Carolyn Swanson
Reburial of Nonexistents.   Reconsidering the Russell-Meinong Debate.
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The round square is metaphysical bad news. Somehow, despite the fact that it does not exist, there are truths about it. Not only are there are truths about its nature (e.g., that it is square) and its ontological status (e.g., that it does not exist), there are truths about the intentional relations it stands in (e.g., that I am presently thinking about it). And, since many of us believe that truth depends upon being, we find ourselves in an uncomfortable position. We can attempt to account for these truths in a familiar fashion, but only at the cost of implausibly claiming that the round square has some degree of being. Alternatively, we can uphold the dependence of truth upon being, but only at the cost of denying that the aforementioned claims are true. Neither option seems attractive.

This puzzle provides a natural motivation for Meinongianism. According to Alexius Meinong and neo-Meinongians, the domain of objects outstrips the domain of existing objects. So, while Zeus, the round square, and the golden mountain are objects, they do not exist nor do they enjoy any shadowy, second-class degree of being. Even so, there are truths about the nature, ontological status, and intentional relations we bear to these objects. So, while Meinongians surrender the thesis that truth depends upon being, they secure something nearly as good: truth depends upon objects, although not all objects exist or have some degree of being.

As is too often ignored, the strongest case for Meinongianism is naturalistic in origin. For Meinong and many neo-Meinongians, intentional phenomena—in particular, our ability to think of things that do not exist—must be properly explained by our best psychological and therefore scientific theories. And, since Meinongians maintain that these phenomena are best explained through an appeal to nonexistent objects, Meinongianism enjoys support from a naturalistic fidelity to scientific and psychological theories as the arbiters of our metaphysical commitments.

Although Meinongianism has stronger naturalistic credentials than is usually acknowledged, charges of incoherence remain commonplace. According to some, the central Meinongian thesis—that some objects do not exist—is an analytic falsehood, so no substantive argument against Meinongianism is required. Others, better able to resist this hasty response, have offered more careful considerations against Meinongianism. Perhaps most notably, Bertrand Russell presented a range of influential challenges to the Meinongian position.

Carolyn Swanson's *Reburial of Nonexistents* has three parts, each of which addresses a point of interest for Meinongians and their opponents. The first part is primarily historical: it surveys the general structure of Russell's most famous objections

to Meinong, which hold Meinongianism to run afoul of classical logic. The second part concerns the theoretical ambitions of Meinongianism: it considers some challenges to the Meinongian treatment of negative existentials and the analysis of claims like the golden mountain is golden. The third part is Swanson's positive proposal: it examines the merits of a Meinongian account of fictional entities, and defends a non-Meinongian alternative.

Swanson succeeds in providing a concise overview of a storied episode within the Meinongian tradition and examining some notable challenges to Meinongianism. Her discussion is even-handed and, more than most commentators, Swanson duly notes the significance of the naturalistic strand running throughout Meinong's case for nonexistent objects. At the same time, a strength of the book—its tripartite engagement with both the Russell-Meinong debate, some general challenges for Meinongianism, and the interaction of Meinongianism and the metaphysics of fiction—is also a weakness.

Those interested in the broader context of the Russellian challenge—for example, Russell's early foray into Meinongianism or Richard Routely's paraconsistent reading of Meinong—will not find an extended historical or interpretive inquiry here. Similarly, those interested in a close analysis of competing neo-Meinongian views are unlikely to be satisfied. There is, for example, comparatively little time spent on the ins and outs of Terence Parsons' neo-Meinongian framework, and no discussion of Graham Priest's more recent defense of noneism. Finally, those interested in the implications of Meinongianism for the metaphysics of fiction will note that many avenues of discussion are left unexplored. Most notably, in the course of Swanson's defense of her preferred anti-realist account, there is no mention of realism about fictional characters, according to which fictional entities are abstract artifacts that instantiate properties like *being abstract* and *being created in the 17th century*, but are merely ascribed properties like *being human* or *being tyrannical*.

In what follows, I will focus my discussion on Swanson's most distinctive proposal: her contextualist account of truths regarding fictional characters. I do so not because the first two parts are not fertile ground for considering the issues Swanson raises, but because the final part presents a novel and distinctive challenge to Meinongianism in the form of Swanson's allegedly superior contextualist account. This account has two components.

First, Swanson appeals to a "primary context operator" to explain truth in fiction. In doing so, she denies that fictional claims like 'the Hulk is green' are true *simpliciter*, but admits that, *according to the fiction of Marvel Comics*, the claim that the Hulk is green is true *simpliciter*, since the proposition expressed by 'the Hulk is green' is true in the context of Marvel Comics. For Swanson, the primary context operator couples with a given fiction to determine the truth-value of an embedded sentence. So, within Swanson's framework, the claim that, according to Marvel Comics, the Hulk is green becomes the claim,[C]M:Gh. (Non-superscript small capitals indicate a primary context operator.)

Second, Swanson introduces what she calls "secondary context operators" in order to accommodate the truth of what I will call *secondary fictional claims,* which relate fictional characters to real objects or characters from other fictions. For example, Swanson holds secondary context operators to accommodate claims like that of Carl admiring the Hulk and of the Hulk being stronger than Gandalf. Within Swanson's framework, these claims are formalized as follows: $[C]^M{:}As(h^M)$, and $[C]^M[C]^L{:}S(h^M)(g^L)$. According to Swanson's semantics, these claims are now to be read as follows: (in reality) Carl admires the Hulk (according to Marvel Comics), and (in reality) the Hulk (according to Marvel Comics) is stronger than Gandalf (according to Lord of the Rings). (Superscript small capitals indicate a secondary context operator applies to a preceding constant.)

Swanson's primary context operator is a defensible, easily grasped primitive commitment. As is widely acknowledged, modal paraphrasing is unlikely to provide an account of truth in fiction, since many fictions describe impossible events or entail contradictions. But, as Swanson is well aware, primary context operators cannot provide a complete account of secondary fictional claims like that of the Hulk representing America's fear of nuclear disaster during the Cold War. So, for those who take secondary fictional claims seriously, Swanson's proposal will therefore stand or fall with the tenability of her secondary context operator account of secondary fictional claims. And, while Swanson's primary context operator may be unobjectionable, there is reason to be suspicious of her appeal to secondary context operators. To see why, it will be useful to consider a parallel ontological debate concerning the ontology of time.

According to presentism, only presently existing things exist. According to eternalism, the past, present, and future share the same ontological status, so past, present, and future objects exist. And, while eternalists can account for the truth of claims about the past—e.g., that dinosaurs existed—by virtue of quantifying over past, present, and future objects, presentists require primitive sentential tense operators like [WAS] (read: "It was the case that...") and [WILL] (read: "It will be the case that..."). As unanalyzable primitives, these operators are a significant ideological cost to the presentist's metaphysical theory. Even so, they are well-motivated commitments for those inclined towards presentism, since the presentist requires them in order to express truths about reality without incurring ontological commitment to past or future entities. In the presentist framework, "Dinosaurs existed" is therefore rendered as: [WAS] there are dinosaurs. (The parallel strategy is used to capture truths about the future.)

Unfortunately, the presentist's appeal to primitive tense operators only goes so far. Consider a true claim involving a relation across times: "Some Canadian philosopher resembles some Ancient Greek philosopher." For the eternalist, this claim is easily expressed using the apparatus of quantification (i.e., $\exists x\exists yCx\&Gy\&Rxy$), since she affirms the (non-simultaneous) existence of both Canadian and Ancient Greek philosophers. In contrast, the presentist denies the existence of Ancient Greek philosophers, so the presentist must appeal to a primitive tense operator, but, in this case, it seems the presentist account just won't do. Since there was no time at which both

Ancient Greek and Canadian philosophers exist, even a primitive tense operator cannot successfully capture claims that relate individuals across times.

The presentist's primitive tense operator is a natural analogue of Swanson's primary context operator, but is there are tense analogue to Swanson's secondary context operator? I believe that an analogous operator can be introduced to the presentist framework, but only at the cost of either transforming presentism into a mere notational variant of eternalism or severing any substantive connection between truth and being. Notice, in particular, that the primary inferential role of Swanson's secondary context operator is to block existential generalization. So, consider the rendering of the sentence "Ben resembles Zeno" that uses a secondary tense operator that parallels a secondary context operator. Crucially, the result, $[\mathrm{WAS}]\mathrm{Rb}(e^{\mathrm{WAS}})$, is not to be read as (in the past) Ben resembles Zeno, but, rather, as (presently) Ben resembles Zeno (in the past).

The eternalist can now press the presentist: how can there be Zeno-involving truths if presentism denies the existence of Zeno? More importantly, given that there are Zeno-involving truths, why can we validly infer that there is someone who resembles Zeno from the preceding claim, but cannot validly infer that there is someone who resembles Ben? Here, the presentist who employs secondary tense operators can only claim that the secondary operator blocks such an inference. But, crucially, formalism is no safeguard from this metaphysical challenge, and it seems that there is no longer anything distinctive about the presentist's position: it allows for individuals to stand in relations across time, but delivers a rather puzzling inferential prohibition against quantifying over the very same individual. For this reason, the eternalist has every reason to interpret secondary tense operator presentism as nothing more than a notational variant of eternalism that uses secondary tense operators to indicate that the individuals implicated in claims are past or future rather than present entities. Here, I believe the eternalist is correct in her assessment of secondary tense operator presentism: secondary tense operators do not allow for the theft of cross-time truths over the honest toil of quantification over past, present, and future entities. Rather, the appeal to secondary tense operators collapses any substantive metaphysical difference between eternalism and presentism, leaving only a terminological distinction.

Turning from issues of tense to issues of fiction, the point is much the same. Secondary context operators accomplish their goals only by collapsing any substantive difference between realism and anti-realism about fictional characters. And, while Swanson takes her opponent to be Meinongianism, I believe Swanson is better served to endorse (or, as I have claimed, explicitly endorse) a rival realist view of fictional characters and dispense with the questionable apparatus of secondary context operators. Fortunately, this alternative leaves Swanson's line of argument intact. Granted a commitment to abstract fictional entities, she need only admit a distinction between an abstract fictional entity, the Hulk, instantiating properties like *being a fictional artifact* and *being abstract* and encoding or being ascribed properties like *being green* and *being gamma-radiated*. And, since Swanson presents no objections to fictional realism, the resulting view is a comfortable alternative that still secures Swanson's desired result: it stands as a viable and likely superior alternative to Meinongianism.

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