Scholastic Debates about Beings of Reason and Contemporary Analytical Metaphysics

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Abstract

Prima facie it would seem that the traditional scholastic debates about *entia rationis* ("beings of reason") may be easily brought into dialogue with debates about nonexistent objects in contemporary analytical metaphysics. It turns out, however, that the scholastic debates about beings of reason are placed within a very different ontological framework or paradigm, so that bringing scholastic and analytical authors into common discussion about this topic is not trivial. In this paper I make the first step toward establishing such discussion by describing the ontological framework presupposed by the scholastic debates about beings of reason, and by identifying the roles that beings of reason were supposed to play in it.

1. Introduction

One of the main tasks of metaphysics – as it was conceived by Aristotle – is to provide a list of categories of what exists.[1] Late scholastic authors of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, however, were increasingly preoccupied not just with what exists but also with what does *not* exist.[2] The most important and well-known label with which these late scholastic discussions are associated is '*ens rationis*', literally "being of reason".[3] *Prima facie* it would seem that the traditional

[1] This is, of course, an oversimplification and a bold claim, see e.g. Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Metaphysics and Its Task: The Search for the Categorial Foundation of Knowledge* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999); Robert A. Delfino, ed., *What are We to Understand Gracia to Mean: Realist Challenges to Metaphysical Neutralism* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006); and van Inwagen's contribution in this volume.

[2] For an introduction into these scholastic discussions see, e.g., John P. Doyle, "Suárez on Beings of Reason and Truth (First part)", *Vivarium* 25 (1987): 47–75; "Suárez on Beings of Reason and Truth (Second part)", *Vivarium* 26 (1988): 51–72; Daniel D. Novotný, "Prolegomena to a Study of Beings of Reason in Post-Suarezian Scholasticism, 1600–1650", *Studia Neoaristotelica* 3, no. 2 (2006): 117–141.

[3] Henceforth in this paper, for the sake of simplicity, whenever I shall speak about scholasticism I shall mean "scholasticism of the Renaissance and especially Baroque period", to wit, scholasticism of the seventeenth century. Baroque scholastic culture and discussions differed in many ways from the scholasticism of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. See Daniel D. Novotný, "In Defense of Baroque Scholasticism", *Studia Neoaristotelica* 6, no. 2 (2009): 209–233.

scholastic debates about beings of reason may be easily brought into dialogue with the current work on nonexistent objects in analytical metaphysics.[4] It turns out, however, that the scholastic debates about beings of reason are placed within a very different ontological framework or paradigm, so that bringing scholastic and analytical authors into common discussion on this topic is not trivial. In this paper I make the first step toward establishing such discussion by (1) providing a description of the framework presupposed by the scholastic debates about beings of reason, and (2) identifying the roles that beings of reason were supposed to play in it.

2. The Ontological Framework of Scholastic Debates

Let me start with a scheme (see the opposite page) attempting to classify into "super-categories" whatever non-existing items one might encounter in scholastic works.

At the very left of our scheme we see the term 'item'. By this term I mean anything to which one can refer and of which one can say that "it is (in some sense) there" (*datur*) – regardless of such issues as to whether it exists or whether it is real. (The asterisk next to this and some other super-categories indicates that it is a term that scholastic authors themselves did not use but that is useful to have for our talk about their views). For comparison, in analytical philosophy Bertrand Russell tried to capture this broad meaning of 'item' by the term 'term':[5]

> Whatever may be an object of thought, or may occur in any true or false proposition, or can be counted as one, I call a term. This, then, is the widest word in the philosophical vocabulary. I shall use as synonymous with it the words unit, individual, and entity. The first two emphasise the fact that every term has being, i.e. is in some sense. A man, a moment, a number, a class, a relation, a chimaera, or anything else that can be mentioned, is sure to be a term...

And Peter Strawson, to take another example, also acknowledged the possibility to have such a "widest word in philosophical vocabulary":[6]

> Anything whatever can be introduced into discussion by means of a singular, definitely identifying substantival expression... Since anything whatever can be identifyingly referred to, being a possible object of identifying reference does not distinguish any class or type of items or entities from any other.

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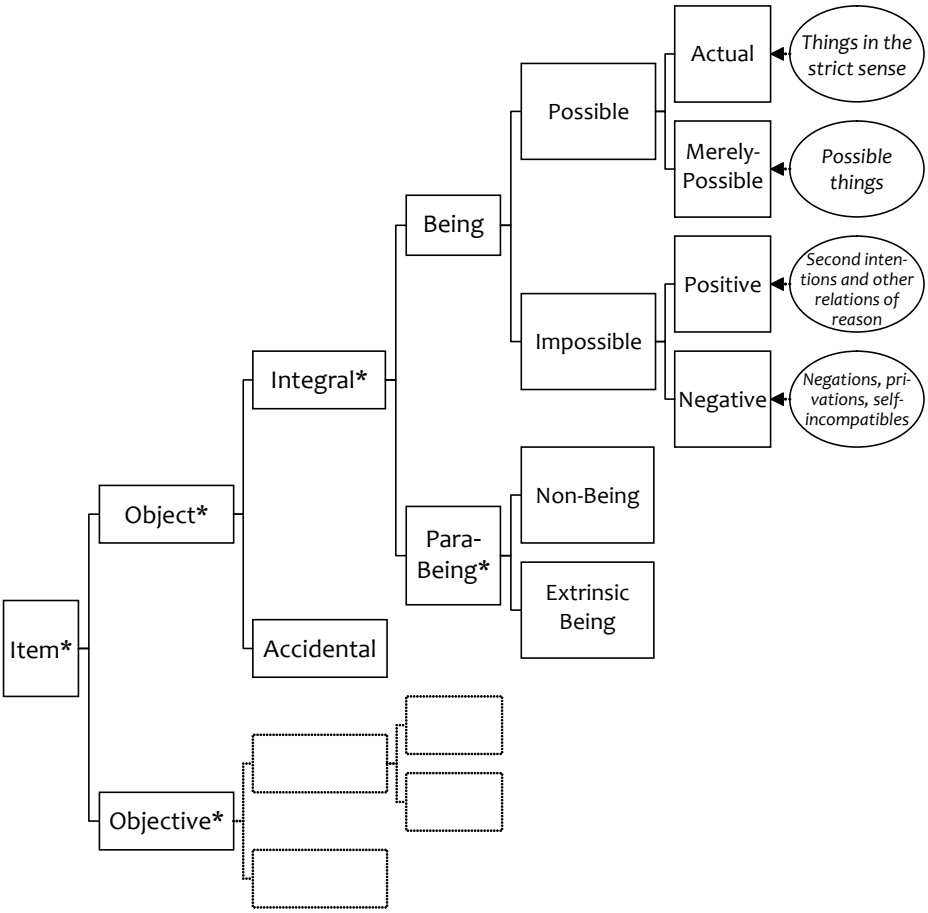
[4] For an overview of these debates see, e.g., Maria Reicher, "Nonexistent Objects", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2010 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, ⟨http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/nonexistent-objects/⟩.

[5] Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, ⟨http://fair-use.org/bertrand-russell/the-principles-of-mathematics/⟩ (1st ed. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1903; 2nd ed. 1938), §47.

[6] Peter F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (New York: Routledge, 1959, repr. 2005), 137.



Items are divided into objects and objectives by which I mean things and propositions/states-of-affairs, respectively.[7] Let me expand a bit. Etymologically, the word 'object' means "thrown in the way"; a stone, for instance, could be an object. The stone is something that catches our attention and hence it becomes

[7] The division and the terminology is inspired by Alexius Meinong. What I call 'item' Meinong calls 'Gegenstand'. He then divides it into Objekt and Objektiv. See ALEXIUS MEINONG, *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1904), 6; translated in RODERICK M. CHISHOLM, *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), 80. See also JOHN N. FINDLAY, *Meinong's theory of objects and values*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing (Gregg revivals), 1995), 60–69 (1st ed. 1933).

an object of perception and thought. But the expression 'object of thought', as A. N. Prior points out, is ambiguous:[8]

> The phrase 'object of thought' may be used in two very different ways. An object of thought may be (1) what we think, or (2) what we think about; e.g. if we think that grass is green, (1) what we think is that grass is green, and (2) what we think about is grass. 'Objects of thought' ... are sometimes called 'propositions', not in the sense of sentences, but in the sense of what sentences mean. ... *What we think*, may be *false*; and what we think *about* may be *non-existent*. These are quite different defects, though philosophers have sometimes slipped into treating them as if they were the same.

Some analytical philosophers consider Prior's propositions to be primary truthmakers, corresponding or failing to correspond to facts or obtaining states-of-affairs as truthmakers. These distinctions within the "genus" of objectives, however, need not concern us at this point, because Baroque scholastics paid virtually no attention to them – at least in the context of beings of reason.[9] For them, the world is the totality of *things* and not of *facts* (pace Wittgenstein).[10]

Next comes the division into accidental objects (*per accidens,* loosely united objects, aggregates) and integral objects (*per se,* "innerly integrated", tightly/naturally united objects). Accidental objects include artefacts, heaps, or any kind of arbitrary wholes.

The following division, the division of integral objects, is of crucial importance, because many scholastic authors simply identify integral (*per se*) objects with beings (*entia*). There are, however, texts in which, for instance, Francisco Suárez acknowledges the categories of non-beings and extrinsic beings. These, for the lack of a better term, I call "para-beings", a term I have made up but which captures the idea of a category of objects parasitic on beings in the strict sense.[11]

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[8] Arthur N. Prior, *Objects of Thought*, ed. Peter Geach and Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 3–4.

[9] There were some exceptions, see Daniel D. Novotný, "The Historical Non-Significance of Suárez's Theory of Beings of Reason: A Lesson From Hurtado", in *Metaphysics of Francisco Suárez (1548–1617):* Disputationes metaphysicae *in their systematic and historical context*, ed. Daniel Heider, Lukáš Novák, and David Svoboda (Prague, forthcoming), ch. 9. There is an evidence that propositions and states-of-affairs (under the heading '*complexe significabile*' – '*something signifiable in a complex way*') were discussed in different contexts by Renaissance scholastics, see Gabriel Nuchelmans, *Late-Scholastic and Humanist Theories of the Proposition* (Oxford, New York: North Holland Publishing Company, 1980). I prefer Meinong's term 'objective' to the medieval term '*complexe significabile*' for two reasons. First, Meinong's term highlights the correlation between objectives and objects, and second, it is neutral with respect to the question whether objectives are mental constructs or not. The term '*complexe significabile*' or '*complexly signifiable*' may seem to imply that it is something mental.

[10] Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 1922, repr. 2009), 29, prop. 1.1.

[11] The term is mine but it is inspired by Caramuel's 'πάροντα', see Ioannes Caramuel,

Then we get to the division of beings into possible in the broad sense and impossible (*impossibilia*). Broadly possible beings are divided into actual (*entia actu*, *vera entia*) and merely possible (*possibilia*). Actual beings, i.e. beings in the narrowest sense of the word, make up the world/reality of the scholastics.[12] They are ontologically prior to everything else. Beings divide into substances, such as people, animals, plants, or stones, and their various accidents, and are typically classified into nine structured groups, called 'categories'. Merely possible beings were enormously controversial among the scholastics.[13]

Finally, we get to the impossible beings, i.e. beings that *cannot* exist in actual reality. These, according to the common default scholastic assumption, are mind-dependent and hence they are called '*entia rationis*'. As I have already said, this expression means literally "beings of reason" although there are at least three other translations of this term in use: 'mental being' (Gracia), 'rationate being' (Schmidt), and 'intentional being' (Sousedík). I use 'being of reason' not only because it is the most common (Doyle, Canteñs), but also because its oddity highlights the fact that we speak about a kind of item taken from within a specifically scholastic context.[14]

Leptotatos (Vigevani: Typis Episcopalibus, apud Camillum Conradam, 1681), diss. 2, pars 2, a. 1, concl. 5, 96a; cf. Daniel D. Novotný, "Ens rationis in Caramuel's Leptotatos (1681)", in *Juan Caramuel Lobkowitz, the Last Scholastic Polymath*, ed. Petr Dvořák and Jacob Schmutz (Praha: Filosofia, 2008), 71–84.

[12] This world/reality has material and non-material "regions". Angels, for instance, belong to the non-material region and human beings are peculiar hybrids of the two worlds (they have a non-material "part"). God has a *sui generis* ontological status: Everything, whether material or non-material, depends on God both for the beginning and for the continuation of its existence (cf. E. Feser's contribution to this volume).

[13] There are several studies of the late scholastic views on merely possibles, e.g.: Jeffrey Coombs, "The Possibility of Created Entities in Seventeenth-Century Scotism", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (1993): 447–459; Stanislav Sousedík, "Der Streit um den wahren Sinn der Scotischen Possibilienlehre", in *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics*, ed. Ludger Honnefelder, Rega Wood, Mechtild Dreyer (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 191–204; Tobias Hoffmann, *Creatura intellecta: Die Ideen und Possibilien bei Duns Scotus mit Ausblick auf Franz von Mayronis, Poncius und Mastrius* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002).

[14] Jorge J. E. Gracia, "Suárez's Conception of Metaphysics: A Step in the Direction of Mentalism?", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991): 287–309; Robert W. Schmidt, "The translation of terms like *Ens rationis*", *The Modern Schoolman* 41 (1963): 73–75; Stanislav Sousedík, "Pomyslná jsoucna (*entia rationis*) v aristotelské tradici 17. století", *Filozofický časopis* 52 (2004): 533–544; John P. Doyle, "Suárez on Beings of Reason and Truth (First part)"; Bernardo Canteñs , "Suárez on Beings of Reason: What Kind of Being (*entia*) are Beings of Reason, and What Kind of Being (*esse*) Do they Have?", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 77 (2003): 171–187.

Now the surprising fact: Suárez and most other Baroque scholastics considered merely possible beings to be *real* and hence they were *not* classified as beings of reason. This fact is often overlooked. Nicholas Rescher, for instance, writes:[15]

> With regard to non-existents, the medieval mainstream thus sought to effect a compromise. On the one hand, their lack of reality, of actual existence, deprived non-entities of a self-sustaining ontological footing and made them into mind-artifacts, *entia rationis*. On the other hand, their footing in the mind of God endowed them with a certain objectivity and quasi-reality that precluded them from being mere *flatus vocis* fictions, mere verbalisms that represent creatures of human fancy[16]

Hence, using non-scholastic terminology, beings of reason might be best described as intentional or mind-dependent impossible objects. This mind-dependency of beings of reason, however, is more precisely characterised by the scholastics as merely objective mind-dependency. This sort of mind-dependency is contrasted by them with subjective mind-dependency, which is a real relation of dependency of the mental accidents, such as sensations, emotions, thoughts, and volitions, on the mind. There are two sorts of objective mind-dependency. (1) Suppose there is a person *p* who apprehends a real being *x*. In this case *x* is not merely objectively in the intellect of *p*, for *x* also has its own real being in itself. (2) Suppose there is a person *p* who apprehends *x* and *x* has no other being besides the being it has in the intellect of *p*. In this case *x* is merely objectively in the intellect of *p*. It is only in this last sense of 'mind-dependency' that the word '*ens rationis*' is appropriately used.[17]

Impossible beings (beings of reason, necessarily mind-dependent beings) divide into negative beings (*entia negativa*) and positive beings (*entia positiva*). The former are further divided into negations (*negationes*) and privations (*privationes*), and the latter are identified with relations of reason (*relationes rationis*). Impossible beings should be understood as objects for which it is impossible to exist in actual reality and hence they need to be distinguished from what I call "self-contradictory beings", which are objects, such as square-circles or goat-stags, that

[15] Rescher, *Imagining Irreality*, 362.

[16] Antonio Millán-Puelles (see *The Theory of the Pure Object*, trans. and ed. by Jorge García-Gómez, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996) does not make the same historical mistake, although for systematic reasons he agrees with Rescher's view that mere possibles are non-real. Even some contemporary Thomists argue that for systematic reasons the traditional thesis about the reality of the possibles is inconsistent with other tenets of scholastic ontology, see, e.g., Norris W. Clarke: "What is Really Real?", in *Progress in Philosophy. Philosophical Studies in Honor of Rev. Doctor Charles A. Hart*, ed. by J. A. McWilliams (Milwaukee, 1955).

[17] Note that in contemporary usage the words objective/subjective are used in exactly the reversed sense. The term 'objective' means real and mind-independent, whereas 'subjective' means apparent and mind-dependent. How this reversal of meaning happened is still an untold story of the history of philosophy.

contain explicit contradictions.[18] Although many later Baroque authors reduced impossible beings to self-contradictory objects, this is not a trivial move. For Suárez and other scholastics there seem to be objects that cannot exist in actual reality but still, they are not self-contradictory (for instance, the universal *human being* or *blindness*).

So far for the explanation of the above given schematic classification of scholastic super-categories. Before we go on to the second part of my paper, let me make three clarificatory notes about this classification.

Note 1: Classifications and Natural Classes

The classification of super-categories (if I am right) provides an overview of various strange ontological items one can encounter in scholastic texts. But why did the scholastics themselves not formulate such a classification? I can only speculate. First of all, many elements of the classification I give were controversial among them. Not all scholastics agreed, for instance, that extrinsic beings or non-beings were in some sense real and hence a special "genus" of items. Hence, since there was no agreement on these issues, they did not feel the need to provide an explicit classification of the items they talked about. Secondly, the hesitancy to formulate such a classification might be due to their assumption that "good" concepts *must* delimit natural classes (members of which are at least analogically related). And since there is no natural class, for instance, of existing and non-existing beings, the two should not be lumped under one label. Today, however, we feel free to draw such classifications, provided that we keep in mind that some of the "fields" of our classification may represent just arbitrarily united classes. The fact that *x* and *y* belong to a class *C* does not imply that *x* and *y* share some common (intrinsic) feature. Later Baroque scholastics seem to go in this direction in that they started to acknowledge "extrinsic thinkability", i.e. the possibility of subsuming *x* and *y* under a common concept, without implying that they share anything intrinsically in common – except for the extrinsic feature of *belonging to the same class*. The notion of extrinsic thinkability gave rise to the idea that there are supertranscendental terms, such as 'thinkable' or 'something', which are applicable both to real and non-real objects.[19]

[18] Millán-Puelles calls these "paradoxical quiddities" or "openly paradoxical beings" (Millán-Puelles, *The Theory of the Pure Object*).

[19] It is also noteworthy that Baroque scholastic authors in Catholic lands, with some exceptions, did not use graphs in their philosophical and theological works. One of the reasons might be that they wished to avoid associations with the infamous ex-Catholic Petrus Ramus (1515–1572) and his movement (Ramism) that was using them extensively.

Note 2: Existence and Being

One of the presuppositions of any classification of non-existing items is the distinction between the meanings of 'there is' and 'exists'. Many analytical philosophers, notably those in the Frege-Quine tradition, like to treat the expression 'there is' with metaphysical seriousness. In their view 'there is' and 'exists' are synonymous – they both have "ontological import". The scholastics would disagree.[20] According to them one needs to make a distinction between 'there is' (*datur*, "is given"), which is meant to be as neutral and broad as possible, and narrower predicates, such as 'exists', which express a first-order non-trivial feature of individuals.[21]

Note 3: Categories and Transcendentals

There is another group of terms one may encounter in scholastic texts, the so-called transcendentals (one, true, good, etc.) that apply to every being. Beside these there are also other terms, such as actual/potential, real/nonreal, perhaps whole/part, one/many, etc. that apply to beings from various categories but not to everything. Although one could perhaps subsume these trans-categorial terms (and whatever they express) under *item*, it is more convenient and closer to scholastic usage of the words to keep the super-categories and the super-transcendentals separately, not to include them in the same classification. To put the difference between the two in a rather simplistic way one could say that the aim of the categories and super-categories is a general *division* of what there is and is not, whereas the aim of the transcendentals and super-transcendentals is a general *characterisation* of what there is and is not.[22]

[20] Cf. Klima's distinction between soft and hard ontological commitments in pre-Ockhamist philosophy. For Aquinas beings of reason are "objects of thought and signification that are required by a certain kind of semantics but undesirable as objects simpliciter in ontology". Gyula Klima "The Changing Role of *Entia rationis* in Mediaeval Semantics and Ontology: A Comparative Study with a Reconstruction", *Synthese* 96 (1993): 25.

[21] In the latter part of the twentieth century some analytical philosophers came to defend the distinction as well. For instance, Terence Parsons (*Nonexistent Objects*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) constructed a logic distinguishing the existence predicate ('E!') from the quantifier ('∃'). Another way of dealing with the distinction was developed by Graham Priest (*Towards Non-Being: The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality*, Oxford University Press, 2005), who treats 'there is' and 'exists' synonymously but interprets them as ontologically neutral. Still, to acknowledge that existence is a property of individuals as such does not imply that it is a *non-trivial* property. For instance, Peter van Inwagen in *Metaphysics,* Third Edition (Philadelphia, PA: Westview, 2009, 277–292) argues that existence is a *trivial* property of individuals (amounting to self-identity). For more on existence "as one of the deep topics in philosophy, if not the deepest", see William F. Vallicella, *A Paradigm Theory of Existence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

[22] The traditional idea of transcendentals is one that does not seem to have emerged so far as a topic in analytical metaphysics. With some exceptions: cf. Uwe Meixner, *Einführung*

3. The Roles of Beings of Reason in Scholastic Debates

Having classified non-existing items discussed by the scholastics into super-categories and identified the position of beings of reason within the classification, let us take a look now at the roles they were supposed to play in scholastic ontology. Why did the scholastic authors feel the need to talk about them? They used them to address various philosophical puzzles, most conspicuously the problem of non-being/intentionality. Hence we start with the latter issue (3.1) and then discuss several other problems related to beings of reason (3.2).

3.1 The Problem of Non-being/Intentionality

Thought and language direct our attention to various sorts of objects that either clearly do not exist or whose existence is questionable. This fact is the main source of the problem (or the family of problems) addressed first by Parmenides and discussed by philosophers ever since. From one point of view, the problem concerns non-being including questions such as, What is the status of non-being? Is it in some sense real and mind-independent? What belongs to its domain: past, future, potential, merely possible, impossible, fictitious, and so on? From another point of view, the problem concerns intentionality and intentional being. The pertinent questions in this case include: What is an intentional object, if any? Does a category of intentional objects help to explain our thinking of and about non-being?

Several basic strategies have been used to deal with the problem of non-being. First, however, we need to note that the problem of non-being divides into the problem of non-existing objects and the problem of negative facts (also referred to as negative truths). The question whether there are negative facts is more fundamental than the question whether there are non-existing objects. Indeed, negative facts are sometimes taken as evidence that there are non-existing objects but not vice versa. And it is possible to hold that there are negative facts and no non-existing objects, but not vice versa.[23]

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in die Ontologie (Darmstadt: WBG, 2004), 22–29. For an introduction into transcendentals in Baroque scholasticism, see, e.g., Jorge J. E. Gracia and Daniel D. Novotný, "Fundamentals in Suárez's Metaphysics: Transcendentals and Categories", in *Interpreting Suárez: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Daniel Schwartz (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19–38.

[23] At this point one might wonder whether there is a distinction between negative objects and non-existent objects. This question is posed by Meinong, *Über Annahmen* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1902), 7ff. Examples of putative negative objects that Meinong gives include nothing, immortal, infinite, A without B, not-A. In the end Meinong rejects negative objects as distinct from non-existing objects which I agree with because I do not see any difference between the two: non-redness of an apple is just non-existent redness of it, immortality of the soul is just the non-existent capacity-to-die of the soul, etc. For Meinong's arguments, see Findlay, *Meinong's theory of objects and values*, 81–89.

With respect to non-being one may adopt views of various sorts. The most radical one holds that there are no negative facts, and consequently no non-existing objects. A less radical view acknowledges negative facts, but rejects non-existing objects. The least radical position acknowledges both. These views might be further subdivided according to the account they give of negative facts and of non-existing objects.

With respect to non-existing objects, drawing on Meinong and Findlay, I would distinguish three accounts: Intentional, Quasi-Being, and *Ausser*-Being Views.[24]

The Intentional View explains non-existing objects in terms of mind-made, intentional being. Quine ascribes a version of the Intentional View to (the fictional philosopher) McX and dismisses it as a deception "by the crudest and most flagrant counterfeit". Quine asks, what can be more dissimilar and unlike than, for instance, Pegasus, an alleged non-existing object, and the Pegasus-idea, the intentional object? If it comes to real objects, Quine contends, such as Parthenon and the Parthenon-idea, we would never be deceived, but when it comes to Pegasus, somehow, confusion sets in.[25] Meinong also rejects the Intentional View for "with regard to an innumerable multitude of non-existent objects it may be the case that no one thinks of them or needs to think of them".[26]

The Quasi-Being View explains non-existing objects in terms of some peculiar sort of being that pertains to everything. Every object, whether existing or not, whether non-existing contingently or necessarily, has it. As early Russell puts it "being is a general attribute of everything, and to mention anything is to show that it is".[27] Meinong suggests calling this sort of being 'quasi-being' for it has no contrary and thus it is a very unusual sort of being. Quine ascribes a version of the Quasi-Being View to Wyman and dismisses it for it offends his "aesthetic ... taste for desert landscapes", and is to him "a breeding ground of disorderly elements" in the case of unactualised possibles and even of contradictions in the case of unactualisable impossibles.[28] In the end, Meinong also rejects the Quasi-Being View, although for some time he was, as he says, tempted by it.[29]

The *Ausser*-Being View is Meinong's own child, although in a different context an analogy to it might be seen in Aquinas's notion of *natura absoluta* (something which is neither one nor many, neither individual nor universal). Findlay summarises the *Ausser*-Being View as follows:

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[24] See Findlay, *Meinong's theory of objects and values*, 42–58.

[25] Willard Van Orman Quine, "On what there is", *Review of Metaphysics* 2, no. 5 (1948); reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays*, (Cambridge, MA; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1980), 2.

[26] Findlay, *Meinong's theory of objects and values*, 45.

[27] Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, 449.

[28] Quine, "On what there is", 2–5.

[29] Findlay, *Meinong's theory of objects and values*, 48.

> [T]he pure object stands beyond being and non-being; both alike are external to it. Whether an object is or not, makes no difference to what the object is. The pure object is said to be außerseiend or to have Außersein: it lies 'outside'. What the object is ... consists in a number of determinations of so-being. ... [S]uch determinations are genuinely possessed by an object whether it exists or not ... [T]his does not mean that any objects are exempt from being or non-being; the law of excluded middle lays it down that every object necessarily stands in a fact of being or a fact of non-being. ... [but] being and non-being have nothing to do with the object as object.[30]

This view and its distinctive thesis was dubbed by Ernst Mally 'The Principle of the Independence of So-being from Being'. It has been the main source of the attraction to Meinong in contemporary philosophy.[31]

The scholastics usually accepted the Intentional View: non-existent objects are immanent to (=staying within) our mental/intentional activity and they "exist" only as long as somebody actually thinks about them.[32] For the most part, however, this was the view that was simply assumed and not argued for because no alternative was seriously entertained by them.[33]

3.2 Other Problems

Although beings of reason have to do primarily with non-being and intentional being, the scholastics used the theory of beings of reason for various other purposes, two of which stand out. First, to account for higher-order predicates ("second intentions").[34] Second, to account for self-contradictory objects, such as square-circles or chimeras.[35] (The standard view was that the latter are reducible to negative beings of reason.)

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[30] Findlay, *Meinong's theory of objects and values*, 49.

[31] Richard Routley (*Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1980), for instance, takes up Meinong's ideas to develop so-called noneism that posits (1) there are non-existent objects, (2) these objects have no existence, being, or what-have-you. The main principle of noneism, which amounts to Mally's Independence Principle, is the so-called Characterisation Principle: An object has (only those?) properties that it is characterised as having.

[32] We can think of it this way: Let us take, for instance, the proposition "The apple is not red". This proposition is true in virtue of the real/mind-independent fact that the apple is not red. This fact involves a non-existent object, namely the apple's non-redness, which is, however, not real but purely intentional: the apple's non-existent redness "exists" only as long as somebody actually thinks about it.

[33] There were exceptions: some scholastics seem to come close to a version of Quasi-Being View according to which beings of reason have a peculiar type of (essential) being, which is in some sense mind-independent.

[34] For an excellent study of second intentions in late scholasticism, see Larry Hickman, *Modern Theories of Higher Level Predicates: Second Intentions in the Neuzeit* (München: Philosophia Verlag, 1980).

[35] Jennifer Ashworth distinguishes between literary and logical definition of 'chimera' in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century scholastics: "*References [in the literary definition]*

Several kinds of questions were addressed with respect to beings of reason in standard philosophical works in seventeenth-century scholasticism. The issues can be divided into three areas:

Nature: What is a being of reason? Do beings of reason exist? Are they to be identified with extrinsic denominations? Why do we construct beings of reason? In what sense do beings of reason exist? Is there a sense of 'being' which is common to real beings and beings of reason? Is there a science that studies beings of reason?

Causes: What mental powers are involved in conceiving beings of reason? Intellect, will, sense, imagination?

Division: What is the division of beings of reason? (negation, privation, relation, ...) What is a negation? What is a privation? What is a relation of reason?

Various "additional" issues, which perhaps could be subsumed under the heading 'nature', were also treated. For instance: motivation (Why do we need beings of reason?) and methodology (Does the study of beings of reason belong to the domain of logic or metaphysics?). Scholastic authors of the seventeenth century did not care much for semantic problems (the meaning of being-of-reason terms, the truth-value of sentences with such terms, etc.).

For a comparison, contemporary philosophers seem to discuss the following issues related to beings of reason:

(1) *Non-being (in thought):* non-existent objects, negative facts
(2) *Non-being (in perception):* vacuum, holes
(3) *Intentionality:* mental objects, objects of thoughts, semantic content
(4) *Modality I:* possible (i.e. contingently non-existing) objects
(5) *Modality II:* impossible (i.e. necessarily non-existing) objects
(6) *Temporality:* past or future (i.e. now non-existing) objects
(7) *Fictitiousness:* texts, objects of literary fictions
(8) *Fallibility:* objects of errors, mis-representations, illusions

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were made to such diverse sources as Ovid, Virgil, Lucian, and the Koran, and the consensus of opinion was that a chimera is a monster formed out of parts of other animals having, on one account, the head of a lion, the torso of a girl, and the tail of a dragon. This was said to be impossible. ... [*For*] *chimera was thought of not as a mere hybrid, but as something which had the essences of all the creatures which entered into it, and it was for that reason that it was thought to be an impossible object. ... One of the important features of this definition of "chimera" is ...* [*that it*] *is not thought of as a mere aggregate, a random assemblage of different parts. If the term "chimera" is to refer, it must refer to some one thing. ... The logician's definition of "chimera", which stems from Buridan, was considerably less picturesque ... for it said merely that a chimera is a being composed of parts which cannot be put together, or which it is impossible to put together.*" – Jennifer E. Ashworth, "Chimeras and Imaginary Objects: A Study in the Post-Medieval Theory of Signification", *Vivarium* 15 (1977): 63.

(9) *Ontologically Suspicious Items I:* abstract entities (universals, sets, numbers, etc.)

(10) *Ontologically Suspicious Items II:* extrinsic properties, logical, semantic, social relations, etc.

(11) *Methodology:* fictionalism, ontological commitments, paraphrases

The scholastics have much to say about all of these matters, with the exception of (7), which is astonishing, given the extent and detail of Baroque scholastic works.[36] In the treatises on beings of reason the scholastics were concerned mainly with (1), (3), (5), (10), and (11), although some authors discussed (8). The remaining issues, i.e. (2), (4), (6), and (9) were extensively treated elsewhere, but not under the heading 'beings of reason'.[37]

4. Conclusion

Thus I have finished a brief description of the ontological framework presupposed by the scholastic debates about beings of reason. First I provided a list of super-categories of various non-existing items one might encounter in scholastics works of the Baroque era. Then I identified the roles that the most important of these items, namely beings of reason, were supposed to play in scholastic ontology. In this paper I have not tried to say whether the scholastic approach to perennial issues of non-being, intentionality and other related issues makes sense for us today or not. My aim was more modest: to take the first step toward making scholastic discussions and concerns somewhat more intelligible to contemporary analytical metaphysicians. Whether contemporary analytical metaphysics can be inspired or challenged by these scholastic debates or whether these debates have merely historical value remains at this point an open question.[38]

[36] An explanation for this strange neglect might be the assumption that literary fiction describes possible entities and possible worlds and hence there are no special questions about literary fiction that would not be dealt with in the discussion of possibility.

[37] Some of these topics in scholasticism have already been treated in secondary literature; for possibility, see note 13; for vacuum, see Edward Grant, *Much Ado About Nothing: Theories of space and vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); for temporality, see Jacob Schmutz, "Juan Caramuel on the Year 2000: Time and Possible Worlds in Early-Modern Scholasticism", in *The Medieval Concept of Time. Studies on the Scholastic Debate and Its Reception in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Pasquale Porro (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill 2001), 399–434.

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