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Modal Difficulties with Singular Propositions[1]

Singular propositions are traditionally considered to be propositions composed of — among other entities — some individuals which may happen to be concrete macroscopic things.[2] By admitting singular propositions to be a special case of propositions in general, we commit ourselves to a metaphysically controversial thesis that there exist some abstract objects (since all propositions are abstract by definition) whose components are not only some abstracts but also certain concrete things. General (as opposed to singular) propositions do not give rise to such metaphysical issues. For instance, the general proposition expressed by "Panda loves bamboo" should be considered as comprising properties of *being a panda* and *being a bamboo*, together with the *loving* relation. In such a case, we deal with a homogeneous proposition which is an abstract built exclusively of other abstracts — properties and relations. The homogeneity disappears when it comes to singular propositions. According to the most profound theories of singular propositions, i.e. Russell's (2008) and Kaplan's (1989) accounts, the proposition expressed by "Socrates snores" is singular and is composed of two elements: the property of *snoring* and Socrates himself — a macroscopic physical thing, a human being built of flesh and blood. Such a proposition can be represented as the following ordered pair:[3]

$$<\text{☺}, \psi>$$

[1] The research for this paper was supported by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (grant no. 0174/B/H03/2010/39) from the budget for science in 2011.

[2] The natural and inevitable presupposition of the discussion presented in this paper is that propositions are structured entities, i.e. they are complex and built of certain constituents.

[3] It is worth emphasizing that what is claimed here is that a proposition can be represented by an n-tuple but cannot be identified with such a mathematical entity.

where "☺" stands for Socrates and the Greek character stands for the property in question. Thus it appears that such a proposition includes two components of significantly different ontological features: a concrete object on the one hand and an abstract on the other. Such hybrid nature of singular propositions is enough to make a metaphysician sceptical about them.

The issue that directly reflects the odd nature of singular propositions is the argument developed by Alvin Plantinga (1983), concerning evaluation of singular propositions across various possible worlds (known as the Modal Problem), the conclusion of which is that accepting singular propositions immediately leads to certain ontological absurdity. My aim in this paper is to show that a theory of language involving singular propositions can avoid problems brought to light by Plantinga.

In the first section I present Plantinga's reasoning and its negative consequences for the conception of singular propositions. In the second section I examine whether rejection of the theory of Direct Reference (and the notion of singular propositions) actually makes it possible to avoid Plantinga's conclusion. In particular, I argue that the rival theory (a version of Descriptivism) is not resistant to the Modal Problem. The third section is devoted to several possibilities of dealing with the problem indicated by Plantinga without rejecting the Direct Reference theory. I analyze three such attempts, carried out within the frameworks of Possibilism, "Radical" Actualism, and "Moderate" Actualism. In the fourth section I present the distinction between *truth in* a world and *truth with regard to* a world and show how it enables to preserve the notion of singular propositions. Finally, in the fifth section, I defend the above distinction against the sceptic's attacks, by introducing the notion of mock proper names.

1. PLANTINGA'S ARGUMENT

Plantinga presents his reasoning as a counterargument to the position dubbed by him "Existentialism", according to which — broadly speaking — existence precedes essence. Two major theses of Existentialism are:

I. *Thisness* (*haecceitas*) of an object is ontologically dependent upon the object.

II. Each singular proposition is ontologically dependent upon the individuals it is about.

Thisness of an object is its individual essence, that is to say, the property of being this particular object. More specifically:

A property θ is thisness of an object X iff the two following conditions are met conjunctively:

1) it is not possible that X should exist but lack θ;

2) it is not possible that there should be an object *Y*, different from *X*, which should possess θ.[4]

Ontological dependence is a relation that holds, for instance, between a square and each of its sides. A segment which is a side of a square can exist without there being the whole square (in such a case, however, we would not describe this segment as a side of any square), whereas a square cannot exist without any of its four sides; therefore, we may say that a square is ontologically dependent upon its sides. According to existentialists, thisness stands to its object in the same relation as square to its side. Thus the first of the existentialist theses claims that for there to be thisness of an object, that particular object must "previously" exist.

According to the second existentialist thesis, it is a necessary condition for the existence of a singular proposition that there exist all individuals that are constituents of that proposition. Apparently, such a statement is not controversial as it is founded on the general ontological principle which says that the whole composed of several parts is ontologically dependent upon those parts. Thus the proposition expressed by "Socrates snores" exists provided that its constituents — which are Socrates and the property of *snoring* — also exist. Hence, when a speaker wishes to express this proposition reasonably, she should be certain that both Socrates and the relevant property exist. Even if, for the sake of simplicity, we set aside (for a while) the question about the ontological status of properties and accept the view that all properties exist necessarily (thus ensuring that properties involved in propositions do exist), there would still remain a doubt concerning Socrates. For it would be highly counter-intuitive to claim that he is a necessary being: it is obvious that he could have not existed at all. These doubts are the starting point of Plantinga's reasoning against existentialists which at the same time appears to be a strong argument against Direct Reference and singular propositions.

Plantinga's reasoning goes as follows:[5]

Consider the proposition α expressed by "Socrates does not exist":

(P1) Possibly, Socrates does not exist.

(P2) Necessarily, if Socrates does not exist, then α is true.

(P3) Necessarily, if α is true, then α exists.

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[4] For further details concerning the notions of thisness, *haecceitas*, and individual essence, see e.g. Grygianiec 2007: 136-140, Jubien 2009: 41-46, Loux 1998: 196-199, Plantinga 1983: 1. Sometimes thisness is also defined as the relation of being identical with this object, i.e.: t is thisness of x $\leftrightarrow_{def}$ t = (λy: y = x). Such a definition reflects the fact that thisness is considered to be a non-attributive property (it should rather be called referential or "numerical"). However, as Grygianiec (2007: 137) points out, entertaining such a definition requires drawing a distinction between e.g. John's thisness, which is then *being identical with John*, and, on the other hand, the property that John also (necessarily) possesses, but which is not his thisness, namely *being identical with oneself*.

[5] In the original Plantinga's formulation, the argument consists of ten steps. I cite here its shortened version presented by Fine (2005: 192).

Therefore, it is possible that (i) Socrates does not exist and (ii) α exists.[6]

Briefly speaking, the paradoxical conclusion from the reasoning is this: Socrates does exist even when he does not exist.

Without a doubt, Socrates might have never appeared in this world, i.e. there is a possible world without Socrates in it. Proposition α is singular by assumption and as such it includes Socrates as a constituent; however, at the same time it is asserted in α that Socrates does not exist. If α is true in a world in which Socrates does not exist, we are obliged to admit that in such a world α exists, since it possesses some property (namely being true) whereas it is not possible for an object to have a property and not exist at the same time. Thus we accept the thesis that in that world Socrates exists too, for he is one of the constituents of α. Eventually, it turns out that Socrates exists in every possible world, since for obvious reasons he exists in all worlds in which "Socrates exists" expresses truth, and, as shown by Plantinga's reasoning, he must also exist in all those worlds in which "Socrates does not exist" expresses truth. Needless to say, the claim ascribing necessary existence to Socrates is unacceptable.

Opponents of the Direct Reference theory suggest that to avoid the problem of "unwanted existence", one has to reject the notion of singular propositions. However, I believe the case is not as simple as they suppose it to be. One thing that I will try to show is that giving up singular propositions does not provide a solution to the problems indicated by Plantinga. Furthermore, Plantinga's reasoning suffers from a certain defect, and once the defect is corrected, it appears that the reasoning is no longer a threat to singular propositions.

2. REJECTING SINGULAR PROPOSITIONS DOES IT REALLY DO THE TRICK?

If we agreed that the proposition expressed by "Socrates does not exist" is not singular but general and utterly attributive, that is to say, it involves only properties or relations and no concrete individuals, we would thus commit ourselves to a version of the descriptivist theory of reference for proper names. According to Descriptivism, a proper name, e.g. "Socrates", is merely an abbreviation of a definite description, or a cluster of definite descriptions, which uniquely determines the person the name refers to.[7] The description — let us call it "$\varphi!$" (with the exclamation mark

[6] Formally:

(P1) $\Diamond\ulcorner\exists s$

(P2) $\Box(\ulcorner\exists s \rightarrow T\xi\ulcorner\exists s)$

(P3) $\Box(T\xi\ulcorner\exists s \rightarrow \exists\xi\ulcorner\exists s)$

$\therefore \Diamond(\ulcorner \exists s \wedge \exists\xi\ulcorner\exists s)$

(where "s" — Socrates, "ξa" — the proposition that a, "T" — "is true").

[7] More precisely: the description(s) used attributively in the sense proposed by Donnellan (1966).

to emphasize that it is a *uniquely* identifying description) — can be something like "the most famous teacher of Plato", „the main character of Plato's *Dialogues*", or "the ancient philosopher sentenced to death by drinking poison", etc. (or a disjunction of such). For the sake of brevity, we can substitute this description or cluster of descriptions with the artificial one: "something that is uniquely *Socratesque*" (see Salmon 1998: 52). Thus the proposition expressed by "Socrates is ψ" is equal to the one expressed by "Something that is uniquely *Socratesque* is ψ" and composed exclusively of properties, namely of the property ψ ascribed to Socrates in the sentence and of the property $\varphi!$ expressed by a description which is synonymous with the name. The proposition takes the form:

$$<(\varphi!), \psi>$$

As a matter of fact, such a proposition is about some relations holding between the two properties in question. From the cognitive point of view, what is important here are the relations between properties — the object which happens to have those properties fades into the background. What is asserted in the discussed proposition is merely that whichever object has the uniquely identifying property $\varphi!$ also possesses ψ; according to the standard Russellian analysis, this may be put as follows:

$$\exists x\,(\varphi! x \wedge \psi x)$$

If Descriptivism is correct, propositions of such form are expressed by sentences like "Socrates snores", "Socrates is human", "The Present King of France is bald", etc. What about the proposition expressed by "Socrates does not exist"? The interpretation according to which what is asserted in this proposition is that there *exists* some unique object being $\varphi!$, and that at the same time the object possesses the property ψ which would be the property of *non-existence* in this case, is unacceptable, since it leads to contradiction. It seems much more sensible and intuitive to represent the proposition as follows:

$$\neg\exists x\ \varphi! x$$

which is equivalent to saying that there is no object that would be *something that is uniquely Socratesque*.

At this point, you can reasonably ask whether such a strategy is actually an efficient way to avoid the Modal Problem. To answer this question, one must first settle the question concerning the modal status of properties, that is, whether they are contingent or necessary beings. With regard to this issue, several positions can be distinguished. Below, I briefly discuss consequences of the two most extreme of them.

First account — so called Minimalism[8] about properties — is based on the Aristotelian "Principle of Instantiation", which limits the class of existing properties to those properties that are actually exemplified (by some objects). In other words, properties are ontologically dependent upon their bearers, e.g., if there is no dog that

[8] One of the most famous adherents of Minimalism is Armstrong (1997).

has read *War and Peace*, then — according to Minimalism — there is no property of *being a dog that has read War and Peace*.

The descriptivist (and thus attributive) analysis of the proposition expressed by "Socrates does not exist", namely the formula "$\neg\exists x\ \varphi!x$", involves the property $\varphi!$ which is assumed to uniquely identify some particular object. However, what is stated in the proposition is that there is no object possessing $\varphi!$. Along these lines, the paradoxical consequence of Plantinga's reasoning returns, yet in a slightly different disguise. If the above proposition is supposed to be true in some possible world, then the proposition possesses some property in that world and thus exists in that world together with all constituents of the proposition. Since this proposition is purely attributive, it is composed of properties exclusively. One of those properties is $\varphi!$, which is thus supposed to exist in the possible world in question. However, in the proposition it is asserted that there is no object possessing $\varphi!$, hence $\varphi!$ cannot exist in that world, because no object exemplifies $\varphi!$. So again we end up with the conclusion that something (property $\varphi!$ in this case) does exist even when it is supposed to not exist, and thus it is clear that Descriptivism in connection with Minimalism fails to solve the "unwanted existence" issue.

The polar opposite of Minimalism is Maximalism about properties,[9] whose main thesis is that every property which could possibly exist, actually exists. In other words, if it is not the case that a property is self-contradictory, then this property exists whether or not some object exemplifies it. In short, according to Maximalism, properties are necessary beings.

Indeed, the maximalist account allows to deal with Plantinga's problem. If the proposition expressed by "Socrates does not exist" is considered to be attributive (and not singular), which means that it contains only properties, then in keeping with Maximalism all constituents of that propositions exist in all possible worlds, and in particular also in the worlds in which the proposition is true. To explain what is stated in the proposition, the maximalist may say that although the property $\varphi!$ exists in the world devoid of Socrates, it is asserted in the proposition that no object exemplifies $\varphi!$ in that world.

The unpleasant result of accepting Maximalism is that only self-contradictory properties are excluded from the realm of being; every consistent property exists. Thus, somewhere in the universe, there exist properties *like being a fragrance-emitting TV set*, *being the first man to visit Mars*, *being a cell phone that prepares espresso*, *being a dog that has read War and Peace*, etc.[10] Probably the majority of the properties allowed by Maximalism are never going to be exemplified — especially when we realize that

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[9] Linsky and Zalta (1994) advocate a maximalist view to which I will get back later.

[10] I believe there are no fragrance-emitting TV sets so far, but it is quite possible that the Japanese will construct them before long (if they have not already done so). On the other hand, I think there is never going to be a dog reading books, but still the property of being a dog that has read *War and Peace* is not a self-contradictory one, so the property exists according to Maximalism.

the maximalist is obliged to admit existence of conjunctive properties, e.g. *being a man and the first living creature to visit planet Venus and the author of a billion textbooks*, and infinitely many others. There can be no doubt that Maximalism is not particularly economical about ontology. These are not, of course, knock-down arguments against Maximalism, but I believe they show that accepting this theory requires a solid support.

It appears then that if one rejects the theory of Direct Reference for the benefit of Descriptivism and at the same time holds the minimalist view as regards the existence of properties, such a strategy does not allow to avoid Plantiga's problem. Theoretically better results are achieved when one accepts the maximalist account; however, Maximalism turns out to be a rather controversial — or at least not uncontroversial — theory, so the descriptivist is under the obligation to offer some additional arguments in favour of that account.

3. HOW TO DISMISS "UNWANTED" EXISTENCE WITHOUT DISMISSING SINGULAR PROPOSITIONS?

The natural way to undermine Plantinga's argument would be to reject one of its three premises. The second premise (P2) seems to be obviously true and unquestionable. Propositions are commonly thought to be truth-value bearers and a kind of intermediate level between sentences expressing them and, on the other hand, facts that propositions are about. Hence, I see no possibility of avoiding the Modal Problem by rejecting (P2) if you accept propositions at all. If you do not, you do not have any problems with any propositions — either singular or general ones.

Another option is to reject either (P1) or (P3). Both of them regard (possible) existence of certain objects in possible worlds; the former concerns modal properties of the existence of Socrates, and the latter — the modal properties of the existence of the proposition α. This leads us directly to the ontological issue of the existence of possibilia (i.e. things that can exist), so rejecting (P1) or (P3) is equal to taking some position on that issue. I will briefly discuss two main theories of possibilia (namely Possibilism and "Radical" Actualism) and show why they are hardly helpful in dealing with the Modal Problem. The views I analyze are fraught with numerous problems of various nature; however, my aim here is to pinpoint the disadvantages immediately associated with Plantinga's reasoning. Afterwards, I will try to argue for the "Moderate" Actualism as the view that is more successful in solving the issue in question.

3.1. Radical Actualism

Let me start with rejecting (P1) and thereby denying that it is possible that Socrates does not exist and thus considering Socrates as a necessary being. There is nothing special about Socrates's existence in particular, so if you claim that he is a

necessary entity, it inevitably leads to the position according to which every object exists necessarily. I call such a view "Radical" Actualism.

Actualism in general is the view that everything that exists is actual (alternatively: there does not exist anything that is not actual). The radical version of Actualism strengthens that claim — according to this account, it is necessary that everything necessarily exists ($\Box\forall x\,\Box\exists x$) (see Linsky, Zalta 1994).

The crucial point of Radical Actualism is that it assumes *being concrete* and *being abstract* to be contingent properties of things. A radical actualist treats, for instance, a dog that has read *War and Peace* (which was traditionally considered to be a mere possibile, i.e. an object that does not actually exist but which could have existed) not as non-existing in the actual world but rather as rightfully existing in the actual world, yet with the qualification that it exists as an abstract thing. Moreover, it is just a matter of a quirk of fate that e.g. Socrates and I are concrete in the actual world. Since *concreteness* is not a necessary property of mine, in some possible world I am an abstract as well. On the other hand, it is hardly necessary that abstracts like love and justice are abstracts; there are possible worlds in which they are as concrete as I am in the actual world. The radical actualist may then say that in the possible world which (P1) is about, Socrates should be considered not as non-existing but as existing as abstract; in other words, according to the theory, Socrates is a necessary being. Such a claim clearly amounts to rejecting (P1) and throws out the baby with the bath water, because it violates the basic ontological intuition that it might have happened that Socrates never existed. Accepting Radical Actualism seems then to be quite a high price for undermining Plantinga's reasoning.

It is worth mentioning that Plantinga (1982, 1983) also endorsed the view that can be considered as a radical version of Actualism and is supposed (among other things) to solve the Modal Problem. What I have in mind here is his famous theory of individual essences (or thisnesses) in which he claims, that individual essences are not ontologically dependent upon objects to which they belong. That directly leads to the view that individual essences exist necessarily, that is to say, every individual essence exists in every possible world. Furthermore, Plantiga maintains that every individual has its individual essence, and thereby he can argue that in the world in which the proposition expressed by "Socrates does not exist" is true, there is no Socrates indeed. However, it should be acknowledged that in that world the individual essence of Socrates does exist and that the essence is a constituent of the proposition α.

I believe the reason to reject the above view as a proper remedy for the Modal Problem is quite simple and straightforward: the proposition α is not about Socrates's individual essence but about Socrates himself, and it is Socrates himself that is a constituent of the proposition — not his individual essence. If individual essences are supposed to be components of singular propositions, then to remain consistent with his own theory, Plantinga needs to admit that in the world including Socrates the proposition expressed by "Socrates exists" is identical to the proposition expressed by "Socrates's individual essence exists", which leads to the unfortunate consequence

that — if we accept that propositions are what is said — we always say something about some property of Socrates (namely, his essence) and not Socrates himself.

3.2. Possibilism

It seems that the last possible way to avoid the Modal Problem is to reject the third premise (P3). In doing so, one denies that it is necessary that if the proposition α is true in the possible world in which Socrates does not exist, then α exists in that world. There are (at least) two possible ways of developing this approach.

The first option is to accept the notorious theory called Possibilism, according to which there are some things that do not exist actually but could have existed.[11] Things of this kind, so called mere possibilia, are attributed a special type of being called *subsistence*, as distinguished from *existence*, which characterizes objects that exist actually. So we may say that I exist, Socrates exists, Europe exists, etc., and on the other hand, that Sherlock Holmes, Zeus, and a dog that has read *War and Pace* all subsist. Existence thus understood is something that we may actually call the *real* existence, while subsistence is a kind of second-class being.

With respect to Plantinga's reasoning, a possibilist can say that in a possible world in which "Socrates does not exist" expresses truth, Socrates subsists (just as Zeus subsists in the actual world). Then, although Socrates does not exist in the world in question, he subsists there and thus can be a component of singular propositions.

Of course, drawing a distinction between two kinds of being is a risky philosophical method which poses a problem by itself; but even when we put aside the eccentricity of this account, the possibilist approach is not helpful in solving the Modal Problem.

Since (P3) does not concern Socrates but the proposition α, a possibilist needs to decide what the ontological status of α is — whether it exists or subsists in the world in question. Of course, she cannot claim that α exists, because then the whole problematic reasoning remains untouched. Thus, the possibilist has to consider α as subsisting in the world in which Socrates does not exist (and in which — as a matter of fact — Socrates does subsist). Let us try to figure out how Plantinga's reasoning would look like after the possibilist corrections:

(P1) Possibly, Socrates does not exist.
(P2) Necessarily, if Socrates does not exist, then α is true.
(P3*) Necessarily, if α is true, then α subsists.
Therefore, it is possible that (i) Socrates does not exist and (ii) α subsists.[12]

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[11] Possibilism in its contemporary form is usually said to have been formulated for the first time in Russell's early works (2008: e.g. §427).

[12] For the sake of clarity, let me add that existence and subsistence are said to be two distinct kinds of being. In particular, subsistence is not a broader category and existence is not merely a special subtype of subsistence. In other words, it is not the case that all (not self-contradictory) things

The conclusion is not paradoxical, for there is nothing incoherent with Socrates not existing but subsisting in a given world while the singular proposition about him is also supposed to subsist in that world. So has the Modal Problem just been solved? Well, not exactly. Possibilist assumes here something that at first glance looks quite innocent but as a matter of fact is unjustified and highly controversial.

The consequent of (P3*) claims that the proposition α subsists, and as we said it is the crucial point of the reasoning. However, it is extremely unclear why the proposition is supposed to subsist rather than exist. To see the controversy clearly, let us set aside Socrates and think of someone who is considered by possibilists to subsist in our actual world, namely Zeus. Although Zeus subsists, it is hardly reasonable to claim that people's thoughts about Zeus or stories about Zeus, or, finally, propositions about Zeus do not exist in the actual world. Subsistence is the mode of being which is ascribed to possibilia, i.e. things that are not real but could have been real, while there are no good reasons in this context to suspect propositions about Zeus to be possible yet unreal. Strictly speaking, there are no reasons to believe that such propositions are "more unreal" than propositions about the Eiffel Tower and other *existing* things.[13] Thus, the possibilist has to admit that *all* propositions subsist. It is rather obvious that propositions — like other abstracts — have some specific ontological properties, significantly different from those possessed by concrete things. Yet this difference does not automatically translate into being either real or just possible, that is, into existing or subsisting. Accordingly, endowing propositions with subsistence appears to be merely an unjustified theoretical trick that allows possibilists to avoid the Modal Problem.

But even if the possibilist somehow forced us to accept the claim that propositions subsist,[14] the case would still be problematic. For instance, one could ask what is common to Zeus and a proposition about Zeus (or any other proposition) that makes them both belonging to the realm of subsistence and what is the factor determining that the Eiffel Tower or a panda bear do not belong there. The only reasonable answer seems to be that neither Zeus nor a proposition about Zeus have spatiotemporal characteristics — in other words they are not concrete things but abstracts. So if you are a possibilist and you say that Zeus is an abstract, your theory appears to be surprisingly similar to another theory discussed earlier — namely to Radical Actualism. In fact, in

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subsist and some of them also exist. If existence were a subclass of subsistence, then of course (P1) would be false, and the whole argument would become forceless. However, since there is no object that can exist and subsist at the same time in the same world, (P1) is entirely acceptable, and thereby the argumentation remains valid.

[13] Besides, if someone states that propositions do not exist but subsist, it leads directly to the account according to which all abstracts subsist. But such view should not be called Possibilism anymore, since there is nothing concerning possibilities in saying that abstracts have their own special mode of being.

[14] Probably the only way she could do that is by threatening us with the claim that if we do not agree, it entails that we do not exist, but subsist…

this particular context of considering singular propositions in the light of Plantinga's reasoning, Possibilism gives results almost identical to those produced by Radical Actualism. According to both accounts *everything* has some kind of *being*: actualists claim that everything has *being* understood as (actual) existence while possibilists state that everything has *being* and there are two kinds of *being* (existence and subsistence).[15]

Platinga's reasoning starts with the assumption that it is possible that Socrates does not exist, which means that it can be truly said about some possible world that there is no Socrates in it; just as there is no Zeus in the actual world. It is not defined in which technical sense the verb "exist" appears in (P1), and in such cases it is natural to assume that what is meant is the existence according to common sense. I believe that when you say that Socrates does not exist, what you mean by common-sense standards is not that he subsists instead of existing, or that he exists as an abstract — you basically mean then that there is *no Socrates at all*. Hence, even though Possibilism and Radical Actualism are successful in rejecting (P1) from the theoretical point of view and thus undermine Platinga's argumentation, their methods cannot be treated as satisfactory by those who *seriously* would like to defend singular propositions. The true challenge is to undermine the argumentation with the common-sense ontology assumed, when Socrates is supposed not to exist *at all*.

Then, if Plantinga's reasoning is modified according to the possibilist paradigm, we can clearly see that Possibilism is helpless against Plantinga's argument:

Consider the proposition α* expressed by "Socrates neither exists nor subsists" (for the possibilist, this is the only way of saying that there is *no Socrates at all*):

(P1*) Possibly, Socrates neither exists nor subsists.

(P2*) Necessarily, if Socrates neither exists nor subsists, then α* is true.

(P3*) Necessarily, if α* is true, then α* subsists or exists.

Therefore, it is possible that (i) Socrates neither exists nor subsists and (ii) α* exists or subsists.

The conclusion is as paradoxical as the original one since to exist or subsist the proposition α* requires Socrates to exist or subsist as one of its parts, while it is assumed that Socrates neither exists nor subsists.

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[15] For instance, when ontological status of Sherlock Holmes in the actual world is considered, according to Radical Actualism the detective exists as an abstract entity, and he subsists according to Possibilism. Either way, Sherlock Holmes is somehow present in that world. Analogously, the world which we would normally describe as one in which Socrates does not exist (a world about which P1 is supposed to be true) would include Socrates — relevantly — existing as an abstract or subsisting; again, either way, Socrates would be in that world in a way.

3.3. Moderate Actualism

In my view, the most promising approach to the Modal Problem is what I call Moderate Actualism. Within this framework, the third premise (P3) is rejected, but on a completely different basis than in the case of Possibilism or Radical Actualism. The Moderate Actualism approach consists in claiming that the notion of truth occurring in (P3) is somehow defective. The question that Moderate Actualism poses — reasonably, in my opinion — is whether it is really the case that judging a proposition to be true within the framework of possible-worlds semantics always implies that this proposition exists in the worlds in which it is evaluated.

Adherents of Moderate Actualism, such as Robert M. Adams (1981), Kit Fine (2005), and Jeffrey King (2007), have advanced various versions of the theory, but from our point of view, what is essential to this approach is the claim that there are no singular propositions about objects that do not *actually* exist. In other words, when we speak about possible worlds, we in fact speak either about wholly general possibilities or about individuals from the actual world; in the latter case, we attribute to the individuals properties that they do not actually possess.[16] The source of such an idea can be easily found in Kripke's masterpiece (1984: 44), which contains one of the most significant theses concerning possible worlds:

> Possible worlds are stipulated not discovered by powerful telescopes. There is no reason why we cannot stipulate that, in talking about what would have happened to Nixon in a certain counterfactual situation, we are talking about what would have happened to him.

When we want to say something about Nixon's lot — hypothetical and different than it was in reality — we speak about some possible world, but we do not have to worry whether Nixon is present in the world in question or not; Nixon exists there because we stipulate this world as the one in which he exists. Kripkean idea can be paraphrased by saying that possible worlds are thoroughly "obedient" to us — we give them life and decide what they are. "Investigation" concerning a given possible world is certainly not a teleportation to that world and exploration of it. Possible worlds are basically a theoretical tool that allows us to attribute to real objects some properties that they do not possess in reality; however, possible worlds are not some mysterious locations to which you can transfer yourself to check if a given proposition is true in them. According to the actualist account, possible worlds do not exist on their own. As Adams (1981: 19-20) aptly puts it:

> From an actualist point of view, modalities […] are not to be understood in terms of non-modal property (truth) that propositions could have had, but in terms of modal properties that actually existing entities do have. To say that I might have never existed is not to say that the proposition that I never exist could have been true. There is such a proposition; but if I ever exist it is

[16] Hereafter, I adopt the terminological convention according to which, when I speak about "possible worlds", I mean all possible worlds except the actual one. If sometimes I wish to treat the actual world as a possible world, it will be clearly emphasized.

> false and if I never existed it would not be true because it would not exist. To say that I might never have existed is to say something about the modal properties that I actually have — and by implication about the modal properties that my thisness, and the proposition that I exist, actually have.

Without a doubt, I am not a necessary being, which means that I could have never existed. Adams argues — in my opinion quite rightly — that when I utter a sentence like "If I did not exist, then I would…", I express the proposition [that Filip Kawczyński does not exist] which can be evaluated, yet the evaluation does not consist in arranging for that proposition a trip to a world in which I do not exist, and then figuring out what the truth value of that proposition is in that world. Rather, the propositions stays "at home" (i.e. in the actual world) and we attempt to investigate *a priori* whether it would be true or false in the context of different counterfactual situations stipulated by users of language. In brief, such a proposition should be analyzed from the point of view of an inhabitant of the actual world rather than from the perspective of a resident of the relevant possible world.[17]

Still, we are strongly inclined to consider the proposition [that FK does not exist] as true when a world in question is one in which I do not exist — what else could "It is possible that I have not existed" mean if not that in the context of some possible world the above proposition is true?

Before moving to the main point and addressing the above issues, let us take a quick look at some illustration of two ways of evaluating propositions. First, let us assume that a proposition in order to exist in a given world has to be *expressed* in that world. It should be emphasized here that this assumption is made exclusively for the sake of the illustration, and it is not a part of the Moderate Actualism theory. Yet it will help us in understanding the difference between two modes of evaluation in the modal framework.

Consider the proposition [that FK is fair-haired]. If it is possible that I was fair-haired (and it surely is, although I am dark-haired in the actual world) we can speak of a possible world in which I am fair-haired and with respect to which the proposition in question is true. Now we have the choice between two possible ways of evaluating that proposition. Additionally, for a better picture, let us assume that for some reason only I am allowed to express propositions about myself.

According to the first mode of evaluation, the proposition should be regarded as existing in the world in which I am fair-haired. Metaphorically speaking, we are talking about a situation in which in some possible world I fond myself being a fair-haired man and then — *in that world* — I utter "I am fair-haired!" and thus express the proposition [that FK is fair-haired]. There is no problem with the existence of elements of that (singular) proposition in that world, since — according to our assumption — the proposition in question is supposed to be expressed by me, so I exist there.

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[17] Very similar view was favoured by another expert in the field of possible worlds, namely by Kaplan (1989: part V, in particular).

Another possibility is to acknowledge that — like in the case of the proposition [that FK does not exist] — the proposition is evaluated from the perspective of the actual world and *with regard to* a given possible world. In this case, we do not commit ourselves to the assumption that the proposition *exists in* the possible world in question: it does not exist there (or at least need not to) — it exists in the actual world where it has been actually expressed.

In the case of propositions like [that FK is fair-haired], the choice between *evaluation in* and *evaluation with regard to* possible worlds does not affect results of that evaluation, because it is assumed that I exist in the world in which I am supposed to be fair-haired, and thus, the proposition also — by assumption — exists there.

On the other hand, when the proposition [that FK does not exist] is under examination, the choice between two modes of evaluation is crucial. Namely, the first possibility — evaluating the propositions as existing *in* a given possible world — is simply irrelevant, for if by assumption I do not exist in some possible world, there can be no doubt that in that world there is no proposition expressed by me. Thus the proposition cannot be said to be true or false in the world in question. The second interpretation, however, works perfectly here — the proposition [that FK does not exist] can be said to be true *with regard to* the possible world in which I do not exist, because then the proposition is not assumed to exist in that world. Such evaluation is equivalent to asserting that I am not a necessary being (see Adams 1981: 20), but it does not involve postulating that in a world in which I do not exist some proposition expressed by me does exist.

To make it perfectly clear let me repeat that it is not an actualist point of view to presume that a proposition has to be expressed in a possible world to exist in that world. As a matter of fact, an Actualist does not have to make any assumptions about the relation between being expressed and existence of proposition, and by default the weaker assumption is made —that propositions exist independently of human beings. Either way, the distinction between two modes of evaluation across possible worlds as described above remains legitimate. I decided to present it against the background of the stronger assumption about expressing and existence just because I believe it throws more light on the distinction in question.

4. THE SOLUTION

The conclusion of the foregoing considerations is as follows: when we evaluate a proposition in the possible-worlds semantics and state that it is true or false in a given possible world, our statement is ambiguous, because there are two significantly different modes of evaluation. According to first of them, when evaluating across possible worlds, we stipulate a counterfactual scenario in which the proposition is assumed to exist. The second method consists in investigating what the truth value of a given proposition is *with regard to* certain counterfactual circumstances, but it is not assumed

that the proposition exists in that possible world. Thus, evaluating a proposition sometimes means evaluating it *in a possible world* and sometimes *with regard to a possible world*.[18] A distinction of this kind was presented first by Adams (1981), then by Fine (2005), and recently it became a part of the theory of propositions advanced by King (2007). Fine characterizes those two kinds of truth in the following words:

> One should distinguish between two notions of truth for propositions, the inner and the outer. According to the outer notion, a proposition is true in a possible world regardless of whether it exists in that world; according to the inner notion, a proposition is true in a possible world only if 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 2005: 194; for another characterization of the distinction, cf. Adams 1981: 22).

Fine's notion of the outer-truth is of course equivalent to "truth with regard to" in my nomenclature, and the inner-truth equals "truth in". The distinction delivers an easy method of evaluating the propositions we have discussed. The proposition [that FK is fair-haired] can be evaluated in both manners; moreover, it will be *true in* and *true with regard to* exactly the same worlds. In other words, everything stays the same in terms of extension, but there is an important conceptual difference between evaluating that proposition *in* a world and *with regard to* a given world. On the other hand, although it is problematic to evaluate the proposition [that FK does not exist] *in* a possible world, we still can say if it is true or false *with regard to* a given possible world, and such strategy seems to satisfy our theoretical requirements.

The distinction in question opens up a possibility of solving the Modal Problem. When you are about to evaluate the proposition [that Socrates does not exist], the relevant scenario is not the one in which you travel to the possible world in which Socrates does not exist and you try to find out the truth value of this proposition. The appropriate picture is that you determine the truth value of the proposition in the context of a possible world in which Socrates does not exist; or in other words, you consider the truth value *with regard to* that world. It appears that the proposition [that Socrates does not exist] can be considered as belonging to the same type as [that FK does not exist], i.e. to the class of propositions that can be evaluated only *with regard to* possible worlds, not *in* possible worlds. Obviously, evaluating propositions *with regard to* some possible world does not involve the requirement of existence of a given proposition in the world in question. Neither Socrates nor the proposition α are supposed to exist in the world in which Socrates is said not to exist, yet α is *true with regard to* that world. Thus the third premise of Plantinga's argument has been successfully rejected, the whole reasoning undermined, and the problem of "unwanted" existence of Socrates disappears.

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[18] For the sake of clarity, when used technically, phrases "(true) in" and "(true) with regard to" will be put in italics.

4.1. Dispelling doubts about the distinction

I suppose there are two main concerns about the distinction between evaluation *with regard to* and evaluation *in* possible worlds. First of them regards theoretical value of the distinction. Some philosophers (see e.g. Crisp 2010: 229) think that introducing the distinction is invalid since it is an *ignotum per ignotius* kind of explanation: they argue that the distinction makes the obscure picture of evaluation across possible worlds even more gloomy. Such a sceptical position is definitely not too strong. I believe that even the short characterization presented above is fairly enough to grasp the nature of the distinction. What is more, formal and far more extended definition of *with-regard-to* type of evaluation was offered by King (2007: 82-83).

Another doubt that could be raised by a sceptic is how our method would work if Socrates had never existed in the actual world. To put it another way, imagine that one of possible words in which Socrates does not exist happens to be the *actual* world. How could it be then — the sceptic may argue — that the proposition α is evaluated *with regard to* the world in question and not *in* that world, given that we are indeed in this particular world (since by assumption it is the *actual* one). My response to the sceptic is to admit she is right — it is true that propositions cannot be evaluated *with regard to* the actual world, because notions of *truth with regard to* and *truth in* are applicable only to propositions concerning possibility. Propositions about how things actually are do not involve possibility, therefore they are evaluated in a standard way. And every time we speak about something that is not a part of the actual world, we stipulate a possible world, and that gives a reason to make use of the distinction between two modes of evaluation.

I think that if the actual world were one of the worlds without Socrates, the proposition α [that Socrates does not exist] would act just as the proposition [that Zeus does not exist] acts for us. The crucial question here is whether any proposition about Zeus is a singular proposition. My answer is no. Thus, if the actual world lacked Socrates, no proposition about Socrates would be singular.

I believe there are several types of expressions whose occurrence in a sentence has the result that the sentence expresses then a singular proposition. Those expressions are proper names, demonstratives, and definite descriptions used referentially. Within such a framework, it seems that both "Socrates does not exist" and "Zeus does not exist" express singular propositions, since they include proper names. However, I believe that treating the two above sentences as belonging to the same semantic category is a fundamental — though common — mistake. I think that while the former sentence actually expresses a singular proposition, the second does not; in fact, I think that all sentences about Zeus express purely attributive propositions.[19] My reason is quite simple: I do not consider words like "Zeus", "Atlantis", "Sherlock Holmes", "Eric Cartman", etc. to be proper names. To put it bluntly, I do not think

[19] Unless a sentence includes some other expression from the above list.

there is anything like an empty proper name. Words like "Zeus" resemble proper names *syntactically* (that is, inasmuch as they are words starting with capital letters, usually play the role of subject in a sentence, etc.), yet the category of proper names is a *semantic* category, and expressions are identified as proper names due to performing definite semantic functions. The basis for such an account is the so called Hybrid Theory of proper names proposed by Gareth Evans (2002: ch. 11) and developed in some detail in my paper (Kawczyński 2010). One of the notions I tried to add to Evans's theory was the notion of *mock proper names*, and as may be easily guessed, I consider "Zeus" and similar expressions to be the mock proper names. However, to explicate what is mock about mock proper names I need to recap some fundamentals of the Hybrid Theory.

This article is not a proper place to go into details of the multithreaded Evans's theory; however, the crucial point is that according to Evans, proper names function always within some practice of using that particular name as referring to that particular object. The people who start the practice of using a name "N" as referring to an object *x* are called producers, and they are the speakers who know *x* directly. I would like to omit here the technical details concerning naming procedure, so let me just assume that it is a kind of a baptism, in which reference to the object that is about to be named is fixed by use of one of four: an appropriate gesture, a definite description (used referentially), a demonstrative expression (along with an appropriate gesture), or already existing proper name of the object; what is important here is that in order to use an expression of any of those three types (as well as in the case of making a gesture), the person who names the object has to be in some causal relation to it (usually the speaker can perceive with her senses the object being named).

In the course of time, other speakers, who do not know *x* directly, usually join the practice — Evans calls them consumers. Producers and consumers exchange the ability of participating in the practice in question (i.e. the ability to competently use "N" as referring to *x*) within numerous Kripkean causal chains that altogether constitute a kind of a network of flow of semantic competence regarding "N", as well as flow of information about *x*. The portion of information that a given speaker associates with "N" determines to which practice the speaker's particular use of "N" belongs, and this in turn determines which object is the reference of "N" (it is the object which was named by producers at the beginning of the practice in question). This mechanism presented by Evans is, in my view, the proper account of the reference of actual or real proper names. It is obvious that "Zeus" could not be involved in such practices, since there existed no object to be named in this way by producers. In other words, it was impossible to conduct a baptism involving the expression "Zeus", for it was impossible to refer to Zeus either by making a gesture or by using an expression belonging to one of three types mentioned before.

What is "Zeus" then, if it is not a proper name? As I said, I think it is a mock name, and a mock name is nothing more than an abbreviation of a description or a cluster of descriptions. It is easy to notice then that I believe Descriptivism to offer a

good account of mock names. Mock names are given within a procedure in which the reference to the object that is about to be named is fixed by using a definite description attributively (or by using another mock name). No one has ever seen, touched, or heard Zeus, thus no one could ever refer to him by using a description referentially. However, some people could conduct a mock baptism by saying: "Let's call »Zeus« a male, whoever he actually is, who rules all Olympians and is the god of thunder and…". It does not matter whether those people really believed that there existed someone who matched this description. They simply introduced to the language a word which is an abbreviation of "the male who rules all Olympians and is the god of thunder, and…". Those creative Greeks did not refer to some particular object — in fact, they were not able to do that, since there was no such an object — but rather introduced a handy expression for calling some product of their imagination or faith.

Even if one sets aside Kripke's arguments against descriptivist approach to names (which show that if Descriptivism works well for a noun phrase, this phrase is definitely not a proper name), intuitively, when you say "Zeus is mighty" and "The male who rule all Olympians… is mighty", you convey exactly the same information. No one has any other access to Zeus than via the descriptions in question. On the other hand, "Aristotle is mighty" and "The teacher of Alexander the Great is mighty" are significantly different with respect to their content and the information carried by them. What is important, the difference does not appear in virtue of "Aristotle" and "the teacher of Alexander the Great" having different meanings, but rather as a result of the fact that while the description has meaning, the name does not, and it refers directly to Aristotle.

This is why I think no propositions about Zeus are singular propositions. From the semantic point of view, "Zeus" is not a proper name but a description, so it cannot yield a singular proposition, since it refers only indirectly via some intensional component (namely, meaning). And exactly the same would happen with "Socrates" if the actual world were a world in which Socrates does not exist. If in such circumstances we formulated some sentences with the word "Socrates" (just as we actually did in the case of "Zeus"), none of those sentences would express a singular proposition. In such circumstances, we would be able to stipulate the word "Socrates" to be the abbreviation of e.g. "a dog that has read Tolstoy" and utter the sentence "Socrates does not exist", but then it would just mean that there is no dog that has read Tolstoy.[20]

Consequently, in the *actually actual* world (that is, the one we live in and in which Socrates exists), saying "Socrates does not exist" is, at least, an oxymoron, since if you assume that "Socrates" is a (real) proper name, you know that it came into being at the beginning of some practice concerning some particular object. Thus

[20] Of course, it would be possible to give a child, a dog, a car, etc. the name "Socrates"; however, then the world in question would not be the world in which Socrates does not exist.

you cannot deny the existence of that object.[21] And I believe this is exactly why we need proper names as devices of stable and reliable reference.

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[21] If it brings to mind the Russellian notion of logically proper names, it means that I am successful in the explication of my view.