Defending Existentialism?

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This paper is concerned with a popular view about the nature of propositions, commonly known as the *Russellian* view of propositions. Alvin Plantinga has dubbed it, or more precisely, a crucial consequence of it, *Existentialism*, and in his paper "On Existentialism" (1983) he has presented a forceful argument intended as a *reductio* of this view. In what follows, I describe the main relevant ingredients of the Russellian view of propositions and states of affairs. I present a relatively simple response Russellians might want to make to Plantinga's anti-existentialist argument. I then explore one aspect of this response—one that leads to some rather curious consequences for the Russellian view of propositions and states of affairs.

1. The Russellian View of Propositions and States of Affairs

For present purposes, I take for granted that there are *propositions*. They are most perspicuously referred to by unadorned that-clauses, such as 'that ants are insects', or by what grammarians call appositive noun-phrases containing a that-clause, e.g. 'the proposition that ants are insects'. Propositions are, as one says a bit metaphorically, the shareable *contents* of mental states and speech acts, such as believing, disbelieving, assuming, asserting, and denying. If I believe that ants are insects, then there is something I believe, namely (the proposition) that ants are insects. If you too believe that ants are insects, then there is something we both believe, namely (the proposition) that ants are insects. If our ancestors denied that ants are insects, then they denied what we believe, namely (the proposition) that ants are insects. Propositions are also bearers of truth and falsehood. Indeed, according to most of their advocates, propositions are the basic bearers of truth and falsehood: other states, acts, or things, such as beliefs, assumptions, assertions, utterances, and sentences, are called true or false, or correct or incorrect, only because they stand in certain relations to true or false propositions. My belief that ants are insects is true, or correct, because the proposition that is the content of this belief, the proposition that ants are insects, is true. If you assertively utter the sentence 'Spiders are insects', thereby asserting that spiders are insects, your assertion is false, or incorrect, or wrong, because the proposition that is the content of your assertion, the proposition that spiders are insects, is false; and the sentence you uttered is false too, because it expresses this same false proposition. Being bearers of truth or falsehood, propositions are also bearers of properties that spin-off from truth and falsehood. Most relevantly to our concerns will be their *modal properties*, such as being necessarily true, possibly true, contingently true, possibly false, etc. All of this is pretty much common ground among all advocates of propositions.[1]

Reflecting on the shareability of propositions between different persons at various places

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[1] But this use of the *term* 'proposition' is comparatively recent. Somewhat confusingly (to us), our ancestors used it in about the opposite way. As Norman Kretzmann (1970) informs us, that was because Boethius had defined the *propositio* as an *oratio verum falsumve significans*, that is, a speech *signifying* what is true or what is false ('speech' here includes spoken, written, and mental speech, i.e. thinking). Owing to Boethius' authority, this became *the* standard usage of the term which can still be found in Mill's *Logic* of 1872. Some time after that, e.g. in Moore's 1899, 'proposition' switched sides, from the left of Boethius' definition to the right, the term now being used to refer to *the thing signified by* what Boethius called a *propositio*.

and times and on the objectivity of truth and falsehood, most advocates of propositions maintain that propositions are *abstract beings*. Propositions, they hold, are neither located in space nor undergoing any intrinsic qualitative changes through time; and they do not depend for their existence on actually being believed, disbelieved, assumed, asserted, or denied. Though we have discovered some truths, many still remain to be discovered; though we have succumbed to some falsehoods, many still remain to be succumbed to; and then there are many more truths and falsehoods, many more propositions, which in all likelihood no human being will ever believe, or disbelieve, or even so much as consider. Propositions, then, are often characterized as bearers of truth values that are *possible contents* of attitudes such as believing, disbelieving, assuming and considering. More precisely: *x* is a proposition iff *x* is necessarily such that *x* is true or false and it is possible that there be someone who believes or disbelieves or assumes or asserts or denies or entertains *x*.

This characterization tells us a bit about what propositions are, or are supposed to be, but not really all that much. One might well think it mostly tells us about the role propositions are supposed to play in our overall view of mind, language, and the world: the role of truth-value bearers and possible contents of the so-called "propositional attitudes". One might like to hear more: What is their inner nature? What, one might like to ask, are propositions made of? Not all advocates of propositions acknowledge this as a reasonable request. But some do.

Russellians do. They tell us that propositions are structured complexes, things that consist of parts or constituents related to each other in certain describable ways. They will describe the many ways in which propositions may be composed of simpler constituents, including the ways in which the propositions familiar from Propositional Logic may be composed of simpler propositions together with certain relations (truth functions), as well as the ways in which the propositions familiar from Predicate Logic may be composed of properties and relations and particular things together with more relations (or functions).[2] Russellians are very liberal when it comes to the question what sort of things propositions can be made of. There is only one general requirement on propositional constituents: every proposition must contain at least one *n*-place relation (a property counts as a 1-place relation), together with some other constituent or constituents that, as one says, plug into the slot or slots of the relation.[3] There is no general restriction on what sorts of items can combine with an *n*-place relation to constitute a proposition. There are, for example, purely general propositions, such as the proposition that there are ants and the proposition that all ants are insects, which are constituted entirely by properties and relations (or functions). However, in the most basic sorts of propositions the items that combine with the *n*-place relation will be one or more particular things, such as bicycles, or Arnold Schwarzenegger, or ants. To put this a bit differently, according to the Russellians, there are not only *linguistically* singular *sentences*, i.e. sentences containing singular terms, there are also *ontologically* singular *propositions*, propositions containing particular things. So, when the eminent entomologist, Prof. Hölldobler, speaking of his current favorite, says, "Alma ist eine

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[2] The 'is composed of'-locution is very much *not* to be taken to imply that propositions have to be put together by some process or some agent. Russellians might follow Russell (cf. 1918) and think of the well-formedness rules of "ideal languages", such as the languages of Propositional and Predicate Logic, in two complementary ways. Looked at one way, the rules tell us how to put symbols together to generate well-formed formulas of the ideal language. Looked at the other way, they describe and exhibit the internal structure and composition of the propositions that are expressed by well-formed formulas. That's why an ideal language is *ideal*.

[3] The number of these other constituents, it seems, does not have to equal *n*, it can be smaller than *n*. Compare the proposition that Alma is biting Al with the proposition that Alma is biting Alma and also the proposition that Alma is biting herself.

Blattschneiderameise", the content of the thought he thereby expresses, i.e. the proposition that Alma is a leaf-cutter ant, has Alma, the ant herself, as a constituent.

Frege, using a different example, took exception to this: "Mont Blanc with all its snowfields is not itself a component part of the thought that Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high" (Frege 1904: 163). To which Russell replied: "I believe that in spite of all its snowfields Mont Blanc itself is a component part of what is actually asserted in the proposition 'Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high'" (Russell 1904: 169). *Fregeans* tend to find this absurd. Some reject, or at least are highly skeptical of, the very idea that propositions are structured complexes. They suspect that talk of propositions as having constituents and internal structure, taken from the world of concrete material things, is overly metaphorical and cannot be applied to abstract beings with any ontological seriousness. Others embrace the structural approach but reject the idea that just anything, including a contingent particular, can be a constituent of a proposition. They hold that all propositions are *purely* abstract beings, composed entirely of purely abstract beings, variously referred to as Fregean senses, or concepts (in the non-psychological sense), or pure properties and relations. All typical Fregeans, whether or not they are structuralists about propositions, maintain that all propositions are purely abstract and are, therefore, necessary beings which do not depend for their existence on any contingent beings. They thus reject the Russellian view, for on that view there are some propositions that depend for their existence on concrete contingent things. Note, Russellians do not say that such propositions depend for their existence on being believed or disbelieved or considered. Russellians are realists about propositions just as much as the Fregeans are. Moreover, they agree that propositions are abstract beings. But they maintain that there are some propositions, very many in fact, that are *impure* abstract beings (somewhat similar to impure sets), namely the ontologically singular propositions, the ones that have concrete contingent things among their constituents: such propositions are themselves contingent beings, according to the Russellians, depending for their existence on the contingent beings that are among their constituents.[4]

So the Russellian view implies that some propositions are contingently existing beings. More precisely, this is implied by the Russellian view in conjunction with the assumption that there are some contingently existing beings. This implication will be crucial to Plantinga's argument: it will be the linchpin of his *reductio*. It seems pertinent, then, to point out that the disagreement between Russellians and Frege about this implication of the Russellian view is a symptom or manifestation of a larger disagreement. The symptom is not always present, even though the larger disagreement remains. Here is what I mean. Take a sentence with the form of a singular predication, 'a is F', where 'a' is a proper name. Russellians hold that the proposition expressed by such a sentence contains the particular thing named by 'a' as a constituent. Frege denies this, holding quite generally that the particular thing named by a name, 'a', is never a constituent of the proposition expressed by 'a is F'. According to Frege, if a proposition can be said to have constituents at all, then the constituent corresponding to a name will be an individuating sense or concept or property associated with the name, but never the named particular itself.[5] This is the general disagreement. Note that it won't manifest itself in a

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[4] A Russellian might also be an Aristotelian about properties and relations, holding that properties and relations exist only if exemplified by something. On this view, a version of which is advocated by Armstrong (1997), many more sorts of propositions, including many purely general propositions, will be contingent beings. I will set this view aside for present purposes.

[5] Frege (1906: 191): "So the object designated by a name seems to be quite inessential to the thought-content of a sentence which contains it."

disagreement about whether the proposition is a contingent or necessary being in cases where the particular thing named by 'a' is itself a necessary being. Take the singular predication: 'π is a transcendental number'. Russellians will *agree* with Frege that the proposition expressed by *this* sentence, the proposition that π is a transcendental number, is a necessary being, because π is itself a necessary being. Still, the more general disagreement remains. Frege maintains that even in this case π itself is not a constituent of the proposition: if the proposition has any constituents at all, Frege says, then the constituent corresponding to 'π' is an individuating sense or concept or property associated with the name 'π' and not π itself.[6]

Negative existential claims, more precisely, singular negative existential claims about existing things, will play a central role in Plantinga's argument. Remember Russell. In "On Denoting" (1905a), he applied his analysis of definite descriptions to ordinary proper names in order to solve the riddle of non-existence. The riddle was this. The sentence 'Pegasus does not exist' appears to be a true singular predication. Yet, if it is, then, according to Russell's view of propositions, it expresses the true singular proposition that Pegasus does not exist; but there is no such proposition if Pegasus does not exist. Russell inferred from this that the surface form of the sentence 'Pegasus does not exist' is misleading: that it is not a genuine singular predication and that, consequently, the proposition that Pegasus does not exist is not an ontologically singular proposition. This led him to the view that ordinary proper names in general are not genuine or "logical" proper names, instead they are disguised definite descriptions. This, in turn, helped with the riddle because, by his theory of definite descriptions, it means that the propositions expressed by sentences of the misleading surface form 'a is F', where 'a' is an ordinary proper name, do not contain any constituent corresponding to 'a'; they are not ontologically singular with respect to 'a'. Instead, they are general propositions whose true structure is given by sentences of the logical form: 'There is exactly one *x* such that *x* is G and *x* is F'. This solution, however, comes at a price. The view that ordinary proper names are disguised definite descriptions implies that very many sentences that look like they are singular predications really aren't. These include not only 'Pegasus does not exist' and 'Pegasus exists', but also seemingly singular predications about *existents*, such as 'Alma is an ant' and 'Alma is not an ant', and also 'Alma exists' and 'Alma does not exist'.

Contemporary Russellians, such as Kaplan (1989), Almog (1986), Salmon (1986), and Soames (1987), trace back their view to the very early Russell (1903; 1904a)—the Russell of *before* "On Denoting" (1905a). This does not mean they disapprove of his analysis of definite descriptions, on the contrary, but they disapprove of applying it to ordinary (non-empty) proper names. They follow Kripke (1980) in maintaining that ordinary names are not disguised definite

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[6] In this paragraph I talk of Frege instead of Fregeans, because I am sure that Frege held the general view I ascribe to him (cf. Frege 1892, 1892a), but I am not sure about other Fregeans. Whether they *ought* to hold his view has to do with issues like the following. Say the sense Prof. Hölldobler associates with the name 'Alma' is Alma's individual essence: Almaity (= being identical with Alma; according to Plantinga 1976). Say, furthermore, that in spite of Hölldobler being such an eminent authority, and in spite of her being his favorite and everything, he nevertheless sometimes fails to recognize Alma, and when he does so fail, he refers to her as 'Traudel', associating with this name the individual essence Traudelity (= being identical with Traudel). It now seems that Almaity = Traudelity; but it also seems that it's possible that Prof. Hölldobler might believe that Almaity is the essence of his favorite and fail to believe that Traudelity is the essence of his favorite. This example, which can be modified to accommodate other views about what Fregean senses might be, is structurally analogous to the sort of examples that lead Fregeans to hold that it must be the sense of 'a', rather than its referent, that is the relevant constituent of the proposition expressed by 'a is F'. It would seem, then, that all Fregeans *should hold* that it is not Almaity itself, but a sense associated with its name, which is the constituent of the proposition that Almaity is the essence of Hölldobler's favorite ant.

descriptions (except maybe empty names, which may not be genuine proper names at all). Being Russellians, they infer that seemingly singular predications about existent things, such as 'Alma is an ant' and 'Alma is not an ant', really are genuine singular predications, expressing ontologically singular propositions containing the bearer of the ordinary proper name, Alma, as a constituent.[7] It appears, then, that contemporary Russellians, just like the Russell of before "On Denoting", are committed to the view that positive and negative existential sentences about *existing* things, such as 'Alma exists' and 'Alma does not exist', are genuine singular predications expressing ontologically singular propositions after all.[8]

So far, I have not said anything about *states of affairs*. I could be brief, simply pointing out that the essentials of the Russellians' view, of their disagreement with the Fregeans, and of Plantinga's argument against the Russellians (to which we will get in the next section), is easily transposed from 'proposition'-mode to 'state of affairs'-mode. But I want to say a little bit more, especially about the relation between propositions and states of affairs. This is a somewhat confusing issue (not the least because it's hard to tell to what extent it is a substantive or a terminological issue) which will become important later in the paper.

States of affairs are often characterized as ways things are or might have been. Alma is strong. This is one way things are: (the state of affairs) that Alma is strong occurs or *obtains*. Alma is not weak, but she might have been: (the state of affairs) that Alma is weak does not obtain but it could have. Those who thus recognize states of affairs, including states of affairs that do not obtain, will also recognize states of affairs that could not have obtained, e.g. the state of affairs that π is a ratio of integers, and states of affairs that could not but obtain, e.g. the state of affairs that π is an irrational number. They would do better, then, to characterize states of affairs not merely as ways things are or might have been, but as ways things are or might have been or could not have been or had to be. But there are also those who merely recognize states of affairs that obtain (ways things are); they deny the existence of states of affairs that do not obtain and even more so of states of affairs that could not have obtained.

One point is common ground among many who recognize states of affairs: *facts* are states of affairs that obtain. Beyond this, things get more complicated. There are, for starters, two canonical ways of referring to states of affairs. Just like propositions, they can be referred to by that-clauses, such as 'that Alma is strong'—though in the case of states of affairs the appropriate appositive noun-phrase is of course 'the state of affairs that Alma is strong'. In addition, one can also refer to states of affairs using a sentential gerundive, such as 'Alma's being strong' and 'the state of affairs of Alma's being strong'. Whether there is any deeper significance to there being two canonical modes of referring to states of affairs, in particular, whether this indicates that propositions and states of affairs are two different sorts of things, is unclear.[9]

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[7] They infer this even though Kripke himself has remained very skeptical about drawing any conclusions as to the structure of propositions from his arguments concerning the semantics of ordinary proper names; cf. Kripke 1980: 20-21.

[8] So contemporary Russellians seem committed to holding, along with Descartes, that 'x exists' is a genuine predicate of some sort, and be it only the predicate '$(\exists y)(x = y)$'—*pace* Gassendi and the later Russell and some others. For Russell, see e.g. his 1918, Section 6; for Gassendi and Descartes, see the former's objection to the fifth Meditation and the latter's response in Descartes' 1642, pp. 224-5, 262-3.

[9] Linguistic evidence adduced and analyzed by Vendler (1967, Chap. 5) suggests that there is no deeper significance to this. That-clauses and sentential gerundives are both nominalized sentences; and if Vendler is right, they are very closely related. However, the latter, e.g. 'Alma's being strong', have to be carefully distinguished from certain other superficially similar sentential nominals, e.g. 'Alma's strength', 'the strength of Alma', and even 'the being strong of Alma', that turn out to be more appropriate for naming events, processes, and concrete states (temporally stretched-out events) than for naming facts and states of affairs.

It is maybe not surprising, then, that there are two parties, let us call them the Meinong party and the Husserl party. The *Meinong party* says that propositions just *are* states of affairs, hence true propositions are facts. According to this party, to which Chisholm belonged at a time, we have here merely two sorts of *labels* for things of the same sort: 'state of affairs', 'does not obtain', 'obtains', 'fact' *versus* 'proposition', 'false', 'true'—the latter labels being used when a speaker wants to signal to the hearer that the state of affairs referred to has been, or might well have been, asserted, denied, believed, disbelieved, assumed or considered by some person or other.[10]

The *Husserl party*, on the other hand, says that propositions and states of affairs, or *Sachverhalte*, are two different sorts of things that should not be confused, even though there is a close correspondence between them: every proposition corresponds to (or represents) a state of affairs; a true proposition corresponds to a state of affairs that obtains, a fact; a false proposition corresponds to a state of affairs that does not obtain.[11] The Husserl party is committed to the view that that-clauses are systematically ambiguous. It also has to contend with a considerable amount of "ontological doubling": propositions line up with states of affairs, true propositions with states of affairs that obtain (facts), false ones with states of affairs that don't obtain; and then there are two different but somehow very similar sets of modal properties: being necessarily true *vs*. necessarily obtaining; being necessarily false *vs*. necessarily not obtaining, and a proposition's entailing a proposition *vs*. a state of affairs' entailing*, or including, a state of affairs. To many, this appears to be a case of ontological double vision. But the Husserl party is, among other things, impressed by the following points: on the one hand, it seems right to say that propositions are true or false and right to say that states of affairs obtain or don't obtain, while on the other hand, it seems wrong to say that propositions obtain or don't obtain and wrong to say that states of affairs are true or false, and even more wrong to say that facts are true, and still rather odd to say that some propositions are facts. Plantinga, who is mildly impressed by these points, is a somewhat diffident member of the Husserl party.[12]

But there is a third party, call it the *Wittgenstein party*. It holds that facts are not to be analyzed as states of affairs that obtain because states of affairs *are* facts. According to the Wittgenstein party, states of affairs do not line up with propositions. Propositions are true or false. But states of affairs are said to be different because, on this view, there are no states of affairs that do not obtain: to say that some state of affairs does not obtain is understood as merely another way of saying that there is no such state of affairs, just like saying that some fact does not obtain is merely another way of saying that there is no such fact (and to say of some state of affairs that it obtains is merely another way of saying that it exists). Indeed, the Wittgenstein

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[10] See Meinong 1910, §§8-14. Admittedly, Meinong did not use 'state of affairs' but the invented technical term '*das Objektiv*', contrasting it with '*das Objekt*' to distinguish the "object" of a judgment or belief from the "object" of a presentation or idea. But in §14, he remarks that the term 'state of affairs' ('*Sachverhalt*') would have been even better, if its natural field of application were not "too narrow". He thinks ordinary language will frown upon negative states of affairs (the state of affairs that no spider is an insect) and even more at non-obtaining states of affairs (the state of affairs that spiders are insects). However, he points out that 'state of affairs' might be artificially extended to cover the same range as his *Objektiv*, which plays all the roles propositions are usually taken to play by their advocates. For Chisholm, see e.g. his 1976, Chapter 4.

[11] According to Husserl, all mental states and acts, and all speech acts, have a *content* as well as an *object*, and the content of an act is never identical with its object. The judgment or belief that Alma is strong has as its content the proposition that Alma is strong and has as its (direct) object the state of affairs that Alma is strong (its indirect object would be Alma). Husserl called propositions '*Sätze*' and '*ideale Bedeutungen*' (ideal meanings). See the first and the fifth Logical Investigation in Husserl's [1]1900/01, [2]1913/22.

[12] See Plantinga 1974, p. 45; 1976, p. 107f.; and 1987, p. 194f.

party may be regarded as insisting that the noun-phrase 'state of affairs' is properly used only as an equivalent of 'fact'.[13] Both parties mentioned earlier, the Meinong party and the Husserl party, disagree with this: they hold that states of affairs come in two flavors, that there are states of affairs that do not obtain just like there are states of affairs that do obtain.[14]

Where do the Russellians stand on all this? For some reason, contemporary Russellians don't usually say. But when one looks at what propositions are made of according to them, e.g. the proposition that Alma is hungry is made of Alma herself and the property of being hungry, it is hard to see how a true proposition of this sort could not be a fact: What would a fact *be* if not this sort of thing?[15] This suggests that what Russellians call 'propositions' are states of affairs: true propositions are states of affairs that obtain and false propositions are states of affairs that do not obtain; and of course, there are many ontologically singular states of affairs that depend for their existence on the contingent beings that are among their constituents. When it comes to states of affairs, Russellians *appear* to belong to the Meinong party, which is not to say that they share Meinong's views on existence, being, and *Außersein*. But why do contemporary Russellians usually talk about (singular) propositions rather than (singular) states of affairs? Because they primarily think of the things they are concerned with, the things they refer to by that-clauses, in terms of their being bearers of truth or falsehood and especially in terms of their being possible contents of the so-called propositional attitudes. These are the roles one primarily associates with propositions, and as I have remarked, it doesn't seem right to say that propositions obtain or don't obtain and that states of affairs are true or false. So maybe Russellian propositions merely correspond to states of affairs after all.

Though this issue will become important later on, we can bracket it for now. If you think Russellian propositions just are Russellian states of affairs, then Plantinga's argument will bear immediately on this Russellian view of states of affairs. If, on the other hand, you think even Russellian propositions should be distinguished from Russellian states of affairs, then Plantinga's argument will still be relevant: you just have to execute a global "find-and-replace" first, replacing occurrences of 'proposition' by 'state of affairs' and occurrences of 'true' and 'false' by 'obtains' and 'does not obtain', respectively.

2. Plantinga's Anti-Existentialist Argument

What is Existentialism? Plantinga distinguishes two existentialist theses. The second is the one of interest here because it pertains to the Russellian view of propositions and/or states of affairs. Plantinga (1979: 151) puts it like this: "A proposition or state of affairs *P* directly about an object *x* is ontologically dependent upon *x* in that it is not possible that *P* exist and *x* fail to exist". In the paper "On Existentialism", he puts it a bit differently (1983: 160):

> *Existentialism*: A singular proposition is ontologically dependent upon the individuals it is directly about.

Russellians embrace the structuralist view of propositions (or states of affairs), according

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[13] Armstrong (1997) is a member of the Wittgenstein party. The early Wittgenstein (1921) is officially a member of his own party, though there are the disconcerting statements 2.05 and 4.25 of the *Tractatus*, where—in the German version—he slides into talking as if there are states of affairs that do not obtain. (Wittgenstein reserved the term 'state of affairs' for *atomic* facts; but this is not relevant to our present concerns.)

[14] In the case of Meinong himself, there is a complication because of his Meinongian views about 'there is'.

[15] The early Russell, the one to whom contemporary Russellians trace back their position, accepted the consequence that true propositions are facts, albeit with some discomfort; cf. Russell's 1904, pp. 73-6, and his 1905.

to which propositions are complex structured things, having constituents standing in relation to each other. Plantinga assumes, plausibly, that structuralists about propositions in general, hence Russellians in particular, are committed to *constitutional existentialism*: A proposition could not have *c* as a constituent, if *c* did not exist. He also assumes, again plausibly, that they are committed to *constitutional essentialism*: If a proposition contains *c* as a constituent, then the proposition could not have existed without having *c* as a constituent.

Plantinga himself appears to be rather skeptical about the very idea of propositions having structure and constituents. But his argument will not attack this aspect of the Russellian position directly. It will aim to bypass potentially murky questions about what it means for propositions to have structure and constituents by focusing on a crucial consequence of the Russellian version of the structuralist view, one that can be stated without employing the notions of *structure* and *constituent*.[16]

Russellians are existentialists. A propositional-structure skeptic, like Plantinga, will find the existentialist thesis murky: a singular proposition is (roughly) a proposition that *contains* at least one particular or individual *as a constituent*; a singular proposition directly about *x* is (roughly) a proposition whose *structure* is properly represented by a formula of the form 'a is F', where 'a' indicates a genuine proper name and *x* is the bearer of that name. However, this doesn't really matter. Whatever the existentialist thesis means precisely, it surely entails that any singular proposition that is directly about, or contains as constituent, a contingently existing particular will itself be a contingently existing being; hence, it entails that there are certain propositions that are contingently existing beings—which is the consequence of the Russellian position that Plantinga intends to reduce to absurdity. To do so, he does not need to fully understand the notions he regards as problematic. He only needs to check with Russellians to make sure they are committed to holding that some sample particular, say, Socrates, is a contingently existing particular and that various propositions about Socrates—the proposition that Socrates is a philosopher, the proposition that Socrates exists, and especially the proposition that Socrates does *not* exist—are singular propositions containing Socrates as constituent. Plantinga can then observe that Existentialism commits Russellians to claims of the form:

(1)   The proposition *that Socrates is such and such* could not have existed without Socrates

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[16] Plantinga expresses his skepticism about the applicability of the notion of *constituency* to propositions on pp. 164-5 of his 1983. He doesn't make entirely clear though whether he finds structuralist accounts of propositions in general obscure, including Fregean structuralist accounts, or only Russellian structuralist accounts; cf. especially p. 165, and also his 1987, p. 194, where he says propositions and states of affairs are "isomorphic". One reason for worrying about the intelligibility of constitution-talk applied to propositions may, ironically, be the *determinacy* of propositional constitution. Constitutional essentialism does not hold, it seems, for ordinary material things where we think we have some grasp of what constitution amounts to: having material parts. For material things constitution is a bit fuzzy: they "survive" annihilation or replacement of smallish parts. But propositions are supposed to have all their constituents essentially, even the tiniest material ones, in case they have material ones. This may suggest that the notion of constituency is overstretched, viciously pictorial or metaphorical, when applied to propositions. Here are two additional and maybe better reasons for this worry. *First*, different propositions can have the same constituents at the same time, viz. the proposition that all ants are insects and the proposition that all insects are ants. Different material things can have the same parts too but not, it seems, at the same time. (And even if one thinks that a statue and the lump of clay it is made from may raise a problem for the latter view about material things, the case of propositions still looks rather different: the two propositions just mentioned are like *two* statues made from the same clay existing at the same time.) *Second*, oddly, it seems that the same constituent can "occur" in the same proposition many times over, e.g.: the proposition that every brown cow is brown; the proposition that Alma bites Alma; the proposition that every one who is married is married to someone who is married; and propositions of the form '$((p \rightarrow (p \lor \sim q)) \lor (p \mathbin{\&} (q \rightarrow p)))$', and many others.

existing;

and to the claim:

(2)   The proposition *that Socrates does not exist* could not have existed without Socrates
        existing.

Note that these claims can be stated without the notions of propositional *structure* and
constituent that might give rise to interpretational difficulties. Plantinga intends to show that (2)
is false on the assumption that Socrates is a contingently existing being. Since nothing in the
argument will depend on the choice of Socrates as our sample contingent being, this will show
that there are no singular propositions that are directly about, or contain as constituents,
contingently existing particulars, whatever that means precisely.
        Some noteworthy points.
        The argument, if successful, will refute the Russellian view only under the assumption
that there are contingent particulars; and it will refute only the part of the Russellian view that
says there are singular propositions having *contingent* particulars among their constituents. It
will not establish the view, advocated by Frege, that no proposition properly expressed by a
sentence of the form 'a is F' contains the bearer of the name indicated by 'a' as a constituent. As
far as Plantinga's argument is concerned, Fregeans—or at least Frege—could still be wrong
because there might be any number of ontologically singular propositions having *necessary*
individuals among their constituents.[17]
        Russellians have notorious difficulties accounting for Frege Puzzles (cf. Frege 1892). Say
Alma is Traudel. Intuitively it is possible that under certain circumstances Hölldobler might
believe that Alma is his favorite while failing to believe that Traudel is his favorite. But that
should not be possible, if the Russellians are right, because according to them the proposition
that Alma is his favorite is identical with the proposition that Traudel is his favorite. Plantinga's
argument will *not* exploit this difficulty. Contemporary Russellians also have notorious
difficulties with the riddle of non-existence, i.e., with accounting for true negative existential
predications that involve what appear to be empty proper names, such as 'Pegasus does not
exist'—the very problem cases for which Russell abandoned contemporary Russellianism.
Plantinga's argument will *not* exploit this difficulty either, at least *not directly*. Plantinga thus
attacks the Russellians not in areas of well-known weakness, but at a place where they thought
the ground was solid.
        Concerning the last point, someone might be distracted by Plantinga's choice of Socrates
as sample contingent being: "Socrates", you might say, "did exist, but does not: so Plantinga is
after all exploiting the contemporary Russellians' troubles with empty proper names and true
negative existentials." Since it is crucial to Plantinga's argument that the sample contingent
particular exist, and since there is no point in entering into a protracted debate over, say, the a-
temporal nature of existence, or maybe over the continued existence of dead people, merely for
the sake of an example, I propose that the reader simply baptize with the name 'Socrates' a
member of their household who clearly exists (the cat, a child, Arnold Schwarzenegger, their
favorite ant).
        I will make a slight change in Plantinga's wording of the argument. I will use square
brackets '[…]' in place of that-clauses to refer to propositions, so 'that Socrates does not exist'

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[17] See page 3f. and note 6.

will be written like this: '[Socrates does not exist]'. The brackets take the place of the 'that' and indicate the "scope" of the that-clause. The appositive noun-phrase, 'the proposition [Socrates does not exist]', will be optional, as it is in English. Plantinga's anti-existentialist argument now runs as follows—see Plantinga (1983: 166; his numbering):

(3)   Possibly Socrates does not exist.
(4)   If (3), then [Socrates does not exist] is possible.
(5)   If [Socrates does not exist] is possible, then [Socrates does not exist] is possibly true.
(6)   Necessarily, if [Socrates does not exist] had been true, then [Socrates does not exist] would have existed.
(7)   Necessarily if [Socrates does not exist] had been true, then Socrates would not have existed.

From (3) to (5), Plantinga derives (8); from (6) and (7) he derives (9):

(8)   [Socrates does not exist] is possibly true.
(9)   Necessarily, if [Socrates does not exist] had been true, then [Socrates does not exist] would have existed and Socrates would not have existed.

The anti-existentialist conclusion is drawn from (8) and (9):

(10)   It is possible that both Socrates does not exist and [Socrates does not exist] exists.

Let us look first at the very last part, the step from (8) and (9) to (10), just in case it is not entirely clear at first glance. The step apparently proceeds in accordance with the following fundamental modal principle which is, I believe, a theorem of any system of standard Modal Logic: '$\Box(p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\Diamond p \rightarrow \Diamond q)$'—the box, '$\Box$', means 'necessarily', or 'it is necessary that', and the diamond, '$\Diamond$', means 'possibly' or 'it is possible that'. Line (9) provides the whole antecedent for (a substitution instance) of this theorem, while (8) provides the antecedent of the consequent; and the anti-existentialist conclusion, (10), plays the role of the consequent of the consequent.

The popular reaction to Plantinga's argument—popular among contemporary Russellians—would be to quarrel about (6). But I wish to consider the prospects of Russellian views that want to hold on to (6). So my attention turns naturally to the beginning of Plantinga's argument, to premises (4) and (5):

(3)   Possibly Socrates does not exist.
(4)   If (3), then [Socrates does not exist] is possible.
(5)   If [Socrates does not exist] is possible, then [Socrates does not exist] is possibly true.

You might wonder why Plantinga states (4) and (5) separately, especially since the meaning of 'is possible' becomes a bit unclear when it is thus set apart from 'is possibly true'. What does 'is possible' mean here? Does it mean 'is a possible *being*', as opposed to an impossible being? If it did, (5) would not be plausible: a proposition that is not possibly true—a necessary falsehood—is not *a fortiori* an impossible being. But no, the 'is possible' is supposed to be an *alethic* possibility, not an *ontic* possibility, as Plantinga (1983: 171) makes clear. We

will look at (4) and (5) separately later. For the moment it will be helpful to consolidate them into one premise:

(45)   If possibly Socrates does not exist, then [Socrates does not exist] is possibly true,

thereby forestalling any possible objections that might arise due to an *ontic* misreading of the 'is possible'. Russellians should look at this fusion premise, (45), for they might want to deny this premise without thereby committing themselves to finding intelligible the difference between 'is possible' and 'is possibly true'.

So let us try the suggestion that a Russellian should deny (45). Remember the Modal-Logic theorem I mentioned earlier:

ML $\square(p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (\diamondsuit p \rightarrow \diamondsuit q)$.

Now consider instances of the theorem taking the form:

$\square(p \rightarrow [p] \text{ is true}) \rightarrow (\diamondsuit p \rightarrow \diamondsuit([p] \text{ is true}))$.

It looks like (45) is an instance of the consequent of this theorem. So, given the theorem, denying (45) should commit our Russellians to denying the relevant instance of the antecedent of the theorem, namely

(11)   Necessarily, if Socrates does not exist, then [Socrates does not exist] is true,

which is an instance of:

$\square$T $\square (p \rightarrow [p] \text{ is true})$.

The suggestion is, then, this: Russellians should reject $\square$T because it has false instances on their view, and they should reject (11) because it is one of those false instances; this allows them to avoid (45) on the grounds that it depends on (11) which they reject.

Three points before I continue. First, consider again the modal theorem I called ML. The fusion premise (45) does not fit the theorem exactly. In the theorem, '$\diamondsuit$' occurs in both places as the sentential operator 'possibly (sentence)', whereas in (45) the second 'possibly' appears syntactically as part of a predicate, 'is possibly true', which is applied to the name of a proposition. (I've skated over this point when I said earlier that the step from Plantinga's (8) and (9) to the conclusion, (10), appears to proceed in accordance with our theorem—strictly speaking, (8) isn't quite of the right form to fit the theorem: it has to be recast as 'Possibly, [Socrates does not exist] is true'.) I will assume for now that this point isn't crucial once (4) and (5) have been consolidated into (45); that is, I assume that the resulting version of Plantinga's argument can be cast in standard Modal-Logic form, using both '$\square$' and '$\diamondsuit$' as sentential operators throughout.

Second, concerning the claim that (45) *depends* on (11), Plantinga might respond that (45) can stand on its own two feet and doesn't need any backing-up from (11). This may be a good response as far as Plantinga's own views are concerned, but it is not my intention here to convince Plantinga. I am trying to see what Russellians can say in response to the argument; and

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it does seem they can plausibly maintain that (45) needs backing up from (11)—together with the modal theorem ML. I must admit, though, I am not entirely sure whether the dependence claim isn't unnecessarily strong. In any case, since my Russellians deny (45), they have to reject ML or □T. The suggestion here is that they do the latter. In the next section, I will try to convince you that this is not as strange as it may seem.

Third, once the role of theorem ML has been emphasized, one realizes that Russellians who want to keep (6) and deny (45) may have an alternative to denying □T: they might try denying the "theorem" instead, holding that it isn't a theorem at all, that it fails for some instances, e.g. when 'Socrates does not exist' is put for 'p' and '[Socrates does not exist] is true' is put for 'q'. In this paper, I will not pursue this alternative response to Plantinga's argument.[18]

3. T and Boxed T

The present suggestion is that Russellians reject (45) and (11) and

□T $\Box$ (p → [p] is true).

This is the boxed version of one direction of the well-known T-schema (''p' is true ↔ p'), but formulated for propositions instead of sentences; let us call it

T   p → [p] is true.

The suggestion is that Russellians reject boxed T but not that they reject unboxed T, understood as a material conditional. Is this *ad hoc*?

Well, T has a somewhat unusual feature: on the face of it, it involves ontological increase or "ontological ascent", as one might call it. Its left-hand side does not, or not obviously, imply that there are propositions, whereas its right-hind side does. Quine would reject many instances of T for this reason; he would say: "Alma is an ant, but since there are no such things as propositions, there is no such thing as the true proposition that Alma is an ant."[19] Fregeans hold that the proposition that Alma is an ant exists. In addition they hold that it, along with all other propositions, is a necessary being. Because they hold this, they are apt to say: "'Alma is an ant' *does imply* 'the proposition that Alma is an ant is true'". But they ought to admit that this claim is somewhat similar to the claim that 'Alma is an ant' implies 'God believes that Alma is an ant'—you can make it, if you are a believer. The implication is not a formal implication, and Quine is not being absurd when he affirms that Alma is an ant but denies that the proposition that Alma is an ant is true on the grounds that there is no such proposition. The Russellians, of

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[18] Theorem ML, i.e. '□(p → q) → (◇p → ◇q)', is derivable from a principle which in standard presentations of the various systems of Modal Logic appears as the single modal axiom shared by all the systems:

        □(p → q) → (□p → □q).

To derive ML: in the axiom substitute '~q' for 'p' and '~p' for 'q' to get '□(~q → ~p) → (□~q → □~p)', which yields '□(p → q) → (~□~p → ~□~q)', which yields ML. Russellians who wanted to reject ML instead of □T would then face a further "choice": reject the axiom too? or reject the derivation of ML from the axiom on the grounds that it requires substituting *negations*? The latter move would no doubt involve discussion of the distinction between "internal" and "external" negation in the context of Russellianism.

[19] Or, in case Quine is ill informed about Alma, he would say: "Alma isn't an ant, but since there are no such things as propositions, there is no such thing as the true proposition that Alma isn't an ant." Either way he would reject an instance of T along with many others—about half of them: he wouldn't reject the ones whose antecedents he takes to be false.

course, are not like Quine. They hold that there are propositions, and they are committed to the instances of T, provided T is understood as a material conditional. Assuming c is a contingently existing particular, they think that, if c is F, then there is the proposition that c is F, and there is the proposition that c exists, and the proposition that c does *not* exist. But Russellians are not like Fregeans either. They think that the existence of these propositions is contingent on the contingent existence of c: if c had not existed, then the proposition that c is F, as well as the proposition that c exists and the proposition that c does not exist, would not have existed either. Given this view, it seems obvious that Russellians ought to be cautious when it comes to modal matters, that they should not simply embrace boxed T because they embrace T.

That there is trouble brewing for the Russellian in the modal vicinity of T should have been, or at least could have been, fairly obvious from the start. Take c again to be a contingently existing particular and consider the following derivation, which I call 'R' for Russell:

R	c does not exist $\rightarrow$ [c does not exist] is true	by T
	[c does not exist] is true $\rightarrow$ [c does not exist] exists	by Plantinga's (6)
	[c does not exist] exists $\rightarrow$ c exists	by Existentialism
	c does not exist $\rightarrow$ c exists	by transitivity of $\rightarrow$
	c exists	by $(\sim p \rightarrow p) \leftrightarrow p$

Though this may look a bit surprising, it is not a problem, not yet. All that has been shown is that c exists, which was assumed at the outset anyway. But now imagine the boxed version of R, $\square$R, the version that results from putting boxes in front of each of the lines. Now we have a derivation of '$\square$(c exists)', i.e. 'Necessarily, c exists', which is contrary to the assumption that c is a contingent being. Since c was picked arbitrarily, it shows that the boxed versions of the premises, taken together, rule out the existence of contingent beings.

The above derivation has some interesting features. Put an empty name, say 'Pegasus', in place of 'c' in unboxed R and you have a derivation of 'Pegasus exists'. This convinced Russell to renounce Existentialism for propositions expressed with ordinary names and to embrace the view that ordinary names are disguised descriptions: the proposition [the winged horse does not exist] does not depend for its existence on the existence of Pegasus; similarly, the proposition [the best-known philosopher who did not leave any philosophical writings does not exist] does not depend for its existence on the existence of Socrates.[20]

$\square$R is a more streamlined relative of Plantinga's argument. If one adds the assumption with which Plantinga begins, '$\diamond$(c does not exist)', it follows that one of the boxed versions of the premises must be wrong: $\square$R does for non-empty names what R did for empty names. Plantinga holds that the fault lies again with Existentialism and that 'Socrates does not exist' should be understood to express a proposition like [Socrateity is not exemplified] which does not depend for its existence on the existence of Socrates (cf. Plantinga 1976, 1979, 1983). Our contemporary Russellians cannot go along with this. The present suggestion is that they diagnose the fault as lying with boxed T.

$\square$R is a relative of Plantinga's argument that does not employ Plantinga's (45). It indicates that boxed T really does play a crucial role in anti-existentialist argumentation, either explicitly or more implicitly, as in Plantinga's original argument—in case the earlier diagnosis of

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[20] I seem to be forgetting here that we temporarily baptized someone else 'Socrates'.

Plantinga's original argument left some doubt about this.[21]

"But □T seems eminently plausible: How could it seem so plausible, if it is false?" One reason might be that we learned proposition-talk from Frege. Thus learning this talk from someone who believed that all propositions are necessary beings (and who was mostly interested in purely mathematical propositions, all of which actually are necessary beings), we have become accustomed to hearing and making claims about propositions that presuppose that they are necessary beings—claims that go against this presupposition sound odd to our Fregean ears. One should also remember that our Russellians hold that □T has *some* falsifying instances; they do not hold that all its instances are false, far from it. They will say that, if Socrates were hungry, then the proposition that Socrates is hungry would exist and be true; and similarly for many other cases. But the following, '□(Socrates does not exist → ([Socrates does not exist] is true)' is one of the special instances they do not accept: if Socrates did not exist, then the proposition that Socrates doesn't exist wouldn't exist either, so it wouldn't be true.

In addition, our Russellians should point out that there is a nearby relative of T, call it T^+: '[p] exists → (p → [p] is true)'. By conditionalizing on the proposition's existence, T^+ renders harmless the ontological ascent involved in T (even Quine would accept T^+). In non-modal contexts one rarely has occasion to distinguish the two. But in modal contexts the difference becomes important because, unlike the former, the latter can be boxed:

$$\Box T^+ \quad \Box\ ([p] \text{ exists} \to (p \to [p] \text{ is true})),$$

which should help explain why □T seemed plausible. With this weaker version—the correct one, according to our Russellians—Plantinga's argument will not go through: the premise 'Necessarily, [Socrates does not exist] exists' would have to be added as an additional assumption. Russellians reject this as question begging: it affirms exactly what they deny. $\Box T^+$, slightly rewritten,

$$\Box T^+ \quad \Box\ ((p \ \& \ [p] \text{ exists}) \to [p] \text{ is true}),$$

leads to the following observation. Russellians allow that possibly Socrates does not exist. They also allow that possibly [Socrates does not exist] exists. But they do not allow, being Russellians, that the two are compossible. If we reconstruct Plantinga's argument so that it conforms to $\Box T^+$, we can see that the resulting revised argument would have to begin with the assumption that they *are* compossible. It would have to begin with a premise (3*), taking the form '◇(p & [p] exists)'; that is, it would have to begin with the assumption that ◇(Socrates does not exist & [Socrates does not exist] exists). But this is what Plantinga set out to show.[22]

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[21] Relating to the topic of note 18, note that □R also gets by without employing theorem ML. But the axiom '□(p → q) → (□p → □q)' is needed; cf. the derivation of '□(~p → p) ↔ □p' in Hughes & Cresswell's 1968, p. 38.

[22] Russellians might regard Plantinga's argument as suspect on the grounds that singular negative existentials, even singular negative existentials about existents, are special cases—especially odd or problematic or anomalous cases. Thomas Crisp (2003: 225-29) presents an interesting variant of Plantinga's argument which does *not* employ negative existentials at all. His argument makes use of a principle that can be expressed schematically as

NT   □p → □([p] is true).

Consider again the standard axiom (cf. note 18):

        □(p → q) → (□p → □q).

Crisp's NT is the consequent of a substitution instance of this axiom:

        □(p → [p] is true) → (□p → □([p] is true)).

4. Truth and Existence

I should make a confession. The idea to reject □T is not all that original. It is just beneath the surface at various places in Kit Fine's (1985) discussion of Plantinga's argument, and it is quite explicit in his earlier (1977) treatment of modality for views that allow for contingently existing propositions, where the "correct" boxed T-principle, □T$^+$, is also mentioned.[23] I am concerned here with a Russellian view that aims to deny (45). In his objections to Plantinga's argument, however, Fine (1985) does not focus on (45), instead he focuses on Plantinga's premise (6) and on the question whether propositions can be true in worlds in which they do not exist. The issues Fine and others raise with respect to this question are relevant to the present suggestion, albeit in a somewhat roundabout way.

My Russellians want to deny (45) because they want to hold on to (6) in the face of Plantinga's argument. Earlier I mentioned that quarreling with (6) appears to be the more popular response among contemporary Russellians. Let us take a look, then, at what is involved in denying

(6)   Necessarily, if [Socrates does not exist] had been true, then [Socrates does not exist] would have existed.

Someone who denies (6) maintains that the proposition [Socrates does not exist], and many others along with it, could have been true even if it had not existed. Consider now the quick, intuitive version of Plantinga's argument; it is cast in possible-worlds language and goes like this: "Assume it's possible that Socrates does not exist. If so, then the proposition that Socrates does not exist is true in some world *w*, where *w* must be a world in which Socrates does not exist. But if Socrates does not exist in *w* then, according to Existentialism, the proposition *that Socrates does not exist* does not exist in *w* either; hence, the proposition is not true in *w*, contrary to the assumption." Reflecting on this version of the argument, one notices that its last step assumes that the proposition [Socrates does not exist] is true in a world *w* only if it exists in *w*. It is then tempting to question this assumption and to maintain that some propositions are true with respect to worlds in which they do not exist.

Kit Fine says we must distinguish two concepts or senses of *truth*: the *inner* and the *outer* sense (Fine 1985: 163). On the inner sense, a proposition is true relative to a world only if it exists in that world. On the outer sense, a proposition is true relative to a world regardless of whether it exists in that world:

> We may put the distinction in terms of perspective. According to the outer notion, we can stand outside a world and compare the proposition with what goes on in the world in order to ascertain whether it is true. But according to the inner notion, we must first enter with the proposition into the world before ascertaining its truth. (Fine 1986: 163)

What comes to mind here, with regards to this outer notion of truth, are pictures and

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Our Russellians can reject NT while keeping the axiom, because the antecedent of the instance of the axiom is □T, which they reject. Crisp's argument becomes question-begging, when NT is revised to conform with □T$^+$.

[23] Cf. Fine 1985, pp. 161-5, 170, 172-3; and 1977, 135-39, 148-53. See also Adams (1981: 27) who develops a distinction between a proposition being true *in* a world and being true *at* a world: □T, he says, must be rejected because T has instances that are false *at*, though none that are false *in*, some possible world.

stories: a picture may depict a scene (and typically does) of which it itself is not a part; a story may describe a world (and typically does) in which that story does not exist. Similarly, so the idea, a proposition may describe a world to which it does not belong, in which it does not exist. This analogy to pictures was actually drawn by John Pollock (1986: 135) in the course of his objection to Plantinga's premise (6). We might say, then, that in the inner sense a proposition is true or false *in* a world (emphatic 'in'), while in the outer sense a proposition is true or false *of* or *about* a world (but Fine himself does not use these terms). This distinction seems to make some sense—though I agree with Plantinga (1985: 342) that it is not really a distinction between two senses of truth, it is rather a distinction between two ways of *relativizing* truth to possible worlds, between two ways in which something can be said to be true with respect to a world.

But how will this distinction be of help to Russellians? Fine admits that Plantinga's premise (6) is correct on the inner reading—more precisely, he should say that a possible-worlds *relative* of (6), put in terms of the inner reading, is correct, i.e. the proposition [Socrates does not exist] is true *in* a world *w* only if it exists in *w*. Fine merely maintains that (6) is incorrect on the outer reading—more precisely, that a possible-worlds relative of (6), put in terms of the outer reading, is incorrect, i.e. the proposition [Socrates does not exist] is true *of* some world *w* in which it does not exist. But merely finding one incorrect reading of (6), or one incorrect possible-worlds relative of (6), is not enough as long as there is also another acceptable reading of (6), or another possible-worlds relative, which is correct—correct on the inner reading. Even if Russellians adopt Fine's two-relativizations-of-truth view, they still have to find another premise in Plantinga's argument that is incorrect—incorrect on the inner reading. This premise, it seems, would have to be (45), which indicates that the concern with Plantinga's (6) is somewhat misplaced.

Moreover, as Plantinga (1985: 325) in effect points out, the falsehood of an outer reading possible-worlds relative of (6) does not actually bear on (6) itself. Return to the picture analogy. Say a certain picture accurately depicts a world in which it does not exist. Does this indicate that it is possible that the picture be accurate and not exist? Apparently not. To think otherwise seems to involve a confusion between the world depicted by the picture and the world in which it does the depicting. The picture may accurately depict a world in which it does not exist, but in order to do so it has to exist—it has to exist in the world in which it depicts a world in which it does not exist. Consider a different example; this one comes from Joseph Almog who is discussing closely related matters but is not commenting on Plantinga:

> Suppose I say to you "Quine doesn't exist." I have definitely said something. What I said is actually false. ⟨Quine was still alive at the time.⟩ But it is true of a counterfactual situation where Quine does not exist. Why? The answer is already given in describing that situation. I said: "a situation where Quine does not exist". Indeed, that is the answer: 'Quine' would ⟨sic⟩ refer to something that would not exist in that situation. What we say when we use 'Quine does not exist', the proposition thus expressed, is true in such a Quineless world, not because the word 'Quine' doesn't refer there, but because the referent of the word, Quine himself, does not exist there. (Almog 1986: 219)[24]

Almog first says that what he said by uttering "Quine does not exist" is true *of* a counterfactual situation where Quine does not exist, then he says that it is true *in* such a situation, using the 'in'

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[24] If I understand Almog's intentions correctly, it would have been better if he had sad that 'Quine' *does* refer to something that would not exist in that situation.

in the sense of his earlier 'of'. Almog's claim, thus understood, seems plausible enough. But does it indicate that it is possible that the proposition [Quine does not exist] is true *and* does not exist, that this proposition could have been true without existing? Not at all.[25]

The analogy of pictures depicting worlds in which they do not exist and the talk of propositions being true *of* worlds in which they do not exist does not seem to touch Plantinga's premise (6). On the other hand, one does get the strong impression that they are relevant somehow to the issues under discussion in Plantinga's anti-existentialist argument. This suggest, again, that the considerations that have been brought up by Fine and Pollock and Almog may have been misplaced; that they should be directed not at Plantinga's premise (6) but at his premise (45) instead. But how is this supposed to go? Curiously enough, Plantinga provides some help with this.

5. Sentences, Propositions, and States of Affairs
Reconsider Plantinga's premises (4) and (5) and their fusion, (45):

(4)   If possibly Socrates does not exist, then [Socrates does not exist] is possible.
(5)   If [Socrates does not exist] is possible, then [Socrates does not exist] is possibly true.
(45)   If possibly Socrates does not exist, then [Socrates does not exist] is possibly true.

Plantinga (1983: 174) refers to Arthur Prior (1969) who refers to John Buridan who, in his *Sophismata*, argued that we should make a distinction between propositions that are *possible* and propositions that are *possibly true*. Buridan, of course, was using the term 'proposition', or rather '*propositio*', in its old Boethian sense: he was talking about concrete utterances or *sentenc-tokens* which, it seems plausible to assume, are contingently existing beings. Let me simply use 'sentence' for short, and take the sentence:

(12)   There are no sentences.[26]

This sentence is possible in the sense that the proposition (in our sense) it actually expresses in English, the proposition that there are no sentences, could have been true: the sentence expresses a proposition that is possibly true. However, the sentence itself is not possibly true, i.e. it isn't possible that the sentence is true: (12) could not have been true, at least not in English as it is

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[25] Almog's paper belongs to a related, but somewhat different discussion, where one is much concerned with the evaluation of *linguistic* items. Kaplan argues that the right way to define *rigid designators* (cf. Kripke 1980) is in terms of what is now sometimes called *Kaplan rigidity*: a rigid designator designates the same thing in every possible world whether that thing exists in that world or not—as opposed to: designates the same thing in every world in which that thing exists (cf. Kaplan 1989: 492-97; 1989a: 568-73). Clearly, this bears on the question whether *sentences* can be true "in", or with respect to, worlds in which they do not exist. How it bears on the related issue for *propositions* is less clear. Kaplan's two-dimensional evaluation procedure (cf. Kaplan 1989: 494-507) may make one think of the distinction between truth *in w* and truth *of w* mentioned in the text. But note that Kaplan's first dimension of evaluation is concerned with a *sentence* in a context of use which includes a world *w'* (the world of the context): it yields the proposition that is expressed by the sentence in the context including *w'*. The second dimension is then concerned with evaluating the truth value of that *proposition* relative to a world *w*. Nothing here indicates that it is possible for a proposition to be true even though it does not exist. For the debate about Kaplan rigidity, see Salmon 1981, pp. 32-41, Smith 1984 and 1987, Steinman 1985, Deutsch 1989, Stanley 1997, and Branquinho 2003. For more about sentences, see the next section.

[26] Buridan's actual example was: 'No proposition ⟨sentence-token⟩ is negative'. He points out that God could have annihilated all negative sentence-tokens; see the first and second sophism in his *Sophismata*.

actually spoken. For this sentence is true in English only if the proposition it actually expresses in English is true. But the sentence expresses in English the proposition that there are no sentences; and if this proposition were true, then the sentence would not exist, hence it would not be true in English as it is actually spoken.[27]

Or take a different example, one that is more similar to the proposition we have been concerned with; take the sentence

(13)   The name 'Socrates' does not exist,

which exists only if the name 'Socrates' exists. Reasoning as above, we can observe that the sentential analogue of Plantinga's premise (4) holds: If it is possible that 'Socrates' does not exist then sentence (13) is possible, because the proposition it actually expresses in English is possibly true. But it is not possible that (13) is true in English. For (13) is true in English only if the proposition it actually expresses in English, the proposition that the name 'Socrates' does not exist, is true. But if this proposition were true, then the name 'Socrates' would not exist, then sentence (13) would not exist, hence, it would not be true. So the sentential analogue of Plantinga's premise (5) fails, and the sentential analogue of (45) fails too.

"But all this pertains to sentence-tokens and to sentence-token analogues of Plantinga's premises: How does it bear on Plantinga's real premises which are concerned with propositions rather than sentence-tokens?"[28]

Note first that the above arguments turn on the fact that truth for sentences in English is a relational property, involving a relation, the *expression* (in English) relation, to a true proposition: a sentence is true in English iff the proposition it expresses in English is true. This leaves room for a difference, owing to a difference in the scope of the modal operator, between instances of 'the sentence 'p' expresses in English the proposition [p] and $\diamond$([p] is true)', on the one hand, and '$\diamond$(the sentence 'p' expresses in English the proposition [p] and [p] is true)', on the other hand, which gives rise to Buridan's distinction between sentences that are possible and sentences that are possibly true.

And now remember *states of affairs*, and remember the Husserl party, according to which propositions are not to be identified with states of affairs though there is a close correspondence between them: the Husserl party might say that propositions *represent* states of affairs. It so happens that the following passage from Plantinga may well be taken to express this view:

> It is the *intentional* character of propositions that is most fundamental and important. Propositions are *claims or assertions*; they *attribute* or *predicate* properties to or of objects; the represent reality or some part of it as having a certain character. A proposition is the sort of thing according to which things are or stand a certain way. (Plantinga 1987: 193)

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[27] There may be some doubt about this argument owing to the presence of the qualifier 'in English' or 'in English as it is actually spoken' without which the argument would not work but whose precise behavior in modal contexts is not entirely perspicuous. However, since the argument is used for illustrative purposes only, there is no need to be overly concerned about this point.

[28] Plantinga's original reason for stating (4) and (5) separately was to discuss a response based on Prior's (1969) handling of Buridan's distinction, which differs from what comes next; see Plantinga 1979 and 1983; cf. also Fine 1977, pp. 148-53, but note that Fine (1985: 171-80) says Prior's actual response would not have been the one Plantinga discusses.

Propositions represent reality, so the Husserl party may hold, by representing states of affairs: true propositions represent states of affairs that obtain (facts); and false propositions represent states of affairs that fail to obtain. The view also fits well with the passage quoted from Almog in the previous section, where he says that a proposition is true *of* a *counterfactual situation*—a counterfactual situation, it seems, would be a state of affairs that does not obtain but could have obtained.

On this view, truth for propositions is a relational property, involving a relation, the *representation* relation, that holds between propositions and states of affairs that obtain. This leaves room for a difference, owing to a difference in the scope of the modal operator, between instances of

(a)   The proposition [p] represents the state of affairs [p] and ◇(the state of affairs [p] obtains),

on the one hand, and instances of

(b)   ◇ (The proposition [p] represents the state of affairs [p] and the state of affairs [p] obtains),

on the other hand, which gives rise to a Buridan-type distinction between propositions that are possible and propositions that are possibly true: on this view, propositions are to states of affairs as sentence-tokens are to propositions. Indeed, the argument is now much smoother than before because, thanks to the non-linguistic nature of propositions, we don't need to bother with a qualifier like 'is true in English' or 'is true in English as actually spoken'. The proposition

(14)   [Socrates does not exist]

is possible in the sense that the state of affairs it represents could have obtained: the proposition represents a state of affairs that possibly obtains. But the proposition is not possibly true: it could not have been true. For the proposition is true only if the state of affairs it represents obtains. But the proposition represents the state of affairs that Socrates does not exist; and if this state of affairs did obtain, if Socrates did not exist, then, according to Existentialism, the proposition [Socrates does not exist] would not exist either, hence it would not be true. So, if it is possible that Socrates does not exist, then the proposition [Socrates does not exist] is possible. Plantinga's premise (4) holds. But it does not follow that it is possible for the proposition [Socrates does not exist] to be true. Plantinga's premise (5) fails, hence (45) fails too.

The expressing relation[29] between sentence-tokens and propositions is contingent: a sentence-token could have expressed a proposition different from the one it actually expresses. This is why the word 'actually' had to be inserted in the earlier arguments at various places. The representation relation between propositions and states of affairs is more intimate. It is non-contingent, or internal, in one sense of this term: if the proposition [p] and the state of affairs [p] both exist, then □(the proposition [p] represents the state of affairs [p]); or in possible-worlds mode: the proposition [p] represents the state of affairs [p] in every world in which both exist— no need for a qualifier corresponding to 'in English' or 'in English as it is actually spoken'. Since the representation relation is thus internal, the difference between (a) and (b) would never *make* a

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[29] As opposed to the actually-expressing-in-English-(as-it-is-actually-spoken) relation.

modal difference *if* all propositions and states of affairs were necessary beings. To assume that they are would of course be question-begging in the present context.

6. A Defense of Existentialism?

The response to Plantinga's anti-existentialist argument that I have considered in the previous section is, I think, successful taken strictly as a response to his argument: if propositions are to states of affairs as sentences are to propositions, if propositions *represent* states of affairs, then Plantinga's argument fails. However, looked at more broadly, this response has some rather curious features.

I pointed out earlier in the paper, when considering propositions and states of affairs in the first section, that Plantinga's argument is easily transposed from 'proposition'-mode to 'state of affairs'-mode: simply replace all occurrences of 'true' by 'obtains' and all occurrences of 'proposition' by 'state of affairs', i.e. reinterpret '[Socrates does not exist]' to refer to *the state of affairs* that Socrates does not exist. This point still remains. So Plantinga's argument, thus transposed, creates a prima facie problem for a contemporary Russellian view of *states of affairs*, according to which Existentialism holds for states of affairs because states of affairs are complex structured beings some of which have contingent beings as constituents and are thus contingent beings themselves. The response I have considered could be reapplied to this view, provided there are things of some sort *X* and there is some property *F* such that states of affairs could be said to represent, or rather, represent* *X*s that are *F*. For then the property of obtaining would be a relational property, involving a relation, *representation**, between states of affairs and *X*s that are *F*, which would make room for a Buridan-type distinction between states of affairs that are possible and states of affairs that possibly obtain. But what sort of things would these *X*s be? And can a state of affairs plausibly be said to represent something, even if that just means representing* something?

Of course, the point I just made pertains to states of affairs, whereas the Russellian view is usually stated as a view about *propositions* rather than states of affairs. So Russellians about propositions can still be existentialists *if*, that is, they are prepared to distinguish between propositions and states of affairs. But this would appear to be a fairly sizeable *if*. As I also pointed out in the first section, when it comes to the relation between propositions and states of affairs, it is natural to see Russellians as members of the Meinong party rather than the Husserl party, to see them as being committed to holding that propositions *are* states of affairs—though it has to be admitted that contemporary Russellians about propositions don't often talk about states of affairs. According to the Russellians, the true proposition that Alma is hungry is composed of Alma herself and the property of being hungry. It is not easy to see how a true proposition of this sort could not be a fact. But facts are surely states of affairs that obtain; and if true propositions are states of affairs that obtain, then false propositions are states of affairs that fail to obtain. So it is quite natural to see Russellians as holding (at least implicitly) that propositions are states of affair, in which case the response to Plantinga's argument described in the previous section is not available to them—unless something else, *X*, can be found that states of affairs may plausibly be said to represent.[30]

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[30] Early on in his 1971, Kripke sketches the naïve theory of proper names, which is basically the one he is going to defend as the correct one, in the following words: "First, if someone says "Cicero was an orator," then he uses the name 'Cicero' in that statement simply to pick out a certain object and then to ascribe a certain property to the object…If someone else uses another name, such as say 'Tully', he is still speaking about the same man. One ascribes the same property, if one says "Tully is an orator," to the same man. So to speak, the fact, or state of affairs,

On the other hand, there was that point that it seems wrong to say propositions obtain or fail to obtain and wrong to say that states of affairs are true or false, which was one of the reasons why members of the Husserl party think that propositions are not to be identified with states of affairs. However, if contemporary Russellians are prepared to distinguish between propositions and states of affairs, as Almog seems to be in the passage quoted earlier, we still get an intuitively rather curious result. For then the Russellian view of propositions can be protected from Plantinga's argument but, it seems, a Russellian view of states of affairs cannot be so protected (unless one can find those *X*s): so states of affairs would have to be Fregean. In other words, propositions could be Russellian, containing concrete real-world objects as constituents, while states of affairs would have to be Fregean. Odd. Intuitively, one would have expected that, if one of the two can be Russellian while the other has to be Fregean, then it should go the other way round, that it would be states of affairs that come out as more worldly and propositions that come out as more wordy—not so.

Plantinga has observed that one could, as it were, turn the above consideration around to get Russellianism about states of affairs. This would involve construing the property of obtaining as a relational property characterized in terms of truth: a state of affairs obtains iff it represents* a proposition that is true—or less awkwardly: a state of affairs obtains iff it is represented by a proposition that is true. This allows for a response to the transposed, 'state-of-affairs'-version of Plantinga's argument. Propositions now function as the *X*s and truth as the property *F*, which makes room for a Buridan-type distinction between a state of affairs being possible (i.e. being represented by a proposition that is possibly true) and a state of affairs possibly obtaining (i.e. its being possible that the state of affairs is represented by a true proposition). The response seems somewhat unintuitive: one would have thought that, if there is both, obtaining and truth, then truth should be characterized in terms of obtaining and not the other way round. More importantly for present purposes, the response makes room for a Russellian view of states of affairs at the price of relinquishing the Russellian view of propositions.[31]

7. What About Facts?

In the first section, I briefly mentioned what I called the *Wittgenstein party* about states of affairs. According to this party, there are no states of affairs that do not obtain and facts are not to be analyzed as states of affairs that do obtain: the term 'state of affairs' is used merely as an alternative to 'fact'. In the previous section, I said that Plantinga's original argument is easily transposed into 'state of affairs'-mode. Actually, this is not entirely correct. It holds only for a non-Wittgenstein use of 'state of affairs', on which there are states of affairs that obtain and states of affairs that do not obtain, so that obtaining and not-obtaining for states of affairs lines up with truth and falsehood for propositions. Plantinga's argument is not easily transposed into 'state of affairs'-mode on the Wittgenstein use of 'state of affairs'. This raises the question how my discussion bears on Russellian views of propositions and states of affairs with states of

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represented by the statement is the same whether one says "Cicero is an orator" or one says "Tully is an orator."" (Kripke 1971: 140) It looks like Kripke advocates a Russellian view of states of affairs rather than propositions. Does he belong to the Meinong party or to the Husserl party? Well, what does he mean by "statement"—a sentence or a proposition? I am not sure. But note that the quoted passage is a rough initial characterization, so it's unclear how much weight one can put on it. Moreover, Kripke is in any case a rather non-standard contemporary Russellian; see note 7.

[31] Howard Wettstein (1985) says it is a mistake for Russellians to state their view as a view about propositions, that it is more properly understood as a view about states of affairs. I am not sure, though, that he would be happy with advocating Russellian states of affairs represented by Fregean propositions.

affairs understood the way the Wittgenstein party understands them. Assume, then, that a true propositions is one that represents, or corresponds with, a Wittgenstein state of affairs, a fact: Does this make a difference? Does it lead to a response to Plantinga's argument with less curious consequences?[32]

According to the Wittgenstein party, there are no states of affairs that do not obtain, states of affairs just *are* facts. To avoid confusion and cumbersome expression, it will be best for present purposes to avoid Wittgenstein's use of 'state of affairs' entirely and to use 'fact' instead, always remembering that facts are now *not* to be analyzed as obtaining states of affairs (from now on, I will use 'state of affairs' only in the non-Wittgenstein sense). So the position presently under consideration can be expressed quite simply like this: a proposition is true iff it corresponds with some fact.

There are two issues to address. The first issue is this: Is there an argument against Existentialism about *facts*, where it is now understood that facts are not to be analyzed as states of affairs that obtain? Well, there is no argument quite like Plantinga's. But there is a very short argument reminiscent of boxed R from the third section. Assume that c is a contingent being:

(15) $\square$ (c does not exist $\rightarrow$ the fact [c does not exist] exists) $\approx \square T$
      $\square$ (the fact [c does not exist] exists $\rightarrow$ c exists)   by Existentialism for facts
      $\square$ (c does not exist $\rightarrow$ c exists)   by transitivity of $\rightarrow$
      $\square$ (c exists)   by $\square(\sim p \rightarrow p) \leftrightarrow \square p$

Here we have again an argument leading to the conclusion 'Necessarily, c exists', contrary to the assumption that c is a contingent being. Note that we did not even have to use a premise analogous to Plantinga's (6). This is because facts, unlike propositions and states of affairs, do not come in two flavors, true and false, obtaining and non-obtaining.

Responding to this rather efficient little argument, Russellians about facts will have to reject (15), which is reminiscent of $\square T$. This will allow them (even in the presence of theorem ML) to reject

(16) $\diamond$(c does not exist) $\rightarrow$ $\diamond$(the fact [c does not exist] exists),

which is reminiscent of Plantinga's (4) and (5) and of (45).[33] The main justification I know of for rejecting (15) and (16) is a logico-metaphysical claim associated with the real Wittgenstein's *Logical Atomism*: Necessarily, there are no negative facts.[34] There are various difficulties with

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[32] I will concentrate, again, on a view on which truth is characterized in terms of a relation: representation, or correspondence as I shall say now. Identifying propositions and states of affairs (=facts) is not an option for the Wittgenstein party because it would, absurdly, rule out false propositions. Some members of this party might want to identify Wittgenstein's states of affairs, facts, and *true* propositions. I will neglect this variant here because I cannot see how it would help with a response to Plantinga's argument: it would merely take us back to the original, propositional version of the argument.

[33] Rejecting (16) seems necessary, because an alternative argument leading to '$\square$ (c exists)' can be constructed from (16) in combination with Existentialism about facts and a premise similar to Plantinga's (7): '$\square$ (the fact [c does not exist] exists $\rightarrow$ c does not exist)'.

[34] Wittgenstein (1921: 4.0312): "My fundamental idea is that the 'logical constants' are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the *logic* of facts." There is a disconcerting statement in the *Tractatus* (1921: 2.06), where it looks as if Wittgenstein acknowledges negative facts. However, on closer inspection, it appears to be

this sort of position which have been much discussed. I will not discuss them here. Instead, I will assume (or pretend, if you want) that atomism offers at least a reasonably promising response to the anti-existentialist argument against facts; and I will move on to consider the second issue that needs to be addressed.[35]

The second issue is this: Does the position presently under consideration offer any help to Russellians about *propositions*? Does it, for example, help to avoid the curious consequences I mentioned in the previous section? The answer to this question is, I think: Not really.

Note first that, because of the atomist response to the argument just mentioned, "the position presently under consideration" has in effect shifted in a crucial manner. Above I said that the position can be expressed like this: a proposition is true iff it corresponds with some fact. But after the atomist response, this characterization of truth has to be qualified. It must now be restricted to *positive* propositions: according to atomism, there are no negative facts for true negative propositions to correspond to. What, then, is the atomist characterization of truth for negative propositions? The negation of a proposition is true, according to the atomist, iff the negated proposition is false, i.e. iff the negated proposition does not correspond with any fact. So in particular, the proposition [Socrates does not exist] is true iff the proposition [Socrates exists] does not correspond with any fact, i.e. iff there is no fact the latter corresponds with.

But now our Russellians about propositions will encounter a serious obstacle. The response to Plantinga's argument given in Section 5 relied on making a Buridan-type distinction between propositions that are possible and propositions that are possibly true. This distinction could be made quite generally, because all propositions, including negative propositions, were said to correspond with, or represent, *something*. In particular, the negative proposition [Socrates does not exist] was said to represent something, namely the negative state of affairs [Socrates does not exist]. Buridan's distinction relied on this feature. The proposition [Socrates does not exist], though not possibly true, is nevertheless possible, we said in Section 5, because the state of affairs it actually represents, the state of affairs [Socrates does not exist], is one that could have obtained. But on the atomist view, there is no such thing as the state of affairs [Socrates does not exist]: states of affairs are facts, and there are no negative facts, according to the atomist. There is no room here for Buridan's notion of a proposition's being possible in distinction to a proposition's being possibly true.[36]

It appears, then, that our contemporary Russellians about the nature of propositions cannot expect much help from the Wittgenstein party, from adopting Wittgenstein's conception of states of affairs as facts—even granted that this conception allows for a Russellian view about

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a comment on what we *call* negative facts. For atomism and the rejection of negative facts, see e.g. Armstrong's 1997; note that Russell's best-known version of atomism embraces negative facts, see his 1918.

[35] In a discussion of closely related matters, Forbes (1989: 46-50) argues for rejecting Existentialism about facts; more precisely, for restricting it to *positive* facts. He holds that a negative fact, a fact of the form 'the fact [not (n exists)]', does not depend for its existence on the existence of n. I don't see how this is compatible with a Russellian view of facts. To use possible-worlds talk for brevity, in our world, where Socrates exists, there is of course no such fact as the negative fact [not (Socrates exists)]. According to Forbes, this negative fact exists in worlds in which Socrates does not exist. But what is it made of in such worlds? It is made of the negation function, applied to a complex consisting of existence and…What? Socrates is needed as a constituent, but not available, in such a worlds.

[36] Here is a slightly different way of looking at this. Consider the claim: there is no fact *f* such that the proposition [p] corresponds with *f*. On the non-Wittgenstein conception of facts, this can be understood as saying that there *is* something the proposition corresponds to, only it is not a fact: it is a state of affairs that does not obtain. On the Wittgenstein conception of facts, this move cannot be made: there are no things that are or are not facts depending on whether they have or lack a certain property like obtaining.

the nature of facts.[37]

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