Modest Possibilism

Winter 2004

Erich Rast

`http://akira.ruc.dk/~erast/`

Roskilde University

erast@ruc.dk

Introduction

Topics of this Talk

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:

● Actualism

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
- Actualism
- Meinongian Possibilism

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
- Actualism
- Meinongian Possibilism
- Modest Possibilism

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
- Actualism
- Meinongian Possibilism
- Modest Possibilism

▲ Discuss the following entities:

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
  - Actualism
  - Meinongian Possibilism
  - Modest Possibilism

▲ Discuss the following entities:
  - Round Squares

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
- Actualism
- Meinongian Possibilism
- Modest Possibilism

▲ Discuss the following entities:
- Round Squares
- Caesar

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
- Actualism
- Meinongian Possibilism
- Modest Possibilism

▲ Discuss the following entities:
- Round Squares
- Caesar
- Sherlock Holmes

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
- Actualism
- Meinongian Possibilism
- Modest Possibilism

▲ Discuss the following entities:
- Round Squares
- Caesar
- Sherlock Holmes
- A Halluzinated Oasis

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
- Actualism
- Meinongian Possibilism
- Modest Possibilism

▲ Discuss the following entities:
- Round Squares
- Caesar
- Sherlock Holmes
- A Halluzinated Oasis
- Elves and Dwarfes in Iceland

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
  - Actualism
  - Meinongian Possibilism
  - Modest Possibilism

▲ Discuss the following entities:
  - Round Squares
  - Caesar
  - Sherlock Holmes
  - A Halluzinated Oasis
  - Elves and Dwarfes in Iceland

▲ Draw the conclusion:

Topics of this Talk

▲ Introduce the following notions:
- Actualism
- Meinongian Possibilism
- Modest Possibilism

▲ Discuss the following entities:
- Round Squares
- Caesar
- Sherlock Holmes
- A Halluzinated Oasis
- Elves and Dwarfes in Iceland

▲ Draw the conclusion:
- We should all be modest possibilists.

Argument Structure

For the thesis that various notions of existence should be used, I argue in the following way:

▲ The existence of some sort X of objects is established by a set of criteria K_1.

▲ The existence of some sort Y of objects is established by a set of criteria K_2.

▲ If the criteria differ $K_1 \neq K_2$, then there should be two different notions of existence for X and Y respectively.

Argument Structure

For the thesis that various notions of existence should be used, I argue in the following way:

▲ The existence of some sort X of objects is established by a set of criteria K_1.

▲ The existence of some sort Y of objects is established by a set of criteria K_2.

▲ If the criteria differ $K_1 \neq K_2$, then there should be two different notions of existence for X and Y respectively.

This argument is directed against Quine (1948):

"To be is to be the value of a bound variable."

Argument Structure

For the thesis that various notions of existence should be used, I argue in the following way:

▲ The existence of some sort X of objects is established by a set of criteria K_1.

▲ The existence of some sort Y of objects is established by a set of criteria K_2.

▲ If the criteria differ $K_1 \neq K_2$, then there should be two different notions of existence for X and Y respectively.

Quine's dictum is to be supplemented by Rast (2004):

"To exist is to have the property of being existent in a certain way."

Possibilism

Actualism versus Possibilism

(1) This desk is wooden.

(2) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

(3) Round squares are round.

Example	Actualist	Modest Possibilist	Meinongian
1	✔	✔	✔
2	✗	✔	✔
3	✗	✗	✔

✔=can be true

Given that: Sherlock Holmes and round squares do **not** actually exist.

Actuality

Actuality the totality of what is being given; the Given; what is *Dawider* (Kant); what you can physically interact with

Rule of Thumb: If you can bump against it, then it actually exists.

Two Arguments Against Round Squares

① **Refutation by Inconsistency** (Russell 1905)
   "Logical Argument"

Two Arguments Against Round Squares

① **Refutation by Inconsistency** (Russell 1905)
   "Logical Argument"

▲ Talking of objects only make sense if some non-negative, simple predicative statement about them can be veridical.

Two Arguments Against Round Squares

① **Refutation by Inconsistency** (Russell 1905)
   "Logical Argument"

▲ Talking of objects only make sense if some
non-negative, simple predicative statement about
them can be veridical.

▲ $P(\imath x(Px \wedge \neg Px))$

Two Arguments Against Round Squares

① **Refutation by Inconsistency** (Russell 1905)
  "Logical Argument"

▲ Talking of objects only make sense if some non-negative, simple predicative statement about them can be veridical.

▲ $P(\imath x(Px \wedge \neg Px))$

▲ $\neg P(\imath x(Px \wedge \neg Px))$

Two Arguments Against Round Squares

① **Refutation by Inconsistency** (Russell 1905)
  "Logical Argument"

▲ Talking of objects only make sense if some non-negative, simple predicative statement about them can be veridical.

▲ $P(\imath x(Px \land \neg Px))$

▲ $\neg P(\imath x(Px \land \neg Px))$

▲ That's a contradiction. The system is inconsistent! (contradictio ad absurdum)

Two Arguments Against Round Squares

① **Refutation by Inconsistency** (Russell 1905)
"Logical Argument"

▲ Talking of objects only make sense if some non-negative, simple predicative statement about them can be veridical.

▲ $P(\imath x(Px \land \neg Px))$

▲ $\neg P(\imath x(Px \land \neg Px))$

▲ That's a contradiction. The system is inconsistent! (contradictio ad absurdum)

② **Refutation by Inconstructibility**
"Ontological Argument"

Two Arguments Against Round Squares

① **Refutation by Inconsistency** (Russell 1905)
   "Logical Argument"

▲ Talking of objects only make sense if some non-negative, simple predicative statement about them can be veridical.

▲ $P(\imath x(Px \wedge \neg Px))$

▲ $\neg P(\imath x(Px \wedge \neg Px))$

▲ That's a contradiction. The system is inconsistent! (contradictio ad absurdum)

② **Refutation by Inconstructibility**
   "Ontological Argument"

▲ Objects that are both perfectly round and square have never been observed.

Two Arguments Against Round Squares

① **Refutation by Inconsistency** (Russell 1905)
   "Logical Argument"

▲ Talking of objects only make sense if some non-negative, simple predicative statement about them can be veridical.

▲ $P(\imath x(Px \land \neg Px))$

▲ $\neg P(\imath x(Px \land \neg Px))$

▲ That's a contradiction. The system is inconsistent! (contradictio ad absurdum)

② **Refutation by Inconstructibility**
   "Ontological Argument"

▲ Objects that are both perfectly round and square have never been observed.

▲ There exists no method to construct such objects.

Sorts of Possibilia

Temporal Possibilia

(4) Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

Temporal Possibilia

(4) Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

▲ Temporal possibilia take part in actuality, but not **now**.

Temporal Possibilia

(4) Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

▲ Temporal possibilia take part in actuality, but not **now**.

▲ Past objects: We reconstruct them by their traces.

Temporal Possibilia

(4) Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

▲ Temporal possibilia take part in actuality, but not **now**.

▲ Past objects: We reconstruct them by their traces.

▲ Future objects: We wait until we can observe them.

Temporal Possibilia

(4) Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

▲ Temporal possibilia take part in actuality, but not **now**.

▲ Past objects: We reconstruct them by their traces.

▲ Future objects: We wait until we can observe them.

Existence Criterion An object *exists temporally* (=as a temporal possibilium) iff it has existed actually or will exist actually.

Fictional Objects

(5) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

Fictional Objects

(5) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

▲ Even if some real Sherlock Holmes existed, the Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle's writings would still be a fictional entity. (ambiguous proper names)

Fictional Objects

(5) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

▲ Even if some real Sherlock Holmes existed, the Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle's writings would still be a fictional entity. (ambiguous proper names)

▲ In case of doubt, we consult the stories.

Fictional Objects

(5) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

▲ Even if some real Sherlock Holmes existed, the Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle's writings would still be a fictional entity. (ambiguous proper names)

▲ In case of doubt, we consult the stories.

▲ Fictional objects can be regarded as large descriptions extracted from a written or spoken corpus.

Fictional Objects

(5) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

▲ Even if some real Sherlock Holmes existed, the Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle's writings would still be a fictional entity. (ambiguous proper names)

▲ In case of doubt, we consult the stories.

▲ Fictional objects can be regarded as large descriptions extracted from a written or spoken corpus.

▲ Identity: Fictional objects usually differ from each other if they have different names (ignoring differences in spelling or translation).

Fictional Objects

(5) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

▲ Even if some real Sherlock Holmes existed, the Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle's writings would still be a fictional entity. (ambiguous proper names)

▲ In case of doubt, we consult the stories.

▲ Fictional objects can be regarded as large descriptions extracted from a written or spoken corpus.

▲ Identity: Fictional objects usually differ from each other if they have different names (ignoring differences in spelling or translation).

Existence Criterion An object *exists fictionally* iff it is not believed to exist actually, has been invented, and there's a shared corpus describing it.

Doxastic Objects

(6) *Wanderer in the desert pointing to the south:* An oasis!

Doxastic Objects

(6) *Wanderer in the desert pointing to the south:* An oasis!

▲ What the wanderer believes to be in the south is relevant for explaining his behavior.

Doxastic Objects

(6) *Wanderer in the desert pointing to the south:* An oasis!

▲ What the wanderer believes to be in the south is relevant for explaining his behavior.

▲ Both linguistic and extralinguistic behavior is relevant for confirming that a person believes something.

Doxastic Objects

(6) *Wanderer in the desert pointing to the south:* An oasis!

▲ What the wanderer believes to be in the south is relevant for explaining his behavior.

▲ Both linguistic and extralinguistic behavior is relevant for confirming that a person believes something.

▲ Likewise, the existence of a doxastic object is extrapolated from the agent's behavior.

Doxastic Objects

(6) *Wanderer in the desert pointing to the south:* An oasis!

▲ What the wanderer believes to be in the south is relevant for explaining his behavior.

▲ Both linguistic and extralinguistic behavior is relevant for confirming that a person believes something.

▲ Likewise, the existence of a doxastic object is extrapolated from the agent's behavior.

▲ Doxastic objects can be regarded as bundles of properties: the properties that the believer attributes to the alleged object.

Doxastic Objects

(6) *Wanderer in the desert pointing to the south:* An oasis!

▲ What the wanderer believes to be in the south is relevant for explaining his behavior.

▲ Both linguistic and extralinguistic behavior is relevant for confirming that a person believes something.

▲ Likewise, the existence of a doxastic object is extrapolated from the agent's behavior.

▲ Doxastic objects can be regarded as bundles of properties: the properties that the believer attributes to the alleged object.

Existence Criterion An object *exists according to a person's belief* iff the person believes that the object has such and such properties, among them the property to exist actually.

Shared Doxastic Objects

(7) *Icelanders:* Elves have large ears.

Shared Doxastic Objects

(7) *Icelanders:* Elves have large ears.

▲ Shared doxastic objects are like doxastic objects, except that the constituting beliefs are shared.

Shared Doxastic Objects

(7) *Icelanders:* Elves have large ears.

▲ Shared doxastic objects are like doxastic objects, except that the constituting beliefs are shared.

▲ There may be no general agreement on how the existence of an object is established.

Shared Doxastic Objects

(7) *Icelanders:* Elves have large ears.

▲ Shared doxastic objects are like doxastic objects, except that the constituting beliefs are shared.

▲ There may be no general agreement on how the existence of an object is established.

▲ But of course the shared doxastic object exists 'doxastically' for all people that believe that it actually exists.

Shared Doxastic Objects

(7) *Icelanders:* Elves have large ears.

▲ Shared doxastic objects are like doxastic objects, except that the constituting beliefs are shared.

▲ There may be no general agreement on how the existence of an object is established.

▲ But of course the shared doxastic object exists 'doxastically' for all people that believe that it actually exists.

▲ Shared doxastic objects are extrapolated from the behavior of a group of people.

Shared Doxastic Objects

(7) *Icelanders:* Elves have large ears.

▲ Shared doxastic objects are like doxastic objects, except that the constituting beliefs are shared.

▲ There may be no general agreement on how the existence of an object is established.

▲ But of course the shared doxastic object exists 'doxastically' for all people that believe that it actually exists.

▲ Shared doxastic objects are extrapolated from the behavior of a group of people.

Existence Criterion An object *exists according to the beliefs of some persons* iff the persons believe that the object has such and such properties, among them the property to exist actually.

Résumée

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:
  ● Past objects are not reducible to actuality.

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:

- Past objects are not reducible to actuality.
- Different criteria for establishing existence indicate different ontic realms.

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:
  ● Past objects are not reducible to actuality.
  ● Different criteria for establishing existence indicate different ontic realms.
  ● Fictional existence even presupposes actual non-existence.

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:

- Past objects are not reducible to actuality.
- Different criteria for establishing existence indicate different ontic realms.
- Fictional existence even presupposes actual non-existence.

▲ Actualism is not expressive enough:

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:
- Past objects are not reducible to actuality.
- Different criteria for establishing existence indicate different ontic realms.
- Fictional existence even presupposes actual non-existence.

▲ Actualism is not expressive enough:
- Actualists cannot properly compare and evaluate richer ontologies; they must resort to evasive modes of talking.

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:
  ● Past objects are not reducible to actuality.
  ● Different criteria for establishing existence indicate different ontic realms.
  ● Fictional existence even presupposes actual non-existence.

▲ Actualism is not expressive enough:
  ● Actualists cannot properly compare and evaluate richer ontologies; they must resort to evasive modes of talking.
  ● Extreme nominalism is not feasible. (Instantiation and compresence relations are needed.)

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:
- Past objects are not reducible to actuality.
- Different criteria for establishing existence indicate different ontic realms.
- Fictional existence even presupposes actual non-existence.

▲ Actualism is not expressive enough:
- Actualists cannot properly compare and evaluate richer ontologies; they must resort to evasive modes of talking.
- Extreme nominalism is not feasible. (Instantiation and compresence relations are needed.)
- Logical positivism has failed to give an account for theoretical entities like electrons.

Some General Arguments Against Actualism

▲ Reality comprises more than actuality:
- Past objects are not reducible to actuality.
- Different criteria for establishing existence indicate different ontic realms.
- Fictional existence even presupposes actual non-existence.

▲ Actualism is not expressive enough:
- Actualists cannot properly compare and evaluate richer ontologies; they must resort to evasive modes of talking.
- Extreme nominalism is not feasible. (Instantiation and compresence relations are needed.)
- Logical positivism has failed to give an account for theoretical entities like electrons.

▲ Actualism is based on the prejudice that all other ontic realms can be reduced to actuality.

Modest Possibilism

Modest Possibilism

▲ The domain contains possibilia as long as they don't have contradictory properties.

Modest Possibilism

▲ The domain contains possibilia as long as they don't have contradictory properties.

▲ To each sort of objects corresponds an existence predicate.

Modest Possibilism

▲ The domain contains possibilia as long as they don't have contradictory properties.

▲ To each sort of objects corresponds an existence predicate.

▲ To each existence predicate corresponds a set of criteria for establishing existence.

Modest Possibilism

▲ The domain contains possibilia as long as they don't have contradictory properties.

▲ To each sort of objects corresponds an existence predicate.

▲ To each existence predicate corresponds a set of criteria for establishing existence.

▲ There may be meaning postulates between different kinds of existence (see fictional objects).

Modest Possibilism

▲ The domain contains possibilia as long as they don't have contradictory properties.

▲ To each sort of objects corresponds an existence predicate.

▲ To each existence predicate corresponds a set of criteria for establishing existence.

▲ There may be meaning postulates between different kinds of existence (see fictional objects).

▲ The (possibilist) quantifiers mean nothing, they only serve as a means for defining relativized quantifiers.
$$\bigwedge xA := \forall x(Ex \supset A)$$

Modest Possibilism

▲ The domain contains possibilia as long as they don't have contradictory properties.

▲ To each sort of objects corresponds an existence predicate.

▲ To each existence predicate corresponds a set of criteria for establishing existence.

▲ There may be meaning postulates between different kinds of existence (see fictional objects).

▲ The (possibilist) quantifiers mean nothing, they only serve as a means for defining relativized quantifiers.
$$\bigwedge xA := \forall x(Ex \supset A)$$

▲ Requirement: All objects in the domain are in the extension of some existence predicate.
$$E_1 \cup E_2 \cup \ldots \cup E_n = D$$

Modest Possibilism

▲ The domain contains possibilia as long as they don't have contradictory properties.

▲ To each sort of objects corresponds an existence predicate.

▲ To each existence predicate corresponds a set of criteria for establishing existence.

▲ There may be meaning postulates between different kinds of existence (see fictional objects).

▲ The (possibilist) quantifiers mean nothing, they only serve as a means for defining relativized quantifiers.
$$\bigwedge xA := \forall x(Ex \supset A)$$

▲ Requirement: All objects in the domain are in the extension of some existence predicate.
$$E_1 \cup E_2 \cup \ldots \cup E_n = D$$

▲ The various ontic realms have to be explored in a branch of formal ontology, Meinong's *Gegenstandstheorie* (theory of objects).

Santa Clause Exists!