

C J F Williams, formerly editor of *Analysis*, is a philosophical logician much influenced by the work of Arthur Prior. This is his second book, and it can fairly be regarded as a sequel to his first. By considering what might be meant in calling something true, *What is Truth?* (Cambridge, 1976) tried to show that many traditional problems about Truth are unreal since the meaning of 'What Percy says is true' is given, roughly, by 'For some  $p$ , both Percy says that  $p$  and  $p$ ' (echoes here of F P Ramsey). By considering what it might mean to say that something exists (by seeking to understand propositions of the form 'A's exist' or 'There are A's'), in *What is Existence?* Williams is led to doubt the sense of many traditional problems about existence, and he defends the view that existence is what the existential quantifier expresses, which, for Williams, means, among other things, that '— exist' is never a first order predicate, that sentences like 'Socrates exist' are not, by themselves, intelligible, and that existence is to be understood by understanding such notions as 'proposition', 'predicable' and 'variable'.

As Williams acknowledges, his thesis is not original. Its presence can be detected in Hume, Kant, Russell and Quine, all of whom are expounded and discussed by Williams. But the real hero of *What is Existence?* is Frege, whom Williams takes to have given a clear sense to Kant's view that being is not a real predicate. 'Frege's account of the concept of existence is the correct one', says Williams (p 30).

Frege's account of existence is connected with his conclusions about number. Number statements, for Frege, ascribe properties to concepts, and 'existence is

analogous to number. Affirmation of existence is in fact nothing but denial of the number nought. Because existence is a property of concepts the ontological argument for the existence of God breaks down' (*Grundlagen*, 53). Since this view has been attacked, Williams considers some recent criticisms (explicit or implicit) of the Fregean doctrine, and he argues that they are answerable in Frege's favour. In reaching this conclusion he considers a variety of problems, such as the nature of negative existential propositions (e.g. 'There are no dodos'), the question of embedded existential propositions (e.g. 'John does not know that Fred exists'), the status of fictional characters and possible worlds, and the connection between the copulative and existential senses of the verb 'to be' (the connection between the senses of existence in propositions like 'Tigers are lazy' and 'Tigers are').

It is terribly easy to talk nonsense about existence. One might suppose, for example, that since one can say things like 'Dombey is a character in Dickens' it follows that Dombey exists. Or one might think that if 'Dombey does not exist' is true, then Dombey must exist after all, for how else could it be true of him that he does not exist? The early Russell seems to be saying something like this in *The Principles of Mathematics*. Here he writes: 'Being belongs to whatever can be counted. If  $A$  be any term that can be counted as one, it is plain that  $A$  is something, and therefore that  $A$  is. "A is not" must always be either false or meaningless. For if  $A$  were nothing, it could not be said not to be; "A is not" implies that there is a term  $A$  whose being is denied, and hence that  $A$  is. Thus unless "A is not" be an empty

sound, it must be false – whatever *A* may be it certainly is. Numbers, the Homeric Gods, relations, chimeras and four-dimensional spaces all have being, for if they were not entities of some kind, we could make no propositions about them' (p 449). But existence is not a property of objects, of individuals. And 'X does not exist' does not entail that something is not the case with X. The correct account of what 'existence' means is the one which Russell finally adopted, the one which is clearly stated by Frege. And the great merit of *What is*

*Existence?* is that it explains why this is so. The book is a technical one, liberally peppered with Polish notation. So I doubt that it will readily endear itself to readers uninterested in logic. And it will probably be simply ignored by those for whom existence or being is something that can be named. Be that as it may, the book is a fine contribution to philosophy. It is packed with careful argument and it ought certainly to be studied by anyone seriously concerned with its subject matter.

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**NUCLEAR NIGHTMARES** by Nigel Calder. *Penguin, 1981. pp 168 £1.50.*

**INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING** by Anthony Verrier. *Penguin, 1981, pp xxxi + 172 £5.95.*

Four possible routes to nuclear war is the subject of a very alarming and depressing book by the distinguished science commentator Nigel Calder: first use by NATO of their battlefield weapons in Europe; proliferation and local use of nuclear weapons leading to super-power involvement; temptations to behead the command and control system of the other side; temptation in a moment of great tension to strike out the other side's nuclear weapons before they can be used. The simple game of nuclear deterrence is, as he says, now over, and speculations about "fighting" and "winning" a war with nuclear weapons fill the air of the defence establishments yet again. The weapons are certainly made, in place and targeted for many possible plans – products of the military imagination and potentially fatal to us all. This book makes me wonder how we have managed so far to escape nuclear death. It makes the everyday world seem a very fragile and transitory achievement. In the end the accumulated danger is too much for the mind to take in. This short book packs in

more loaded information than most of us can emotionally cope with. One of the dangers at this stage of the public uproar about nuclear weapons is that excess of information becomes numbing for the many and a fascinating field of expertise for the few: the technology of Armageddon. But one useful thing books of this kind can still do is to show us what a blind, confused and musclebound monster Western "defence" really is. Neat policy statements by governments are just weak attempts to give the impression of rationality and control, when both of these essential qualities for any security system are in extremely short supply. But what can the ordinary citizen do with these revelations of contradictions, short-term gambles for ultimate stakes and reluctance to think of the future other than in terms of weapons procurement for genocide? In our minds I suppose we have already abolished the future.

Any faint glimmer of hope becomes a beacon in this darkness. A glimmer is provided by the chequered history of the UN