

Remaining Azzouni matters

Apologies again to Jamin for not allotting him enough time.

His critical point is a very good one, (not surprisingly) parallel to my basic complaint about Meinongians generally: What is the noncommisive quantifier supposed to mean? (This is independent of and unmitigated by Azzouni's distancing of himself from Meinong, which consisted only of (a) perversely rejecting or pseudo-rejecting *Sosein* and (b) rejecting "mind independence.") We talked about truthmaking, and I think Ram was right to point out that Azzouni is pretty clear about truthmakers for sentences about nonexistent. But a truthmaker is not a truth-*condition* or other representation of meaning.

In light of Azzouni's correct insistence on the prevalence of the noncommisive quantifier in natural language and in light of his (*Noûs*) remarks on our ability to understand a primitive concept without even having a word or phrase that unambiguously expresses that concept, I expect he would reject Jamin's question. After all, why should there be *another English expression* that is synonymous with the noncommisive quantifier and is also somehow clearer than it?—which is what would be required for an illuminating answer. And on pp. 67-73 he explicitly argues (convincingly or not) that the noncommisive quantifier admits of no paraphrase, is not merely substitutional etc. If all that is right, then Azzouni is a *Relentless* Meinongian in my sense, i.e., one who simply insists that there are two distinct existential primitives and goes on to explain, "Shut up." And but, in light of ditto and in light of ditto, maybe Relentless Meinongianism isn't as bad as I made out in 1979/1994.

Thanks to everyone, especially Felipe, Jason and Jamin, for much-needed help with Azzouni interpretation. I like the hermeneutic principle that emerged: When you see the characteristic Azzounian hyperbole and oracular italics, do not take what he says literally, but dial the rhetoric *way* back and see what slipshod tendency of mind he is hyperbolically warning us against.

I've downloaded several reviews in addition to Thomas', and put them in the folder. Curiously, none of them helps with our main interpretive issues.

I return to a few issues that we didn't finish discussing.

Quantifier vs. predicate

Surprisingly, in fn 6 to Ch. 3 and in fn 32 of the article Azzouni concedes my point about trivial interdefinability. How does he then buttonhook that, instead of taking back all the hammering on "*existence predicate*" and saying "Sorry I spoke"? In the first footnote he says only (what is obvious) that to interdefine a predicate with the *noncommisive* quantifier would not serve his commisive purpose. In the second, he (correctly) accuses a particular opponent of begging the question. Thus, neither footnote is responsive. The mystery remains. (After class, Dean suggested a mild reading, nicely in keeping with the hermeneutical principle stated above: Maybe all Azzouni means is that *natural-language* quantifiers have nothing at all intuitively to do with ontology, and so when we get around to regimenting it would be mildly unfortunate to use a quantifier rather than a predicate to represent actual existence.)

Vs. Meinong: Making things up

As Jason rightly noted, one of Azzouni's two disagreements with Meinong is over what might be called the "realm" issue: He denies that nonexistent individuals inhabit a realm or sector of being that is in some sense independent of us. Rather, "*we make [them] up*" (p. 71, italics of course original).

It would perhaps be mere churlish wordplay to point out that as the phrase is used in English, to *make up* something, especially an individual, is to bring that individual into being. And Azzouni points out on p. 83n that we don't make fictional objects *out* of anything. But in any case his idea is too simple. Authors do make up their characters (on which, see Kingsley Amis' wonderful if mendacious essay, "Real and Made-Up People," variously reprinted). However: (1) They don't make up everything about them. Characters often surprise their authors, often by refusing to do what the author wants them to do or by taking over and morphing into something the author does not want. (2) More generally, as we shall learn from Lewis' "Truth in Fiction," *a lot* is true in a given fiction that the fiction's author didn't put there. (It's just false that "what's true about...fictional entities is only what the author *stipulates* as true of them" (p. 93, slightly out of context).) Perhaps more to the point, (3) there are garblunkajillions of nonexistent possibles that were never made up by anyone, have never so much as been thought of, etc.

Ontological independence

This notion, especially when specified as "mind" independence, is very important to Azzouni, indeed the basis of his test for actual existence. But what notion is it? *Not* what its name suggests, that a "mind independent" item is "independent of linguistic and psychological processes" (p. 97). For one thing, as Azzouni observes, the latter independence isn't necessary for actual existence. (To take the most obvious example, many linguistic and psychological processes themselves are actual, but could not very well be called independent of linguistic and psychological processes. Notice also, as reviewer Julian Cole does, that cultural and conventional artifacts such as the U.S.-Canadian border, the banking laws, and the game of chess are perfectly real too, though entirely made up by human beings.) What is "mind independence," then, given that it's not independence of mind?

'Ontologically dependent' here is *not* understood in the sense that...[a thing is], say, a psychological state or a linguistic item...but in the sense that it's (part of) the *content* of such a thing...in the more elusive sense that a hallucination of an elf (or apple) has as its content "an elf" (or "an apple") that exists in no sense at all.... (p. 98)

<>That's *it*.

Now, Azzouni can't mean that something is ontologically dependent if it's the intentional object (or part of the content) of someone's mental state. Because, obviously, you and I and the Old Well are the intentional objects of lots of actual mental states. Merely being an intentional object has no ontological implications. Rather, Azzouni must mean that the elf and the hallucinated apple are *merely* intentional objects; they are *only* in the mind of the hallucinating subject. Fair enough. But now what is it we're being told? An "ontologically independent" item must not be a merely intentional object. A merely intentional object is an intentional object that does not also actually exist. So what an "ontologically independent" item is, is an object (intentional or not) that does actually exist. Well, Azzouni was hoping to get the extension right, and he has; not much of a *test*, though.

(And don't forget all those nonexistent possibles that have never been and will never be intentional objects.)

What about regimentation, in the end?

Azzouni denies the existence of numbers. But he offers no paraphrastic program. He has no need to paraphrase, because according to him mere quantification over numbers is noncommisive.

So, in final science there will be mathematics that looks just like mathematics, except that the quantification over numbers will be marked as noncommisive. There will also be the standard commisive Quinean quantifier (or, if Azzouni is doing the regimenting, an existence predicate instead; doesn't matter). That will make final science not only Meinongian but Relentlessly Meinongian: two quantifiers, or one noncommisive quantifier and an existence predicate, each taken as primitive; shut up.

Quine would have a cow. Final science WILL NOT talk about Pegasus, golden mountains or Sherlock Holmes, damn you! But Azzouni has not urged that it should. The only nonexistents science will need are the numbers. (Or? It's an interesting question whether *final* science will need nonexistent ideal entities such as perfect vacuums or frictionless surfaces. I'm betting not. Marc?)

Quine would still accuse Azzouni of hypocrisy or self-deception. Science needs the numbers; Azzouni helps himself to the numbers, but, Wymanishly, adds that they "don't exist." What do they do, if they don't exist? They "are"? They "subsist"? They "blurg"?

But as before, this is a standoff. The noncommisive quantifier exists in English (remember, there are things that don't exist), and—somehow—we understand it. Azzouni is only taking it over into the canonical idiom.

Maybe Relentless Meinongianism isn't unintelligible. But I don't yet understand this version. (Yes, I know it's suspiciously similar to a view recently put forward by ME. But I'm not a Relentless Meinongian.)

P.S., incidentally, does Quine have any *argument* for regimenting everything into first-order logic? Sort of. First, the logic of final science must be extensional; no opacity-inducing operators such as modalities or propositional-attitude constructions.

That's because (here I am putting words in Quine's mouth that he would not like, though the idea is his) opacity is a sure sign of hidden structure. If a singular-term position does not allow substitution of co-referring expressions, then its occupant is doing something besides denoting the referent.

Second, intuitively, the world ultimately consists just of individuals and their properties and relations. Well, maybe there aren't any individual things, or properties, or relations. But as Bradley deplored, we don't know how to think except in subject-predicate terms or in generalizations using predicates. Maybe that's a psychological limitation; maybe the Evil Demon has our brains in a vice. But if there ever will be a final science, it will be done by us.

I daresay I'm not being fair to Azzouni. So far as I can see, though, I've been fair to the text. Anyone?