

E. E. Constance Jones on Existence in Fiction and Imagination*

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No one objects to admitting regions of, *e.g.*, Fiction and Imagination.

—Jones, “On the Nature of Logical Judgment,” 1893

1. Introduction

E. E. Constance Jones (1848–1922) was one of the first women to study philosophy at the University of Cambridge.¹ She worked mainly in ethics, metaphysics, and philosophy of language.² In this paper, I present some of her work in metaphysics and philosophy of language, particularly as it pertains to her views about existence in fiction and existence in imagination.

The plan for the paper is as follows. In Section 2, I situate Jones’s views about existence in fiction and existence in imagination both with respect to her views about other kinds of existence and with respect to other views about the reference of names from fiction and the existence of fictional characters. In Section 3, I discuss some of her views about what she calls the *application* of names and about the existence of the things that names apply to. On her view, names from fiction apply to fictional characters, which have existence in fiction. In Section 4, I discuss some of her views about what she calls *categorical* sentences, including sentences that contain terms that apply to mythological characters. On her view, a wide range of sentences carry a commitment to the existence of mythological characters. And, in Section 5, I discuss

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¹ For biographical overviews of Jones’s life, see Waithe and Cicero 1995: 25–27, Warnock 2004, Ostertag 2020: §1, Ostertag and Favia 2021: 328–329, Janssen-Lauret forthcoming. See also Jones 1922.

² For philosophical overviews of Jones’s work, see Waithe and Cicero 1995, Ostertag 2020.

a passage in which she talks about the existence of fairies. In that passage, she offers a novel account of negative existentials; and, I argue, her view has the resources to respond to two objections that come from Bertrand Russell's (1903, 1919) *Principles of Mathematics* and *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*.

2. Other Kinds of Existence and Other Views

2.1. Some other kinds of existence

On Jones's (1890) view in *Elements of Logic as a Science of Propositions*, there are many "different kinds of existence" (§11, p. 101).³ At one end of the spectrum, each thing has a unique kind of existence, which it does not share with any other thing (§2, p. 10). For example, there is a kind of existence that George Eliot has and that Sir Walter Scott lacks, and there is another kind of existence that Sir Walter Scott has and that George Eliot lacks. At the other end of the spectrum, there is "*existence itself*" or "*existence pure and simple*," which is a kind of existence that each thing shares with every other thing (§11, p. 88, p. 90).⁴ For example, George Eliot and Sir Walter Scott both have existence itself.

In between existence itself and the unique kind of existence that each thing has, there are various intermediate kinds of existence, which a thing might share with some other things but not with every other thing. One intermediate kind of existence is "physical existence," which is had by people and buildings (§11, p. 89). Another intermediate kind of existence is "fictitious" existence (§2, p. 9), which is had by fictional characters such as Dorothea from George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*. (Dorothea is what Jones might describe as a "fictitious character."⁵) Jones also talks about "*existence in imagination*" (§11, p. 90), which is had by fairies. And, on her view, yet another intermediate kind of

³ Unless indicated otherwise, citations are to *Elements of Logic*.

⁴ Italics in quotations from Jones occur in the original. I have made some minor changes in quotations, eliminating spaces (after left quotation marks and before right quotation marks) and altering punctuation to conform to a text that Jones quotes.

⁵ Jones 1911: 14.

existence is existence in what she calls “a Region of Supposition,” which is had by round-squares.⁶

On Jones’s view, fictitious existence—or existence in fiction—and existence in imagination are distinct from physical existence, since fictional characters have existence in fiction but lack physical existence, and fairies have existence in imagination but lack physical existence, too. In the rest of this paper, I leave open the question of whether existence in fiction and existence in imagination are distinct from each other. And, if they are distinct from each other, I leave open the questions of whether fictional characters have existence in imagination (in addition to existence in fiction) and of whether fairies have existence in fiction (in addition to existence in imagination). Jones describes existence in imagination as “a certain kind of existence in fairy tales and in imagination” (§11, p. 90), and she says that the golden mountain, for example, “‘exists’ in imagination or a fairy tale.”⁷ Since fairy tales are a kind of fiction, these remarks suggest that the distinction between existence in fiction and existence in imagination might not be so stark on her view. But she talks about “regions of, *e.g.*, Fiction and Imagination.”⁸ And on her view existence in a region is a kind of existence (§11, p. 101). If she takes Fiction and Imagination to be distinct regions, then existence in fiction and existence in imagination would be distinct kinds of existence. Still, even they are distinct kinds of existence, some fictional characters that have existence in fiction might also have existence in imagination; and, conversely, some things (*e.g.* fairies) that have existence in imagination might also have existence in fiction.

2.2. Some other views

Let’s take ‘Dorothea’ from *Middlemarch* as an example of a name from fiction, and let’s take Dorothea as an example of a fictional character. Consider the following two claims.

⁶ Jones 1893: 455. See also Jones 1911: 60–62.

⁷ Jones 1910–1911: 178.

⁸ Jones 1893: 455.

REFERENCE: ‘Dorothea’ refers to Dorothea.

EXISTENCE: Dorothea has some kind of existence.

As we will see in Section 3, Jones accepts both REFERENCE and EXISTENCE. But not everyone does.

Some reject REFERENCE. On Gottlob Frege’s (1892) view, for example, ‘Dorothea’ and other names from fiction do not refer to anything.⁹ One problem with this view is that it is not readily apparent how to account for the truth of sentences like

(1) Dorothea is a fictional character.

if ‘Dorothea’ does not refer to anything.¹⁰

Others accept REFERENCE but reject EXISTENCE. On Terence Parsons’s (1980) view, for example, Dorothea and other fictional characters are objects that do not have any kind of existence or being.¹¹ On Russell’s (1903) view in *The Principles of Mathematics*, mythological characters (e.g. “Homeric gods”) are objects that have being but lack existence.¹² A parallel view about fictional characters would be that Dorothea and other fictional characters are objects that have being but lack existence; on this parallel view, EXISTENCE is false, too.

Some accept both REFERENCE and EXISTENCE but are committed to further claims about fictional characters. For example, Peter van Inwagen (1977) and Saul Kripke (2013) accept REFERENCE and EXISTENCE. But, on their views, Dorothea and other fictional characters are *abstract* rather than *concrete*.¹³ That is, they accept the following claim.

ABSTRACT: Dorothea is abstract.

⁹ Frege might not deny EXISTENCE, but he would not affirm it either, since on his view ‘Dorothea has some kind of existence’ lacks a truth-value if ‘Dorothea’ does not refer to anything. See Frege 1892: 32–34.

¹⁰ See, for example, Caplan 2021: 387–390.

¹¹ See Parsons 1980, especially Chapters 3 and 7. See also Meinong 1904.

¹² Russell 1903: §427, p. 449. See also Russell 1903: §47, p. 43.

¹³ See van Inwagen 1977: 304; Kripke 2013: 73, 78.

Those who accept a plurality of concrete possible worlds might also accept both REFERENCE and EXISTENCE.¹⁴ But, on their view, Dorothea and other fictional characters are *merely possible* rather than *actual*.¹⁵ That is, they accept the following claim.

MERELY POSSIBLE: Dorothea is merely possible.

By contrast, Jones is not committed to ABSTRACT or MERELY POSSIBLE.¹⁶

To avoid problems posed by names that do not refer to anything, one might want to accept REFERENCE. And one might find a certain intuitive appeal to the view that Dorothea and other fictional characters have a kind of existence in fiction. So one might want to accept EXISTENCE. But one might not want to be committed to the view that Dorothea and other fictional characters are abstract or merely possible. So one might want a view that accepts REFERENCE and EXISTENCE without being committed to either ABSTRACT or MERELY POSSIBLE.

This is Jones's view. In what follows, I spell out some of the details of her view and present some of its virtues. Among other things, it allows Jones to offer a novel account of negative existentials and to respond to a pair of objections due to Russell.

3. APPLICATION and EXISTENCE

On Jones's view, a name *applies to* or *refers to* one or more things (§2, p. 5; §27, p. 200). In what follows, I use 'applies to' rather than 'refers to', since that is the terminology that Jones uses more often herself. Using 'applies to' instead of 'refers to', REFERENCE becomes the following claim.

APPLICATION: 'Dorothea' applies to Dorothea.

¹⁴ Lewis (1986) accepts a plurality of concrete possible worlds but does not discuss fictional characters. On Bricker's (2020: 34 n. 60) view, the reference of a name from fiction is indeterminate. So, on his view, REFERENCE and EXISTENCE might not be true as stated. Still, he might accept REFERENCE and EXISTENCE as super-true (i.e. true on all precisifications).

¹⁵ See Bricker 2020: 34, 34 n. 60.

¹⁶ For Jones's discussion of the abstract-concrete distinction, see §5, pp. 37–39.

I take REFERENCE and APPLICATION to be equivalent. In this section, I discuss Jones's acceptance of APPLICATION and EXISTENCE.

On Jones's view, every thing has at least some kind of existence. She divides things into *attributes* and *subjects of attributes* (§2, p. 12). For example, George Eliot is a subject of attributes, and *being a novelist* is an attribute. On Jones's view, the world consists of attributes and subjects of attributes, each of which has "at least a minimum of 'existence'" (§11, p. 88). Since every thing is either an attribute or a subject of attributes, and every attribute or subject of attributes has some kind of existence, it follows that, on her view, every thing has some kind of existence.

And, on Jones's view, every name applies to at least one thing. On her view, every name applies to at least one attribute or subjects of attributes. Speaking of the attributes and subjects of attributes in the world, she says that "to some of these Subjects [of Attributes] or Attributes any term [or name] must apply" (§11, p. 89).¹⁷ Since every name applies to at least one attribute or subject of attributes, and attributes and subjects of attributes are things, it follows that, on her view, every name applies to at least one thing.

We can now see that Jones accepts both APPLICATION and EXISTENCE. If every name applies to at least one thing and 'Dorothea' is a name, then 'Dorothea' applies to at least one thing. And, if 'Dorothea' applies to at least one thing, then presumably it applies to Dorothea. In that case, APPLICATION is true. And, if every thing has some kind of existence, then Dorothea has some kind of existence, too. In that case, EXISTENCE is true.

It might be helpful to work through a number of examples in which Jones says that a name applies to at least one thing, which has some kind of existence. She uses 'name' broadly. Among the expressions that she uses 'name' to apply to are proper names (e.g. 'George Eliot', 'Athena'), possessive descriptions (e.g. 'James Thomson's second

¹⁷ A term, for Jones, is a name that occurs as the subject-name *S* or the predicate-name *P* in a sentence of the form *S copula P* (§2, p. 5).

brother’, ‘George Eliot’s Dorothea’), and bare nouns (e.g. ‘bird’, ‘fairy’).¹⁸

For example, on Jones’s view ‘bird’ is a name that applies to one or more birds, each of which has several kinds of existence. On her view, each bird has a unique kind of existence, which it does not share with any other bird; existence itself, which it shares with every other thing; and physical existence, which it shares with every other bird but not with any fairies. Similarly, on her view ‘fairy’ is a name that applies to one or more fairies, each of which also has several kinds of existence. On her view, each fairy has a unique kind of existence, which it does not share with any other fairy; existence itself, which it shares with every other thing; and existence in imagination, which it shares with every other fairy but perhaps not with every bird. Jones lists ‘bird’ and ‘fairy’ as names that explicitly signify a sufficient number of attributes “to enable us to define and apply the name” (§2, p. 14). And, later, in *A Primer of Logic*, she lists ‘Ghosts’ and ‘Fairies’ along with ‘Men’ and ‘Thoughts’ as “Concrete names” that “apply to subjects of attributes.”¹⁹ The subjects of attributes that ‘Ghosts’ and ‘Fairies’ apply to are presumably ghosts and fairies. (I say more about Jones’s views about the existence of fairies in Section 5.)

On Jones’s view, any thing that we can think of must have some kind of existence (§11, p. 89). Since we can think of fairies, they, too, must have some kind of existence. It is not just that we can think about fairies; we can also imagine them. Fairies are thus among the things that she would call *objects of imagination*.²⁰ As objects of imagination, fairies—like all other things—must have some kind of existence.

Jones has an extensive typology of names and terms.²¹ In this typology, she lists ‘Athena’ and ‘Melpomene’ in the same category as ‘George Eliot’ and ‘Sir Walter Scott’, and she lists ‘George Eliot’s Dorothea’ in the same category as ‘James Thomson’s second brother’ (§3, p. 31 (Table 11)). On her view, each of these names applies to at

¹⁸ The examples are from §2, p. 14 and §3, p. 31 (Table 11).

¹⁹ Jones 1905: 12.

²⁰ See Jones 1908: 533, 1911: 75.

²¹ See §2, pp. 16–18 (Tables 1–3); §3, pp. 25–34 (Tables 4–16).

least one thing, which has some kind of existence. ‘George Eliot’, ‘Sir Walter Scott’, and ‘James Thomson’s second brother’ apply to people; ‘George Eliot’s Dorothea’ applies to a fictional character; and ‘Athena’ (‘the goddess of wisdom’) and ‘Melpomene’ (‘the Muse of tragic poetry’) apply to mythological characters. On Jones’s view, each of these things has its own unique kind of existence, which it does not share with any of the others, and each of these things has existence itself, which it shares with all of the others. In addition, George Eliot, Sir Walter Scott, and James Thomson’s second brother have (or had) physical existence; and Dorothea has existence in fiction.²²

Jones does not describe a kind of existence that Athena and Melpomene share with each other but not with George Eliot and Sir Walter Scott. Perhaps Athena and Melpomene have existence in fiction, or existence in imagination, or a similar kind of existence that one might call *existence in myth* or *existence in mythology*.²³ (Jones might describe Athena and Melpomene as “personages in mythology.”²⁴) On her view, that we can talk about some things tells us *that* they have some kind of existence, but it does not tell us *what* kind of existence those things have, since we might be talking about “the ‘real’ world” or about “mere fancy or fiction” instead.²⁵ Rather, on her view, we can tell what kind of existence some thing has from what attributes it has.²⁶

²² It might be that, on Jones’s view, George Eliot and Sir Walter Scott (and perhaps James Thomson’s second brother) are now among the “visible and tangible objects which *once had* physical existence, but which, in the form in which they are thought about, have altogether ceased to be, except in thought” (§11, p. 89). On time and different kinds of existence, see note 37.

²³ Jones routinely mentions names from Greek mythology—particularly names for the three Graces (i.e. Aglaia, Thalia, and Euphrosyne) and for some of the Muses (e.g. Mneme and Melete)—along with names for people and planets in her typology. See, e.g., §3, p. 33 (Tables 14 and 15).

²⁴ §3, p. 32 (Table 13); §6, p. 75 (Table 30).

²⁵ Jones 1911: 63.

²⁶ See Jones 1911: 63.

4. Categorical Sentences and Mythological Characters

4.1. Categorical sentences

In this subsection, I present Jones’s account of what she calls *categorical* sentences: that is, sentences of the form *S copula P*, where *S* is a subject-name and *P* is a predicate-name (§6, p. 46). In the next subsection, I discuss what her account has to say about categorical sentences that contain terms that apply to mythological characters.

Consider, for example,

(2) Jack is a fidgety child.

and

(3) Monmouthshire is not a Welsh county.²⁷

(2) and (3) are both of the form *S copula P*. In (2), ‘Jack’ is the subject-name *S*, ‘is’ is the copula, and ‘a fidgety child’ is the predicate-name *P*. In (3), ‘Monmouthshire’ is the subject-name *S*, ‘is not’ is the copula, and ‘a Welsh county’ is the predicate-name *P*. (2) is what Jones calls an *affirmative* categorical sentence (§6, p. 54); whereas (3) is what she calls a *negative* categorical sentence (§27, p. 199).

On Jones’s view, an affirmative categorical sentence *S copula P* is true if and only if, in that sentence, *S* and *P* apply to exactly the same things (§6, pp. 46–48).²⁸ For example, on her view, (2) is true if and only if, in (2), ‘Jack’ and ‘a fidgety child’ apply to the same person. Two perhaps surprising features of Jones’s view are worth flagging here.²⁹ The first feature is that, on her view, what a predicate-name applies to varies from sentence to sentence. For example, in (2) ‘a fidgety child’ applies to Jack and does not apply to anyone else; but, in

(4) Mary is a fidgety child.

‘a fidgety child’ applies to Mary and does not apply to Jack. The second feature is that, on her view, what a predicate-name applies to in a sentence depends on what the subject-name in that sentence applies to.

²⁷ Examples (2) and (3) are from §6, p. 64 (Table 19).

²⁸ For different interpretations, see Ostertag 2020: §2.4, forthcoming; Janssen-Lauret forthcoming.

²⁹ See Jones 1893: 441–442.

For example, the reason that ‘a fidgety child’ in (2) applies to Jack but not to Mary is that ‘Jack’ in (2) applies to Jack but not to Mary.

On Jones’s view, a negative categorical sentence *S copula P* is true if and only if, in that sentence, *S* and *P* do not apply to any of the same things (§6, p. 46, p. 48). For example, on her view, (3) is true if and only if, in (3), ‘Monmouthshire’ and ‘a Welsh county’ do not apply to the same thing.

As mentioned in Section 3, Jones uses ‘name’ broadly. Among the expressions that she uses ‘name’ to apply to are, not only proper names (e.g. ‘Jack’, ‘Monmouthshire’), but also complex demonstratives (e.g. ‘this satellite of Jupiter’) and quantifier expressions (e.g. ‘some of the planets’, ‘some of the rivers in America’). As a result, on her view categorical sentences include sentences in which the subject-name is a complex demonstrative or a quantifier expression. For example, on her view,

(5) This satellite of Jupiter is not so large as the moon.

(6) Some of the rivers in America are larger than any in Europe.

and

(7) Some of the planets are larger than the earth.

are all categorical sentences.³⁰

(5) is a negative categorical sentence. On Jones’s view, ‘This satellite of Jupiter’ in (5) applies to a particular satellite of Jupiter; and (5) is true if and only if ‘so large as the moon’ in (5) does not apply to that satellite.

(6) and (7) are affirmative categorical sentences. On Jones’s view, ‘Some of the rivers in America’ in (6) applies to some rivers (specifically, some rivers in America that are larger than any river in Europe); and (6) is true if and only if ‘larger than any in Europe’ in (6) applies to those rivers and does not apply to anything else. Similarly, ‘Some of the planets’ in (7) applies to some planets (specifically, some planets that are larger than the earth); and (7) is true if and only if ‘larger than the

³⁰ Examples (5)–(7) come from §6, p. 71 (Table 26), p. 75 (Table 30).

earth' in (7) applies to those planets and does not apply to anything else.

4.2. Mythological characters

In this subsection, I discuss what Jones's account has to say about categorical sentences that contain terms that apply to mythological characters.

Jones has an extensive typology of categorical sentences.³¹ In this typology, she lists sentences that contain terms that apply to people, heavenly bodies, and rivers in the same categories as sentences that contain terms that apply to mythological characters. For example, for each of the following pairs, she lists both sentences in that pair in the same category.³²

- (2) a. Jack is a fidgety child.
- b. Aglaia was a Greek goddess.
- (5) a. This satellite of Jupiter is not so large as the moon.
- b. This Muse of Hesiod is Terpsichore.
- (6) a. Some of the rivers in America are larger than any in Europe.
- b. Some of the Muses of Hesiod are better known than the others.
- (7) a. Some of the planets are larger than the earth.
- b. Some of the Muses are not very important personages in mythology.

Since (2b) and (5b)–(7b) are categorical sentences, her account of categorical sentences applies to them.

(2b), (5b), and (6b) are affirmative categorical sentences. On Jones's view, 'Aglaia' in (2b) applies to Aglaia; and (2b) is true if and only if 'a Greek goddess' in (2b) applies to Aglaia and does not apply to any other Greek goddess. 'This Muse of Hesiod' in (5b) applies to

³¹ See §6, pp. 62–76 (Tables 17–31).

³² See §6, p. 64 (Table 19), p. 71 (Table 26), p. 75 (Table 30).

Terpsichore; and (5b) is true if and only if ‘Terpsichore’ in (5b) applies to Terpsichore and does not apply to any other Muse. And ‘Some of the Muses of Hesiod’ in (6b) applies to some Muses (specifically, some Muses of Hesiod that are better known than the others); and (6b) is true if and only if ‘better known than the others’ in (6b) applies to those Muses and does not apply to any other Muses.

(7b) is a negative categorical sentence. On Jones’s view, ‘Some of the Muses’ in (7b) applies to some Muses (specifically, some Muses that are not very important personages in mythology); and (7b) is true if and only if ‘very important personages in mythology’ in (7b) does not apply to any of those Muses.

Altogether, (2b) and (5b)–(7b) are true on Jones’s view only if mythological characters (specifically, Aglaia, Terpsichore, some Muses that are better known than the others, and some Muses that are not very important personages in mythology) are among the things that names apply to. And, on her view, every thing that some name applies to has some kind of existence. So, on her view, if (2b) and (5b)–(7b) are true, then mythological characters have some kind of existence.

Some of the sentences that Jones mentions are reminiscent of the kinds of sentences that van Inwagen (1977: 302) and Kripke (2013: 62) use to argue for the existence of fictional characters. For example, (6b) and (7b) are analogous to

(8) Some fictional characters are better known than others.

and

(9) Some fictional characters are not very important in literature.

For the kind of argument that van Inwagen and Kripke offer, what is important about sentences like (8) and (9) is that they existentially quantify over fictional characters and describe them from a perspective that is external to the fiction. On Jones’s view, by contrast, it is not just quantificational sentences like (6b) and (7b) that carry a commitment to mythological characters; sentences like (2b) and (5b) do, too.³³

³³ On Jones’s view, sentences that describe mythological characters from a perspective that is internal to the myth (e.g. ‘Each of the nine Muses was a daughter of Apollo’,

5. Existence in Imagination

5.1. A “certain kind of existence in fairy tales and in imagination”

In *Elements of Logic*, Jones says,

(*) if I say—

Fairies are non-existent,

the existence that I deny is not existence of *every kind*, since fairies have a certain kind of existence in fairy tales and in imagination. This *existence in imagination* is, of course, distinct from the so-called *mental image* which accompanies not only our comprehension of the terms of propositions³⁴ [names in sentences] which we understand, but also our apprehension of objects which we recognise. What is denied to them in the above proposition [sentence] is (perhaps) “ordinary phenomenal existence, and at the time present.” (§11, p. 90)

In this subsection, I discuss what Jones says in the starred passage about a kind of existence that fairies have; and, in the next subsection, I discuss what she says in the starred passage about negative existentials and a kind of existence that fairies lack.

On Jones’s view, one kind of existence that fairies have is existence in imagination. In the middle of the starred passage, she says,

fairies have a certain kind of existence in fairy tales and in imagination. This *existence in imagination* is, of course, distinct from the so-called *mental image* which accompanies not only our comprehension of the terms of propositions [names in sentences] which we understand, but also our apprehension of objects which we recognise. (§11, p. 90)

Here, she distinguishes existence in imagination and the mental image that we have when we think about things that have that kind of existence.

‘Some of the Sirens were heard singing together’) also carry a commitment to mythological characters. See §6, p. 68 (Table 23), p. 75 (Table 30).

³⁴ Jones uses ‘proposition’ to apply to sentences (§6, p. 44). And terms are names. See note 17.

In *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, Russell (1919) criticizes a view on which some things have existence in fiction or existence in imagination. He says,

To say that unicorns have an existence in heraldry, or in literature, or in imagination, is a most pitiful and paltry evasion. What exists in heraldry is not an animal, made of flesh and blood, moving and breathing of its own initiative. What exists is a picture, or a description in words. Similarly, to maintain that Hamlet, for example, exists in his own world, namely, in the world of Shakespeare's imagination, just as truly as (say) Napoleon existed in the ordinary world, is to say something deliberately confusing, or else confused to a degree which is scarcely credible.³⁵

Although Russell might not have had Jones's view specifically in mind, his objection applies to her view. But, I think, her view has the resources to respond to his objection.

On Jones's view, to say that unicorns or fairies have existence in imagination is not an evasion; rather, it is to attribute to them a specific kind of existence, a kind of existence that they have and that other things lack. And, in attributing existence in imagination to some things, she is not confusing existence in imagination with any representations ("pictures, or a description in words"). In the starred passage, for example, she is careful to distinguish the existence in imagination that fairies have from the mental image that we have when we think about them. Nor is she confusing Hamlet's existence in imagination with Napoleon's existence "in the ordinary world." On her view, there is a kind of existence—namely, existence itself—that Hamlet and Napoleon share. But, in addition, there is a kind of existence that Hamlet has and that Napoleon lacks (namely, existence in imagination or perhaps existence in fiction), just as there is a kind of existence that Napoleon has (or had) and that Hamlet lacks (namely, physical existence).³⁶

³⁵ Russell 1919: 169.

³⁶ As a character in Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace*, Napoleon might have existence in fiction or existence in imagination. I am ignoring this complication in the text. And perhaps Napoleon no longer has physical existence. (See note 22.) Still, on Jones's

5.2. Negative existentials

On Jones’s view, we can truly say

(10) Fairies are non-existent.

even if fairies have existence in imagination. On her view, when we truly say a negative existential sentence like (10) we are not saying that fairies lack either existence in imagination or existence itself. Rather, we are saying that there is another kind of existence—for example, physical existence—that they lack. At the beginning and end of the starred passage, she says,

if I say—

Fairies are non-existent,

the existence that I deny is not existence of *every kind*, since fairies have a certain kind of existence in fairy tales and in imagination. ... What is denied to them in the above proposition [sentence] is (perhaps) “ordinary phenomenal existence, and at the time present.” (§11, p. 90)

I take it that “ordinary phenomenal existence, and at the time present” is something like physical existence.³⁷ (The phrase “ordinary phenomenal existence, and at the time present” comes from John Venn’s (1881) *Symbolic Logic*.³⁸ In that work, he mentions a contrast between “phenomenal or sensible existence,” on the one hand, and “the region of the imaginary,” on the other.³⁹)

In her discussion of fairies in the starred passage, Jones thus accepts the following three claims. First, fairies have some kind of existence; in particular, they have existence in imagination. Second, although fairies

view there is a kind of existence (namely, physical existence) that Napoleon had and that Hamlet never had.

³⁷ Jones suggests that existence at a specific time is a kind (or “determination”) of existence (§11, p. 92). So perhaps “ordinary phenomenal existence, and at the time present” is more specific than physical existence. I ignore this complication in the text. On existence at different times (particularly past, present, and future existence) as different kinds of existence, see Frischhut and Skiles 2013, Turner 2013: 275–276, McDaniel 2017: 78–108.

³⁸ See Venn 1881: 127.

³⁹ Venn 1881: 133 n. 1.

have existence in imagination, they lack another kind of existence; in particular, they lack physical existence. And, third, the truth of a negative existential like (10) requires that fairies have one kind of existence (so that we can talk about them) but lack another kind of existence (so that we can truly say that they “are non-existent”). As she later puts it, “in order to predicate non-existence in one sphere it is necessary to postulate existence in another.”⁴⁰

In *The Principles of Mathematics*, Russell (1903) criticizes “the existential theory of judgment—the theory, that is, that every proposition is concerned with something that exists.”⁴¹ The existential theory of judgment, he argues, has trouble with negative existentials, or what he calls “non-existential propositions”: that is, sentences or propositions that deny the existence of some things.⁴² Speaking of the existential theory of judgment, he says,

The theory seems, in fact, to have arisen from neglect of the distinction between existence and being. Yet this distinction is essential, if we are ever to deny the existence of anything. For what does not exist must be something, or it would be meaningless to deny its existence; and hence we need the concept of being, as that which belongs even to the non-existent.⁴³

Distinguishing between existence and being is one way to account for the truth of negative existentials like (10). Perhaps fairies have being, so it is not meaningless to deny their existence; and perhaps fairies lack existence, so it is not false to deny their existence.

But, even if Russell is right that *some* distinction is “essential, if we are ever to deny the existence of anything,” Jones’s discussion of (10) shows that the specific distinction that Russell draws—namely, the distinction between existence and being—is not itself essential to account for the truth of negative existentials. Instead, we can

⁴⁰ Jones 1893: 454.

⁴¹ Russell 1903: §427, pp. 449–450. Jones (1892, 1893) accepts the existential theory of judgment.

⁴² Russell 1903: §427, p. 450.

⁴³ Russell 1903: §427, p. 450.

distinguish between two kinds of existence: for example, existence in imagination and physical existence. This distinction allows Jones to propose a different account of negative existentials, one that, as far as I know, is novel. On her view, fairies have existence in imagination, so it is not meaningless to deny their existence; and fairies lack physical existence, so it is not false to deny their existence (at least if physical existence or something like it is the kind of existence that we are denying that they have). Jones's view thus shows that, contrary to Russell's objection, there is a way for the existential theory of judgment to account for the truth of negative existentials after all.

6. Conclusion

On Jones's view, every name applies to some thing, which has some kind of existence. In particular, the name 'Dorothea' (from George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*) applies to a fictional character, which has existence in fiction; and the names 'fairies' and 'ghosts' apply to fairies and ghosts, which have existence in imagination. Similarly, a wide range of names from mythology apply to mythological characters, which have some kind of existence—perhaps existence in fiction, or existence in imagination, or existence in myth—other than physical existence. On Jones's view, these names (broadly construed) include, not only proper names (e.g. 'Athena', 'Melpomene', 'Aglaia'), but also complex demonstratives (e.g. 'this Muse of Hesiod') and quantifier expressions (e.g. 'Some of the Muses of Hesiod'); and, where *S* is a name that applies to a mythological character, sentences of the form *S copula P* carry a commitment to the existence of mythological characters.

Jones's view has the resources to reply to two of Russell's objections. First, contrary to Russell's (1919) objection in *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, to say that Dorothea has existence in fiction, or that fairies have existence in imagination, is not a "pitiful and paltry evasion," nor is it "confused to a degree which is scarcely credible."⁴⁴ And, second, contrary to Russell's (1903) objection in *Principles of Mathematics*, saying that sentences like 'Fairies are non-existent' are both meaningful and true does not require distinguishing

⁴⁴ Russell 1919: 169.

existence and being, nor does it require rejecting the existential theory of judgment (according to which every sentence or proposition is about some thing that exists), provided that there are at least two kinds of existence: a kind of existence that fairies have (so that we can talk about them) and a kind of existence that fairies lack (so that we can truly say that they “are non-existent”).

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