

# Meinong's Theory of Objects.

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Meinong's theory of objects<sup>1</sup> has produced mixed reaction, from harsh criticisms<sup>2</sup> to a recent resurgence of neo-Meinongians.<sup>3</sup> The aspect of Meinong's theory that is relevant to this dissertation is the most controversial, namely, his treatment of non-existent objects. First, however, I will discuss Meinong's content-theory of knowledge, which was influenced by Twardowski. Second, I will discuss Meinong's view of metaphysics and its scope. Finally, I will discuss Meinong's treatment of non-existent objects.

## A. Idea, Content, and Object.

My purpose in explaining Meinong's content-theory of knowledge is to gain an insight into his understanding of the mental and its relationship to extra-mental reality. This aspect of Meinong will be important to help distinguish his theory of non-existent objects from Suárez's.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it will highlight some important departures from Brentano's theory of knowledge and his understanding of the mental and its

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<sup>1</sup> The most important expressions of his theory are in Alexius Meinong, "The Theory of Objects" (hereafter "TO") translated by Isaac Levi, D.B. Terrel, and Roderick Chisholm, *Realism and The Background of Phenomenology*, ed. by Roderick M. Chisholm (Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960) and *On Assumptions* (hereafter *OA*), edited and translated, with an introduction by James Heanue (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Russell's charge of inconsistency. See Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," *The Philosophy of Language*, edited by A.P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). For a more recent criticism see Reinhardt Grossmann, "Meinong's Doctrine of the Ausserein of the Pure Object," *Nous* 8 (1974): 67-82; and "Nonexistent Objects versus Definite Descriptions," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62 (1984): 363-377.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Hector-Neri Castañeda, Roderick Chisholm, Terence Parsons, William Rappaport, Ernest Sosa, and Richard Routley.

relationship with extra-mental reality. At the crossroad between Suárez and Brentano lies Descartes. At the crossroad between Brentano and Meinong lies Twardowski. To present an accurate comparison of Suárez and Meinong an understanding of Descartes' and Twardowski's theories of knowledge is necessary or at least helpful.

### 1. Descartes' image-theory of content.

There is one specific issue I want to discuss concerning Descartes' philosophy that is directly related to the subject of this dissertation: Descartes' notion of objective reality.

Objective reality for Descartes is the type of reality that objects of thought, as such, have. Descartes divides thoughts into judgments, volitions and ideas. An idea, according to Descartes, is a mode of thought, but it is also an image of something.

Descartes says:

If these ideas are considered only in so far as they are particular modes of thought, I do not recognize any inequality among them, and all of them appear to arise from myself in the same fashion. But considering them as images, of which some represent one thing and some another, it is evident that they differ greatly among themselves.<sup>5</sup>

In the third meditation, Descartes claims that there are three possible kinds of ideas: (1) innate, (2) fictitious and (3) adventitious.<sup>6</sup> Adventitious ideas are those that are caused by something in the extra-mental world, and they in some way represent things to us and serve as the only medium through which we can know the extra-mental world. Descartes, through his notion of an idea as a mental image of an object, which is

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>5</sup> Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, translated with an Introduction by Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1960) 96-97.

<sup>6</sup> Descartes, Meditations 94.

detached from all extra-mental reality, produces an epistemological crisis that pervades modernity to the present. Descartes says:

Among my thoughts some are like images of objects, and it is to these alone that the name of 'idea' properly applies... up to now it has not been by a valid and considered judgment, but only by a blind and rash impulse, that I have believed that there were things outside of myself and different from my own being which, through the organs of my senses or by whatever other method it might be, sent into me their ideas or images and impressed upon me their resemblance.<sup>7</sup>

This split between the subject and its ideas, and, on the other hand, the extra-mental world, or what the ideas are ideas of, produces an abyss that only God can overcome. Descartes bequeaths us an epistemological theory which sometimes is called a theory of representational reality or an image-theory of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Such a theory claims that what we have direct access to are not things in the extramental world but mental entities or images.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Twardowski's content-theory.<sup>10</sup>

While it appears that Brentano develops his theory of mental phenomena, whether consciously or not, under the influence of Cartesianism, according to Findlay Meinong does not. Findlay claims that Meinong, in his early stage, did adopt an image-theory of

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<sup>7</sup> Descartes, Meditations 93-96.

<sup>8</sup> Findlay calls it the image-theory of knowledge. Cf. J.N. Findlay, Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values (hereafter MTOV) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) 8.

<sup>9</sup> Brentano is working under this influence when he claims that only mental phenomena account for true and authentic perceptions. Cf. *supra*, 172.

<sup>10</sup> I rely on Findlay's interpretation of Twardowski's Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen. All quotations of Twardowski come from J.N. Findlay, Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

knowledge, but, when introduced to Twardowski's content-theory of knowledge, shifted positions. Findlay claims that Meinong's distinction between content and object is a result of this shift. Findlay may be right about this; however, he goes on to claim that Brentano had never made a similar distinction, and this is not a correct interpretation of Brentano. As I have already pointed out<sup>11</sup> and will explain below, Brentano did make such a distinction.

According to Twardowski, the notion of an idea has three parts. First, the object, which is not the mental image but the extra-mental object itself. He sometimes calls it the primary object. Second, there is the content, which is the mental element or image that serves as the vehicle by which we can refer to the extra-mental object. Twardowski sometimes calls the content the secondary object. Finally, according to Twardowski, the idea in a strict sense is the mental act. Twardowski presents the following analogy to explain further these three parts of an idea. Imagine that an idea is like painting a picture of a landscape. The actual activity of painting would be the idea. The subject of the painting or the actual landscape would be the object (i.e. primary object). Finally, the picture painted on the canvas would be the content (i.e. secondary object). Therefore, for Twardowski, there are three terms, the idea, the content, and the object. Two are mental, namely the idea and the content, but the object pertains to the extra-mental world. In Twardowski's content-theory of knowledge, the content or secondary object serves the crucial function of referring the mind to the extra-mental object.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *supra*, 179.

Brentano had made similar distinctions. For Brentano, there is the idea or presentation (*vorstellung*), which is, as for Twardowski, the mental act;<sup>12</sup> and the object, which, unlike for Twardowski, is mental.<sup>13</sup> Brentano does, therefore, make a distinction between the content (i.e. his intentional nonexistent object) and the mental state (i.e. his notion of presentation). The presentation is the way in which the mental act is directed towards the intentional object, e.g. hating it, loving it, judging it, etc. To make a rough comparison, Brentano's object is Twardowski's content or "secondary object."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, they both serve the same function; they refer to or direct the mind towards the extra-mental object. Two more important issues need to be addressed concerning Twardowski's content-theory of knowledge: first, the distinction between the idea, the object and the content with respect to their ontological status; second, the relationship between the content and the object.

According to Twardowski, the content does not have the same kind of reality as the idea or the object. The idea, being a mental act of some kind, enjoys a real and true existence similar to that of the object. The content, on the other hand, does not enjoy the same kind of existence. With respect to the second issue, Twardowski does not want his notion of content to be understood as a representation or mental picture of some kind. Findlay says: "That an idea contains within itself an image of the object, to which it has some sort of photographic resemblance, is rejected [by Twardowski] as the fancy

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *supra*, 165.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *supra*, 175

of a primitive psychology."<sup>15</sup> This criticism of the image-theory of knowledge may not be completely fair. Many representational theories or image-theories describe the content (in the Twardowskian sense) or intentional object (in the Brentanian or Cartesian sense) as a resemblance or as an image or as a picture of the extra-mental object, but do not intend this to be understood in a literal manner. In any case, this does not seem to be a major issue between these two theories. The major distinction and the one that will play a crucial role in the formation of Meinong's philosophy can be expressed as follows. First, we can say that the major distinction between the image-theory and the content-theory is that, in the content-theory, the object is not a mental entity. Therefore, an idea will have only one mental element, the content.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, according to the image-theory, an idea will have at least two mental elements, the intentional object and the content, and no extra-mental object. This distinction will become important for Meinong, since, under the content-theory, having an idea of a non-existent object, such as a round square, will not force one to the absurd conclusion of positing the object's existence. The image-theory of knowledge does have to address this apparent contradiction. I will discuss this in more detail below. For the moment, I would like to clarify Twardowski's notion of content. It appears to me, given Twardowski's refusal to consider it as some sort of resembling image, to be obscure and

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<sup>14</sup> Findlay, MTOV 9.

<sup>15</sup> Findlay, MTOV 13.

<sup>16</sup> Findlay, MTOV 14.

ambiguous. Moreover, given its significant function of referring, it deserves some special attention.

How are we, therefore, to understand Twardowski's notion of content? Findlay suggests that it is similar to an Aristotelian account of knowledge. Findlay says:

It might be imagined that the content-theory of Twardowski is a modern version of the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, according to which the knowing mind receives in itself the pure form, but not the matter of the objects which it knows. Thus it might be held that when I think of an apple, I do so by receiving into my mind its constitutive properties, a certain shape, colour, size, and so on, bound together in a certain characteristic way. The content of my idea would then be made up of those properties by means of which I refer to the physical thing, which, as a concrete physical existent, can of course not enter into my mind.<sup>17</sup>

Findlay stresses the fact that in Aristotle's theory only the form is impressed on the mind and not the matter. But, if this is all, I think that the similarity that Findlay is alluding to is quite trivial. Moreover, any theory of knowledge, including the image-theory, can maintain this similarity with an Aristotelian theory. Moreover, if Findlay is stressing the idea that a content is ultimately composed of properties, then, again, I don't see how this fact would make the content-theory necessarily distinct from the image-theory. It is true that in a content-theory of knowledge one could only talk about properties, and, therefore, some further explanation, principle or notion must be posited which would explain the unity of the properties of a given object. The image-theory presupposes that we have some sort of mental image of the object as such. Furthermore, the notion that a content, or anything mental for that matter, is composed of properties, especially properties such as extension and weight, seems as awkward as

the notion that a content is made of matter. The problem is that the properties of a material object cannot be predicated of a mental entity in the same way. Therefore, Twardowski distinguishes between the idea of a property, as belonging properly to the (mental) content, and the property as such, i.e. the property as belonging to the material object. Twardowski says:

It is not the content of the idea of gold, but gold itself, i.e. the object of the idea, to which the determinations heavy, yellow, shining, metallic etc. belong... . The idea of gold... is made up out of just as many (or more) parts as the determinations which are distinguished in the gold; these determinations are presented by means of the various parts of the idea, i.e. also by means of ideas. The content of the idea of gold is therefore not made up out of the sum of its properties, but out of the sum of the ideas of its properties.<sup>18</sup>

Twardowski's conception of content becomes more complicated when the content is of a complex object. With respect to simple objects, the content would not resemble the object but instead would be an idea of the property that refers to the object. For instance, the mental phenomenon of a simple object, such as a shade of red, would be the mental act and the content of the idea of the property red. According to Findlay, Twardowski's theory cannot be pushed further; we cannot pursue the questioning by asking what is the meaning of the idea of the property red. Findlay says, "nothing further can be said."<sup>19</sup> He describes Twardowski's conception of the content of a simple object as follows. "In the case of an idea of a simple object, or of some object which we

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<sup>17</sup> Findlay, MTOV 14.

<sup>18</sup> Twardowski, Zur Lehre in Findlay, MTOV 15.

<sup>19</sup> Findlay, MTOV 15.



apprehend as simple, the relation between content and object is primary, original, and irreducible, and it is not a relation of resemblance.”<sup>20</sup>

In the case of complex objects, the relationship between the content and the object is more complicated. In these cases, Twardowski would admit some form of resemblance, although the resemblance is not in the form of a mirroring or in the form of a “picture resemblance,” but more in the form of a structural or formal resemblance. Therefore, according to Twardowski, the content of ideas of complex objects will manifest a higher form of complexity, since the relation between the properties of the object would also be an idea and a constituent of the content. This however, Findlay points out, is not enough. What we are left with is a set of independent ideas of properties, and it is not clear how the unity of the object can be represented properly in the content. Findlay describes the difficulty as follows:

This curious doctrine leads inevitably to the most hopeless difficulties; to have an idea of O [an object], it is surely not enough to have ideas merely of A [a property of O], R [the relation between the properties A and B], and B [a second property of O] as three separate entities, one must also have an idea of them as bound together in the unity of the object. On Twardowski’s theory, it is hard to see how we ever cognize more than a set of independent moments, which cannot possibly constitute a unitary object.<sup>21</sup>

One might argue that the idea of R, the relation between the properties of the object in question, would be sufficient for establishing the necessary unity. However, Findlay

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<sup>20</sup> Findlay, MTOV 15.

<sup>21</sup> Findlay, MTOV 16-17.

rejects this possibility, *"because a relation between contents is not itself a content."*<sup>22</sup> In the next sentence, Findlay says: "The mental synthesis of my ideas, not being an idea, cannot set before me the non-mental synthesis of the moments of the object."<sup>23</sup> These claims do not mean the same. The latter statement seems correct, since a mental synthesis of my ideas is not an idea. The first statement concerns a relation between two or more properties in an object and whether such a relation can be a content. The way that Findlay expresses the objection is misleading. It may be true that a relation between contents is not itself a content; however, a relation between two contents is not the same as a relation between two properties in an object. The question is why can't this latter be a content? Therefore, I am skeptical as to whether Findlay's argument is in fact sufficient to demonstrate that Twardowski's conception of content cannot account for the unity or synthesis of an object. Meinong's theory manifests a similar difficulty, and therefore I will leave all further discussion of this topic for the next section.

### 3. Meinong's theory of knowledge

Like Twardowski, Meinong distinguishes between the content and the object of an idea. Meinong relies on the notion of non-existent objects to demonstrate that the object cannot be an element of the idea. He claims that there are three distinct classes of non-existent objects:<sup>24</sup> (1) possible things that do not exist, e.g. a golden mountain; (2) impossible things, e.g. a round square; and (3) facts, e.g. two plus three equal five.

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<sup>22</sup> Findlay, MTOV 16.

<sup>23</sup> Findlay, MTOV 15

Meinong claims that while facts do not have being in the same way as actual existent objects, they have some special kind of being distinct from other non-existent objects. He calls this special kind of being *subsistence*.<sup>25</sup> He argues that the fact that we can have ideas of impossible non-existent objects, such as round squares, demonstrates that the object is not part of the idea. The mental phenomenon of an idea does not include the object. If it did, then an idea could give rise to an impossible being, and this would be absurd. Meinong extends this conception of ideas to existent objects. This is because an idea is an idea regardless of whether it is an idea of a non-existent or of an existent object. Meinong says:

Whether I have an idea of a church-steeple or a mountain-peak, a feeling or a desire, a relation of diversity or causality or any other thing whatsoever, I am in every case having an idea. In spite, therefore, of the unlimited variety of their objects, all these mental processes manifests a common feature, which makes them ideas, and this is the act of having an idea.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of ideas of physically existent objects, Meinong argues that the case is even more obvious, since it would be absurd to suggest that the physically extended object and its properties were somehow a part of the idea. It is evident that for Meinong, as for Twardowski, the object is not a part of the idea.<sup>27</sup> However, while the object is not

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *infra*, section C.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *infra*, section C.

<sup>26</sup> Meinong, *Über Gegenstände höherer Ordnung und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung*, (referred to as *Geg. Hoh. Ord. Gs.*) in Findlay, *Meinong's Theory of Objects*, 22. It is interesting to note that Meinong's claim that all ideas are similar insofar as they are ideas and that all ideas are distinct insofar as they are ideas of something (they have distinct objects) is similar to Descartes' analysis of ideas as modes of thought representing or being images of something, cf. *supra*, 183.

<sup>27</sup> While there are many distinctions between Suárez, Descartes, Brentano, Twardowski and Meinong, it seems to me that some disagreements are not real but verbal. Suárez, Descartes, or Brentano would agree with Meinong's

part of an idea it is not necessarily something in extra-mental reality; this is only true for existent objects. Meinong maintains that there are other kinds of objects besides existent objects. As a matter of fact, the number of objects that are non-existent is infinitely greater than the number of existent ones.<sup>28</sup> Because the object and the idea are distinct, Meinong, like Twardowski, saw that the idea must include something that would give it its direction toward a given object or something that would allow the transcendence of the mental. Meinong says,

...ideas, in so far as they are ideas of distinct objects, cannot be altogether alike; however we may conceive the relation of the idea to its object, diversity of object must in some way go back to diversity of idea. That element, therefore, in which ideas of distinct objects differ in spite of their agreement in the act, may be properly called the content of the idea.<sup>29</sup>

For Meinong, the content of an idea is that part that serves the function of referring to a given object.

We can summarize Meinong's view as follows. An idea is one complete mental act (an experience). This complete experience of an idea must have two aspects or parts: (1) the act-element and (2) the content. The act-element is the actual experience, e.g. seeing, hearing, judging, etc., and it entails an attitude, such as judging, assuming, seeing, etc.<sup>30</sup> It is the way the mind directs itself to a given object.<sup>31</sup> The content

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argument if they all understood the word "object" as he does. More on the problem of terminology will be addressed in Chapter Eight.

<sup>28</sup> For a list of the classes of non-existent objects cf. *supra*, 192. For an analysis of these cf. *infra*, 215.

<sup>29</sup> Meinong, *Geg. Hoh. Ord. Gs.* in Findlay, *MTOV* 22.

<sup>30</sup> Here there is a clear and real distinction between Brentano and Meinong. For Brentano the attitude is not part of the mental act; instead Brentano's notion of content serves this function.

<sup>31</sup> This is Brentano's conception of content.

functions as the part of the idea that refers to the object. Therefore, it is possible for the act-element to change while the content remains the same. For instance, first I may judge proposition  $p$ , then assume proposition  $p$ . In the foregoing example, the first act-element was judging, the second assuming. On the other hand, there can be two similar act-elements with different contents. For instance, I may assume proposition  $p$  and assume proposition  $q$ . Both the act-element and the content are necessary constituents of an idea.

If an idea consisted only of the act-element we would have a blank or naked idea, judging without judging anything, hearing without hearing anything, etc. In that case, introspection alone would not be capable of revealing what the idea is about. Findlay says:

We do not look into our minds and perceive a certain naked idea, then look outwards and see a certain object, and then finally perceive that they are related in a certain way, such that the one is the idea of the other. If this were our procedure we might quite conceivably connect an idea with the wrong object.... That such errors in connecting ideas with objects not only do not occur, but are *a priori* unthinkable, proves that the act-element in an idea is only an abstract moment, and that every idea, as a concrete experience, *bears on its face a reference to a certain object*, which reference is immediately accessible to introspection.<sup>32</sup>

Now that we have a preliminary understanding of Meinong's conception of an idea and its constituents, let us try to obtain a better understanding of Meinong's conception of content and its relation to the object.

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<sup>32</sup> Findlay, MTOV 23-24.

For Meinong, the content performs the function of connecting the idea to a specific object. It is the element of an idea that allows one, through introspection, to distinguish between similar act-elements, such as judging. Like the act-element, the content, according to Meinong, is mental. He says:

That element, therefore, in which ideas of distinct objects differ, in spite of their agreement in the act, may be properly called the content of the idea. This exists, is therefore real and present, and is of course mental, even when the object presented by its aid does not exist, is not present, and is not physical.<sup>33</sup>

Meinong at times uses the terms *content* and *representation* interchangeably. This should not lead one to confuse a content with a sense-datum, a sense impression, or a mental image. Instead, for Meinong, a sense-datum, a sense impression, or a mental image is an object of an inferior ontological status (as compared to real existent objects), but an object none the less. Moreover, these latter imply the notion of resemblance, and Meinong, like Twardowski, does not consider resemblance to be part of the nature of a content. Findlay nicely divides his discussion of Meinong's content into two issues: first, whether the content, this obscure mental phenomenon, can be experienced; second, whether the conception of content in fact helps explain referring or, as Findlay puts it, the self-transcendence of the mental.

First, let us consider whether the content can be experienced. It is clear that Meinong needs to explain what a content is and show that there are such mental phenomena. He does not simply postulate their existence as merely hypothetical entities, "like

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<sup>33</sup> Meinong, , *Geg. Hoh. Ord. Gs.* in Findlay, *Meinong's Theory of Objects*, 22.

microscopic objects postulated by physical science as the causes of certain appearances," as Findlay puts it. However, several difficulties arise.

The first difficulty concerns the use of language. When we try to describe an inner experience, such as an idea, we sometimes use words that are only appropriate to physical objects, and therefore we cannot be accurately describing the mental content. For instance, if we examine a visual experience and attempt to describe it, we may say something like, "it is red." In this case we would be describing the object of the experience. Therefore, as long as one uses words that are only appropriate for properties of physical and extended beings, there is no hope of revealing what a content is.

A second difficulty is the intimate relation between the content and the object. The inability to separate them and their distinct natures make it difficult for the content to be exposed in its authenticity. Findlay describes the difficulty as follows: "The fact that, when we are living through contents, our attention is usually not directed to them at all, has as a consequence our total lack of words to describe their qualitative nuances."<sup>34</sup> Let us consider another example. If I am listening to music, I may stop to examine my inner perception of a given melody. The act-element is the actual hearing, but what is the content in this case? All I really notice in introspection, besides the act-element, is the melody or sounds I hear, which is the object. Where is the content? According to Meinong, the inner object I perceive is not to be confused with the content. With respect to a similar case of perception, Findlay says:

It is very hard to see why we should perceive the object and not the content. Meinong admits that, owing to the difficulties of attending to our mental state, contents retreat behind the objects they present; we perceive that we are thinking of such and such an object, but the content is obscured by the pseudo-existent object.<sup>35</sup>

I will present an analogy that may help explicate the distinction in question. When you see a movie, let us say *Titanic*, on the screen you also see the screen itself. However, if I ask you to describe what the screen was like, it would be difficult without saying something about the movie. In this analogy, the content is analogous to the screen and the movie on the screen to the “pseudo-object,” as Meinong refers to it. Findlay describes this relation between the object and the content as follows:

The relation between content and object shows a curious reciprocity; objects cannot enter into the mind but are made accessible to thought by means of contents; contents though they are in the mind, are difficult to apprehend directly, and so are generally grasped by means of objects.<sup>36</sup>

To summarize, the attempt to prove the existence of a content and to describe its nature, when the content is of some extra-mental object, is plagued with two related and major difficulties. One difficulty is the intimate reciprocal relationship between the object and the content. The second difficulty is caused by the fact that the content is *mental* and its intimate relation is with a *physical* object, and that the language suited for describing properties of physical objects will not do justice to mental entities. Therefore, Meinong concludes:

But these reflections at the same time serve to show that the demand for agreement or even similarity between content and object is unfulfillable, at

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<sup>34</sup> Findlay, *MTOV* 28.

<sup>35</sup> Findlay, *MTOV* 29.

<sup>36</sup> Findlay, *MTOV* 30.



least for all representations of physical objects...If the content and its object lie qualitatively far asunder when the content, as is inevitable, is mental and the object is physical, then there is nothing that can be done about it.<sup>37</sup>

The fact that contents are difficult to detect and impossible to describe when the content is of a physical object is not sufficient to demonstrate that there are no such contents. Meinong will argue, instead, that in the case of inner perception, where the object is not a physical thing but an inner experience, such as pain, it is possible to live through the experience of the content.

Meinong claims that in the case of feelings and desires the content is much more readily accessible. What permits this greater accessibility of content is that there is no physical object because the object is either an inner experience or non-existent. These conditions preclude the content or mental phenomenon from getting intertwined and confused with a wholly dissimilar object. For instance, according to Meinong, in the case of pain, the mental aspect of the sensation can be easily considered through introspection, without considering the specific pain, such as the pain in the foot. The inner sensation of feeling pain, unlike the inner sensation of seeing something red, will allow us to experience the content or the mental phenomenon; we can live through it. Therefore, inner phenomena, such as feelings or desires, will allow us to “live through contents in full intuitive consciousness of the fact that they are there.”<sup>38</sup> So, for instance, Findlay says that there are two distinct headaches. The first is the, “unextended, unpleasant headache through which we can live [i.e. the content or mental aspect], and

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<sup>37</sup> Meinong, OA 190.

<sup>38</sup> Findlay, MTOV 26.

a headache which consists in the intermittent pervasion of certain parts of our head by a certain peculiar quality [i.e. the object]."<sup>39</sup>

While Findlay stresses the distinction between content and object, we must be careful not to read too much into his interpretation of this distinction. Meinong tells us that in cases of feelings and desires the content and the object will coincide, as is evident in the case of pain.<sup>40</sup> Whether this correspondence is to the point of indistinguishability is not clear. However, if it were, then it would seem that Meinong would have the opposite problem to the one he had concerning physical objects (viz. their total dissimilarity) in observing the content of the idea. In addition to the importance of maintaining the distinction between the content and the object in cases of inner sensations, it will also be important to return to the notion of the act-element and make sure that this experience maintains its own identity. The act-element is the actual experience; in the previous example, it would be the act of feeling, as opposed to an act of judging, desiring, etc. The act of feeling would be different from that of feeling pain (i.e. the content) or feeling pain in my right foot (i.e. the object).

The content is also readily accessible in cases of valuing or valuations. Meinong distinguishes between mental acts of valuing and valuation. The former is a value-feeling based on judgments. The latter is a value-feeling based on assumptions, which he calls imaginative-feelings.<sup>41</sup> Meinong says:

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<sup>39</sup> Findlay, *MTOV* 31.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *infra*, 206.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Meinong, *QA* 238.

Valuation is the counterpart to valuing, then; it is distinguished from the latter by the fact that the judgment essential to valuing is replaced by an assumption and by the fact that the judgment-feeling essential to valuing is replaced by an assumptive quasi-feeling, i.e., by an imaginative feeling.<sup>42</sup>

Valuings and valuations may be of non-existent objects, abstract objects, or physical objects. For instance, Meinong asks, “Doesn’t ‘feeling the want of’ something consist precisely in this, that one ‘sets value’ on something that does not exist—with the result that one desires its existence?”<sup>43</sup> There are many problems with the notion that “desiring something” necessarily implies “valuing it” and “its non-existence.” However, while necessary implication may be too strong, it certainly is possible to desire and value something that not only does not exist, but cannot exist, such as another outcome for a past event. Consider the subject who desires and values the existence of some non-existent object. In such a case, there is an experience or a feeling for a non-existent object. The feeling of valuing is immediately present to the subject. The possibility of the mental experience getting entangled with a physical object does not exist, since there is no physical object. A similar analysis can be made in cases in which there is an object but the object is abstract in nature and has no physical or actual existence (e.g. honor, public welfare or reputation.) Even in cases of a physical object,

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<sup>42</sup> Meinong, QA 238.

<sup>43</sup> Meinong, QA 236.

e.g. the collector who values his antique violin,<sup>44</sup> the feeling or content of valuing is readily accessible. Findlay says:

There are certain experiences of approbation or disapprobation in which an object is given to us as beautiful or ugly...Yet such an object [the beautiful violin] is given to us by means of a peculiar sort of approbation and disapprobation of which it is possible to be introspectively aware; these emotions must therefore function as content.<sup>45</sup>

Let us consider one final example, the case of judgments. According to Meinong, a judgment is a mental phenomenon in which, like the cases of inner sensation and valuing, the mental aspect or content is readily accessible by introspective observation. When one makes a judgment, one affirms or denies a given proposition. In other words, one believes or disbelieves the proposition. It is not enough to think it, since there is a distinct qualitative difference between the attitude towards the things we think as opposed to the things we believe. This is evident from the fact that there are many things we think and yet do not believe. The special quality of the mental attitude towards the judgment or belief or disbelief in question, according to Meinong, is founded on the notion of evidence. For example, if I make the judgment "two plus two is four," I experience a feeling towards that proposition, and one of the properties that belong to my experience is the evidence I have for the truth of that proposition. Findlay describes it as follows:

The evidence which accompanies certain judgments...is clearly a property of experiences, not of their objects. To describe this property is very difficult; one may regard it, rather unsatisfactorily, as a sort of compulsion

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<sup>44</sup> Meinong, OA 235

<sup>45</sup> Findlay, MTOV 34.

which certain circumstances exercise upon our judgments, or we may say that something “bursts on us with a flood of light.” In whatever the essence of evidence may lie, it is clearly something which we live through, and which is ultimately the only testimony by which a fact can show us that it is a fact.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, the content or mental aspect of the judgment or belief in question is that special feeling, which is hard to describe but which is something like a conviction, an inclination, an allurements or an attraction towards the proposition in question. This feeling, therefore, is an instance of what Meinong means by a content.

The second major concern we will address is whether Meinong’s conception of content helps explain referring to an extra-mental object. This function of transcending is essential to any theory of knowledge. Meinong says: “*The general property of all knowing, [is] that of transcending [my emphasis].*”<sup>47</sup> Else- where he says:

Yet there is still something in this cognitive apprehending of an actuality that might be called the miracle of epistemology, to vary a well-known saying of Schopenhauer, or the basic fact of all knowing, as it undoubtedly better could be called...I suppose I should not avoid the customary word “transcendence” in designating the fact; following this usage, the aforementioned basic property of a justified existential affirmation can also be spoken of as the judgment’s transcending toward an actuality.<sup>48</sup>

What is ultimately in question is the relation between the content and the object. The goal of this relation between the content (or representation) and the object is complete agreement. The optimal state of knowing for any epistemology, according to Meinong, would be attained when there is complete agreement between the content and the

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<sup>46</sup> Findlay, MTOV 33.

<sup>47</sup> Meinong, OA 191.

<sup>48</sup> Meinong, OA 161.

object. Meinong refers to this relation as one of *adequation*. He says: "Accordingly, the relation between representation and object...could also be called the relation of adequation."<sup>49</sup> A perfect agreement between the content and the object would constitute a case of perfect adequation. This relation exists when the content is perfectly adequate to the actuality that it apprehends. Meinong says:

For it seems almost self-evident that if someone is to know an actuality, and therefore represent it just as it is, he will approach his goal more closely, the closer his representations are to the actuality to be represented. Accordingly, adequation would be tantamount to an agreement of the representation with the actuality.<sup>50</sup>

Meinong's notion of adequation or agreement needs to be explained further. First, we should be mindful that the content or representation is mental in nature. The object, on the other hand, when it is a physical thing, is a material object in the extra-mental world. It is clear, given the difference in nature of the content and the object in such cases, that there cannot really be a literal similarity or agreement between the two. Therefore, if one were to say that there is a perfect adequation between a content (or representation) and a square table, this cannot mean that the content is square. It is evident that this is absurd, as we saw with Twardowski, since the content can never take on any of the properties of the physical object. Therefore, Meinong claims that it is not the content or the representation that is square but the object of the content. Meinong says:

It is by all means correct to the point of triviality that if I want to apprehend a quadrangular table by my thinking, I should conceive of a

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<sup>49</sup> Meinong, *OA* 189.

<sup>50</sup> Meinong, *OA* 189.

table, e.g. neither as round nor as oval, but simply as quadrangular. But does this somehow mean that for this purpose my representation itself, or more precisely its content, would have to be quadrangular? Or is not the requirement limited, rather to this: that my representation, if it is not to lead to any error, must simply be the representation of *something quadrangular*, i.e., of a quadrangular object? On closer inspection, therefore, the agreement required is by no means an agreement between my representation and the actuality [the thing in the extra-mental world] in question, but an agreement between the object of my representation and this actuality.<sup>51</sup>

My concern is with Meinong's conception of "the object of my representation." What object is Meinong referring to? The introduction of this object may seem problematic and may even seem inconsistent with Meinong's other comments. First, "the object of my representation" seems to be something that cannot be the actuality or the same as the object in the extra-mental world. If it were, then Meinong would be suggesting that knowledge is based on an object's agreement with itself, and this seems absurd. Second, "the object of my representation" cannot be the same as the content (or representation), since the content is mental and Meinong wants to predicate of it properties only predicable of physical entities, such as the property of being quadrangular. I must admit that "the object of my representation" seems quite a mysterious object, which does not in any way help explain how it is that the content performs its transcending functions. These difficulties only occur when the actuality is of a physical object. I will present a possible resolution to this difficulty below.<sup>52</sup>

In the case of inner sensation, the content and the actuality coincide. Meinong says, "due to the self-presentation of inner experiences, at the moment when a quasi-content

offers itself to knowing, it does coincide with the object that is to be apprehended.”<sup>53</sup> Meinong stresses that even in such a case there is still transcending, since we still have the experience of knowing something, namely, the inner sensation, and knowing it is a different experience than the sensation itself. The transcending, therefore, according to Meinong, is part of the essence of knowing and thus is present in our experience of cognition. When we know something (and it is always the case that when we know, we must direct ourselves to something), we necessarily transcend to the thing known. What follows is that transcending is only a property of judgments<sup>54</sup> and not a property of presentation or even assumptions. The significance of this will be highlighted below in the discussion of non-existent objects.

Meinong’s theory of ideal relations reveals something more positive about his notion of adequation. He claims that of the two major classes of relations, (1) real relations and (2) ideal relations, the relation between a content and an object (in all circumstances, e.g. affirmative knowledge, assumptions, presentations, etc.) can best be described as an ideal relation. Meinong says: “The relation between a representation and its object, or more precisely the relation between the content and the coordinate object, is an ideal relation, no matter what the more precise nature of it [the relation] may be.”<sup>55</sup> An ideal relation has three major characteristics. First, an ideal relation

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<sup>51</sup> Meinong, OA 190.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *infra*, 228-230.

<sup>53</sup> Meinong, OA 190-191.

<sup>54</sup> For Meinong, judgments concern an actuality, which can be either an existing thing or subsisting things.

<sup>55</sup> Meinong, OA 192.



binds two existent things into a unity, but this unity is not itself some third type of complex existent of which the other two are constituents. Second, in an ideal relation the two things related do not come into contact with each other. Finally, ideal relations are absolutely necessary. Findlay describes an ideal relation of similarity between two peas and other similar examples as follows:

It is not merely an accident that this pea is like that pea, that this point is between these two points, that this moment is later than that moment: that they stand in these relationships follows with absolute necessity from the fact that they are the entities they are.<sup>56</sup>

In the case of content and object, an ideal relationship exists. The first two characteristics of an ideal relation hold, since in an act of cognition there is a unity between me and the object without my coming into physical contact with it. In no act of cognition does my knowing affect the thing known in any way. Meinong says: "if the thing that I know is itself real, or more precisely a bit of actuality, then it most assuredly cannot in any way be affected by my knowing."<sup>57</sup> This means, for instance, that my knowing the streets of Granada does not in any way affect them. The third characteristic is what gives knowledge its special character of transcendence, since the relation between content and object is necessary. For example, I do not determine that I have an idea of a computer when I am looking at a computer because of some deductive, inductive, or any other deliberative process. I do not have to examine my idea and then examine the object and match them in some rational manner. Instead, the idea is

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<sup>56</sup> Findlay, MTOV 35-36.

<sup>57</sup> Meinong, QA 191.

related to the object in such a way that the object is given to me immediately, necessarily and *a priori*.

I want to address one last problem that I brought up in my discussion of Twardowski. This is the problem of how Meinong is able to obtain a unity in his notion of content. As I insisted above, the fact that both Twardowski and Meinong reject a resemblance or image theory of content requires their theories to explain how the content or representation of an object gets its unity. Consider the example of an object, O, that has parts A and B in relation R. I would have contents A, B and R, but what accounts for O? I will present only a brief sketch of Meinong's theory concerning the apprehending of complex objects. To go into detail would require an extensive discussion that would take us too far off the main topic.

Meinong claims that the unity of complex objects is not captured in the representation of the parts of the objects. Instead, the unity is provided by a distinct mental act, namely, a judgment or an assumption. All judgments or assumptions are "objectives,"<sup>58</sup> and in these mental acts there is always an intending towards a given object. Meinong says: "We found it to be a characteristic of intending that it apprehends objects by way of an objective in which they stand."<sup>59</sup> When the intending is towards a thing, the objective is of being. However, when the objective apprehends a property of a thing, then the objective is of so-being. It is this intending that apprehends the complex object in its unity. Meinong's theory of how the unity of a

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<sup>58</sup> I will discuss Meinong's notion of objectives below.

<sup>59</sup> Meinong, OA 193.

complex object is apprehended brings to mind Descartes' wax experiment. In the second meditation, Descartes attempts to show the deficiency of our senses by illustrating that they are not capable of recognizing a thing's identity with itself. In Descartes' experiment, there is a piece of wax that still tastes like honey, still has the aroma of flowers, is hard and solid, makes a sound when tapped, has a certain shape and size, and feels cold. When the wax melts, it no longer smells like honey, no longer feels hard but turns liquid, grows hot, changes in color, size and shape, and makes no sound when tapped. Descartes inquires as to how it is possible that anyone can still recognize that piece of wax to be the same piece of wax. Interestingly enough, it is certain that what allows us to make the identification cannot be any of the sense perceptions of any of the properties of the wax, since the melted wax has none of the same properties it had before. Therefore, if it were the image or representation of a thing that provides the unity of the thing in question, there would be no way of making the necessary connection between the hard wax and the melted wax. Instead, Meinong would say, "...the object of a perceptual representation is this *concretum*, apprehensible *only through intending* [my emphasis] by way of being, or more precisely, through existential judgment. Thus, *concreta* are the true domain of pure intending by way of being."<sup>60</sup> Meinong's solution, therefore, to the problem of the unity of complex objects consists in an appeal to a higher faculty than sense perception. Descartes called it "the understanding;" Meinong calls it "an objective." Meinong concludes:

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<sup>60</sup> Meinong, *QA* 195.

Where there is a complex [object], there is also an objective as integrating factor in it, and one who wants to apprehend the complex cannot do it otherwise than apprehending the objective, too. From that, it now becomes directly understandable, in the first place, why representing fails in the presence of complexes...But further, we know that where the point is to apprehend an objective, the means thereto can be found only in a judgment or assumption.<sup>61</sup>

In this section I have discussed Descartes' and Twardowski's theories of knowledge very briefly as a background to Meinong's content-theory. This background will provide us with a much better view of the philosophical positions of Suárez and Meinong, and it will make it easier to comprehend their similarities and differences. The slight deviation into Descartes and Twardowski is justified because it provides a smoother flow in going from Suárez to Brentano and then to Meinong. Without this historical deviation the epistemological and metaphysical shifts from Suárez to Brentano to Meinong would seem arbitrary.

#### B. Theory of objects and metaphysics.

Meinong is not concerned with redefining the realms of the different scientific disciplines, such as metaphysics. Instead, he claims that the way one understands the scope of these disciplines is of little importance for the furthering of scientific knowledge. He says: "What matters in the final analysis is the work that is accomplished, and not the banner under which it is done."<sup>62</sup> However, there are two exceptions. The first occurs when the boundaries of different scientific disciplines overlap and infringe on each other's territory. In this case, the end result may be

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<sup>61</sup> Meinong, OA 202.

<sup>62</sup> Meinong, "TO" 77.

positive for science, since one aspect of reality will be investigated from two distinct perspectives. The second exception occurs when there is a gap between two distinct realms that pertains to no discipline. In this case, there is no discipline that covers the intermediate territory. As a consequence, this region remains untouched and uninvestigated. The seriousness of such an omission will depend on the size and significance of the region in question. Meinong's purpose in his theory of objects is to consider such a region, namely, the region of the Object (*Gegenstand*) as such. He says:

The question concerns the proper place for the scientific investigation of the Object (*Gegenstand*) taken as such and in general—we wish to know whether, among the sciences that are accredited by scientific tradition, there is one within which we could attempt a theoretical consideration of the Object as such, or from which we could at least demand this.<sup>63</sup>

Meinong argues that there is no science with sufficient universality, not even metaphysics, to bring under its scope the extensive territory covered by the study of the Object as such. Meinong concludes that a new discipline is required, namely, a Theory of Objects. Meinong's claim is much more radical than some have made it out to be. What he is attempting to do, in essence, is not rid us of metaphysics, a project that has been quite common in the history of philosophy, but *supplement it* with a more universal science, namely, the theory of objects. Meinong says: "From what has been said, I draw the conclusion that the theory of Objects has a claim to the status of a discipline independent even of the theory of knowledge, and, accordingly, to that of an independent science."<sup>64</sup> To understand Meinong's argument two things are required.

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<sup>63</sup> Meinong, "TO" 77-78.

First, we must understand his notion of metaphysics and what, according to him, the appropriate object of metaphysics is. Second, we must understand what the territory or region of the Object (*Gegenstand*) as such is.

### 1. Meinong's notion of metaphysics

Meinong's conception of metaphysics is that it is a universal science that tries to understand "the nature of the world in its entirety and of its ultimate foundations."<sup>65</sup> This view of metaphysics is consistent with the traditional view. However, when considering the scope of metaphysics Meinong has a rather limited and restrictive position. He claims that metaphysics deals with existent objects as such. In scholastic terminology, Meinong's view is that metaphysics deals with being (*ens*) *qua* being (*ens*) insofar as it has being (*esse*). Therefore, an object is considered part of the discipline of metaphysics only if it has existed, exists, or will exist. Another important concept that Meinong uses synonymously with existence is reality. For Meinong it is real if and only if it exists.<sup>66</sup>

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### 2. The Object as such (*Gegenstand*)

Meinong, using Brentano's theory of intentionality<sup>67</sup>, claims that knowing and all acts of cognition, judgments, ideas or presentations, assumptions, desires and feelings are always directed at some object. While all the objects of all these mental phenomena

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<sup>64</sup> Meinong, "TO" 98.

<sup>65</sup> Meinong, "TO" 78.

<sup>66</sup> Meinong, "TO" 79.

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 6 above.

are meant to be included in the scope of the theory of Objects, Meinong treats the objects of cognition and the act of knowing as special.

The act of knowing is not merely directed toward what is known in the way in which a false judgment may be directed toward its Object. In knowing, on the contrary, it is as though what is known were seized or grasped by the psychological act, or however else one may attempt to describe it, in an unavoidably pictorial way, something which is indescribable.<sup>68</sup>

According to Meinong, in these acts of knowing there is presented “a double fact (*Doppeltatsache*) in which what is known confronts the act of knowing as something relatively independent.”<sup>69</sup> What makes this enigmatic is that at times these independent objects will lack existence. In such cases, Meinong claims that the objects *subsist*.

In explaining the theory of objects, Meinong clarifies the distinction and relationship between a universal science and a specialized science. It may be argued, Meinong claims, that if the theory of object studies the objects of cognition as such, then the sum total of all the cognitive disciplines provides the realm of the theory of objects. As a result, the theory of objects is repetitive and adds nothing new. A similar argument is made against the traditional view of metaphysics, claiming that if metaphysics studies being, then metaphysics is the study of the sum total of all the disciplines that study being from their own special perspective. Both of these arguments fail, since the universal perspective is different than the sum total of the specialized perspectives. To study being as such is not the same as studying the sum total of the

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<sup>68</sup> Meinong, “TO” 78.

specialized studies of being. Similarly, to study the object of cognition as such is not to study again and in the same manner what is already the object of cognition. Instead, the universal perspective of the theory of objects is such that it studies the object as such in its totality.

Given Meinong's notion of metaphysics and its limitation to existence, there is an immense realm of objects that surpasses its legitimate scope. I have categorized those objects as follows. First, there are those that are subsistent but not existent: (1) facts or objectives, (2) numbers, and (3) connections. Second, those that are neither subsistent nor existent: (4) imaginative objects, e.g. a golden mountain; (5) contradictions, e.g. a roundsquare; and (6) assumptions. While technically Meinong's theory of objects overlaps with metaphysics as defined by Meinong, it is more universal than metaphysics since it covers the realm of non-existent objects (subsistent or not), which metaphysics does not. Meinong concludes:

Without doubt, metaphysics has to do with everything that exists. However, the totality of what exists, including what has existed and will exist, is infinitely small in comparison with the totality of the Objects of knowledge.<sup>70</sup>

### C. Meinong's treatment of non-existent objects.

I have analyzed Meinong's notion of an idea, and the discussion up to now has focused on his theory of knowledge. The purpose of the discussion was solely to illuminate further Meinong's notion of "Object." There are two important conclusions

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<sup>69</sup> Meinong, "TO" 78.

<sup>70</sup> Meinong, "TO" 79.



that we can draw from the analysis that will play a vital role in correctly understanding the nature and essence of Meinong's non-existent objects. The first is that for Meinong the Object (whether existent or non-existent) is not part of an idea, and thus cannot be a mental phenomenon. This will have grave implications for Meinong, since it will preclude the commonly suggested solution to the problem of non-existent objects of equating them with mental phenomena.<sup>71</sup> The second important aspect is the nature and essence of his notion of "content" and its relation to "the object of one's representation." This relation is difficult to understand, since it seems that the object of one's representation can neither be something mental nor the object in the extra-mental world.<sup>72</sup>

Meinong, in his theory of non-existent Objects, maintains four controversial propositions. First, he claims that everything that can be thought, whether existent or actual, possible, or impossible, *is an object*; second, some of these objects subsist but do not exist; third, some objects neither exist nor subsist but have quasi-being (*Quasisein*); fourth, the object is not part of the mental aspect of an idea. There are, therefore, according to Meinong, three distinct kinds of being (*esse*), existence, subsistence, and quasi-being. Corresponding to each kind of being there is a set of Objects.

We must attempt not to fall prey to the most commonly committed mistake of Meinong's critics, which is to confuse the distinct kinds of being and their corresponding objects. Findlay says: "it is unfortunate therefore that it should be

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Findlay, *MTOV* 44-45.

generally believed...that Meinong attributed subsistence to chimeras."<sup>73</sup> Meinong himself is not always careful in maintaining the accurate and precise distinctions, but one thing is abundantly clear, and that is that Meinong does not contradict himself, as Bertrand Russell claimed, concerning non-existent objects. Meinong maintains a clear distinction between existent objects and non-existent objects. As a matter of fact, his argument for the position that objects are not part of the mental aspect of an idea is that if they were, then we would have an idea of a non-existent object and be forced into the contradiction that there are objects (in the mind) which do not exist.

I envision two possible approaches in examining Meinong's treatment of non-existent objects. The first is to examine the different kinds of objects and focus on his notion of Object. The second is to focus not on the objects but on the nature of the different ways of being (*esse*), viz. existence, subsistence and quasi-being. This approach would primarily examine the meaning of existence, subsistence, and quasi-being. In my analysis, I will employ the latter strategy. The investigation of Meinong's non-existent objects, therefore, is nothing other than an investigation of Meinong's implicit theory of ontology. Of course, this does not mean that I am exempt from speaking about Meinong's notion of Object. On the contrary, in explaining the meaning of each of the ontological categories, my prime and essential source will be the sort of objects included. Moreover, in the end, one of my objectives is to demonstrate that

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. *supra*, 203-204.

<sup>73</sup> Findlay, *MTOV* 47.

while Meinong employs the word “Object” to encompass all objects, in fact to do so is to equivocate on the word “Object.”<sup>74</sup>

The first ontological category, existence, is not controversial; nevertheless, an explanation of what is entailed by Meinong’s notion of existence is important. The other two kinds of being (*esse*), viz. subsistence and quasi-being, can be defined negatively as non-existence. In this section, therefore, what is under consideration is the nature of subsistence and quasi-being, according to Meinong. That an interpretation of what Meinong means by these concepts is a difficult task is evident from the misinterpretations that exist in contemporary philosophical literature. Routley argues that there are at least three Meinongs: “the mythological Meinong of mainstream philosophical literature, the consistent Meinong, and the paraconsistent or dialectical Meinong.”<sup>75</sup>

The manner in which I will proceed in my investigation is first to explore Meinong’s concept of existence. Second, I will explore Meinong’s notion of subsistence. I will attempt to determine the nature of the ontological status of a subsistent being. Third, I will explore Meinong’s notion of quasi-being. I will attempt to determine the nature of the ontological status of a quasi-being.

### 1. Existence and Subsistence

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<sup>74</sup> This is probably why when he uses the word “Object” to include all objects he capitalizes it.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Routley, Meinong’s Jungle (Canberra: Central Printery, Australian National University, 1979) 489.

For Meinong, the notion of existence is the basic and ordinary concept connoted by the verb “to be.” Existence can be predicated of ordinary extra-mental objects. Objects that exist are exhausted by ontologically basic physical entities. In Aristotelian or scholastic terminology, this entity is called a being (*ens*) or a substance. A simpler term would be “a thing.” Meinong’s conception of metaphysics includes within its scope only existent objects.<sup>76</sup> The object is a particular and singular physical and extended object localizable in space and time that has existed, exists, or will exist. For instance, if I look out the window and see Kayla’s bike, then “Kayla’s bike” will be an object of my representation. Meinong refers to this object as “an actuality.” Therefore, actualities are the kind of objects that correctly pertain to the ontological category of existence. This means that true reality (i.e. existence) can be predicated only of particular actual entities.

Actual and existing objects may become objects of representation when they are conceived by some intellect. Meinong distinguishes actual objects from objects of representation by using the Latin *objectum* (singular) and *objecta* (plural) to refer to the latter.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, an object of representation for Meinong is an *objectum*, which may be either an actual object or a non-existent object. Therefore, we must be careful not to equate an *objectum* with an actual object; and while it is true that all objects of representation presuppose an *objectum* they do not presuppose an actual object.

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. *supra*, 213.

<sup>77</sup> Meinong, QA 38.

Meinong distinguishes actual objects from what he calls “ideal Objects.”<sup>78</sup> Ideal objects are the kinds of objects that do not exist, and therefore Meinong denies them any sort of reality.<sup>79</sup> However, Meinong claims that the special nature of these objects lets them “stand on their own.” In other words, while actualities have an ultimate and absolute kind of ontological independence (i.e. they exist on their own), ideal Objects have only some degree of ontological independence. Meinong attempts to articulate the ontological status of ideal Objects by granting them subsistence (*bestand*) and denying them existence (*existenz*). By so doing, Meinong establishes clear distinctions between two different ontological realms (i.e. existence and subsistence) and their appropriate objects. He says:

How little truth there is in such a view [the view that the non-real or non-existent is something for which science has no application] is most easily shown by ideal Objects which do indeed subsist (*bestehen*), but which do not by any means exist (*existieren*), and consequently cannot in any sense be real (*wirklich*).

The first ontological realm of existence and its appropriate object are non-controversial and are in accordance with most traditional views, although his equating existence with reality may be a point of contention. What is controversial is the second ontological realm, *subsistence*. The question is: what is subsistence? To answer this question, we could ask a further pragmatic question: How does Meinong arrive at the notion of subsistence? Does he invent it? Does he create it? Is it something of his fancy? If it were any of these, we would probably have a difficult time trying to understand it.

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<sup>78</sup> Meinong, “TO” 79.

<sup>79</sup> For Meinong a thing is real if and only if it exists. Cf. *supra*, 113.

However, if it were something that Meinong discovered, then it should be accessible to all. I believe that the latter is the case. Therefore, the question is: what is the reality to which this ontological notion of subsistence is anchored?

I want to argue that Meinong discovers this ontological truth, which he calls subsistence, through ideal Objects. It is important to note that, while Meinong has been interpreted as an esoteric philosopher, he repeatedly emphasizes his focus on our natural way of speaking, i.e. “a person speaking naturally,”<sup>80</sup> as opposed to “the theorists.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, Meinong begins with the way we speak of the world and of objects and draws his conclusions in a more commonsense way than has been in the past attributed to him. If my hypothesis is true, then the manner by which we should approach the examination of Meinong’s notion of subsistence is through his notion of ideal Objects.

Meinong claims that there are three distinct types of ideal Objects: (1) facts or *objectives*, (2) numbers, and (3) connections (Suárez refers to these as relations). At first glance, it appears that these three kinds of objects have little or nothing in common. According to Meinong, what they have in common is that they can all be objects of knowledge, yet none are existent or actual objects. Neither facts, numbers, nor connections between actualities are existent or actual beings, yet all can be objects of knowledge. The object that can best explain the nature of ideal Objects is a fact (or what Meinong calls an objective), because it makes accessible and clear the distinction

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<sup>80</sup> Meinong, QA 37.

<sup>81</sup> Meinong, QA 37.

between existence and subsistence. Moreover, numbers and connections can be construed as facts, since it is their factual aspect that permits them to participate in the realm of subsistence. The way Meinong arrives at the notion of an objective is through the *objectum*. I will, therefore, examine Meinong's distinction between an objective and an *objectum*.

When an object exists and is in some way presented to us, it will be an "object of representation." An object of representation that is an existing object is presented to the senses, and this experience Meinong considers basic; it is an "appearing to" or presenting to the mind. Once one has a representation of something, one can make a judgment about that object. For instance, once I look outside and see Kayla's bike, I can make the judgment: "Kayla's bike is outside." Meinong claims that, while this statement is not itself an object in the way that a bike is an object, it can be an object none the less. He says: "Admittedly, this is not some piece of actuality that an affirmative existential cognition would by nature be suited to apprehend, but it is still something that can be the object of an affirmative judgment."<sup>82</sup> For instance, "it is the case that *Kayla's bike is outside*." Objectives can be objects of either positive or negative judgments. Negative judgments are more interesting, since the non-existence of the *objectum* (as affirmed by the objective) seems to highlight the distinction between the objective and the *objectum* in a way that affirmative judgments do not.

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<sup>82</sup> Meinong, QA 38.

Meinong argues that while an objective is not an *objectum* it is nevertheless a fact and something that can stand on its own besides the *objectum*. So I can know “that Kristian’s bike is not outside,” and this fact is not the same as Kristian’s bike. The latter is the *objectum*, the former is a fact, and Meinong calls it an “objective.” Meinong says: “Indeed, they [the *objectum* and the objective] are not identical; and so we can generalize and say that affirmative as well as negative knowledge has not just an *objectum*, but an objective as well.”<sup>83</sup> According to Meinong, therefore, judgments have two objects: (1) the *objectum* or what the judgment is about, e.g. Kristian’s bike, and (2) the objective or what is judged, e.g. “that Kristian’s bike is not outside.” Meinong says: “I have recommended the name Objective (*Objektiv*) for this type of Object, and I have shown that the Objective itself can assume the functions of an Object in the strict sense [i.e. *Objectum*].”<sup>84</sup>

Meinong claims that objectives, as such, have a subsistent status. He says: “But this existence of the antipodes is a fact (*Tatsache*) which, as everyone sees immediately, can very well have a subsistent status, but cannot be still another existent entity in its own turn, as it were. This holds, likewise, for all other objectives.”<sup>85</sup> What is the nature of the being (*esse*) of a fact? Examining the main prerequisite for subsistence is the best way to apprehend the meaning of Meinong’s notion of subsistence (*bestand*).

Meinong claims that not all objectives as such subsist; instead, only true judgments subsist. Therefore, the objective of a false judgment, such as “that Karina is on the

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<sup>83</sup> Meinong, *QA* 39.

<sup>84</sup> Meinong, “TO” 80.



moon on December 23, 1998," does not subsist. Of course, it does not exist either. However, to say that it does not exist is obvious since no objective, subsistent or not, exists. This clarifies somewhat Meinong's notion of subsistence. It reveals his notion of subsistence, which at first seemed a bit enigmatic, as being more in line with common sense. Meinong is claiming that certain states of affairs or propositions, viz. true ones, have a certain kind of diminished being as compared to existence.

The notion of an objective or a *fact* implies various possibilities. Professor Lemos says:

...the term 'fact' has at least four distinct senses, according to which facts are either real entities, states of affairs that obtain, the obtaining or the nonobtaining of states of affairs, or true propositions.<sup>86</sup>

There are real distinctions between these notions of a fact. Meinong must be interpreted as maintaining the broadest one, namely, true propositions. The reason for this is that the first three notions of a fact imply some actuality, but, according to Meinong, subsistent objectives may include propositions about non-existent objects. For instance, the objective "that the golden mountain is golden" has a subsistent ontological status. The observation that one can construct objectives that are detached from actuality is so important, according to Meinong, that he develops it into a general principle. He calls it "the principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*."<sup>87</sup>

The principle states that properties of certain kinds of objects can be correctly and truly predicated of them regardless of the ontological status of that object. Therefore,

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<sup>85</sup> Meinong, "TO" 80.

<sup>86</sup> Ramon M. Lemos, Metaphysical Investigations (Rutherford: Associated University Presses, 1988) 125.

even if the object does not exist, such as a geometrical figure or a golden mountain, or the object is an impossible being, such as a round square, it is still the case that certain properties can be truly and properly predicated of it. Meinong says: "None of this alters the fact that the *Sosein* of an Object is not affected by its *Nichtsein* [non-existence]." <sup>88</sup> There is an exception to this, namely, all objects that are known *a posteriori*. Meinong says: "There would, indeed, be little sense in calling a house large or small, a region fertile or infertile, before one knew that the house or the land does exist, has existed, or will exist." <sup>89</sup> What the principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein* claims is that subsistence is predicable is not only of true objectives that deal with actualities, but also of any true objective regardless of the ontological status of its *objectum*. In conclusion, one may argue that for Meinong objective is subsistent if, and only if, it does not exist and is true.

Understanding better the relationship between an objective and an *objectum* will help illuminate further the notion of subsistence. The relationship between a judgment and an objective is intimate and necessary, since it is impossible, according to Meinong, to have a judgment without an objective, just as it is impossible to have a representation without an *objectum*. While Meinong claims that an objective and an *objectum* are two distinct objects of a judgment, the appropriate object of the judgment is the objective. An objective, however, presupposes an *objectum*. Moreover, the objective and *objectum*

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<sup>87</sup> Meinong, "TO" 82.

<sup>88</sup> Meinong, "TO" 82.

<sup>89</sup> Meinong, "TO" 82.

do not stand side by side as two separable objects; instead, the *objectum* is an essential part of the objective. Meinong says: "The objective does not stand separately alongside the *objectum*; as something apprehended by the judgment, the *objectum* always stands in an objective. It forms a kind of integral part of the objective."<sup>90</sup>

Meinong believes that one can create an infinite number of judgments of a higher order, so that it is possible for the object of a judgment, an objective, to have as its object another objective instead of an *objectum*. Nevertheless, Meinong maintains that all objectives must originally begin with a judgment about some existing or non-existing thing, and thus must have as its object an *objectum* at its origin. He says:

This is the fact that to every objective there belong infinitely many objectives of higher order... Yet one naturally cannot put it the other way round, saying that whenever a judgment judges an objective, as it must, it must also judge about an objective. What is judged about can just as well be an *objectum*. Accordingly, one cannot maintain that every objective must likewise have objectives of lower order under it, as well as objectives of higher order over it. Certainly it must have an object "under itself," in the sense just indicated, but this object can also be an *objectum*... But if one starts with a given objective and proceeds "downwards" in the sense just mentioned, one can sometimes meet with a longer series of objectives of progressively lower order, sometimes with a shorter series; but in any case the series to be traversed that way will end with an *objectum*, supposing one stays within the limits of the possible.<sup>91</sup>

The conclusion that can be drawn from Meinong's analysis is that while an objective is dependent on an *objectum*, subsistence is not dependent on existence. This holds, according to Meinong's theory, because an *objectum* may be an existent or a non-existent object. This analysis of Meinong's understanding of the relationship between an

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<sup>90</sup> Meinong, OA 40.

<sup>91</sup> Meinong, OA 50-51.

objective and an *objectum* emphasizes his principle of the independence of *sosein* from *sein*.

One thing still remains ambiguous, which I referred to in the last section although under a different name. In the last section, I expressed concern over the meaning of “the object of one’s representation.”<sup>92</sup> In this section Meinong re-introduces the same concept, which plays a fundamental role in his theory of subsistence. The *objectum* is the object of representation, and Meinong insists that just as every representation must have an object, so every judgment must have an objective and an *objectum*. This condition is necessary even if the representation is of a non-existing object, just as a judgment must have an objective even if it is false. My concern in the last section, as in this one, is over the nature and ontological status of the representational object.<sup>93</sup> There are two possible scenarios I would like to address. First is the case of a true judgment, i.e. a subsistent objective, concerning an existing *objectum*, for instance, the true statement “it is the case that Esther’s bike is outside.” Second is the case of a true judgment, i.e. a subsistent objective, with a non-existent *objectum*, for instance, the true statement “it is the case that there are no bikes outside.” My concern is over the nature of one’s representation or the *objectum*.

Both judgments are acts of cognition. They are knowledge claims. A basic and fundamental property of any epistemology, according to Meinong, is the notion of

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. *supra*, 206.

<sup>93</sup> This problem is related to the problem concerning the ontological status of Suárez’s objective concept (see pp. 45-46) and *esse cognitum* (see p. 114) and Brentano’s intentional object (see p. 178). For the solution to this problem see p. 250.

transcending. As I have already discussed above, this notion of transcending requires a description and explanation of how a content or representation is adequated with an actuality. In all acts of cognition, therefore, there is a transcending towards some actuality. I concluded in the section above that a major consequence of Meinong's notion of transcendence is that it is solely a property of judgments and not of mere presentations or even assumptions.<sup>94</sup>

In a true judgment with an existing *objectum*, the content is mental and the object extra-mental. To explain what it means for the content to be the vehicle by which the subject is able to transcend himself in an act of knowing and grasp the extra-mental object itself in some way, Meinong introduces the concept of "the object of my representation." For instance, he claims that in the case of perception, it is impossible to ascribe the properties of a physical object to my mental representation. Therefore, I should not say, "my representation is quadrangular," instead, he claims, I should say, "the object of my representation is quadrangular." What is "the object of my representation?" According to Meinong, the essence and status of "the object of my representation" depends on the actuality itself. If the actuality is a physical object in the extra-mental world and my attitude is an existential judgment towards that thing, then "the object of my representation" *is* the actuality. Meinong says:

If the object of a being-cognition consists in the thing whose being is cognized by means of the relevant judgment, then in our present case the judgment cannot really be [about] anything but the actuality toward which the judgment in question transcends.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. *supra*, 206-207.

<sup>95</sup> Meinong, *QA* 161.

Nothing further can be said. "For this fact [the fact of transcendence] there is neither description nor explanation; there is just acceptance, the attitude that in the end we are always thrown back upon in the face of ultimate facts."<sup>96</sup>

To explain the second case, where there is a true judgment, i.e. a subsistent objective, containing a non-existent *objectum*, Meinong introduces the notion of the Pure Object. All true negations or privations (using Suárez's terminology) belong in this category. According to Meinong, Pure Objects, unlike Ideal Objects or Actual Objects, are neither existent nor subsistent. To explain and distinguish Pure Objects, Meinong believes it is necessary to introduce another distinct realm of being (*esse*), namely, quasi-being (*Quasisein*).

## 2. Quasi-being (*Quasisein*)

Since the ontological notion of quasi-being originates from cases where you have a judgment containing a true objective and a non-existent *objectum*, an understanding of these kinds of judgments is essential. First, that a judgment contains a true objective, e.g. "that there is no fighting going on between Kristian and Kayla at this moment," indicates that something true is being said about reality, i.e. a fact. As I have already noted above, Meinong claims that these objectives have a subsistent status. I argued that Meinong grants subsistence to these objects because of the nature of the objects themselves. One way of highlighting the special nature of facts is to compare them with statements of the imagination, e.g. "that a bird is on top of my printer." The unique

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<sup>96</sup> Meinong, QA 161.

property of a fact is that it is not created by one's intellect but is discovered or at least discoverable. A fact, therefore, is not dependent on an intellect's knowing it. Meinong would argue that facts have their own independent status, unlike imaginative statements that are totally dependent on one's thinking them. So, if someone were to walk into my office, they not only would not discover "that a bird is sitting on my printer," but could not. On the other hand, if someone were to come into my house, they may discover "that Kristian and Kayla are not fighting." It is important to remember that for Meinong the latter is not dependent on its being observed or acknowledged by anyone; it *is* a fact; it subsists whether or not it ever becomes an object of an intellect.

The second characteristic I wish to discuss that pertains to the kind of judgments from which the notion of quasi-being originates is the non-existent *objectum*. Given that there is a true objective, what we have is a fact about a non-existent object. It is clear that we can make true judgments about existing things, but can we make true judgments about non-existing things? That we can is self-evident, since to deny the existence of something is itself a judgment. Therefore, I can make the true judgment "there are no round squares." It is apparent that Meinong's method is to approach these philosophical problems from a naturalistic perspective so that he does not create problems or paradoxes; instead, he analyzes natural language and the way we naturally speak and from that the difficulties are unearthed. Meinong would say something like, "that there are true objectives about non-existent *objecta* is a fact and has a subsistent ontological status." What are the implications of this fact?

First, Meinong notes that the objective has subsistence and that the *objectum* is an essential part of the objective, so that the *objectum* must also have some kind of being. Meinong says: "Now an Objective, whether it is a *Seinobjektiv* [affirmation] or *Nichtseinobjektiv* [negation], stands in relations to its Object (*Objekt*), albeit *cum grano salis*, as the whole to its part. But if the whole has being, so must its part."<sup>97</sup> However, Meinong argues that in the case, for instance, of an objective that denies the being of the Object, e.g. "there are no round squares," it is impossible to grant the object either existence or subsistence. This line of argument employed by Meinong is more than sufficient to vindicate him from Russell's accusation of committing a contradiction. Meinong is arguing that neither existence nor subsistence can be granted to these sorts of objects. He says:

Furthermore, since the Objective strictly prevents us from assuming that A has being (being, as we have seen, can sometimes be understood as existence, sometimes as subsistence), it appears that the requirement that the Object have being (which was inferred from the being of the *Nichtseinsobjektiv* [negation]) makes sense only insofar as the being in question is neither existence nor subsistence – only insofar as a third order of being, if one may speak this way, is adjoined to existence and subsistence. This sort of being must belong to each object as such. ... The term "*Quasisein*" seemed to me for a while to be a completely suitable expression for this rather oddly constituted type of being.<sup>98</sup>

Meinong's argument does not seem very plausible, since it relies on a false analogy. In the case of physical objects, if the parts do not exist then the whole cannot exist. Therefore, with respect to physical objects there is an ontological implication from the whole to the parts. The argument of analogy relies on the assumption that the same

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<sup>97</sup> Meinong, "TO" 84.



must be the case with facts or objectives. But this implies that facts are the same sort of entities as physical things, and this is not the case. Therefore, the analogy does not work. Even according to Meinong, objectives are distinct from *objecta*. Moreover, Meinong does not believe that in the end the argument will work. He says: "it would be better to conclude from the facts with which we are concerned that this analogy does not apply to the Objective of non-being - i.e., that the being of the Objective is not by any means universally dependent upon the being of its Object."<sup>99</sup>

The second argument, stemming from judgments with true objectives about non-existent *objecta*, is that in order to make such judgments we must be able to at least refer to the *objecta* in question. If they have no being, then they are nothing, but how can we refer to nothing? Meinong says:

We could also describe the situation from its psychological side in this way: if I should be able to judge that a certain Object is not, then I appear to have had to grasp the Object in some way beforehand, in order to say anything about its non-being, or more precisely, in order to affirm or to deny the ascription of non-being to the Object.<sup>100</sup>

Meinong suggests that one possibility of ridding us of the apparent paradox is to explain what is actually occurring by appealing to the notion of an assumption (*Annahme*). What is really going on is that I am first assuming the object in question to later deny its existence. Meinong says:

As we have seen, *A* must be 'given' to me in some way or other if I am to grasp its non-being. This produces, however, as I have already shown

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<sup>98</sup> Meinong, "TO" 84.

<sup>99</sup> Meinong, "TO" 85.

<sup>100</sup> Meinong, "TO" 84.

elsewhere, an assumption (*Annahme*) possessing affirmative quality: in order to deny *A*, I must first assume the being of *A*.<sup>101</sup>

It is important to realize that Meinong distinguishes between the description of the problem from a psychological perspective and from the perspective of the object itself. Hitherto, Meinong has only explained away the experience, and thus has only provided an explanation of the apparent contradiction from the psychological perspective. There are two problems with Meinong's explanation.

The first is that it reveals nothing about the object itself, which is what interests us. Instead, Meinong's explanation hitherto only explains how our intellect may be capable of stating a true objective about a non-existent *objectum*. Findlay says: "Meinong makes the somewhat unsatisfactory reply that, even if we can only refer to non-existent objects by assuming them to have being, this is only a fact about our apprehension, and not about the objects themselves."<sup>102</sup> The second problem is that the explanation itself seems to fail because it inherently commits itself to a contradiction. This occurs because it employs the notion of an assumption, which by nature requires that the object need not exist. Therefore, by first assuming *A*, one has already implicitly determined that *A* does not exist. It is true that once one has conceived the non-existence of *A*, then to state this fact one may assume *A* in order afterwards to deny explicitly its existence. However, the question is how can one first conceive of a thing's non-existence if it has no being whatsoever, i.e. is nothing? The use of the notion of assumption commits Meinong to the claim that the thing assumed has no being, and yet Meinong's objective

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<sup>101</sup> Meinong, "TO" 85.

is to demonstrate that in fact these non-existent beings do have some “strange kind of being.”<sup>103</sup> Findlay says: “Meinong does not explain why, if a chimera or a golden mountain are genuine but non-existent objects, we have to assume that they exist in order to have them before our thought.”<sup>104</sup> My criticism is not only that Meinong does not explain it, but that it contradicts his metaphysical explanation of the notion of objects as such. Meinong himself, in the end, does not advocate the doctrine of assumption as an appropriate explanation for the apparent paradox. Instead, he introduces the doctrine: “the principle of the indifference of pure Objects to being.”<sup>105</sup>

What is the principle of the indifference of pure Objects to being? Meinong believes that this principle touches upon the essential nature of Objects as such. In effect, it could be looked upon as a description of the essence of the Object as such. We must keep in mind that it is the Object as such that Meinong’s new discipline, The Theory of Objects, is concerned with. So, the importance of this principle is twofold. First, Meinong believes that it presents the ultimate understanding of the Object as such. Second, the essential nature of the Object inherently resolves the apparent contradictions and paradoxes. Meinong says:

What one could thus call with propriety the principle of the indifference of pure Objects to being (*de Satz Vom Aussersein des reinen Gegenstandes*) finally eliminates the appearance of a paradox which was the immediate occasion for the assertion of this principle.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Findlay, *MTOV* 48.

<sup>103</sup> Meinong, “TO” 85.

<sup>104</sup> Findlay, *MTOV* 48.

<sup>105</sup> Meinong, “TO” 86.

<sup>106</sup> Meinong, “TO” 86.

First, let us see how it is that this principle illuminates the essential nature of the object as such. To do this, we must once again present the apparent paradox or contradiction concerning judgments with true objectives and non-existent objects, e.g. *there are* no round squares, or *there are* objects of which it is the case that there are no such objects. Meinong introduces a distinct order of being, viz. quasi-being, to account for the being of these sorts of objects. As in the case of existence and subsistence, which were understood through their appropriate Objects, the essence of quasi-being can be grasped through the essence of the Pure Object. However, unlike Actual Objects or Ideal Objects, the essence of Pure Objects introduces something much more radical and universal. It is universal since its application covers the Object as such and thus entails all objects. Meinong says: "This sort of being [quasi-being] must belong, therefore, to every Object as such."<sup>107</sup>

Besides the universality of Meinong's notion of quasi-being, it is fundamental insofar as it is a description of the essence or the nature of the Object as such. We can begin understanding Meinong's conception of the Object as such with the radical distinction between essence and existence, which he maintains. The distinction between the essence of an object and its existence is derived from the realization that existence is not an essential property of the Object. Therefore, in determining the essence of an Object, its existence is not considered. Meinong says: "...it is, after all, clearly understandable that neither being nor non-being can belong essentially to the

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<sup>107</sup> Meinong, "TO" 84.

Object in itself.”<sup>108</sup> Therefore, the essence of any object is indifferent to its existence.

Meinong claims that the essence of the Object as such only concerns its properties, and existence is not an appropriate property of any Object. Instead, he claims that existence is something external to the Object as such. He says:

As soon as it is recognized that, apart from special cases, both being and non-being are equally external to an Object, it is then understood that nothing more, so to speak, is involved in comprehending the non-being of the Object than there is in comprehending its being.<sup>109</sup>

Quasi-being, therefore, concerns the nature of all Objects of knowledge. It pertains to the nature of all Objects, since any Object can be contemplated concerning *what it is* irrespective of whether *it is*. Findlay says in explaining Meinong’s notion of Pure Object: “Whether an object is or is not, makes no difference to *what* the object is.”<sup>110</sup> Emphasizing the argument from the nature of the Object as such, Meinong says: “The Object is by nature indifferent to being (*aussersein*), although at least one of its two Objectives of being, the Object’s being or non-being, subsists.”<sup>111</sup> Therefore, while Meinong maintains this radical distinction between the essence of an Object and existence, he does not believe that there is some other ontological category, besides existence or non-existence, into which an Object can fall. Therefore, all objectives concerning the being (existence) of an Object, must conform to the law of excluded

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<sup>108</sup> Meinong, “TO” 86.

<sup>109</sup> Meinong, “TO” 86.

<sup>110</sup> Findlay, *MTOV* 49.

<sup>111</sup> Meinong, “TO” 86

middle. A failure to understand the latter can lead to a misunderstanding similar to

Bertrand Russell's. Russell says:

Mr. MacColl regards individuals as of two sorts, real and unreal; hence he defines the null-class as the class consisting of all unreal individuals. This assumes that such phrases as "the present king of France," which do not denote a real individual, do, nevertheless, denote an individual, but an unreal one. This is essentially Meinong's theory, which [we] have seen reason to reject because it conflicts with the law of contradiction.<sup>112</sup>

It is apparent that Russell's alleged contradiction could only be understood if one were to understand Meinong as using "quasi-being" and "existence" in an univocal way. It should be evident that not only is Meinong not using these terms univocally, but that "quasi-being" inherently excludes the notion of existence. Meinong claims that there are exceptions to the separation of essence from existence. The exceptions pertain to cases where the essence implicates an Object's non-existence, e.g. a round square.

Finally, I want to address the relationship between "the principle of the indifference of pure Objects to being" [hereafter the principle of the Pure Object] and "the principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*" [hereafter the principle of *Sosein*]. Meinong claims that the principle of *Sosein* and the principle of the Pure Object complement each other. He says:

The above-mentioned principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein* now presents a welcome supplement to this view. It tells us that that which is not in any way external to the Object, but constitutes its proper essence, subsists in its *Sosein* – the *Sosein* attaching to the Object whether the object has being or not.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. by A.P. Martinich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 210.

<sup>113</sup> Meinong, "TO" 86.

First, we should remember that it was the principle of *Sosein* that created the apparent contradictions and paradoxes in the first place, i.e. judgments containing true objectives and non-existent *objecta*. Also, according to Meinong, the solution to the apparent contradiction and paradoxes is the principle of the Pure Object. Therefore, that there exists an intimate relationship between the source of the problem, i.e. the principle of *Sosein*, and its solution, i.e. the principle of the Pure Object, is only to be expected. What should be noted is that the principle of the Pure Object is the more fundamental and primordial of the two. In other words, the principle of Pure Objects says something about the nature and essence of the Object as such, so that if it is true it explains why the principle of *Sosein* is possible. Adding content to the latter, I may say that since the principle of the Pure Object excludes existence from an Object's essential properties, it is understandable that one may correctly predicate properties of an Object, regardless of the object's being or non-being.

Finally, I want to conclude this chapter by briefly noting one of the implications of Meinong's Theory of Objects. Meinong believes that his analysis has overcome the prejudiced attitude knowledge seekers have towards being or existence. He believes that he has demonstratively shown that being or existence is not the fundamental presupposition of knowledge claims. This in itself is an important accomplishment.

Meinong says:

Being is not the presupposition under which knowledge finds, as it were, its point of attack; it is itself such a point of attack. Non-being is equally as good a point of attack. Furthermore, in the *Sosein* of each Object, knowledge already finds a field to which it may have access without first

answering the question concerning being or non-being, or without answering this question affirmatively.<sup>114</sup>

Meinong's theory, especially his notion of the Pure Object, brings to mind many striking similarities with Aquinas' notion of the abstracted essence and Husserl's notion of the "bracketed" or "disconnected" object in "pure consciousness." In the next chapter, in my comparison with Suárez, I will discuss some of these similarities and differences.

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<sup>114</sup> Meinong, "TO" 86.