

This raises the question of whether Sherlock Holmes might be such an existent impossible object. I have said that Holmes is an impossible object, now I say such objects exist, so might not Holmes be one such? My answer is that impossible objects come in two varieties: the existent and the non-existent. We already know that Holmes does not exist, and his impossibility does not disturb this knowledge; but in the case of round squares the matter is up for discussion, and there seem to be grounds for allowing existence to these entities. We at least know what it would *be* for round squares to exist—they are well-defined entities. But in the case of fictional entities we have the problem, noted by Kripke, that there are too many candidates for being Holmes in the space of possible (and impossible!) worlds—his individuation is too underdetermined by the content of the stories. So: some impossibilia exist and some do not. (Of course, I am aware that these are very delicate issues, and that it is not altogether clear *what* to say about them; I am presenting what seems to be the best overall conception of the ontology of these matters.)

[28] Compare ascribing properties to merely possible objects: my possible sister Edith (the one that would have resulted from the combination of a particular sperm and egg) has the property of being female. So it is not only actual objects that have properties.

need to respect this fact not deny it. And if so, there is no bar to ascribing the property of non-existence to some of the things we talk about. Just as Zeus fails to be mortal, so he fails to exist; just as Vulcan fails to be a cactus, so it fails to exist; just as unicorns fail to be two-horned, so they fail to be exist. Imagine someone overhearing a conversation you are having about Vulcan and wondering what you are talking about. 'What is this Vulcan thing anyway?' they ask, and you reply, 'Oh, Vulcan is a planet that some astronomers mistakenly thought to exist.' 'So it's not a cactus you're referring to with the name "Vulcan"?' 'Definitely not, Vulcan is a planet not a cactus—and moreover it doesn't exist.' Here we see properties asserted and denied of a non-existent entity, among them existence itself. As a general rule, intentional objects have just those properties our mental acts confer on them; this is why it sounds so odd to suggest that Pegasus is really a fluffy poodle not a winged horse.

But there is another approach to assertions of non-existence, which might be prompted by disquietude at the idea that non-existent objects can be genuine subjects of predication, at least in a primitive way. We want to ask what it *is* for an object to fail to exist; we want some analysis of this. To exist is to have the simple property of existence, but non-existence seems to be a matter of our failed intentionality, if I may put it thus. Given that non-existence is representation-dependent, we should be able to explain it in those terms. Thus we might suppose that there is some complexity in such statements, and that they make reference to cognitive acts in some way. There are two main cases to consider: fiction and empirical postulation. The idea, then, is that when I say, 'Holmes does not exist' I am saying something like this: 'it is just a fictional pretence that Holmes exists'; and when I say, 'Vulcan does not exist' I am saying something like this: 'it was a mistaken postulation

In the case of fictional objects the origin and foundation of their properties is the story that refers to them; hence we can say quite correctly that Holmes is a detective, thereby predicating a property of Holmes. And clearly the predicate 'detective' is not ambiguous in factual and fictional contexts.

that Vulcan exists'. In these paraphases 'exists' occurs only in its positive form, and the denial of existence is carried by the implication that cognitive acts of make-believe or mistaken postulation have occurred. Putting both together, the basic truth condition of the negative existential is that there was only an entertaining of existence. And we cannot further explain this by saying that the object of the entertaining does not exist; the end of line comes with the statement that this was a case of mere entertaining. Non-existence is essentially and constitutively failed intentionality, whereas existence is not definable as successful intentionality. Existence is having a mind-independent property, but non-existence results from the occurrence of a certain kind of mental act—a pretence or an erroneous postulation of existence. Assertions of non-existence really are statements about mental acts, just as the representation-dependence thesis suggests.[29] This makes non-existence very different from non-squareness, say: to assert

[29] When I say this I do not mean to be asserting that statements of non-existence *mean* the same as statements about failed intentionality; I am speaking rather of the basic truth-maker for negative existentials. Analogies are always potentially misleading, but we can compare this to the secondary quality conception of colour: what makes it true that an object is red is that it is disposed to look red to perceivers, but it is not that 'red' *means* (is synonymous with) 'disposed to look red'; rather, the disposition is what redness ontologically consists in—or redness supervenes on such a disposition (see my 'Another Look at Colour' on this). Similarly, the non-existence of Holmes depends upon the occurrence of certain creative mental acts that have no target in the real world; if you like, such non-existence is supervenient on mental acts that have no real world reference. This view is quite compatible with acknowledging that the concept of failed intentionality must be analysed by invoking the concept of non-existence—failed intentionality is precisely a case in which the intentional object *does not exist*. In the case of colour 'looks red' contains the word 'red', but that does not show that redness is not supervenient on dispositions to look red. My claim about non-existence is not that failed intentionality is conceptually prior to non-existence; it is the claim that facts of non-existence obtain in virtue of failed intentionality, in the sense that there is no non-existence without failed intentionality. This marks the difference between existence and non-existence, since existence is not supervenient on successful intentionality. Existence is like a primary quality; non-existence is like a secondary quality. So we don't have to regard the non-existence of an object as a bedrock fact with no further articulation; we can say what is involved in an object's (so to speak) coming not to exist.

Alternatively, we could stick with the simple idea that non-existence is just primitively one of the properties that Sherlock Holmes has in addition to being a detective.

that an object is not square is not to assert that it was mistakenly taken to be square, since that may not be so and anyway is not what the statement means. There is no allusion here to erroneous mental acts. But to say that an object does not exist *is* to allude to mistaken suppositions or acts of make-believe. I think this asymmetry is entirely intuitive: non-existence really does have a lot more to do with misfirings of the mind than do other kinds of property lack. I suspect that it is the nature of non-existence—its difference from other kinds of property lack—that is at the root of the old feeling that existence cannot be a property like any other. The negation of existence works differently from the negation of other properties, because of the underlying representation-dependence of non-existence; but we should not infer from this that existence itself is not a simple first-order property of objects. Thus we can explain the feeling that existence is a peculiar sort of property while not withdrawing the claim that this is nevertheless what it is. To be a peculiar or even unique kind of property is not to fail to be a property.

There is a further reason someone might have for doubting the predicate view, which is epistemological in character: namely, that existence is not a *perceptible* property of objects. If we hold to the empiricist principle that the only properties of objects are perceptible properties, at least in principle, then we get the result that existence isn't a property, at least on some plausible assumptions. (Russell, of course, was strongly empiricist in his general outlook, so he may well have been influenced by this consideration: where in my sense-datum of a table, he might have asked, is the quality of existence?) Why is existence not a perceptible feature of objects? Because regardless of whether or not an object exists it will still present the same sensory appearance: hallucinated pink rats look an awful lot like existent pink rats. A non-existent object can appear just as an existent object does. Being blue, say, makes a difference to how something looks, so that blue rats look quite unlike pink ones: but existing makes no qualitative difference—there is no *impression* of existence (as Hume in effect said). This is really why

scepticism about the external world is possible: you can never build existence into the appearances, so it must always be inferred or assumed. If existence were like colour, you could know that the external world exists just by inspecting your sense-data: but that is exactly what existence does not allow. I know that my current intentional object is blue and circular, but I have nothing sensory to guarantee that it also exists.

The right response to this point about imperceptibility is to concede the premiss but deny that the conclusion follows: true, existence is not a perceptible property, but it does not follow that it is not a property—it is just a rather special property. Is self-identity a perceptible property of objects, or logical and modal properties? Apparently not, but then why should existence be? Empiricism of this kind is just mistaken, a misguided assimilation of everything real to the perceptible. To deny that existence is a property on account of its imperceptibility is just a hyperbolic reaction to its specific character. It is a property that is universal to what exists, whose complement class is representation-dependent, and which is not perceptible: that is its nature. So there is no cogent objection here to the view that existence functions as a first-order property of objects.

I now want to consider three specific contexts in which the concept of existence is essentially invoked; my purpose is to show the superiority of the predicate view over the orthodox view in handling these contexts.

(i) The *Cogito.* Consider the statement 'I exist': how should we analyse it? On the face of it, this is a subject–predicate statement consisting of an indexical singular term and a term that ascribes a property to the referent of that indexical (in a context). And I maintain that this is precisely what it is, logically speaking. This is the default position, barring arguments to the contrary. But how does the orthodox view handle it? It needs to find a predicate for 'exists' to attach to; but no such predicate apparently figures there;

so one has to be contrived. Thus we are pushed towards a description theory of 'I', which will enable us to say that the proposition that I exist is equivalent to the proposition that a description *D* has a unique instance. But there are well-known problems with this, since any natural description will fail to have the force of the indexical.[30] I can know, for example, that the description 'the author of *The Mysterious Flame*' has a unique satisfier without realizing that I am that author, so indexical and description do not mean the same.[31] The only remotely workable description will be metalinguistic, like 'the referent of *this* (token of) "I"', so that the *Cogito* is saying in effect that '*x* is a referent of this (token of) "I"' is uniquely instantiated. Now that does not look much like what the original statement says: the *Cogito* is less convoluted than that; it is not metalinguistic; it could be stated by someone incapable of semantic ascent; it has a transparent certainty the paraphrase lacks. But there is also a clear logical problem, because we are now referring to *two* things—the self and a token of 'I'—and both have to exist for the statement to be true. So we are presupposing the truth of 'this token of "I" exists', which contains an indexical referring to a word token—and how is *that* to be analysed? We will need another definite description: but that will either contain an indexical or it won't. If it does, then we need another description to explain the existence of *its* referent; if it does not, then we fail to produce something with the semantic force of the original, since indexicality cannot be captured non-indexically. The same point applies if we replace 'I' with 'the bearer of *these* mental states',

[30] What about invoking self-identity again in the shape of the predicate '= I'? Then we could say that 'I exist' means '$(\exists x)(x = I)$', which latter inherits the semantic properties of the original indexical. But, again, this presupposes my existence, since the term 'I' must be taken to refer to an existent entity—me—in the context '= I'. We do not explain what it is for me to exist by stating that someone is identical to me. Nor, intuitively, is this what I mean when I say that I exist—where is the identity sign to be found in that sentence? And there is also the point I made at the beginning, that the idea of an *instance* of '= I' already builds in the notion of existence, since Sherlock Holmes cannot be allowed to count as an instance of self-identity if this is to be sufficient for existence.

[31] See John Perry, 'The Problem of the Essential Indexical'.

referring to my own mental states: this presupposes the truth of 'these mental states exist', and this cannot be analysed non-indexically. The point here is that the irreducibility of indexicals, especially the 'I' of the *Cogito*, is inconsistent with the orthodox analysis of singular existentials in terms of descriptions. If the only way to preserve the special semantic properties of 'I' is to introduce some new indexical, then we need to explain the corresponding existence statement, which presents the same irresolvable dilemma. So the case is even worse here than for existence statements containing proper names. The lesson is that the *Cogito* cannot be formulated using the orthodox analysis of existence; it needs the predicate treatment.

(ii) Essentialism. A natural way to express essentialist claims employs the notion of existence: for Clinton to be necessarily a man is for it to be the case that Clinton could not exist without being a man. Generally, '*x* is essentially *F*' means 'necessarily, if *x* exists, *x* is *F*'. Now let us ask how the orthodox view would analyse this latter sentence. There are two possibilities: either we use '*F*' itself as the predicate to which existence attaches, or we introduce a new predicate. Suppose we use '*F*' itself: then we get 'necessarily, if *x* is an instance of *F*ness, *x* is *F*'. This would be a way of formulating the claim that (say) every man is such that, necessarily, if he exists, he is a man; and it says that every man is such that, necessarily, if he is an instance of manhood, then he is a man. But this, of course, is a plain tautology, which the original statement is not—so they cannot mean the same. We thus need to find some predicate distinct from that which is being declared essential to the objects in question. That will not in general be impossible to do: Clinton, say, satisfies the predicate 'US president in 1999'. This raises Kripkean problems about whether we can preserve modal status under such an analysis, but the point I want to make is different and parallels the point I made earlier about bare existence. It is that the orthodox doctrine now entails that nothing can have an essential property *F* unless it instantiates *other* properties (not including existence). But is that really a metaphysical necessity?

Couldn't an object have just one property and have it essentially? More to the point, is the denial of this something that an essentialist claim *entails*? Is it *contradictory* to say '*x* is essentially *F* and *x* has no properties other than *F*'? I don't see that it is, but the orthodox analysis implies that it must be, once the tautological translation is ruled out. If we take 'exists' to be a predicate, on the other hand, then we can say simply that for Clinton to have the property of existing he must also have the property of being a man, and this is neither tautologous nor committed to the idea that Clinton must have some *further* property. But if we take existence to attach to a property, in the orthodox way, then we are committed to Clinton having properties other than that of being a man. He does, of course, but my point is that this is not something that the essentialist claim should logically imply, since it is not contradictory to say that an object is essentially *F* and yet has no further properties. I therefore conclude that the orthodox analysis cannot properly handle the use of existence in expressing essentialist claims, while the predicate view has no trouble with this.

(iii) The Ontological Argument. The standard objection to the ontological argument (OA) is that it assumes that existence is a property. Clearly, I am committed to saying that this is a bad objection; so the question for me is what to say about the claim that the definition of God implies his existence. Now I think it was always suspicious to pin the fallacy of the argument on treating existence as a property instead of as a second-order concept, as if we just hadn't noticed that 'exists' is logically on a par with 'numerous'. That is like saying that the argument depends upon a scope confusion or affirming the consequent or some such logical howler. But surely the argument is more interesting and substantive than that diagnosis allows; it is not some simple logical fallacy—pleasant as it might be to think this. Second, it seems to me quite unclear that the argument cannot be reformulated using 'exists' in the second-order way. Thus we can ask whether it is part of God's definition that his attributes must have at least one instance. Does 'being all-powerful and all-knowing and all-good' have to have an instance?

For if it did not, then wouldn't it fail to express the concept of the most perfect being? The concept 'being a perfect being' has to have an instance or else it would not be the concept it purports to be. Third, we should note that the argument can be deployed in the opposite direction to prove the non-existence of the most *imperfect* being. Call that being 'Satan': then Satan cannot exist because he is the most imperfect conceivable being, and existence is one of the perfections. To exist and be imperfect is to be less imperfect than a maximally imperfect being who fails to exist. Thus the most imperfect conceivable being cannot exist. Whatever is wrong with these arguments is independent of whether existence is a property; the logical status of 'exists' is irrelevant.

How can the OA and its Satanic counterpart be resisted? I don't need to answer this in order to defend the property view of existence, but I will make some observations about it anyway. One might think that the weakness lies in the assumption that existence is a perfection and non-existence an imperfection. That is certainly questionable on any natural interpretation of the notion of perfection. But actually we can formulate the argument without using this premiss, by appealing to other aspects of God's definition. He is also the most impressive and most powerful being, by definition. But surely, it will be argued, you cannot be the most impressive and powerful being conceivable if you fail to exist; another being who was just like you but did exist would have to be more impressive and powerful. Thus existence is part of God's definition by virtue of these attributes and not merely by virtue of the notion of perfection. Equally, we can prove that the least impressive and powerful being conceivable could not exist (he will not be the devil, as traditionally conceived), since if a being is defined as the most minimally impressive and powerful being conceivable he could not exist given that existence augments one's impressiveness and power. It is true that this argument sounds strange and sophistical, but it is hard to put one's finger on what exactly is going wrong.

My own suspicion, which is outside the scope of the topic of existence, so I won't try to pursue it here, is that the fault lies in

taking notions like 'the most perfect, impressive and powerful being conceivable' to be well-defined. We can make sense of being the most perfect being that exists, and we know what conceivability is, so we think we know what is meant by combining them. But we are lapsing into disguised nonsense here, analogous to the idea of (say) the most perfect conceivable triangle or piece of music or meal. Here too we may know what it is to be the most perfect triangle to exist (construed as an actual drawing), or the best piece of music, or the best meal—and we also know what it means to conceive of one of the things as being superior to another. But it does not follow—and it looks peculiar—to say that there is then a well-defined concept of the most perfect *conceivable* item of any of these types. Suppose I call the most perfect meal conceivable 'Bill': can I infer that Bill exists because if it did not then there would have to be a meal that was conceivably better than Bill? We just don't know what it would *be* to be the most perfect conceivable meal or piece of music. Similarly, the notion of, say, the most powerful conceivable mouse makes little sense; or the most impressive conceivable daisy. This seems to me the place to look for the error in the OA, not in some supposed mistake about the logical character of existence. We can let God have that property so long as his definition really warrants it—but that is what is not at all clear. The problem with the OA, then, is that it trades on notions of the maximal forms of certain attributes, particularly perfection, that are inherently ill-defined.

I conclude that 'exists' is a predicate and that it expresses a property just as other predicates do (whatever properties are and whatever it is for predicates to express them). There is no good objection to this view, and the alternative to it is full of difficulties. It is a word we can correctly apply to individuals, which is just what the surface form of our existential sentences suggests. It has its peculiarities, of course, but they merely tell us what kind of property it is. As so often, the way a word is semantically turns out to be the way it appears to be syntactically (compare proper names).

This is quite compatible with maintaining that 'tigers exist' says that 'tiger' has instances, since the relevant notion of instance is simply that of an object that has the (first-order) property of existence. The orthodox view has inflated a correct point about general statements of existence into the incorrect denial that existence is a property. So we can keep all that is good and wholesome in the logical tradition while not rejecting the obvious. By all means analyse general statements of existence in terms of the 'existential quantifier', but do not make the mistake of inferring that existence is not a predicate just because this analysis works. The existence of tigers consists in the fact that tigers severally have the property of existence; this is what *grounds* the fact that the concept *tiger* has instances and hence makes true '$(\exists x)(x$ is a tiger)'.[32]

[32] Thus singular existential facts are basic relative to general existential facts, as we generally suppose for singular and general facts: '*a* is *F*' is what makes true 'something is *F*'. The Russellian doctrine, by contrast, does not allow this obvious parallelism with singular and general facts in general.