

Subject and Predicate in Existential Propositions: A Survey of Frege’s Problem and Its Solutions


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Abstract: Frege argues that considering Socrates as an object in the proposition “Socrates exists” raises two problems. First, this proposition would be uninformative. Second, its negation entails a contradiction. Attempting to solve these problems, Frege claims that Socrates is representing the *concept* of a man whose name is Socrates. Therefore, existence is a second-order concept. This paper surveys the main modern theories about the types of existence, in order to find another response to Frege’s problems. For, if Socrates’ existence differs from the type that “exists” implies, “Socrates exists” is informative and its negation is not a contradiction. At last, this paper argues for an idea, in which “existence” is not a concept or property. Existence is the principle of the objects. So, “Socrates exists” is in fact “*the* existence is Socrates,” and “Socrates does not exist” is “there is no existence that be Socrates.” This idea could be an alternative for responding to Frege’s problems.

Keywords: Existential proposition; existence; Frege; object; concept.

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1. Introduction

During the history of philosophy, the meaning of “existence” has always been the subject of most ambiguous philosophical debates. From the era of ancient Greek philosophers to the present days, accomplished philosophers have clearly acknowledged this obscurity. As Aristotle emphasizes in *Metaphysics*: “the question which was raised long ago, is still and always will be, and which always baffles us—‘What is Being?’...” (7, 1028b, 1). And, Williamson (1988) believes, “Both actualism and anti-actualism are obscure doctrines, for the crucial term ‘exist’ is ambiguous” (Williamson 1988, 259).

From the late nineteenth century, however, Gottlob Frege made the ontological debates, at least in analytic tradition, more complicated when he published his idea about “existence” as a second-order predicate. His opinion drew the term “existence” into a new phase of difficulty, and added unprecedented problematic challenges to all previous quandaries. The epitome of Frege’s idea is that in an existential proposition,¹ the subject’s referent is not a specific object, but it is a concept. Indeed, such a proposition is expressing that the concept—which is the de facto subject’s referent—has, at least, one factual extension. Frege surprisingly demonstrates “Socrates (a specific object) exists” as neither true nor false, but a meaningless proposition. Instead, he presents “the man whose name is Socrates (a concept) exists (has an extension)” as a meaningful proposition, which could be true or false. This deconstructing idea about existential propositions was the opposite of the philosophers’ opinions up to that day and the common understanding of this kind of proposition. Accordingly, some philosophers were stimulated to look Frege’s problematic idea through, finding detailed interpretations about the entity of the subject’s (a proper name’s) referent.

¹ In this paper, an “existential proposition” is a proposition in the “x exists” format, in which “x” is a proper name of a specific object, such as Socrates, Eiffel Tower, etc. Frege typically applies the term “thought” instead of “proposition.” Anyway, of both “proposition” and “thought,” we mean the content of a sentence. So, two sentences might be different, while expressing a single proposition or thought, such as “John is Anna’s brother” and “Anna is John’s sister.” See (Frege 1960b, 49).

2. Frege's claim

Consider "Socrates was an accomplished philosopher." In this proposition, "Socrates," that is grammatically the subject, has a sense,² and a referent which is a person called Socrates in the realm of spatiotemporal objects. More importantly, this term could be saturated or unsaturated, or in a mathematical terminology, could be an independent variable (argument) or a function. "Socrates," in the above example, is saturated or is an argument, but "was an accomplished philosopher" is unsaturated or is a function, because it must follow a subject to become complete (Frege 1960c, 31). Frege calls saturated referents "objects," and unsaturated referents "concepts." The objects are normally the referents of proper names, while concepts are typically the referents of concept-words (Frege 1960b). For instance, human is a concept and the unsaturated referent of the concept-word "human."

Concentrating on predicative propositions, Frege indicates that the division on subject and predicate is logically unimportant. Therefore, he replaced these notions with argument/function distinction in which the referent of an argument could be an object or a concept while a function's referent should be a concept. In "Socrates was an accomplished philosopher," the subject refers to an object, while in "human is an animal," the subject is a concept-word and its referent is a concept. According to Frege, if a concept describes an object, such as "being an accomplished philosopher" in the former example, it is called a first-order concept. But, if a concept belongs to another concept, such as "being an animal" in the latter example, it is called a second-order or second-level concept. More precisely, Socrates falls under the concept of "being an accomplished philosopher." But human is not under the concept of "being an animal," it has a relation to "being an animal," or belongs to it. Frege demonstrates this meaning with this quote: "To do Justice at once to the distinction and to the similarity, we might perhaps say: An object falls *under* a first-level concept; a concept falls *within* a second-level concept" (Frege 1960b, 50–51).

² Frege believes in Indirect Reference Theory. According to this theory, a proper name has a sense in addition to its referent.

Back to the matter at hand, Frege argues that, in existential propositions, the predicate “exists” could not describe an object. It must predicate to a concept, and so it should be a second-order concept; or, as Frege himself says: “I have called existence a property of a concept” (Frege 1960 b, 48). It means that in “Socrates exists,” “Socrates” is a concept-word and its referent is the concept of Socrates, not Socrates as an object. There is an analogy between existential and numerical predicates in Frege’s works to illustrate this meaning (Frege 1960b, 53; 1953, 65). In Frege’s view, “the solar system has 9 planets” does not mean the solar system (an object) is under the concept of “having 9 planets.” But, this proposition connects the number 9 to the concept of “planets of the solar system.” So, the number 9 is a second-order predicate. Similarly, “Socrates exists” connects the existence to the concept of Socrates, and says that this concept is not empty.

As far as we can see, Frege has not given a clear argument for this claim. But, as Mendelsohn has pointed out (Mendelsohn 2005, 102), Frege’s argument could be concluded from his posthumous dialogue with his colleague and friend, *Punjer*. According to this document, Frege argues that if a subject’s referent of an existential proposition was an object, this proposition would not be informative. For, “Socrates exists” could be interpreted in two similar ways. First, the concept of Socrates has an extension, and second, there is at least one x that is identical with Socrates, or Socrates is identical with himself. And, “Neither in ‘A is identical with itself,’ nor in ‘A exists’ does one learn anything new about A” (Frege 1979, 62). In symbolic language, both interpretations could be shown as $(\exists x)(x=\text{Socrates})$. So, we could find no more information in this proposition than this linguistic identification. In other words, considering “Socrates exists,” we know we are talking about an existent Socrates, otherwise we can say nothing about it. Because, as Williamson demonstrates (Williamson 1999, 260), we cannot inform of absolute nonexistence. Thus, “Socrates exists” is equal to “the existent Socrates exists,” which is an uninformative proposition.

More importantly, the negation of an existential proposition is a self-contradictory proposition. “Hank (a Keebler elf)³ does not exist” or “Hank exists not” is equal to “the existent Hank, does not exist,” and it is an

³ This example has been used by Bennett in her 2006 paper (p. 270).

obvious contradiction (Frege 1979, 59). On this basis, Frege concludes that an existential proposition would be neither true nor false, but senseless, if its subject's referent is considered as an object (Frege 1960b, 50). Rejecting the objectivity of the subject's referent, Frege's only option is a conceptual subject's referent. This means that "exists" is a second-order predicate.

I emphasize the logical contradiction in "Hank does not exist," because only being uninformative—as with positive propositions—does not necessarily lead Frege to call "Socrates exists" senseless.⁴ As David Londy says, considering "not to exist" a property of objects, results in ridiculous conclusions: suppose a shepherd, who is looking for his nonexistent sheep, as well as those which exist (Miller 1975). Also, Ayer confirms the contradiction in "Hank does not exist," and, following Frege, introduces Hank as a concept.⁵ He indicates the grammatical similarity between existential and descriptive sentences as the source of a logical ambiguity. "Hank does not exist" and "Hank does not lie" have the same grammatical structure, but it does not follow that they also have logical similarity (Ayer 1949, 24–26).

3. Various approaches to existence

It seems that considering the subject as a concept is an acceptable solution for Frege's problem among many philosophers after him. With this innovation, an existential proposition is considered informative because in "Socrates exists" the audience is addressed that the concept of "a man whose name is Socrates" is not empty. Also, in "Hank does not exist" there is no contradiction, because it is expressing that the concept of "a Keebler elf whose name is Hank" is empty. Apart from Frege's solution, we attempt to study the possible another solution concentrated on various approaches to existence.

Here, the main question is "is there only one kind of existence?" For, a straight way to respond to Frege's problem is that the subject's type of

⁴ As far as we have searched, there is no attributing senseless to the other analytic propositions, such as "each husband is married" in Frege's works.

⁵ In addition to Ayer, most of other positivists have accepted Frege's idea about 'existence,' which is not an experienced object.

existence would differ from the type of the predicate “exists.” In a part of his dialogue with *Punjer*, Frege says: “if you are using the word ‘exists’ in the same sense as the expression ‘there is,’ then you have at the same time both asserted and denied the same predicate of the same subject” (Frege 1979, 59). Thus, if the type of Socrates’ existence differs from the type of “exists,” “Socrates exists” would be informative, because we predicate a concept to Socrates that he did not have before. Also, “Hank does not exist” has no contradiction if Hank’s existence differs from “exist.”⁶

Plantinga, for instance, distinguishes two kinds of existence: the existence of individual essences in possible worlds,⁷ and the existence of individual essences in the actual world (Plantinga 2003, 48–49). An individual essence, Plantinga says, is a property that can be exemplified by only one particular individual, such as Socrates. It exists in possible worlds, but it would be actual or exemplified only in the actual world (Plantinga 2003, 199–203; 1974, 45–63).

⁶ Today, the various kinds of existence could be discussed under the actualism category. After Kripke’s paper (1959) titled, “A Completeness Theorem in Modal Logic,” which was based on possibilism, some philosophers attempted to harmonize Simplest Quantified Modal Logic with the principal proposition of actualism: “Everything that exists, exists in the actual world.” Some actualists might share with Frege this idea that existence is a second-order concept, and some might not. In this paper, however, sharing this idea with Frege, comparing actualism and possibilism, and studying their strengths and weaknesses are not our task. What we want to do is employ their achievements to respond to this question: does “Hank does not exist” include a necessary contradiction? So, we will use the main important theories to reach our purpose, without discussing under which of these doctrines a theory could be placed. Concentrating on our central problem, we avoid engaging in unrelated debates, and simplifying our paper, we avoid using symbolic language as well as possible.

⁷ The idea of possible worlds emerged in Leibniz’s works for the first time. He believes that among uncountable worlds that could be created, God has created our actual world as the best. See (Leibniz 1988, 416). As Kripke says, we could apply other phrases, such as counterfactual situations or possible states, instead of possible worlds. For example, a possible world could be a world, in which Einstein was not the founder of Relativity Theory. Nevertheless, some like Lewis emphasize that possible worlds exist as well as the actual world. See (Lewis 2001, 84). For criticism to Lewis and helpful information about possible worlds, see (Stalnaker 1976).

On this basis, Socrates is an individual essence—we do not know whether he is actual. Expressing “Socrates exists,” we inform that Socrates is an actual existent. Therefore, it could be an informative proposition. In the same way, “Hank does not exist” means that the individual essence of Hank—which belongs to a possible world—is not exemplified and does not belong to the actual world. Therefore, the contradiction expressed by Frege is not a true one. Based on Plantinga’s view, we are not saying “the existent Hank does not exist,” but we are saying “the individual essence of Hank is unexemplified in the actual world.” So, in his work, Plantinga (1974) has said many times that there is a big difference between claiming that “Hank has the property of nonexistence” and claiming that “Hank does not exist.”

Plantinga’s view, however, has been criticized by the other philosophers,⁸ especially Zalta and Linsky. The central challenge in Plantinga’s view is: how can individual essences exist while they are not actual? What does existent mean without actuality? Indeed, this idea could fall in a chain of circular explanations. Zalta and Linsky, in their common paper, note that Plantinga’s attempt faces difficulties, and say:

The Problem is this: an essence such as *being Reagan* could exist at a world where Reagan doesn’t exist only if it is purely qualitative (i.e., doesn’t involve Reagan as a constituent). But a purely qualitative property could be exemplified by different objects at different worlds, violating clause of the definition of an essence. So, essences seem to require a non-qualitative component. But if so, then if the non-qualitative component is all that there is to an essence, the essence can no longer be seen as a property, for such non-qualitative, non-repeatable entities are not distinguishable from possible objects. If the non-qualitative component is just a part of the essence, then what else could such a component be but the contingent object itself? But then essences would ontologically depend on contingent objects. Thus, they could not exist unexemplified. (Zalta and Linsky 1994, 448)

In other words, if an essence such as “being Reagan” ontologically depends on Reagan himself, then if Reagan had not existed, the essence “being

⁸ For a brief review of criticism of Plantinga’s view, see (Forbes 1987).

Reagan” would not have existed, and so, essences could not exist unexemplified. Therefore, individual essences should be considered as nonexistent. In this situation, Plantinga must demonstrate how we can talk about non-existence; this is impossible based on Plantinga’s philosophical view.

Zalta and Linsky say this argument could be applied against any other theory, such as Fine’s theory,⁹ that entails contingent constituents of the worlds, in which the constituents do not exist.

Instead, Zalta and Linsky propose a new classification of existents, asserting that all existents are actual. In their view, the domain of existents contains abstract and concrete objects. Abstract existents, such as numbers and propositions, and concrete existents, such as Zalta, are the two extremes of the realm of existence in all possible worlds. But, there are many things that are not under these two categories. Zalta and Linsky call these things “possibly concrete objects.” These objects come in two sorts: “contingently concrete” and “contingently nonconcrete” objects (Zalta and Linsky 1994, 432). According to Tomberlin’s explanation, the former are just the ordinary concrete objects that exist in the actual world; here, they are concrete, although they fail to be so in other worlds. With the latter sort, however, these are individuals obeying a pregnant condition: they are nonconcrete in the actual world, concrete in other worlds, and yet they actually exist in our world (Tomberlin 1996, 274). For example, Hank is a nonconcrete existent in our world. But, he could be a concrete existent in a possible world. Based on this theory, the proposition “it is possible that Hank is a Keebler elf” entails “there is Hank that is possibly a Keebler elf” (Zalta and Linsky 1996, 283–86).¹⁰

Zalta and Linsky emphasize that the domain of objects (existents) among all possible worlds is the same. If x_1, x_2, \dots are all things in the world W_1 , they are also all things in the world W_2 . But, it could be that x_1 is concrete in W_1 , and nonconcrete in W_2 , while x_2 is nonconcrete in W_1 , and

⁹ According to Fine, there are two senses of “true” for propositions: an inner sense in which a proposition’s being true at world W requires its existence at W , and an outer sense in which it does not. For details of Fine’s theory see (Fine 1978) and for Zalta and Linsky’s criticism to Fine, see (Zalta and Linsky 1994, 450).

¹⁰ In other words, we can say the Barcan Formula, $\diamond(\exists x) F_x \supset (\exists x) \diamond F_x$, is valid in our actual world.

concrete in W_2 , and x_3 is concrete in both. Thus, considering Hank a concrete object in a possible world, and considering the same domain for our world and that possible world, we conclude Hank actually exists in our world too, but his actuality in our world is contingently nonconcrete.

Accordingly, “Socrates exists” could be informative if it is analyzed based on the variety of existents in Zalta and Linsky’s theory. When one utters this proposition, he absolutely considers Socrates as an actual existent. But, his audience does not know what kind of existent Socrates is. So, “Socrates,” as the subject of this proposition, at first might be supposed either a contingently nonconcrete or concrete object in the actual world. But, the rest of this proposition informs the audience that Socrates is a concrete existent. Similarly, “Hank does not exist” informs the audience that Hank is not a concrete object; he is a contingently nonconcrete object, which is concrete, at least, in a possible world. The mentioned contradiction in Frege’s view arises when the existence of Hank and the predicate “exists” are assumed the same. But, “the contingently nonconcrete existent of Hank is not concrete in the actual world,” does not entail any contradiction.

Apparently, Zalta and Linsky’s idea could solve both being uninformative and the contradiction problems. It, however, faces difficulties, which especially come from Bennett and Tomberlin’s criticisms.¹¹ Though some of these criticisms have been responded to,¹² it seems that some of them are still significant challenges for the idea of contingently nonconcrete objects.

Bennett, for example, says that considering these objects existents in the actual world violates our intuitions about the modal profiles of everyday objects (Bennett 2005, 301–302). When we talk about existents, we intuitively understand concrete objects. Menzel also asserts that only ordinary concrete objects and abstract objects fall under the same intuitive, historically well-grounded concept of (general) existence (Menzel 1993, 199).

Contingently nonconcrete objects are, in fact, alien for our linguistic intuition when we use the term “existent,” even if in some formulas, such as Barcan, the quantifiers’ domain includes these objects. Indeed, the root

¹¹ Although, there are many objections to Zalta and Linsky’s theory, we discuss only those that are related to our topic. Once again, we remind that this paper focuses on the existential propositions with a proper name as the subject.

¹² For example, see (Bennett 2009).

of Menzel and Bennett's objection is placed in supposing the same domain of objects for all possible worlds. We said before that Zalta and Linsky's argument to know Hank as an actual existent in the actual world is: what exists in a world is everything in the stock, concrete or not; the entire stock is the domain of a world, like the domain of all other worlds (Bennett 2006, 269). But, we have the right to ask why the domain of all worlds is the same? Since she could not find a convincing response, Bennett could conclude that no actually existing thing has the modal property "possibly being a Keebler elf" (Bennett 2006, 270). Accepting Bennett's linguistic intuition challenge, "Socrates exists" means "concrete Socrates is a concrete existent," and "Hank does not exist" means "concrete Hank is not a concrete existent." Thus, both Frege's problems (being uninformative and the contradiction) are left unsolved. She also argues that Zalta and Linsky's view has a lot in common with Plantinga's. Though, these two parties have three main differences, Bennett says, their structures are the same. Thus, the difficulties in Plantinga's view could also apply to Zalta and Linsky's (2006, 267–72).

Tomberlin has similar objections to Zalta and Linsky's view, but his criticisms are a bit more destructive. He shows that a single and fixed domain in every possible world not only is not justified, but also could result in some incompatibilities (Tomberlin 1996, 273–76). In simple language, Tomberlin says that in Zalta and Linsky's theory, possible objects have been confused with actual existents, even if we call them "contingently non-concrete objects." Instead, Tomberlin and his like-minded colleagues believe in possible objects, which are also known as *possibilia*. In this view, all objects are *possibilia*,¹³ but some of them are actual and the rest are mere *possibilia*. Thus, mere *possibilia* do not exist in the actual world, but might have existed.¹⁴ Menzel argues for this idea as follows: "A *possibile* is an

¹³ There is another version of this view that might be called moderate possibilism. According to this version, "all things are not possible," is false, but there are some ways to show that such an ontological realm is narrower than one might have supposed. See (Voltolini 2000).

¹⁴ For most of them, the quantifier " \exists " is used as "there is" and the quantifier "E!" is used as "exists" to assert the difference between the realms of *possibilia* and existents. But, for an actualist there is no difference between these two quantifiers.

object that, while not actually concrete, is nonetheless *possibly* concrete. Since nothing that is possibly concrete is abstract, it follows that *possibilia* do not exist” (Menzel 1993, 199).

So, based on this idea, “Socrates exists” could be informative in the way that: we suppose the audience does not know whether Socrates (a possible) is actual or a mere possible. By uttering this proposition, we say to the audience: he is actual. Also, “Hank does not exist” does not contain a contradiction if we consider this proposition as “the mere possible Hank is not actual.”

This view could be analogized with Meinong’s idea about the types of objects, in spite of obvious differences between these two theories (Zalta and Linsky 1994, 440). In Meinong’s view, objects are divided into the objects that have being and the objects that do not have being. Even, Meinong says, impossible objects, such as “round-square,” have a kind of objectivity and are placed under the latter category (Marek 2013). In other words, for Meinong the realm of objects is more extended than existents, and being an object is sufficient to be considered in mind and be the subject of propositions.¹⁵ Thus, in “Hank does not exist” there is no contradiction; though Hank is an object (and so we can talk about him), he does not have being and is not in the existents’ category.

However, all philosophers who think the domain of objects is more extensive than existents, first must cogently respond to this question: what does “being an object” mean without existence? As far as we can see, even the great possibilist philosophers, such as Kripke, only say Hank, for example, might have existed in the actual world. But, they do not illustrate what the ontological type of Hank is and how we can put it in a meaningful proposition as the subject. In other words, they do not clearly show the existential referent of Hank in “Hank does not exist.” It is not satisfying to say Hank refers to a possible, but nonexistent thing. For, the phrase “non-existent thing” could fall in a chain of circular explanations.

¹⁵ We remind the reader that what makes Frege’s problem a serious one is such a presumption that, “We should not admit merely possible objects when everything we want to say (and everything that we can say) can be said with what there actually is.” See (Fitch 1996, 68).

Bennett has attempted to respond to this question by introducing “proxy objects.” In simple words, she believes that each mere possibile has an existent proxy in the actual world in the way that there is a specific relation (proxy function) between possible objects and their proxies (Bennett 2006, 272). Bennett does not believe that anything exists without actually existing, but believes some things are actual without existing (Bennett 2006, 282). She calls something like Hank “quasi-alien,” clarifying that “although it is not in fact possible for there to be anything that does not actually exist, it is possible that some lesser-status things have the higher ontological status—and that is all our intuition about the possibility of aliens requires” (Bennett 2005, 302). As I understand, Bennett has not done anything except alter some words. “Being something actual without existing” is as far from our linguistic intuition as “mere possibilia” or “contingently nonconcrete object.” In Bennett’s theory, the problem is not transferring from a lesser to higher ontological status, or substituting a possible object with an existent. But, the problem is: what are we exactly talking about when we say “a possible actual nonexistent object?”

The other alternative theory has been presented by Timothy Williamson. Williamson shows that a phrase like “possible Hank” could be interpreted in two ways: “x is Hank and x is possible,” or, “it is possible that x is Hank.” In his view, the former interpretation is wrong, because it attributes “possible” to x, and the latter is true since it ascribes “possible” to “being Hank” (Williamson 2000, 201). Indeed, he says “possible” is the mode of properties, not objects. Thus, each object has a necessary existence. His argumentation is as follows (Williamson 2002, 233–34):

1. Necessarily, if I do not exist then the proposition that I do not exist is true.
2. Necessarily, if the proposition that I do not exist is true then the proposition that I do not exist exists.
3. Necessarily, if the proposition that I do not exist exists then I exist.
4. Necessarily, if I do not exist then I exist.
5. Necessarily, I exist.

He asserts, however, this necessary existence is not a concrete, physical existence. A physical existent, Williamson believes, is a spatiotemporal one,

but this is only a narrow domain for extensions of the concept “existent”¹⁶ (Williamson 1999, 259). Unlike physical existents, necessary existents are in the realm of logical objects, and so, Williamson calls them logical existents. This realm is not limited by time and space, and its domain covers a plethora of objects, such as propositions, rules, and of course, necessary existents, and thus we can talk about them. Therefore, based on Williamson’s view, Hank is a logical existent, but he is not a physical one, and so “Hank does not exist” is not a contradiction. Also, each physical existent could have a corresponding logical existent. But, logical existents do not have the properties of physicals. For example, the physical existence of fire has the property of burning, but the logical existence of fire does not. In the same way, “Socrates exists” means that the logical existence of Socrates, has a physical corresponding existent.

It seems that Williamson’s idea, on the one hand, has removed many of the previous challenges, and on the other hand, faces lesser challenges than the other views. However, as I understand this theory, there are some ambiguities in it. For instance, the realm of logical objects requires more clarifying. Could we call logical existents abstract objects? Is the logical existence of Hank independent from our mind? Or, without mind, is there no logical existence of Hank? And, basically, what is the relationship between the logical and physical realms?

4. Is “existence” a concept?

All above ideas about the variety of existents believe that “exists” in “Socrates exists” is a concept. The only problem is if it is a first or a second order concept. But, we have the right here to review existence as a concept. Undoubtedly, “being existent” is a concept; we can abstract this concept from the existents x , y , z , as well as children can abstract “whiteness” from “white wall,” “white chair,” “white dog,” etc. We can say, as we say about the other mental concepts, “these existents are under the concept ‘being

¹⁶ As far as I have seen, Williamson has not believed in concrete but non-physical existents. Some thinkers believe in these kinds of being and exemplify God as an instance.

existent,” and we can apply this concept to the existents other than x , y , z . It seems that when we say “existence is considered as Socrates’ property,” we mention this kind of existence. Let us call this kind of existence “conceptual existence.”

This is also possible for us to change our perspective we look at “existent Socrates” from. In the new perspective, we consider “Socrates” as an existence which has many properties, such as being a philosopher, keen mind, etc. In other words, “Socrates”—as a single unit of reality—can be intellectually analyzed into two aspects: an existence and a set of properties which are related to, or precisely the manifestations of, that existence.¹⁷ Of course, this “existence” is not a conceptual but a concrete fact, and let us call it “factual existence.” In this intellectual analyzing, factual existence should be prior to Socrates’s properties, because the properties need something to attach to. We must note that this priority does not implicate a physical distinction between existences¹⁸ and the Socrates’s properties; they are identical in reality.

The intellectual priority of existence to everything about Socrates, leads us to invert the proposition “Socrates exists” to “the existences is Socrates.” Indeed, existences is the principle reality of what is known as Socrates, but our natural language expresses this reality as the inverse of predication.¹⁹ In other words, “existences” is neither a first nor a second order concept, it is an object, and its properties reveal and describe it. Therefore, Frege’s problem on “Socrates exists” being uninformative is basically removed. Since, the de facto proposition is “the existences is Socrates,” which is informative and meaningful, just as “the existence_P is Plato,” etc.

¹⁷ The author thinks that this assumed hypothesis is not less reasonable than the others, though there is no perfect argument to prove, or at least to justify, it.

¹⁸ Avoiding confusion, we use “existences” for the factual existence of Socrates.

¹⁹ There is a theory called “Principality of Existence” in the context of Islamic Philosophy, which is founded by *Mulla Sadra*. The main claim in this theory is that existence is the principal reality of things, and quiddity is a subordinate reality. So, it is not an innovational theory of the author. Although, this theory is overlooked by modern analytic philosophers, it has many strengths that are valuable for philosophical debates. For more details about this theory, see (Asadi 2017).

Similarly, “Hank does not exist” is, in fact, “there is no existence that is Hank.” It means that among all existences, none of them is the factual existence of Hank. It could be seen that in the latter proposition, the subject belongs to “existences,” and this point makes it possible to utter and be a meaningful proposition. On the other hand, it is not a contradiction, because we do not say “an existent is not existent.” What we say is that “existence₁ is not Hank,” “existence₂ is not Hank,” and so forth. In this view, we do not want to reject the other types of existences completely. Hank might have another type of existence, such as logical, though it would not be concrete.

5. Conclusion

Disregarding philosophers’ conflicts about actualism and possibilism, it seems that employing their ideas cannot perfectly solve the problems brought up by Frege. As we have briefly shown in this paper, each of these views faces some difficulties that prevent it from being a generally acceptable theory. This does not mean all of these ideas are wrong, but it is a fact that they could not give us a satisfactory view of the challenges in existential propositions. If what we suggested here, which could be called “Principality of Existence Theory,” does not have less challenges than the other mentioned views, it does not have more than them. We do not say there is no difficulty in it, or it is the absolutely perfect solution. But, we claim that it could be an alternative way for thinking about and discussing existential propositions among all traditional ways.

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