What Becomes of the Damned: Annhilationism Consistent with Nonexistent Objects

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Abstract: Annihilationism provides a fruitful point of contact between philosophers and theologians for further reflection on nonexistence. In this paper I articulate a key commitment of annihilationism; namely, that some persons cease to exist. Such a commitment, I argue, amounts to the claim that some persons exist at time *t* and then do not exist at *t*+1, become 'annihilated objects.' Claims about annihilated objects induct the annihilationist into a wider realism/anti-realism debate about nonexistent objects. I survey some major viewpoints in this debate. I then draw out some implications for each view for the annihilationist's commitment to annihilated objects. I show that annihilationism is consistent with some forms of realism and anti-realism and inconsistent with others.

Keywords: Nonexistence, Death, Annihilationism, Hell, Meinongianism, Eschatology

Recent theological interest has ignited over the nature, purpose, and moral value of hell. Traditional theories of what hell is or will be like for unrepentant persons have received considerable attention and criticism, not without equally fiery rebuttals. Lacking in this heated exchange is a sustained inquiry into what ontological commitments, if any, proponents of a particular theory of hell incur. The present paper hopes to meet this lack with such an inquiry.

In this paper I investigate the ontological implications of a key commitment of annihilationism; namely, that some persons cease to exist. I begin in Section 1 with an articulation of the basic thesis of annihilationism regarding the fate of unrepentant persons. Section 2 inducts the reader into some of the main positions on offer in the realism/anti-realism debate about what exists and does not exist. No exhaustive survey is attempted. Section 3 situates annihilationism's commitment

within this debate. Here I assess for compatibility annihilationism, realism, and three anti-realisms. I show that annihilationism is compatible with realism and some anti-realisms about non-existent objects and inconsistent with others. Throughout I address objections and flag worries.

1. Annihilationism; or, What No Longer Exists

To begin, some definitions. Annihilationism is the theological view that at least some persons (that is, unrepentant persons) cease to exist after enduring a finite punishment in hell. Primarily scriptural argumentation has been deployed to support annihilationism as the true Christian perspective on the fate of unbelievers. Such argumentation will not be addressed here. Relevant for my purposes will be the following assertion, what I will call the Twofold Annihilationist Commitment.

> *Twofold Annihilationist Commitment (TAC): For some unrepentant subject S, two contiguous states of affairs obtain: i) at time* t *S exists in hell, and ii) at any future time t+1 S no longer exists anywhere.*

TAC says that some person ceases to exist after a finite time in hell (Plantinga Thompson and Lundberg 2010, 409; van der Kooi and van den Brink 2017, 748–749).[1] There is a temporal sequence to respect here. TAC does not specify at what particular time S ceases to exist; it is sufficient for the annihilationist to hold that S ceases to exist at some future point in time. Whenever that is, the time will come. Built into annihilationism then is an existence thesis, some claim about what exists and whether what exists will cease to exist. TAC amounts to the claim that some persons no longer exist. Call such persons 'annihilated objects.' Thus articulated, TAC amounts to the claim that there are (or will be) annihilated objects.[2]

To see this, consider the following argument. For any unrepentant subject S, if S is annihilated, then S ceases to exist. This much seems evident from TAC. Suppose some S, say Tumby, is annihilated. By *modus ponens*, Tumby ceases to exist. Now, it also seems evident that, for any unrepentant subject S, if S ceases to exist, then S

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[1] See Erickson (2013, 1135–1138) for critical discussion of varieties of annihilationism.

[2] The language of "objects" seems broad enough to include entities outside this theological view, like hats. Taken this way, TAC seems trivial: any concrete particular (e.g., a hat, a person, or a mongoose) exists at one time and then ceases to exist at another. To assuage worries of triviality, I stress the contextual import of the debate. In this paper, following theological and philosophical literature about death and the afterlife, annihilationism is a theological view about what becomes of damned persons in their afterlife. The rest of the paper should be understood as restricted to that universe of discourse. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.

becomes an annihilated object. Hence, if Tumby ceases to exist, then Tumby becomes an annihilated object. By *modus ponens*, it follows that Tumby becomes an annihilated object. Therefore, there seems to be a valid path of inference from TAC to the claim that someone becomes an annihilated object, which is just to say that someone becomes a nonexistent object. This informal argument will motivate some of the arguments for (in)consistency to be developed below.

Distinct from, yet a chief motivator for annihilationism is conditionalism. Conditionalism is the thesis that souls or selves are not essentially immortal, but can be granted immortality provided one becomes saved (Erickson 2013, 1135–1136; Harwood 2022, 769–770). Relevant for my purposes is this. Conditionalism is a thesis about what is essential to human persons, what persons possess simply by dint of being persons.[3] Should they lack such a property, they would no longer be persons. Annihilationism, on the other hand, is not about what is essential to human persons, but about what becomes of unrepentant human persons; namely, that they become extinct. TAC accentuates this distinction by drawing attention to two contiguous states of affairs at which one and the same individual exists and then no longer exists, i.e. becomes an annihilated object. Thus, while a key motivation for annihilationism, conditionalism is a distinct metaphysical thesis.[4]

2. Realism/Anti-realism; or, Metaphysical Necromancy

Given that TAC endorses a metaphysical thesis about what exists and no longer exists, it is possible to situate annihilationism within a broader ontological debate about what is and is not real. The goal of this section is to explain what this debate is and explain some basic commitments of some views within it.[5]

2.1 Realism v. Anti-Realism; or, What's the Problem?

Roughly, one can characterize the realism/anti-realism debate as a debate about ways things can be real. Brock and Mares (2007) describe the debate as occurring along two axes: an existence axis and an independence axis. The existence axis locates one's answer to the questions Does something exist? and if so, what?. The independence axis locates one's answer to the question Does what exists exist independently of us (i.e., of our minds, models, or mental states)? In brief, the chief

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[3] Oya (2019).

[4] Theologians may also describe conditionalism as an anthropological thesis. Some systematic theologians describe anthropology as the doctrine of humanity and human nature.

[5] This section draws heavily on the language and taxonomy in Brock and Mares (2007).

questions defining the realism/anti-realism debate are questions about what exists and whether what exists does so objectively, i.e. mind-independently.[6] Realists and anti-realists disagree over these questions and offer varied answers to them.

Realists and anti-realists also disagree over the scope of ontological commitments they wish to make, or just how many concrete particulars there are independent of one's mind and models. This disagreement engenders local and global variants of realism and anti-realism.[7] To preserve economy and respect TAC's limited scope of annihilated objects, I will forego discussion of global variants and instead limit myself to the local variants. Local anti-realism asserts that some entities of some kind do not exist independently of one's mind, models, or mental states. Local realism, on the other hand, asserts that some entities of some kind exist independently of one's mind, models, or mental states.

For both views I say 'some entities of some kind' because realists and anti-realists, in addition to disagreements about scope, disagree about domain. That is, they disagree over what kinds of objects exist. One can be an anti-realist about, say, fictional objects like Sherlock Holmes or Mr. Tumnus, yet a realist about mathematical objects like numbers.

What sort of (anti-)realist an annihilationist may need to be will be addressed below.

2.2 Realism v. Anti-Realism; or, What are They Saying?

Before I situate annihilationism within this debate, more must be said regarding the particular local realisms and anti-realisms on offer. This section elucidates some of these views. No particular view is argued for. To do so would compromise the primary goal of this paper; namely, to assess compatibility between annihilationism and some ontology.

For present purposes, I will restrict my attention to three minimal antirealisms: error theory, prefix fictionalism, and non-factualism. According to error theory, claims that there are objects of some kind have truth-value. Statements or sentences about said objects are also used to assert or express belief. So, if someone said to the error theorist that there are unicorns, the error theorist is committed to saying that such statements are either true or false and can be used to assert that someone believes or takes it to be the case that there are unicorns. Error theorists go one step

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[6] Throughout I use 'objectively' and 'mind-independently' almost interchangeably, in keeping with the disagreement literature. Where necessary, I distinguish them.

[7] For more details, including minimal and robust versions of forthcoming views, see Brock and Mares (2007).

further: such claims entail falsehood. Though the statement is sensible and assertible, it entails a falsehood.

Fictionalists agree with error theorists that claims about what there is have truth-value and are assertible; fictionalists disagree that such claims are false; rather, they are *true*. For this paper, I will focus on prefix fictionalism. Prefix fictionalists take claims like "2 exists" or "Unicorns are nearly extinct" as paraphrased claims. "Unicorns are nearly extinct," for instance, paraphrases the longer claim "According to Peter Beagle's *The Last Unicorn*, unicorns are nearly extinct." The clause "according to the story/theory" prefixes claims about what is real and what is not by situating the claim in the context of the story in question. In doing so, prefix fictionalists can say that the realist offers useful stories or theories, and yet evade realist ontological commitments about, say, unicorns while helping themselves to realist language.

As a brief apology, let me say why I think fictionalism is worth a theologian's serious consideration in this debate. Some may think it is not, because basic religious claims (e.g., "God created man in his own image") talk about persons, divine and nondivine, as though they really exist. One may adopt a Wittgensteinian, language-game approach to religious language. This is an option that has held some sway in philosophy of religion in the past (see chapter 3 in Runzo 1993). A better strategy, I think, will appeal to narrative theologies and models-of-God discourse. Some theologians may already have some fictionalist sympathies due to recent interest in postliberal narrative argumentation (cf. Yandell 2001). Contemporary models-of-God discourse, too, allows one to be a fictionalist in the present sense, since one may interpret claims about annihilated objects according to some fictionalist model of the afterlife. So, fictionalism is worth a theologian's serious consideration in this debate, if only because some element of fictionalism already is operative in theology (e.g., Runzo 1993). The present paper, then, merely offers one more way in which a theologian can be a fictionalist with respect to death and the afterlife.

So much for prefix fictionalism.[8] The last view to be elucidated is non-factualism. Non-factualism asserts that claims like "there are numbers/unicorns" are not truth-apt, and thus cannot sensibly be true or false. These sorts of claims, rather than assert or commit one to a proposition to be defended in disagreement, such claims do something else. They express approval or disapproval, prescribe a course of action, etc. Non-factualists, then, are committed to glossing claims that "there are Fs" for some term F as non-cognitive claims that express non-cognitive attitudes. So, claims

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[8] For a thoroughgoing, notable variant of fictionalist antirealism, see Walton (1990).

that "Unicorns are nearly extinct," for instance, may be glossed as "See to it that there are more unicorns!" or "Would that there were more unicorns!"

In sum, realisms and anti-realisms disagree over: the meaningfulness of assertoric statements about some domain of entities (color, numbers, etc.), the scope of the domain, and whether it is true that the entities within the domain's scope exist independent of one's mind, models, and mental states. No arguments for any particular view have been given. Instead, it is hoped that the views on offer provide a decent, though not exhaustive sampling of views regarding what is real. To be sure, nuances exist, and they take this paper too far afield. Most relevant for this paper is whether the commitments of the foregoing and TAC are mutually consistent. In the next section, I investigate whether TAC is compatible with realist commitments about persons.

3. Annihilationism and Realism; or, What Becomes of Tumby?

Suppose one is a local realist about persons, selves, or other minds. Such a commitment entails commitment to some other claims about persons or selves. We can summarize the set of commitments as follows.

> *Realism re: Persons (RP): Realism about persons commits one to the following: (i) persons exist, (ii) one can make truth-apt claims about them, (iii) at least some of these claims are true or false, and (iv) persons exist independent of one's mind and mental states.*

RP summarizes both the propositions that make up realism about persons, as well as what one who endorses these propositions must defend if challenged. Thus, RP captures the content one will be responsible for defending if endorsed.

For the sake of argument, suppose one is also an annihilationist and endorses TAC. Recall that TAC is a twofold commitment.

> *Twofold Annihilationist Commitment (TAC): For some unrepentant subject S, two contiguous states of affairs obtain: i) at time t S exists in hell, and ii) at any future time t+1 S no longer exists anywhere.*

TAC says that one and the same person exists at one time and then no longer exists. It isolates the metaphysical commitments relevant to the realism/antirealism debate summarized in Section 2. It remains to be seen what being a realist about persons requires the annihilationist to say about annihilated objects.

By implication, RP commits one to knowing non-trivial things about persons. One knows that persons can be rational, have souls, are inherently mortal, have a personality, and so forth. Given TAC, however, at least one unrepentant person—say, Tumby—will cease to exist. He will become an annihilated object. When Tumby transitions from existence to nonexistence, how would that affect realist interpretations of what one non-trivially knows about Tumby post-annihilation? Are they still truth-apt?

One who endorses RP and TAC should say yes, they are. Claims to knowledge about Tumby post-annihilation are still truth apt. Moreover, these claims are true. They ought to be, for the proposition "Tumby no longer exists" needs to be true at some point for the annihilationist. If it is false that Tumby no longer exists, then the subsequent state of affairs required by TAC doesn't obtain for Tumby; thus, the annihilationist would be inconsistent in holding annihilationism and truth-apt yet false statements about persons who no longer exist. Put more straightforwardly:

> AO1) For some unrepentant subject S, two contiguous states of affairs obtain: i) at time t S exists in hell, and ii) at time t+1 S no longer exists anywhere. (TAC)
> AO2) Persons exist
> AO3) Someone can make truth-apt claims about persons
> AO4) Some claims about persons are true and some are false (AO2-4, minimal realism)
> AO5) Persons exist independently of one's mind or mental states (AO2-5, RP)

By elimination, we get

> AO6) Tumby exists (from AO2)

Now suppose further that Tumby is unrepentant and goes to hell. We can derive the following:

> AO7) At time t, Tumby exists in hell (from AO1.i)

and

> AO8) At t+1, Tumby no longer exists anywhere (AO1.ii)

AO8 seems equivalent to the proposition

AO8*) At t+1, there is no Tumby.

AO8* is a claim about an annihilated object, an object subsequently nonexistent. Tumby no longer exists, and so there is no Tumby to be anywhere forever after. Provided that the inferential path from AO1 to AO8* is valid, then AO1 yields AO8*. This seems to amount to the following: TAC and RP together yield AO8*, a commitment about nonexistent objects *via* an annihilated object.

But something curious happens if AO8* is true. Come t+1, Tumby no longer exists. Once the time comes when Tumby ceases to exist, what import, if any, does that have for the claim that there is no Tumby? One concern is that the claim that there is no Tumby becomes meaningless. Since the meaning of sentences is composed of and dependent upon the meaning of their parts, including names, predicates, and so on, sentences such as "There is no Tumby" are not composed of meaningful parts. Why? The proper name 'Tumby' picks out no (extant) individual at any future moment t+1, because Tumby is not there to be picked out by that name. So, the whole sentence "There is no Tumby" is meaningless because the proper name picks out nothing, and so there is no meaning out of which to compose the whole sentence. Thus, sentences like "There is no Tumby" are either not truth-apt or are truth-apt and yet false.

Suppose that's the right account of how sentences get their meaning.[9] What then? Two worries emerge. First, such a commitment seems to contradict essential commitments of RP. Recall that RP is a fourfold commitment. The second commitment of RP is that one can make truth-apt claims about persons. From the foregoing, we can derive a contradiction. For ease of presentation, let me introduce Timby, Tumby's surviving, existent sister. Picking up from AO8*,

AO8*) At t+1, there is no Tumby anywhere.
AO9) At t+1, Timby can make truth-apt claims about Tumby (from AO3).[10]
AO10) If at t+1 there is no Tumby, then at t+1 no one can make truth-apt claims about Tumby.
AO11) At t+1, no one can make truth-apt claims about Tumby.

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[9] Cf. Azzouni (2010).

[10] Technically, this is not an instantiation of AO3, as AO3 makes no reference to a time. However, it seems that, so long as Timby survives Tumby, she can do as AO9 says. Interpret 'from,' then, in the sense that the proposition is a "putative [fact] that constitute[s] part of the stagesetting of the problem" (cf. Rescher 2001, 33).

AO11 contradicts AO9. It is inconsistent to commit oneself to both AO9 and AO11. Since Timby is arbitrary, AO9 can be generalized to

> AO12) At $t+1$, someone can make truth-apt claims about Tumby.

AO12 more explicitly contradicts AO11, since it is not the case both that, at one and the same time annihilation, someone can make truth-apt claims about Tumby and *no one* can. Provided the logical path from AO1 to AO12 is valid, then AO1-AO12 yields a contradiction. The presence of contradiction betrays inconsistency between RP and TAC.[11]

An anonymous reviewer suggests the following remedy. Perhaps it is sufficient for a referring term to be meaningful that it, at some time or other, picks out an existent object, not at all times. Hence 'Tumby' is meaningful if at some time or other it picks out existent Tumby, not all times. This would not save RP and TAC from contradiction, since it does not block entailment from AO9 or AO12 to AO11. It still follows that, at one and the same time, both no one can make truth-apt claims about Tumby and someone can.

Second, provided AO1 yields AO8*, another (potential) contradiction emerges. Recall the third commitment of RP: some claims about persons are true or false. If the foregoing argument shows a contradiction between the meaningfulness or truth-aptness of such claims and Tumby's nonexistence, one can infer that the third commitment of RP is false. Since no claims about annihilated persons are meaningful (because their names no longer pick out any individual and thus fail to contribute meaning to the whole sentence), no claims about such persons will be true or false, because they can't be. Maybe this is obvious and intuitive to some. At the very least, for those with competing intuitions, I have given them an explicit argument which would be valid regardless of intuition.

If the foregoing is sound, one who embraces both TAC and RP must, I propose, do one of the following. First, she can deny TAC and so deny annihilationism. This would allow one to make truth-apt (and true or false) claims about Tumby without ontological commitment to annihilated and nonexistent objects. Doing so would allow her to maintain RP at the expense of TAC. Second, she can deny RP wholesale. Abandon realism about persons and opt for an antirealist theory so as to maintain

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the language and revised semantics of claims about annihilated objects. Third, she can revise RP and TAC to create variants that escape inconsistency, while staying true to the heart of each commitment. More options may be available. The presence of contradiction does not specify which commitment one ought to give up; it merely betrays inconsistency. That said, contradictions have emerged, and I leave it to one who affirms TAC and RP to resolve them as they see fit.

Where does this train of commitments leave the annihilationist? So long as one holds annihilationism and realism about persons, consistency requires that one affirm that claims about annihilated objects are not only truth-apt but true as well. That is, one may need to accept annihilated objects are (in some sense) real yet non-existent objects.

4. Annihilationism and Antirealism(s); or, Whence Cometh Tumby?

What of antirealisms? This section recapitulates and formalizes antirealist commitments about persons, and then assesses for compatibility with TAC.

4.1 Error Theory

Suppose one is an error theorist about persons, selves, or other minds. Recall that error theory is an antirealist view whose basic commitment is that some objects of some kind (in this case, persons) do not exist. Such a commitment entails commitment to several other claims about persons or selves. We can summarize the set of commitments as follows:

> Error Theory re: Persons (ET): *Error theory about (the existence of) persons commits one to the following: (i) claims about persons are truth-apt, and (ii) all such claims entail falsehoods.*[12]

ET says that claims about persons are truth-apt. They are assertible and so can be treated as registering a commitment in a dialogue. In the context of this paper, any claim about the existence of persons, though truth-apt, entail falsehood. As will be seen, commitment to both ET and TAC yield impressive inconsistencies.

With this in mind, we can test ET's consistency with TAC as follows. Assume ET and TAC:

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[12] My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for correcting some early errors in my articulation of this view.

AET1) For some unrepentant subject S, two contiguous states of affairs obtain: i) at time *t* S exists in hell, and ii) at any future time *t*+1 S no longer exists anywhere. (TAC)

AET2) Some persons do not exist. (Local antirealism)

AET3) Claims about persons are truth-apt.

AET4) All entailed claims about the existence of persons are false. (AET3-4, ET)

Taken together, where do these commitments take us? Consider Tumby again.

AET5) Tumby exists.

Now imagine that Tumby, still unrepentant, goes to hell. From this we get

AET6) At *t*, Tumby exists in hell.

and

AET7) At *t*+1, Tumby no longer exists.

As in the last section, AET7 amounts to

AET7*) At *t*+1 There is no Tumby.

AET7* is, once again, a claim about an annihilated object, an object subsequently nonexistent. Tumby no longer exists, and so there is no Tumby to be anywhere forever after. Provided that the inferential path from AET1 to AET7* is valid, then AET1 yields AET7*. This seems to amount to the following: TAC and ET together yield AO8*, a commitment about nonexistent objects *via* an annihilated object.

As with RP, from TAC and ET together we can derive some worrisome conclusions. To take one, AET4 entails that AET5-7 are all false. However, if annihilationism is true (that is, TAC is true), it would seem that the annihilationist is committed to saying AET5-7 are true. After all, the two contiguous states of affairs obtain: Tumby exists, and then Tumby no longer exists. If one is committed to TAC, one seems committed to making true, not just truth-apt, statements about annihilated objects. It seems like it must be true that Tumby no longer exists, that Tumby is no more. However, if such entailed claims are false, it seems to follow that it is false that Tumby no longer exists, a commitment at odds with annihilationism.

More precisely, on ET semantics, AET5-7 contradicts TAC. Thus, TAC and ET together yield contradictory commitments and so cannot be held consistently.

If the foregoing is sound, one who embraces both TAC and ET must, I propose, do one of the following. First, she can deny TAC and indirectly deny annihilationism. This would allow one to make truth-apt and false claims about Tumby without ontological commitment to annihilated and nonexistent objects. Doing so would allow her to maintain ET at the expense of TAC. Second, she can deny ET wholesale. Abandon error theory about persons and opt for some realist or antirealist theory so as to maintain realist language and a revised semantics of claims about annihilated objects. Third, she can revise ET and TAC to create variants that escape inconsistency, while staying true to the heart of each commitment. It is difficult, however, to see what variants of ET could exist without in some way undermining claims to annihilated objects. More options may be available. Again, the presence of contradiction does not specify which commitment one ought to give up; it merely betrays inconsistency. It does not prescribe next steps for resolving the contradiction. That said, contradictions have emerged, and I leave it to one who affirms TAC and ET to resolve them as they see fit.

4.2 Fictionalism

In Section 2.2 I offered a brief argument for why theologians might wish to take fictionalism seriously. Suppose one is a (prefix) fictionalist about persons, selves, or other minds. Recall that fictionalism is an antirealist view whose basic commitment is that some objects of some kind (in this case, persons) do not exist. Such a commitment entails commitment to some other claims about persons or selves. We can summarize the set of commitments as follows:

> *Fictionalism re: Persons (PFP): Fictionalism about persons entails the following commitments: (i) claims about persons are truth-apt, (ii) such claims are explanatorily or theoretically fruitful, (iii) such claims are true only if they are prefixed appropriately.*

PFP expresses an antirealism about claims about persons. Such claims, being truth-apt and assertible, can register commitments to the truth or falsity of them in disagreement. Moreover, PFP allows claims about persons to be insightful. Sentences like "Detective Thomas has some mannerisms in common with Dick Tracey" allow one to draw comparative inferences, inferences of likeness and unlikeness, between existent and nonexistent persons. Such claims facilitate

comparative inferences, allowing us to make conceptual connections, tailor expectations, identify patterns of behavior or thought, and so forth. So, claims about persons are not only truth-apt, but explanatorily and theoretically fruitful.

The third commitment of PFP says that, not only are claims about persons truth-apt and insightful and interesting, but also true provided that they are prefixed accordingly. Recall that the fictionalist feels free to appropriate for herself realist language to express realist-like claims without realist ontologies. Thus, claims like "Sherlock Holmes solves mysteries" or "Reepicheep is a coward" are shorthand, paraphrases of the longer prefixed claims "According to the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stories, Sherlock Holmes solves mysteries" and "According to C. S. Lewis' *Prince Caspian*, Reepicheep is a coward." Clauses like "according to the story" or "according to the theory" restrict the domain of claims about numbers, fictional characters, hallucinations, and so forth without, so says the fictionalist, the ontological commitment of worrying whether they really exist or not. So, fictionalists about (the existence of) persons will take "there are persons" to be shorthand for a longer claim like "according to some theory/story, there are persons." The paraphrased claim will be true just in case, in the story or theory, there are persons.

Is (prefix) fictionalism[13] consistent with TAC? We again begin with adumbrating the commitments as follows.

> APF1) For some unrepentant subject S, two contiguous states of affairs obtain: i) at time t S exists in hell, and ii) at any future time $t+1$ S no longer exists in hell. (TAC)
> APF2) Some persons do not exist. (Local antirealism)
> APF3) Claims about persons are truth-apt.
> APF4) Claims about persons are explanatorily or theoretically fruitful.
> APF5) Claims about persons are true only if prefixed appropriately. (APF2-5, PFP)

Reintroduce Tumby's fate and we get the following:

> APF6) At t, Tumby exists in hell.

and

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[13] Hereafter, I drop the "(prefix)" qualifier and leave it understood.

APF7) At any future time $t+1$, Tumby no longer exists.

Once again, we can render APF7 as

APF7*) At $t+1$, there is no Tumby.

Thus far, the inference path is formally similar to previous inferences. So long as the path is valid, then APF1 yields APF7*. This is just to say that TAC and PFP, taken together, yield a path of inference to a commitment in an annihilated object; namely, Tumby.

Now, given PFP, how should one interpret said commitment? The fictionalist may take APF7* as a paraphrase of a longer, prefixed claim.

APF7**) According to the relevant story or theory, at any future time $t+1$, there is no Tumby.

APF7** will be true just in case there is a relevant story or theory according to which there is no Tumby at the future time(s) in question, or Tumby becomes an annihilated object. What sort of story or theory would yield the desired truth value for APF7*? Given the earlier assessment of ET and TAC, one who wishes to affirm TAC will want to deny antirealisms that render claims about no-longer-extant entities false. As shown above, commitment to false claims about no-longer-extant entities is inconsistent with commitment to true claims about them as required by TAC. That said, what story or theory would render APF7* true?

I think the fictionalist has a couple of options here. One option would be to prefix claims about annihilated objects to the annihilationist story itself. Taken that way, APF7** will be true just in case, according to annihilationism, there is no Tumby at the future time(s) in question. To confirm that it is true, the fictionalist need only consult TAC and see whether that's what the story in fact says. Since this is what TAC affirms, the fictionalist speaks truly of Tumby. Moreover, she speaks truly of Tumby, helping herself to realist language, without committing herself to realist ontologies. So prefixed, no immediate inconsistencies emerge between TAC and PFP. Call this the TAC-Prefix Option.

An annihilationist, however, may wonder whether the TAC-Prefix Option is enough. Sure, according to TAC, there are some annihilated objects, but to interpret all sentences about annihilated objects in that manner reduces the theory to just that—a theory, a fiction. It seems to lose significant metaphysical import to prefix and paraphrase all claims about annihilated objects, when the paraphrased claim

itself is not what the theory asserts.[14] The annihilationist seems to take herself to be asserting claims about not what exists and no longer exists on a given theory with utility value, but what exists and no longer exists full stop. While no formal contradictions have been derived, one may wonder whether PFP deflates TAC's metaphysical import for the annihilationist. That being said, PFP is consistent with TAC when prefixed to TAC. They are mutually compatible commitments.

Moreover, the TAC-Index Option is too broad to render APF7** a plausible interpretation of APF7*. When one reviews TAC, she observes that TAC commits one to two states of affairs' obtaining: someone exists, then she ceases to exist. Nowhere in TAC or annihilationism is there some description of Tumby or any other particular person's annihilation. For APF7** to be a plausible interpretation of APF7*, it seems one would need additional applications or instantiation rules not already built into TAC. It simply is not part of the annihilationist's story that Tumby no longer exists; that is a derivation, given TAC and some ontology. As it stands, TAC is too broad, lacking sufficient specifics to be an appropriate paraphrase or plausible interpretation of APF7*.

I said the fictionalist has a couple of options—what is the other? Another option for the fictionalist is to index the truth of claims about annihilated objects to that object's narrative identity. Roughly, something's narrative identity is that thing's sense of self over a series of events and experiences.[15] Consider persons. Someone's narrative identity is that person's sense of self or self-consciousness over some timeline of events, moments, experiences, and so forth. These events, moments, and experiences contextualize that person's life and identity. In a word, she is as her life story has her. Call this the Life Story Option.

Take the foregoing explanation and apply it to Tumby. Suppose one indexes APF7* in the following way

APF7***) According to Tumby's life story, at any future time t+1 there is no Tumby.

APF7*** says that Tumby has a life story, a narrative identity, and that Tumby's annihilation is to be appreciated in light of his life story. His extinction terminates

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[14] Miravalle (2019) further suggests such deflation violates commonsense and popular intuitions about what some average person means when she asserts claims about fictional objects. This provides a convenient analogue to what some average annihilationist may take herself to be claiming about annihilated objects; namely, that she is saying something meaningful and (hopefully) true about the world.

[15] Cf. Ricouer (1991).

his life story, and thus his narrative identity. Post-annihilation, Tumby accrues no more experiences, memories, relations, events, or moments, because he is no more. To confirm that APF7*** is true, one need only read or recollect the life of Tumby and see whether he is annihilated. If he is annihilated when the claim says he is, then APF7*** is true.

What is intriguing about the Life Story Option is its respect for TAC's metaphysical import and specificity. Not only is there no formal inconsistency between TAC and PFP on this option, Tumby specifically is treated as a genuine object who exists for a time and then expires at some later time. Claims about post-annihilation Tumby, moreover, can be verified by recalling Tumby's life story. So long as his biography is in view, claims about Tumby, though an annihilated object, are truth-apt and can be checked for the appropriate truth value. One may see these merits as warranting a preference for PFP and TAC if one takes the Life Story Option.

4.3 Non-factualism

Suppose one is a non-factualist about persons. She endorses the thesis that claims within some domain of Fs are not truth-apt, and thus cannot sensibly be true or false. Rather than assert or articulate a debatable commitment in a dialogue, such claims do something else. They express approval or disapproval, prescribe a course of action, etc. As a non-factualist, then, she is committed to glossing claims that "there are Fs" for some domain of objects F as non-cognitive claims that express non-cognitive attitudes.[16] Non-factualism about persons, for our purposes, will be articulated along the following lines.

> *Non-factualism (NFP): Non-factualism about persons entails the following commitments: (i) claims about persons are not truth-apt, (ii) claims about persons are not assertibles, and (iii) claims about persons express non-cognitive attitudes (approval, disapproval, prescription, etc.).*

NFP commits one to a three-fold commitment regarding how to interpret language about persons. Some claim about persons, existent or no, will not be meaningful assertibles, and thus they cannot be defended as such in disagreement contexts. Moreover, said claim expresses non-cognitive attitudes, such as praise/blame, approval/disapproval, or prescribe/prohibit some course of action.

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[16] For explanation and critique, see Miravalle (2019).

Is NFP consistent with TAC? As before, we adumbrate the commitments as follows:

>   NFT1) For some unrepentant subject S, two contiguous states of affairs obtain: i) at time t S exists in hell, and ii) at any future time t+1 S no longer exists in hell. (TAC)
>   NFT2) Some persons do not exist. (Local antirealism)
>   NFT3) Claims about persons are not truth-apt.
>   NFT4) Claims about persons are not assertibles. (NFT 3-4, NFP)
>   NFT5) Claims about persons express non-cognitive attitudes (approval, praise, permission, prescription, etc.) (NFT 3-5, NFP)

Reintroduce Tumby's fate and we get the following.

>   NFT6) At time t, Tumby exists in hell.

and

>   NFT7) At any future time t+1, Tumby no longer exists.

Once again, we can render NFT7 as

>   NFT7*) At any future time t+1, there is no Tumby.

Thus far, the inference path is formally similar to previous inferences. So long as the path is valid, then NFT1 yields NFT7*. This is just to say that TAC and NFP, taken together, yield a path of inference to a commitment in an annihilated object; namely, Tumby.

Given NFP, how should one interpret NFT7* and like claims? Since such claims are neither truth-apt nor assertible as such, it seems odd to include them in a check for consistency or compatibility. To oversimplify matters, typically, when assessing for consistency or compatibility,[17] one evaluates (using a truth table, truth tree, or proof) whether the truth of A entails the falsity of B and vice versa. If A entails the falsity of B, and B entails the falsity of A, then A and B entail each other's negation

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[17] For declarative sentences or assertibles in logically valid arguments in first-order logic, that is. If one has a logic that handles deontic and imperative statements, one may revise what counts as a valid argument in that logic. However, the spirit of assessing for consistency should still bear some resemblance to the process as I describe it.

and so cannot be affirmed together; they are mutually incompatible. In a word, it is not possible for both A and B to be true together. Presupposed here is that A and B can be either true or false (but not both), which means they are truth-apt. On NFP, however, no interpretation of NFT7* and like claims can yield a truth-apt claim: they are not assertibles. On the surface, then, it seems odd to test for consistency when NFP yields non-assertibles.

But it need not seem odd for long. To see this, consider consistency from another angle. For two sentences A and B to be consistent, it is not possible that the truth of A entails the falsity of B (or vice versa) under the same conditions. Interestingly, NFP interpretations of NFT7* and like claims satisfy this test. Since claims like NFT7* are taken to be non-assertibles and thus neither true nor false, it is not possible that the truth of A entails the falsity of B (or vice versa) for any two A and B—because there is no truth or falsity to entail or be entailed by the other! Thus, while at first blush it seems out of place to consider NFP's consistency with other commitments, it turns out to be legitimate for a potentially surprising reason: one can still test NFP interpretations of claims like NFT7* for consistency.

That said, what interpretive options face one who wishes to hold TAC with NFP? I see two options before her. First, she could interpret NFT7* as an expression of approval or disapproval. To do so would yield the following possibilities:

> NFT7*$_a$) Would that, at t+1, there were Tumby!

and

> NFT7*$_b$) Huzzah that, at t+1, there is no Tumby!

These interpretations belie two distinct emotional attitudes regarding the news that Tumby has become an annihilated object; respectively, despair and joy. Neither NFT7*$_a$ nor NFT7*$_b$ is an assertible, and so neither is truth-apt. As shown above, however, they both are formally consistent with TAC and NFP; they entail no contradictions. Other possible NFP-interpretations of NFT7* include the following prescriptions:

> NFT7*$_c$) At t+1, Remember Tumby.

and

> NFT7*$_d$) At t+1, may Tumby's memory live long with us.

These prescriptive interpretations invite further reflection on proper courses of action one can take regarding Tumby's annihilation. Both encourage solemn remembrance of Tumby's existence, his life, relations, achievements, shortcomings, idiosyncrasies, etc. Germane to the present argument is whether these interpretations entail any contradictions given TAC and NFP. As with the emotional attitudes, no contradictions emerge.

This is not to suggest non-factualism engenders no other sorts of worries or concerns an annihilationist may have. For instance, NFP may strike an annihilationist as counterintuitive in the following way. If one embraces NFP and TAC, and yields to NFP interpretations of statements describing Tumby's annihilation, would practical or theoretical consistency demand she yield to NFP interpretations of Tumby's existence and life story? An annihilationist may sensibly worry that committing to one kind of interpretation of sentences describing one kind of object (i.e., an annihilated object) would entail she interpret sentences describing another kind of object in the same way (i.e., an existent object). Could one localize her commitments to avoid (in)consistency in this regard? Only if one revises NFP to cover only nonexistent persons and not persons in general.

Another counterintuitive worry may run as follows. If one embraces NFP and TAC, and yields to NFP interpretations of statements describing Tumby's annihilation, it seems like TAC and sentences describing Tumby as an annihilated object lose their descriptive power. Such sentences are not assertibles, and thus cannot be defended as such in rational disagreement. Since they cannot be so defended, TAC would lose its status as a perspective to be rationally discriminated from others on a common topic; namely, what becomes of the damned. An annihilationist may sensibly take herself as asserting something true about the world, Tumby, and annihilated objects. Yielding to NFP interpretations, however, would reduce her assertibles to expressives, self-reports, and personal commitments. TAC, it seems, would longer be a defensible metaphysical thesis. The annihilationist, then, would gain consistency at the cost of commensurability. How is the dialogue to proceed with them?

To summarize this main section, it was shown that the annihilationist has some antirealist ways of expressing or asserting her commitment to TAC. While error theory is inconsistent with TAC, TAC, it was seen, is consistent with fictionalism and non-factualism. No procedure to determine which commitments to give up or keep was suggested. However, informal worries were cited and briefly explicated.

5. Conclusion, with Upshot

In sum, annihilationism commits one to two contiguous states of affairs about persons. At one time, they exist; at another, they no longer exist. Consequently, annihilationists seem committed to claims about what exists and when. Several ontological positions were surveyed above, each assessed for compatibility with a commitment to the aforementioned states of affairs. Annihilationism seems consistent with either realism about annihilated objects (i.e., claims about persons who longer exist are not only truth-apt but true as well), prefix fictionalism, or non-factualism. Not only does the foregoing inspire further reflection on puzzling matters about existence and nonexistence after death; it also invites more collaborative work to be done between philosophers and theologians on said matters. Nonexistence perplexes philosophers. It ought to perplex theologians, too.

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