

Truthmaking with Non-Existence

The basic intuition behind a Truthmaker theory is the idea that for each truth, there is something in the world - either an object, or a state of affairs - that makes it true. A particular problem for the theory concerns negative existential predications. For instance, the proposition that unicorns don't exist seems intuitively true. But what makes it so? Given the idea that propositions are made true by things in the world, the question obviously arises about what that thing is that makes it true that unicorns don't exist. Presumably, if unicorns don't exist, they cannot themselves be a truthmaker for that proposition. But it would seem that we don't have any existing entity which would necessitate that truth.

This essay takes up the challenge of providing truthmakers for negative existentials in order to offer support to what I believe is a well-motivated theory. My account will seek to preserve the intuition that truth is ontologically grounded. The approach I will take is relatively unexplored in the literature: a Meinongian-style admission of non-existent objects in the ontology to do truthmaking work.

In my account I depart from Meinong's view and lean towards the line taken by Graham Priest - what he calls Noneism. The ontological commitment of Noneism is that the domain of a world is the set of all possible objects, some of which exist (Priest [2005]). An implication of this is that the domain is exactly the same for all worlds; the only difference is that in each world different objects exist (Priest [2005]). This entails seeing "exists" as an ordinary predicate. Crucially, we would not read the so-called *existential* quantifier as asserting existence of some objects; the function of expressing existence will be left up to an existence predicate. Understood this way, the existential quantifier can range over all objects in the domain. The import of Noneism is that we have a fixed domain, the same for all worlds, with all possible objects to quantify over.

Consider the proposition (1) <Unicorns don't exist> The set of all unicorns – membership to which is given simply by having the property of *being a unicorn* – cannot by itself be a truthmaker for (1) because just being a unicorn does not imply any existential status – non-existence is a contingent property unicorns can have. What we need to say is that in the actual world each and every unicorn in the set has the property of non-existence. The resulting set of facts – all the facts of the form "x has the property of non-existence", where x is a particular unicorn – is a truthmaker for (1), for it will necessitate its truth. The strategy can be generalised to all truths of the form "All Fs are Gs" (equivalent with "No Fs are non-Gs"), no matter whether *being F* is an essential property. Suppose "All Fs are Gs" is true. Take all the facts of the form "If x is F, then x is G", where x is a particular (existent or non-existent) object. Take the collection of all these facts. Then that collection necessitates the truth of "All Fs are Gs". Crucially, we don't need to worry about the possibility of new, F but not G objects coming into being in another possible world, because the fixed-domain assumption has allowed us to include already every such possible object in the construction of the truthmaker for "All Fs are Gs".

This picture of truthmaking has an intuitive punch regarding negative existentials, which is the idea that it is something *about* the objects that are said not to exist which makes what we say about them true. Besides, this account allows us to keep up with Truthmaker orthodoxy, as it respects both Maximalism and Necessitarianism, providing truthmakers for the most problematic kind of truths.

References

. Priest, Graham (2005) *Towards Non-Being, The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.