Francesco Berto

Existence as a Real Property

The Ontology of Meinongianism

For Graham Priest,
Long-distance teacher

Prologue: Much Ado About Nothing

Some philosophers think that something's having intuitive content is very inconclusive evidence in favor of it. I think it is very heavy evidence in favor of anything, myself. I really don't know, in a way, what more conclusive evidence one can have about anything, ultimately speaking.

–Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*

1

In an episode of *The Today Show* of some years ago, Gene Shalit – NBC's film and book critic, famous for his wits – reviews several books sharing the feature of bearing entertaining titles. The highpoint of the monologue comes with *Nonexistent Objects,* by the UCLA philosopher Terence Parsons. Shalit wonders how one could write a whole book on things that do not exist![1]

This whole book, too, is about things that do not exist. But if one stops to think, one may find that, in a sense, there is nothing special about this. There are, in fact, thousands of books speaking about unreal things. You have probably read quite a few of them: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories portrait the adventures of the detective Sherlock Holmes; *The Lord of the Rings* speaks at length of Gandalf the wizard. Doyle represents Sherlock Holmes as a detective living in London, Baker Street (precisely, at number 221b), describes his remarkable observational and deductive abilities, makes of him the arch-enemy of the criminal mastermind Moriarty. J.R.R. Tolkien characterizes Gandalf as a wizard with a pointy hat and a grey robe (a white one, from a certain point of the story onwards), a heavy pipe-herb

[1] The anecdote is reported by Roy Sorensen [2003], p. 31.

smoker, always holding his wizard's gnarled stick, and who has spotted in the small Hobbits more temper than the Middle-Earth's inhabitants could expect.

To be sure, Doyle and Tolkien never claim that Holmes or Gandalf do not exist. *In* the stories that describe them, both the detective and the wizard appear to be very much existent. They talk, struggle, have adventurous experiences, risk their lives and, in the end, succeed against their evil adversaries: these are all-unfeasible accomplishments for a nonexistent object, for the plain reason that, well, it doesn't exist. In slightly philosophical jargon, Holmes and Gandalf possess several causal features, in the stories in which they appear. They are represented as interacting with the material world surrounding them, modifying it and being affected by it in return. They are characterized as occupying some physical place and as subject to change in the inexorable flow of time, just like the rest of us.

That Doyle and Tolkien don't tell us about the nonexistence of their heroes does not really matter, for we sensible adults know they do not exist in the real world anyway. We know other things to be true of Holmes and Gandalf, even though these truths are not ascribed to them in the stories, nor can we infer them from what is explicitly claimed there. For example: they are both literary characters, both described in books written by British authors. They are both much more famous than I am. They are both in my thoughts and, now that you have started to read this book, they may have surfaced in your thoughts too. Maybe you will think of them reading their names now: Holmes. Gandalf. You can also represent them in your imagination. Let me help you: close your eyes and imagine this wizard, Gandalf, with his pointy hat, his long grey robe, the thick snow-white beard, the pouch full of pipe-herb at his belt, and, naturally, the inseparable wizard's stick in the hand. . .

2

Sherlock Holmes and Gandalf are what one may call nonexistent objects. A few terminological remarks are in order: what does "object" mean here? I shall use the term as applying to whatever bears properties. An object, or equivalently, a thing (my use of "thing", in this book, is such that "object", and "thing" will mean the same *thing*), has properties; by having them it may, as philosophers often say, satisfy certain predicates that denote the properties at issue or, equivalently, make true the corresponding sentences. Gandalf and Uma Thurman are objects, for they are property-bearers. It sounds plausible to say that Gandalf has the property of being a literary character, Uma Thurman that of being an actress; that both satisfy the predicates that denote those properties, and by so doing, they make true such sentences as "Gandalf is a literary character", "Uma Thurman is an actress". This is, so to speak, what their objecthood consists in.

I have glossed the notion of object by saying that objects are bearers of properties. This is not, however, likely to be a full-fledged definition. Perhaps one cannot do much better when such fundamental notions come into play. For, now,

what is a property?[2] Well, it is something objects can instantiate (or have, or bear, or exemplify). Then properties count as objects in their turn. They are something, in that they are bearers of (further) properties, for instance, the property of being something objects can instantiate (or have, etc.). Once being a thing is glossed just as being a property-bearer, it is indeed difficult to think of anything which is not something, or some thing.

I will not attempt here any further characterization of propertyhood. It is well known among philosophers that properties themselves are controversial items, being simply rejected by some, accounted for in divergent ways by others. I am taking a dim view on this, if not for other reasons, because the debate on nonexistent objects has traditionally been phrased in terms of objects and properties, plainly taken (I am, on the other hand, at some point talking of that relation between objects and properties I have invoked above: that of *bearing*, or *having*, or *exemplifying*; but for the most part of the book, this too will be taken plainly).

If I use "object" and "thing" as synonyms, the same does not hold for the word "entity", dear to philosophers, or for the contiguous word "being" (as used in phrases like "A strange being, more or less humanoid, was staring at me"). These expressions may misleadingly inject *being* or *existence* in the concept of an object. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "entity" as "thing with distinct and independent existence". But the focus of this book is on objects that lack (distinct and independent) existence.

3

Lacking existence seems to be a condition shared not only by Holmes and Gandalf, but by innumerable other characters populating our stories, myths, tales, the narrations we love to listen to and read to our children, the books we keep on our bedside table: Anna Karenina, Gregor Samsa, Batman, Jessica Rabbit, Mr. Pickwick, Phlebas the Phoenician, Alice in Wonderland with the Mad Hatter and the Cheshire Cat. I will usually call (*purely*) *fictional* these characters so dear to us. At times, I shall need the adverb "purely" to make a distinction: some of the characters represented and described in those stories, tales, etc., also happen to be real, to exist or, at least, to have existed in the past – though sometimes they did not exist anymore even at the time the story was written. In *War and Peace,* Lev Tolstoj

[2] When philosophy of language used to be more fashionable among analytic philosophers, it was common to say: an object is what can be denoted by a singular term, while a property is what can be denoted by a predicate. But then to characterize singular terms, one may have found himself saying: a singular term is a linguistic expression that can denote an object. And to characterize predicates, one may have found himself saying: a predicate is an expression that can denote a property – thus getting back where one started from.

talks about Napoleon. Napoleon was a very real, existing and, indeed, influential person, even though he passed away in 1821, thus he does not exist anymore (give and take religious beliefs regarding man's immortality). In Dante's *Divine Comedy* we find Virgil, another really existed character, even though (give and take the aforementioned beliefs) he didn't exist anymore already at the time when Dante wrote his poem. Sometimes these non-purely-fictional characters are represented in the relevant stories as similar to what they actually were. Sometimes they look quite transformed: the historical Julius Cesar was probably a bit different from the Cesar of the Shakespearian dramas, and even more from the funny Roman emperor who faces the Gauls Asterix and Obelix in the strips by Goscinny and Uderzo.

It seems that the things populating the many worlds of fictional representations, like Holmes, Gandalf, or Alice, are not the only ones that lack existence. Besides Julius Caesar, Virgil, and Napoleon, many other things not belonging (only) to literary fantasy do not exist anymore, despite having existed in the past: Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Charlemagne, Leonardo da Vinci, George Washington, Immanuel Kant, Marilyn Monroe, Michael Jackson, all our beloved departed (with the usual give and take). All these, in spite of their inexistence at the time I am writing these lines, still retain the status of objects, following the gloss on "object" given above: they still bear properties and make certain sentences true. Socrates is dead; George Washington makes "The first president of the United States had wooden teeth" true;[3] Napoleon has the property that he suffered a defeat at Waterloo; Heraclitus is still misunderstood today; Virgil is self-identical (he is, after all, Virgil); and Plato has the property that, according to Alfred North Whitehead, the history of Western philosophy consists of a series of footnotes to his dialogues. These things *are* no more, in that they have lost being or existence. Other things, so to say, are not yet – future objects that currently lack existence, for instance, the first man to be born in the twenty-second century. According to some, they manage to possess notable characteristics nowadays, such as that of being referred to.

All these objects, indeed, *prima facie* seem to have this in common: they all have been in my thoughts, as things on which my attention has focused. Not only mine: yours too, perhaps, as I have evoked them writing the lines you have just read. We often seemingly think about unreal things. These need not be unlikely things, like the Cheshire Cat or a winged horse, or even manifestly absurd things like a round square. They can be as familiar as an Ikea bookshelf. I bought these pieces of wood, nails, screws, etc., to make a bookshelf, and I have here, written down on paper, the whole scheme to build it. I have had clearly in mind the bookshelf that was to be made out of that stuff, and I even pinned a name on it: I called it Georgina. As yet, though, I haven't built Georgina: it is currently nonexistent, though hopefully it will exist soon.

[3] It is, in fact, unlikely that he does: most scholars believe the rumor that Washington had a wooden denture unfounded. He had several dentures, but none made of wood. I just find the anecdote too nice, as symbolizing Washington's frugality, not to use it.

Nonexistence may concern not only (purely) fictional objects, past and future ones, but also merely possible things: things that may exist but, as a matter of fact, do not, like a golden mountain, or a son of Wittgenstein's (Wittgenstein died childless, but he certainly might have had a son), or Georgina itself – supposing I never manage to build it, Georgina is to remain an unrealized possibility. Some have taken as nonexistent certain ideal objects mentioned in scientific theories (perfect gases, frictionless planes). Another commonsensical view is that the existence of something can represent at times a real problem, to be addressed via empirical investigation or, as philosophers say, *a posteriori*. We wonder whether a certain object exists or not, and we look around. We may stumble upon the very thing, or perhaps discover vestiges that make plausible its having existed in the past – possibly, while some people were convinced of the opposite.

As for most things on which we gather information *a posteriori*, our beliefs on the existence of this or that may be unstable and fallible. Above I spoke of the nonexistent Holmes, the currently existent Uma Thurman, the past existent Plato. Philosophers with sceptical inclinations have traditionally mounted peculiar arguments to prompt doubts on these issues: maybe Uma Thurman is a collective optical illusion, and the actress we have seen in *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill* was just computer graphics. Maybe Plato never existed: maybe the writings ascribed to him were in fact authored, in different times and in places different from Athens, by different people; maybe none of them was named Aristocles. Or perhaps we can tell a longer story to convince people that Holmes has really existed (some tourists wandering around in London, looking for 221b Baker Street as the famous detective's residence, may believe that already). Of course, few (among the non-philosophers, that is) would pay attention to stories of this kind. In other cases, though, the doubt can be serious. Did Odysseus really exist – that is: is the *Odyssey* a partially false story (arguably, so, since syrens and cyclops are acting there, but these are likely to be purely imaginary characters) on a really existed person, or is it a story representing a purely fictional character? The question "Has he really existed?" has been seriously asked about the supposed author of the very story.

About Homeric poems: did the city of Troy ever exist? Many believe so: they believe that the explorer Heinrich Schliemann discovered the ruins of an ancient city with a satisfactory correspondence with Homer's representation of Troy as laid out in the *Iliad*. Now we know that Troy's characterization in the *Iliad* cannot be quite true: it is claimed, for instance, that some Greek gods visit the city. It is unlikely that the Greek gods ever existed, though, and something that doesn't exist can hardly walk across a real city. Yet, for many it makes perfect sense to believe that Schliemann really discovered the city of Troy, that city, the one represented by Homer. Even *War and Peace*'s Napoleon may have some properties that the historical Napoleon lacked and *vice versa*; yet the book is about Napoleon, that historical character (some deny this, and claim that the historical Napoleon and the one mentioned in *War and Peace* are distinct individuals: how can they be the same Napoleon if they differ on some property? As we shall see in due course, this argument may not be as good as it looks).

4

For a professional philosopher, the things I have said so far are probably puzzling. It is easy for her to grasp the implicit philosophical insights, and she is likely not to share most of them. If one is not a philosopher, on the other hand, one may find what I have said platitudinous, if not boring. That some things just do not exist looks as its most prosaic general moral. It is grounded in our intuitions about many statements we take to be true.

Philosophers, especially in the analytic camp, often appeal to intuitions. But what are they? Even this is controversial, and there is a growing literature on the subject. But I take they are something like shared beliefs, opinions, or judgments. If so, they are a plural declination of what could be called, with a mass noun, "good ol' common sense".

Now philosophy is not bound to common sense more than to argumentation or criticism, whatever these amount to in their turn. On the contrary, philosophy's task has often been to defeat shared beliefs and judgments not supported by persuasive reasoning or conclusive substantiation. For their being shared does not, by itself, make them true: take the past platitudes that the stars are fire and the sun doth move (to quote Shakespeare); or the gambler's fallacious view that, if a number has not been drawn in a long time, chances that it will show up increase; or the persistent intuition that there are fewer integers than rational numbers.

Thus I have found myself embarrassed, while writing this book, in appealing so often to our intuitions as supporting the view that some things do not exist. These intuitions may at times be shaky, or such that their very interpretation is controversial, as in the case of the discrepancies between Homer's Troy and the city whose remnants were discovered, or in the case of the historic Napoleon and *War and Peace*'s Napoleon. Sometimes, as we shall see, our intuitions on nonexistents just *cannot* be retained all together in a coherent view: some of them contradict some others, so something has to go. But in the majority of cases they seem to be sound, and grounding the moral.

This is generally taken as a *prima facie* pro in a philosophical view. For on the one hand, there may be no starting point but commonsensical opinions for much philosophical theorizing (apart from previous philosophical theorizing, of course). On the other, depart from such opinions is generally taken as a cost, if not for other reasons, because revisionism can be pricey; this often charges the revisionist both with the burden of proof, and with the need to supply adequate theoretical benefits in return, whatever these are taken to be. Even more, some philosophers just take as the *task* of philosophical theory to vindicate our pretheoretical intuitions in specific fields, for instance, as deposited in ordinary language and manners of speaking.[4]

Yet philosophers have tried to account for our common belief in and talk of nonexistents in oblique ways. They have gone as far as to maintain that such belief

[4] "A good theory [of fictional objects] will be consonant with ordinary pretheoretical talk about fiction", claim Martinich and Stroll [2007], pp. 10–1.

is implausible, or that it easily entails absurd and foolish consequences. I have thus tried to attest that this is not the case, and that its contradictory, the claim that *everything* exists, represents an obvious plainness only among the majority of contemporary philosophers.

5

In *On What There Is* Quine famously says that the response to the question of ontology, "What is there?", can be given in one word: "Everything". But the fast answer is rooted in a preliminary idea of what it means to ask that question – so basic an idea that it stands at the background of ontological investigation (it may, in fact, be called a *meta*-ontological idea: we will come to what meta-ontology is in due course). Here are the opening words of Achille Varzi's introduction to ontology:

> It is customary to identify ontology with that branch of philosophy that originates from the question: "What is there?". And it is customary to claim that this question has two kinds of answer.
>
> The first answer is easy, if not trivial, and can be summed up in one word: "Everything". As Quine has written [. . .] everything exists because it makes no sense to speak of "nonexistent entities", and those who think otherwise would manifest, not an ontological disagreement, but a misunderstanding of the very concept of existence. Of course, one will say, elephants exist but not unicorns, nor round squares; this does not mean, though, that unicorns and round squares *are* things that do not exist. It just means that there are no such things. Precisely because it would be inconsistent to claim that *something does not exist*, though, to claim that *everything exists* is tautological, that is, devoid of content, therefore of interest.[5]

Once the easy answer is given, it is possible to move on to more substantial issues. Meanwhile, that idea of what it means to ask the question has already intruded. The roots of the idea reach back to remote antiquity, to Parmenides' philosophy ("venerable and awesome", as Plato describes him); it develops across centuries, through Hume's and Kant's philosophy (which does not mean that they subscribed to it in what is nowadays its mainstream form, as we shall see – there are many difficult exegetical issues here; rather, it means that they contributed to forge it); and up to the founding fathers of analytic philosophy, Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell. Through them, the idea occupies contemporary logic – both the so-called classical and the majority of non-classical logics. Analytic philosophy being so deferential to (classical) logic, it gets permeated, so much so that the claim that everything exists ends up being not just true, but tautologically so, as we have just heard from Varzi. Accordingly, the contradictory claim that some things do not exist counts as an inconsistency. Tautologicity and inconsistency are logical

[5] Varzi [2005], p. 3 (my translation from Italian).

features of sentences, or of what they express. In such a view the meaning of existence, and the existence of everything, are in an important sense a matter of *logic*.

Although we shall deal with logic to some extent, this is not a book about logic, rather about ontology. The insight to be explored here, that certain things just do not exist, entails that existence is, in an important sense, not a matter of logic. It demands existence not to be a logical property, reducible to logical concepts. Accordingly, it demands "exists" not to be defined only using the logical vocabulary of connectives, identity and, especially, the quantifiers – the latter being (the logical rendering of) terms like "all", "some", "every", "many", "few", etc., telling us to how many objects some condition or property applies. The received view (among philosophers) that everything exists mixes existence with quantification – existing with counting, I shall say in a motto. The alternative insight has it that existence and numbering should not be confused. As Alexius Meinong (a gentleman we shall speak of at length) once said, one may sometimes count also things that do not exist. How many are the Fantastic Four? Aren't they as many as Liverpool's Fab Four?

6

To those with a philosophical background, a claim like "Existence is *not* logical", summarizing the content of this work, is likely to sound as a postmodern slogan of deconstructionist fashion – and an ambitious one at that. The book you have in your hands deals with the meaning of existence. Could any problem be more wide-ranging, deep, and authentically philosophical?

But the real aim is more modest than the slogan suggests. As is probably clear by now, the problem of nonexistent objects is intertwined with the issue of the meaning of the verb "to exist", and of other related expressions. What are we stating when we truthfully say things like "Uma Thurman exists", "Holmes does not exist"? What does "there is" mean in sentences like "There's a round square on my t-shirt" or "There is something that was searched for by many, namely Atlantis' site"? What do "some" and "all" mean in expressions like "Some literary characters are more famous than me", and "All superheroes wear ridiculous tights"? This is likely to be of lesser importance when compared to the issue of the Meaning of Existence, but that does not make of it a superficial topic. Indeed, it relates to another motto that enjoyed largely spotless reputation among philosophers. It reads: "Existence is not a predicate".

This has traditionally been taken as summing up the received view on what existence is (not). Stated this way, it is in fact misleading, as we shall see – not just for the plain reason that existence cannot be a predicate because it does not look as a linguistic item, more as a concept or a notion. One can rephrase it as "'Exists' is not a predicate", and few supporters of the mainstream view of existence would accept it without qualification. They would say, for instance, that "exists" is, of course,

a predicate – what else? – of ordinary language, but only from the viewpoint of surface grammar; or that "exists" is indeed a predicate, but one that is definable via logical notions, and reducible to them; or that "exists" is a predicate, but unlike most other predicates, what it stands for is not an ordinary property of individuals; *et cetera*.

However one shapes it up, the motto is at centre stage in the first part of the book. Its Chap. 1 presents a brief and partial overview of how the idea summarized in the motto may have originated, going through the philosophies of Parmenides, Hume, and Kant. Its Chap. 2 accounts for the contemporary development of the idea through the views of Frege, Russell, Quine, and Peter van Inwagen. The aim of Chap. 3 is to induce some doubts on it and, accordingly, on what I label as the "Parmenidean" conception of existence. Known difficulties are recorded, new ones are proposed.

I am persuaded that alleged knock-down arguments in ontology rarely produce the effects expected by their proponents – and shall try to make it showy throughout the book. If this is so then, when advancing an alternative to a received ontological view, it usually pays off to do more than just trying to provide plain refutations of the old emperor. It is fruitful to show to what extent the non-standard doctrine is preferable, to underline its strong points when compared to its adversary: its simplicity in primitives and/or formulation; its intuitive appeal; its explanatory power; its ability to successfully deal with difficult cases where the rival conception falters.

This begins with Chap. 4, introducing an alternative, non-Parmenidean view of existence and quantification. Most contemporary philosophers would label the view as *Meinongianism*. The name originates from the aforementioned Alexius Meinong, an Austrian philosopher who, between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, proposed a general theory of objects whose most famous spin-off is exactly that some of them do not exist. Chapter 5 presents the so-called naïve Meinongian object theory (of which, in fact, it is uncertain to what extent it can be effectively ascribed to Meinong) – and its troubles. For Meinong is popular among philosophers, but often as a subject of ridicule. It is commonly held that Bertrand Russell demolished his theory in *On Denoting* and other writings; and that later on Quine further contributed to its dismissal with his *On What There Is*.

However, not everyone agrees with this view. Or better: some believe that, even if there *are* knock-down arguments against a naïve formulation of a certain view on existence and quantification, that view itself is not buried. Chapter 6 introduces the theories of a few philosophers, often called neo-Meinongians, who have tried to come to the rescue. Three main kinds of neo-Meinongianism are singled out, their pros and cons are discussed. The last one, labeled "modal Meinongianism" for reasons to be explained in due course, stands out for closer inspection in the third part of the book. This proposes a close encounter with nonexistent objects of the third kind: Chap. 7 is a more formal presentation of modal Meinongianism using standard tools of formal semantics. Chapter 8 examines how the theory addresses in detail the anti-Meinongian concerns of Russell, Quine, and others, and proposes a

specific application to the ontology and semantics of fictional objects. The final Chap. 9 introduces and discusses a set of open problems.

What is, then, the grand aim of this work? Not so much to refute the received view of existence, or to force philosophy to rejoin good ol' common sense on things that do not exist. What we have is rather a delicate balance of pros and cons, costs and benefits. Many criticisms of Meinongianism, I hope to be able to show, originate from superficial familiarity with the criticized view, or from their addressing a simplified version of it. On the other hand, when a theory is developed in more detail, as it happens in part three of the book, the real and less obvious problems emerge. As the last chapter will attest, for some of these I could not do any better than hoping to be able to come up with an *Existence As a Real Property, Part II* someday.

This depends partly on my own (in)competences. One of the most striking features of the topic of nonexistent objects is its triggering an amount of issues from diverse areas, ranging from ontology to philosophy of logic, to the philosophy of language, to epistemology and cognitive science. Whereas I feel (relatively, of course) familiar with the first two subjects, my confidence when it's about philosophy of language is more fractional, and tends to vanish especially when one enters into the semantics/pragmatics interface; even more so for the last two: not being an epistemologist, nor a cognitive scientist, my incursions in these areas throughout the book will look rather tentative to more qualified people. I'd be happy if this *Existence As a Real Property (Part I)* managed to show that some disastrous consequences supposedly entailed by the non-standard perspective on existence are philosophical ghosts, ghosts being good candidates for the status of things that, well, do not exist.[6]

[6] What does a reader need to know, as far as logic goes, in order to fruitfully read this book? Having taken a course of elementary first-order logic would help, but is not necessary to understand most of it. I have made an extremely limited use of logical notation throughout most chapters; when logical symbols show up, this is more as an optional for those already acquainted with them, than because they are necessary for comprehension. Contextual explanations are normally provided anyway. Chapter 7 is different: here I expose a formal semantics for the Meinongian theory at issue. For a complete understanding of that, also elementary logic might not suffice, as I introduce a modal framework phrased in set-theoretic terms. The amount of set theory required is rather minimal for any logician, but may leave non-experts perplexed. I decided that a detailed explanation of all notions starting from scratch would have taken too much space. The exposition in that chapter should be such that one can go through it anyway, not compromising the understanding of the book as a whole, and of the subsequent Chaps. 8 and 9 in particular.

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Part I
Existence as Logic

The problems of existence are, whatever Existentialists may say, problems whose solutions are provided by logic.

C.J.F. Williams, *What is Existence?*

Chapter 1
The Paradox of Non-Being

1.1 The ἀρχὴ κακῶν

What Herodotus called the ἀρχὴ κακῶν, the beginning of troubles, in our case takes place with Parmenides of Elea, the Greek philosopher lived between sixth and fifth century B.C., who, in his poem *On Nature*, forbade to talk, and also to think, about what is not:

> Come now and I will tell thee – listen and lay my word to heart – the only ways of inquiry that are to be thought of: one that is, and it is impossible for it not to be, is the Way of Persuasion, for Persuasion attends on Truth.
>
> Another, that it is not, and must needs not be – this, I tell thee, is a path that is utterly indiscernible; for thou couldst not know that which is not – for that is impossible – nor utter it.[1]

Parmenides is the first in a long list of philosophers supporting the thesis that everything exists. Lacking further qualification, in fact, to claim that Parmenides actually maintained this is misleading. To begin with, the mainstream interpretation has it that, for Parmenides, almost nothing exists! He relegates the multiplicity of objects of our ordinary experience – houses, mountains, people – to the realm of the fallacious δὸξα, the deceptive appearance. What is, is *being*, and being, the true reality, is an immutable and eternal unity. Features of the Parmenidean being are: "ungenerable" and "indestructible", "unwavering", "unitary and continuous", with "no was nor will" (fragment 8). In the above quotation, he does not even claim explicitly that being is: the subject of the central statement is not expressed. Parmenides just says: "that is". Things get slightly easier in fragment 6, where he puts forth the principle of the absolute opposition between being and non-being by claiming: "What can be spoken of and thought must be: for it is possible for it to be, but it is not possible for 'nothing' to be".

Attempts at expressing in nowadays' language what Parmenides could have had in mind bring us into a tangle of linguistic and textual issues, as historians of

[1] Parmenides, *On Nature*, fr. 2.

philosophy are well aware. It has been contested (e.g., by Luigi Ruggiu, and with good arguments)[2] that Parmenides' philosophy consists in the paradoxical monism with which it has been identified, especially after Plato's and Aristotle's interpretations. This need not concern us here, though. We are interested in the views ascribed to Parmenides from Plato and Aristotle onwards, for they have shaped the Western metaphysical landscape. What I shall take as my target from now on might turn out to be a largely fictitious Parmenides. But understanding what Parmenides *really* meant, even granting it to be feasible today, is not of major importance for our purposes.

What the standard Platonic-Aristotelian interpretation puts in Parmenides' mouth may be phrased by claiming that, for him, any concept including or entailing non-being in any form applies to nothing. For instance: being is one because, if there were differences or multiplicity in being, one of those differences would *not be* the other, and thus would be non-being. But this is excluded by the principle that it is impossible for being not to be, and for nothing to be. The same holds for such notions as change or motion: being is out of time, unmovable, unchangeable; it is eternal because, if it were to become, it would *not be* (when? Well, when it is not, that is, before coming to be and after having been); but being cannot but be; and so on. These statements enjoy little philosophical support today.[3] However, the following reconstruction should make clear in which sense much contemporary philosophy is dominated by what one may call the Parmenidean Thesis: everything exists.

1.2 (Armchair) Metaphysical Archeology

A well-known paradox is connected to the widespread philosophical acceptance of the Parmenidean Thesis. I shall call it the *paradox of non-being*. It is also known in the literature as the paradox of negative existentials. A negative existential is a simple thing: a sentence in which the existence of something is denied. It can be a singular statement, negating the existence of a single object – something of the form "*x* does not exist", *x* standing for an object; or, it can be a general statement of the form "(The) *xs* do not exist". And here is the paradox: on the one hand, at least some of these sentences should definitely be true ("Sherlock Holmes does not exist", "Zeus does not exist", "Unicorns do not exist"). On the other hand, it seems that one can mount an argument to the effect that *no* such sentence can be true.

To approach the problem, let us start with some archaeology. Heinrich Schliemann was a famous German treasure hunter. As a child he fell in love with the Homeric saga, and declared that he would find the vestiges of Troy. Once an adult, he discovered in nowadays' Turkey the remains of an ancient city fitting

[2] See Ruggiu (1991).

[3] Not zero support: the thesis that being is eternal because, if it underwent change and becoming, it would not be (when it is not), is supported in Italy by the philosopher Emanuele Severino. I shall return to this view, labeled (somehow misleadingly) "neo-Parmenideanism", in the third part of the book.

quite well Troy's characterization, as given by Homer and other ancient sources. If what Schliemann discovered really are Troy's remains (which is somewhat controversial),[4] then he refuted the statement "Troy does not exist" (more precisely, we may say that he refuted the statement "Troy never existed"; but this is a complication we can leave aside for the time being).

Was an expensive archeological investigation needed to produce such a refutation – to prove that the negation of the existence of Troy is false? Maybe one can rest with a simple *a priori* disproof: a philosophical argument to be mounted in two minutes, sitting on the infamous metaphysical armchair. In order to state that Troy does not exist, we have to refer to Troy. And for this to be possible, there must *be* Troy: otherwise, what would we be talking about? "Thou couldst not know that which is not – for that is impossible – nor utter it", and "What can be spoken of and thought must be", Parmenides has stated.

If "Troy does not exist" is about anything, it is about Troy. If there *were* nothing for the sentence to be about, then it would be meaningless and, as such, not truth-evaluable. It would not even be a full-fledged sentence, but a fraud – a *satzklang*, as a neo-positivist may say: something that sounds and looks like a meaningful sentence, due to deceptive grammatical appearances – but is not; for it would lack a condition of its being meaningful, that is, the existence of an object denoted by its grammatical subject. "Troy does not exist" is in a worse position than "Nobody can talk about Troy", or "Never say never". "Troy does not exist" leaves us only two options: either the sentence is meaningless, or it is false. If it is meaningless, it surely cannot be true. If it is false, then its negation is true and therefore, Troy does exist. Schliemann was right, but on *a priori* grounds!

If the argument is sound, though, it proves more than what Schliemann needed. It works for anything that goes for Troy, that is, anything assigned as the value of *x* in "*x* does not exist". No matter what one takes into account, the negation of *its* existence appears to be either false or meaningless: no negative existential can ever be true. We are close to the Parmenidean conclusion: everything exists.

1.3 "Thou Couldst Not Know That Which Is Not – For That Is Impossible – Nor Utter It"

Isn't such armchair metaphysical archeology preposterous? A non-philosopher might be tempted to downgrade the Parmenidean reasoning to a sophistic trick, the product of a primitive way of arguing. The paradox of non-being, however, has not been downgraded by philosophers. It has passed through the centuries, landing

[4] What we have for sure is a historical site called *Wilusa* or *Truwisa* in Hittite, *Ilion* or *Troia* in Greek, located in Anatolia, and whose ruins have been brought to light by the excavations of various archaeologists. These have, in fact, revealed several past cities, built in chronological succession, and which have been numbered. What Schliemann came across is called Troy II, which he claimed to be Homer's city. The generally agreed-upon candidate for that role is, however, Troy VII, built in the thirteenth century BC, and which appears to have been devastated by a war.

in contemporary analytic philosophy. Here is a fairly recent formulation by Richard Cartwright:

> To deny the existence of something – of unicorns, for example – we must indicate what it is the existence of which is being denied; and this requires that unicorns be referred to or mentioned; the negative existential must be about them. But things which do not exist cannot be referred to or mentioned; no statement can be about them. So, given that we have denied their existence, unicorns must after all exist. The apparently true negative existential is thus either false or not really a statement at all; and, since the argument applies as well in any other case, we seem forced to conclude that there are no true negative existentials.[5]

We can phrase the argument thus:

(P1) To deny the existence of something, one refers to that thing;
(P2) But if one refers to something, then that thing has to exist;

Thus,

(C) To deny the existence of something, that thing has to exist.

From conclusion (C) easily follows that "Everything exists" is an unquestionable claim: all attempts at negating it, that is, all negative existentials, are either false or meaningless. The logic necessary to run the argument from premises (P1) and (P2) to (C) is minimal: one just needs transitivity of the conditional. If we allow ourselves (minimal) contraposition, (P2) can be restated in a negative form to make it sound more pregnant. Let us call this more pregnant formulation Parmenides' Principle:

(PP) It is not possible to refer to something that does not exist.

The expression "refer to" is, intentionally, nonspecific. What is it that can refer to something? To begin with, words, and especially noun phrases. The paradox of non-being has been couched in linguistic terms. The idea is that "Troy", or "Gregor Samsa", or "Sherlock Holmes", can refer to something (to the objects they should *prima facie* denote: Troy, Gregor Samsa, Sherlock Holmes) only if there *is* that thing – it is, it exists.

But thoughts as well can refer to things; or at least, some of them. If I think of Troy that it must have been a very powerful city in ancient times, seemingly my thought refers to Troy – it is Troy the thing I am thinking *of*. This feature that at least some thoughts possess, their referring to something, philosophical jargon calls *intentionality*. Intentionality is a basic, albeit surprising, fact of mental life: while sitting in my office here in Notre Dame, Indiana, looking at the main building's golden dome out of my window, I can turn my mind to Venice, Italy,

[5] Cartwright (1960), p. 21. Here is George Edward Moore's formulation: "It seems as if purely imaginary things, even though they be absolutely self-contradictory like a round square, must still have some kind of *being* – must still be in a sense – simply because we can think and talk about them. [. . .] And now in saying that there is no such thing as a round square, I seem to imply that there *is* such a thing. It seems as if there must *be* such a thing, merely in order that it may have the property of *not* being. It seems, therefore, as if to say of anything whatever that we can mention that it absolutely *is not*, were to contradict ourselves: as if absolutely everything we can mention must *be*, must have some kind of being." (Moore 1953, p. 289)

to my parents and my girlfriend who live down there. But it seems that I am also able to think about things that do not exist anymore, like my grandmother, or about things that never existed, like a winged horse or a unicorn. Still, Parmenides' ban requires us not to be able to "intend", think, or imagine, that which is not.

Isn't the idea that everything exists *strange*? Had Parmenides not heard about phoenixes, chimeras, fictional characters described in stories or fairy tales? We can imagine the venerable and awesome philosopher stamping his feet and complaining: "But if we think about those things, if we give them a name, then those things must *be* there in order to be thought about and named!"

Sure enough, they must be there. Where? When a father who has never studied philosophy confesses to his grown-up son that there is no Santa Claus, or no Sherlock Holmes, meaning that they do not exist, he may be trying to convey something like this: in no part of this world surrounding us, in no physical region however remote from here, can we go and find them. If Holmes existed, he would be somewhere. We could then, at least theoretically (that is, if we were free from our physical limitations, and able to perform travels that as a matter of fact we cannot do), reach him and interact with him in certain ways. We might kick him or, in a friendlier way, kiss him. But this is precisely the feature that things that do not exist, like the Big Bad Wolf or Sherlock Holmes, lack: we have no interactions of this kind with them. I can kiss Uma Thurman, but not Sherlock Holmes; Varenne, but not Pegasus; and I can go shopping with one hundred real thalers (or I might have, for instance, in some places in Europe during the eighteenth century), but I cannot buy anything with one hundred imaginary thalers.

Could the Parmenidean idea be that, in order to have a relation of whatever kind with something, that thing must exist? This seems right for some relations: if x kicks y, or x kisses y, it appears that both x and y must exist. Such an intuition reinforces our persuasion that, unlike with Uma Thurman, one cannot give a kiss to Sherlock Holmes, since he does not exist. It is a different move to suppose that *all* relations are of this kind (this point we shall return to various times: the slip from "some" to "all" is endemic to discussions about these issues). The relation *referring to* seems to be different, both in its linguistic and in its mental variety. I can refer to Sherlock Holmes, mentioning him and talking about him (looks like I just have); you can refer to Sherlock Holmes, in that you can think about him (perhaps you have just done so). It is likely that, in order to mention Sherlock Holmes, talk or think about him, one must exist.[6] The same does not apply to Holmes as the target of our

[6] The intuition here is that things like Sherlock Holmes, not existing, cannot think about anything, whereas by being ordinary existing people we can think about him. On the other hand, within Doyle's novels Sherlock Holmes performs various activities involving thought (Holmes reasons quite well there). "Sherlock Holmes thinks" might sound true, if not for stronger reasons, because such statements as "Sherlock Holmes is a brilliant detective with amazing capacities of observation and deduction" sound in some sense true, insofar as they are faithful reports of the contents of Doyle's stories. Now if one is a brilliant detective with amazing capacities of observation and deduction, then he thinks. As we shall see later on, a plausible strategy is available for keeping together the two apparently clashing intuitions: Sherlock Holmes does not think, because he does not exist; Sherlock Holmes does think, for this is how he is portrayed in Doyle's novels.

referential activity. *Referring to* being taken an intentional relation, if *x* refers to *y* (*x* thinks of *y*, imagines *y*, represents *y*, names *y*, or makes certain claims about *y*), maybe *x* must exist, but the same cannot be said of *y*.

What holds for relations also holds for properties. To phrase the same considerations, as philosophers would have claimed once upon a time, *modo formali* (let us say: in terms of pieces of language like names, predicates, sentences, and their semantics): at first glance, it seems that we can make true statements concerning things that do not exist. For instance, "Sherlock Holmes is a detective"; "Gandalf is a wizard". That would mean that "is a detective", or "is a wizard", are predicates made true by, respectively, Holmes and Gandalf. If we believe that these predicates denote properties (the property of being a detective, the property of being a wizard), we shall conclude (*modo materiali*, that is, in terms of worldly stuff, things, properties, and the like) that things that do not exist can, after all, have properties.

The Parmenidean rejoinder is that this is impossible. In order for Holmes and Gandalf to have those properties, there should *be* something like Holmes or Gandalf, that is, they should exist. Now this may be plausible for properties like that of being a detective: if Holmes *actually* were a detective, he would be a real, tangible individual, i.e., he would exist. We should be able, in principle, to go and meet him somewhere in the physical world, for he would be there; but we can't.

But, again, why suppose that all properties are like this? Being a fictional character, or having been thought of by you twenty lines ago, or being Sherlock Holmes, are properties Holmes may have even without existing (*modo formali*: "Holmes is a fictional character", or "Holmes has been thought of by you twenty lines ago", etc., are statements made true by Holmes, even though Holmes does not exist). Thus, it seems possible to refer to things that do not exist, and to say true things about them. In our intuitive, pre-theoretical understanding of "refer to" and "exist", Parmenides' Principle (PP) may sound unpalatable.

1.4 The Meanings of "Is" and Plato's Beard

The majority of philosophers would nowadays agree that many puzzles raised by Parmenides' doctrine (or better, by the doctrine that has been traditionally ascribed to him) are generated by linguistic tricks. In Parmenides' and Plato's times, philosophers were struggling – so the story goes – with basic distinctions like the one between verbs and noun phrases, and lacked the syntactical and semantic awareness needed to solve such paradoxes.

The missing distinctions would have to do with the different meanings of the small word "is". Also in contemporary Western languages like English, Italian, German, or French, the expression "is" (or "è", or "ist", or "est") is *prima facie* ambiguous. The import of this ambiguity is a deep problem. It has produced a huge amount of literature not only in linguistics, but also and especially in pure

philosophy, since antiquity (the Great Chain of Philosophies of Being, as C.J.F. Williams called it),[7] and with far-ranging implications reaching up to theology.

Let us take a dim view on the subject for now, and just register the common acknowledgement that "is" can have different functions or roles. It can be used, in the often-called copulative sense, to predicate something of something, attributing, for example, a property to something ("Socrates is drinking", "Socrates is a mammal"). It has been conjectured by some that the copulative uses of the expression make no direct semantic contribution to the sentences in which they occur, so that they can be replaced by expressions in which the verb does not show up,[8] albeit with unnatural results at times: "Socrates drinks", "Socrates mammalizes" (?). This is reflected in contemporary standard logical notation, which would render the above sentences as something like "*Ds*", or "*Ms*", with no interest, so to speak, in the verb "to be" poking its nose in some of the corresponding natural language predicates and not in others.

"Is" can also be employed to express identity ("Cicero is Tully", that is, Cicero and Tully are identical, they are the same). This use has been claimed by Williams to be reducible to the copulative,[9] but this need not concern us here. Nor need concern us whether the use of the verb to express inclusion or subsumption, whose purpose is to state that one general feature subsumes another,[10] is reducible to the copulative use or not ("A human being is an animal": if something has the property of being a human being, then it also has the property of being an animal, etc.). "Is" is also sometimes employed to mention a word, as opposed to using it; this can be highlighted in written language through judicious use of quotation marks ("'Napoleon' is of nine letters"), thus reducing this use to the copulative – but this need not concern us either.

What *does* concern us is that, lastly, we have a use of the verb, at times with the other small word "there" in front of it, that expresses existence. This use, especially without "there", is less widespread in English or Italian than it was in ancient Greek. It does show up though, and often in philosophical, theological, or somewhat deep and important claims ("I think, therefore I am"; "God is" or "There is a God", as written on the highway overpass). The verb is used here, as is sometimes said, in an absolute way. Aristotle marked the distinction with the copulative use via the adverb ἁπλῶς, corresponding to the Latin *simpliciter*, and which might be rendered as "being *tout-court*", or "being without qualification", in opposition to "being *something*" (being something-or-other, the having of properties expressed by predication):

> For it is not the same thing not to be something and not to be simpliciter, though owing to the similarity of language to be something appears to differ only a little from to be, and not to be something from not to be.[11]

[7] Williams (1981), p. 3.

[8] See Ibid, pp. 6–7.

[9] See Ibid, pp. 10–2.

[10] See Miller (2002), *Introduction*.

[11] Aristotle, *On Sophistical Refutations*, 167a 4–6.

Because the Greeks did not have anything like our "exists" and different from (their counterpart of) "is", i.e., ἐστί, they could only use the latter to express existence. In his classical monograph *The Verb 'Be' in Ancient Greek,* which accounts for the content of its title by looking mainly, though not only, at Homeric and archaic Greek, Charles Kahn lists absolute uses of εἶναι to express not only reality, that is, actual existence, but possibility (and not only of the alethic, but also of the deontic kind – Kahn calls this the "potential construction"), and even truth ("the veridical construction").[12] "Is not" was used accordingly, not only to express that something does not exist, but also that it is not possible, or that it is prohibited ("Is not to fight Zeus, son of Kronos", *Iliad* 21.193), or that that it doesn't obtain or is false ("This word of yours could [not] be", *Iliad* 24.56). Speaking the truth was expressed as something like "Saying what is", and speaking falsely as "Saying what is not". Aristotle listed the veridical construction as one of the ways of being in his *Metaphysics*, despite referring his audience to his works on the subject of logic, where it more properly belonged, for its treatment.

No surprise if Bertrand Russell once stated that the ambiguity of "is" was a disgrace for the human race! Back in ancient Greece's time, the differences in the various uses of εἶναι – so the story goes – were not quite clear. Some maintain that in Greek it was not even possible to sharply distinguish the meanings of the verb without altering their natural role. Such a muddle legitimized inferences like those of (or attributed to) Parmenides, according to which when we affirm that something is not something, by implication we are saying that it *is not*, thus predicating non-being of being, against the supreme principle of the truth of being.

The merit of distinguishing between the "is" of identity and the "is" of predication is often ascribed to Plato's *Sophist*.[13] Plato certainly made a distinction between *non*-being as the ἐναντίον, the contrary of being, and non-being as the ἕτερον, the "other", thus the *different*, which may correspond to negative predication: when we say that something is not something, we usually mean that something does not have a certain property ("Socrates is not a rock"); we don't want to find ourselves claiming that something is not, ἁπλῶς or *simpliciter*.

Once all the distinctions regarding the different senses or uses or functions of "is" are made, though, the problem of the ἐναντίον itself remains, and with it Parmenides' ban on nonexistents and the paradox of non-being. We are left with the problem, that is, of how one can say of something that it is not, in the absolute sense – of how is it possible to refer to, or talk about, things that do not exist, if only to say that they do not exist.

After more than two thousands years of subtle linguistic distinctions which, it is claimed, the Greeks were lacking, the paradox of non-being is, as we have seen, still around. It was taken seriously, and famously labeled "Plato's Beard", by Quine in his *On What There Is*, mentioned in the Prologue of this book. There Quine labels "Platonist", in a polemical way, one who has too rich an ontology, that is, who

[12] See Kahn (1973), p. 294, p. 336.

[13] For instance by Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), p. 167.

admits certain kinds of things which might be considered for various reasons unwelcome (Platonic ideas; universals; properties; or whatever kind of thing one may not want in one's worldly settings). The first ultra-Platonist we meet in Quine's essay is the imaginary philosopher McX. McX believes in things Quine is not willing to admit. How can Quine express his disagreement? It would seem impossible to say that there are things that McX admits, but of which it would be true that they are not, without undergoing self-defeat:

> It would appear, if this reasoning (i.e., the paradox of non-being) were sound, that in any ontological dispute the proponent of the negative side suffers the disadvantage of not being able to admit that his opponent disagrees with him. This is the old Platonic riddle of nonbeing. Nonbeing must in some be, otherwise what is it that there is not? This tangled doctrine might be nicknamed *Plato's beard*; historically it has proved tough, frequently dulling the edge of Ockham's razor.
>
> It is some such line of thought that leads philosophers like McX to impute being where they might otherwise be quite content to recognize that there is nothing. Thus, take Pegasus. If Pegasus *were* not, McX argues, we should not be talking about anything when we use the word; therefore it would be nonsense to say even that Pegasus is not.[14]

Ockham's razor, as a methodological principle for philosophy, has been expressed in different ways. In this case, the appropriate form is an imperative of ontological parsimony, roughly stating that one should not introduce in her ontology more kinds of things than required (to explain what one wants to explain). The problem still remains the same: contemporary followers of Parmenides' Principle (PP) believe that referring to (thinking of, representing to oneself, saying things about) x entails x's existing. Parmenides' way, as we shall see in the next Chapter, is also Frege's and Russell's way, as well as Sir Peter Strawson's (since he thinks that one cannot literally refer to imaginary things);[15] and also John Searle's (since he takes "Whatever is referred to must exist" as a basic principle in the theory of reference);[16] and it is also, naturally, Quine's way. Nevertheless, it seems difficult to formulate Parmenides' way, unless one oversteps into non-being: one seems to have to glimpse at what does not exist, in order to say that one cannot refer to *it*.

The Parmenideans have thus adopted a special attitude towards the paradox of non-being. On the one hand, they have wanted to stick to the idea that everything exists. On the other, recognizing that the paradox needs to be dealt with, in order to keep premise (P2) (or (PP)), they have targeted premise (P1): it must be possible to have true negative existential claims, without there being something, whose existence gets denied only by referring to it. The Parmenidean strategy can be summarized in a terse (and perhaps unfair) way by claiming that statements of the form "x does not exist" ("Hamlet does not exist", "The round square does not exist") are not what they look like. Their genuine logical form is concealed by everyday language's surface grammar. They look like subject-predicate sentences,

[14] Quine (1953), pp. 13–4.

[15] See Strawson (1950).

[16] See Searle (1968).

in which one refers to something in order to deny that it has a specific property, or to claim that it has a negative property, i.e., nonexistence. They have to be analyzed as something different. The existence of x is a necessary condition to refer to x, but "no such semantic relation comes into play when denials of existence are made".[17]

The question of what existence is (*modo materiali*) is thus inextricably bound to the question, what does the expression "exists" mean, and how does it work (*modo formali*)? To deal with the ontological conundrums concerning being and existence, it will be necessary to deal with bits of language like "is", "there is", and "exists". On the one hand, this looks dangerous: as we have begun to see, such conundrums have been taken as an effect of our being misled by ordinary language. On the other hand, it is a somewhat inevitable perspective: to unveil the effects of ordinary language in ontology, we need to go deep into them and unravel the problem. Finally, the Parmenidean thesis that everything exists is itself based on a certain interpretation of how "exists" works. This interpretation has been developed through the centuries; it is now time to meet two of the philosophers who have given it substance: David Hume and Immanuel Kant.

1.5 Existence Makes No Difference

Hume's stance on existence originates mainly from his empiricist theory of knowledge. According to this, at the roots of all our knowledge are impressions the objects produce on our senses. Our ideas are derived from sensory perceptions – they are indeed similar to pale perceptions, preserved in our memory even when the corresponding impressions are not there anymore.[18]

Hume supports the Parmenidean cause by maintaining that the very concept of a nonexistent object is absurd. These are not his actual words, in fact, since he speaks in terms of impressions and ideas. What he does say is that "there is no impression nor idea of any kind of which we have any consciousness or memory, that is not conceived as existent".[19] This sounds a bit confusing: the point would rather be that whatever we have an impression or idea *of*, we have the impression or idea of something existent. Anyway, he puts those who affirm the contrary in front of a dilemma: "the idea of existence must either be derived from a distinct impression, conjoined with every perception or object of our thought; or it must be the very same with the idea of the perception or object". But the first alternative is not practicable: it is not possible to find any impression that accompanies the idea of

[17] Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), p. 169.

[18] "Impressions, therefore, are our lively and strong perceptions; ideas are the fainter and weaker. [. . .] All our ideas, or weak perceptions, are derived from our impressions, or strong perceptions, and [. . .] we can never think of any thing which we have not seen without us, or felt in our minds." (Hume 1740, p. 9).

[19] Hume (1739), p. 66.

every "perception or object". So we are left with the second. But if the idea of existence is identical to the idea of the perception or of the object, then the idea of existence "is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent".[20]

Apart from the slide from the existence of the ideas or perceptions themselves to the existence of what we perceive or have an idea of, Hume seems to maintain that there is no distinct idea of existence, that could add anything to the idea of any object whatsoever. Translating from Hume's psychological jargon, this seems already close to the thesis that existence is not a property of individuals. He challenges those who disagree to specify *what* exactly should this distinct idea consist in. They could never do it, as existence does not add anything to the idea of the thing that is said to exist:

> When we simply conceive an object, we conceive it in all its parts. We conceive it as it might exist, tho' we do not believe it to exist. Our belief [in its existence] would discover no new qualities. We may paint out the entire object in imagination without believing it. We may set it, in a manner, before our eyes, with every circumstance of time and place. 'Tis the very object conceived as it might exist; and when we believe it, we can do no more.[21]

Williams and others have noted that Hume makes further claims on existence, hardly reconcilable with these.[22] He presses the point of the contingency of what he calls "matters of fact", as opposed to his "relations of ideas". The famous Humean insight here is, snappishly put, that whenever we can conceive something as distinct from something (else), one thing is in fact separable from the other (for what is conceivable, for Hume, is possible – a claim to which we shall come back at length in this book). So their connection is contingent, a "matter of fact".

Now Hume often takes "matters of fact" as a synonym of "matters of existence". If I can conceive Martin Sheen without his son Charlie Sheen, then there is no necessary connection between the two: there is a possible situation in which Martin Sheen exists but Charlie Sheen doesn't. Overall, we can have the idea of a situation fairly similar to ours (e.g., Martin Sheen is around, as in the real world), in which *Charlie Sheen* doesn't exist. Are we conceiving Martin Sheen's son as nonexistent in that situation? It is not clear whether this is consistent with Hume's aforementioned claims, at least given his epistemology-based toolkits.

Apart from these exegetic difficulties, there is something appealing in the thesis that existence makes no difference – "Existence is no news", as we might say. If I tell you that Laura eats, or that she is in love, I might have revealed something enlightening about Laura. But if I inform you that Laura exists, I have told you nothing you were not already aware of if you knew Laura, and something bizarre in case you didn't: who goes around trying to divide people into two groups, those who exist and those who do not? Norman Malcolm made the example of a king who cashes out a list of discriminating qualities for a chancellor. Could *existent* be

[20] Ibid.

[21] Hume (1740), pp. 17–8.

[22] See Williams (1981), p. 19.

reasonably included in the prerequisites? ("Nonexistent candidates are advised not to apply").[23]

As we shall see, such remarks may be based on a misleading choice of examples, followed by an undue generalization. We first need to further inspect the development of the Parmenidean thesis. Its next step comes from Kant's so well known – but so difficult to interpret – statements about existence, as formulated in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

1.6 Kant's Hundred Thalers

The famous slogan to the effect that existence is not a predicate can be traced back to Kant and his discussion over the so-called ontological argument for the existence of God in the first *Critique*. But there Kant does not exactly say that "exists" is not a predicate. What he says is, rather, that it is not a *real* or *determining* predicate – in particular, one that can be adequately included in the definition of a notion or of a concept. Talking about predicates, Kant opposes the qualification "real" to the one "merely logical". He contributes to the logical view of existence targeted in this book by maintaining that the existence predicate is merely logical. He takes as logical those predicates that add no information on the referent of the subject term, no matter what this is: they express trivial features of anything whatsoever. Good examples might be such predicates as "is blue if blue", or "is either rectangular or not rectangular". To take "exists" as a likewise blanket predicate is a way to maintain that existence makes no difference. Kant often seems to have an opinion similar to Hume in this regard:

> '*Being*' is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing. [. . .] If, now, we take the subject (God) with all its predicates (among which is omnipotence), and say "God is", or "There is a God", we attach no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates [. . .]. By whatever and by however many predicates we may think a thing – even if we completely determine it – we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that this thing *is*. Otherwise, it would not be exactly the same thing that exists, but something more than we had thought in the concept; and we would not, therefore, say that the exact object of my concept exists.[24]

This comes as the conclusion of the famous passage where, having claiming that "the real contains no more than the merely possible", Kant proposes the hundred thalers' example: a hundred real thalers do not contain anything more than a hundred possible thalers.

Is there really no difference between a hundred existing thalers and a hundred nonexistent ("possible" meaning here not actually existent) thalers? Isn't it so that

[23] See Malcolm (1960).

[24] Kant (1781), p. 505.

one hundred real, actually existing thalers, and one hundred merely imaginary thalers differ in various ways? You can keep the former in your pocket, put them in the bank, or you can do grocery with them, or spend them for a dinner at Harry's Bar; but try to buy your dinner with a hundred possible thalers. Aren't they thus distinct?

Kant's remark is that, surely, "my financial position is, however, affected very differently by a hundred real thalers than it is by the mere concept of them". Still, the *concept* of one hundred thalers is not expanded by the fact that I affirm that the thalers exist. Otherwise "my concept would not, in that case, express the whole object, and would not therefore be an adequate concept of it".[25] It seems that, by mentioning possible and real thalers, he did not mean to talk about merely imaginary vs. existing coins. He had rather in mind a distinction along the lines of someone's thinking about thalers, versus the thalers' being judged as being out there in the real world. If this is so, then Kant's point would be the following: when I move from merely thinking of something, x, to judging of x that it exists, nothing more and nothing less than x must be the object of both thoughts; for otherwise how could what I think of *be* what I judge to exist?

There is an apparently plausible remark supporting Kant's view that "exists" is not a real predicate which legitimately enters into definitions. If it were, the philosopher of Parmenidean sympathies may say, one might bring into being new things by defining them as existing. If to exist is a genuine property of individuals, I can define the existent golden mountain as that thing which has the properties of being a mountain, being made of gold, and existing. This object, having the properties it has by definition, would exist. Now this is gibberish – not just given that, let us suppose, no golden mountain actually exists; but because it is ridiculous that something exists because I define it that way. If this were feasible, I would have already defined into existence one billion pounds and a villa in the Caribbeans for myself. As we shall see in the second part of this book, this is real issue (although not impossible to bypass) for those who believe that existence is a genuine property of individuals.

This, then, is what existence is not. What *is* it? What are we saying about x, when we say that x exists? According to Kant, what we do both when claiming "God is omnipotent" and when claiming "God is" (i.e., exists), is to posit (*setzen*) the "subject". In the first case, though, we "posit the predicate in its relation to the subject" (one may translate: we assert that the thing denoted by the term in subject position, God, has the property denoted by the expression acting as predicate, that of being omnipotent). In the second case, as we have just heard, we "posit the subject in itself with all its predicates". Which means that to state the existence of x is to place x "as belonging to the context of experience as a whole". Because of such a connection of the thing with the totality of experience, "our thought has thereby obtained an additional possible perception".[26] "Being", says Kant, "is merely the position of a thing or of certain determinations" in themselves.[27]

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid, p. 506.

[27] Ibid, p. 504.

But why should being the content of a possible perception, or belonging to the context of experience, not count as a property of some objects, and not of others? The difference made by existence is not like the difference made by the acquisition or loss of ordinary properties. This may not be enough to conclude that "exists" itself is not a real predicate. Holmes does not exist: we cannot perceive Holmes, that is, we cannot go around the world and have perceptual experiences of him, run into him, touch him, see him. Holmes does not belong to the "context of experience as a whole" as a "possible perception": if we were able to experience him this way, we would causally interact with him (according to Kant, causality governs the entire phenomenal world, the world of experience: "Everything which happens has a cause" is the Kantian example of synthetic *a priori* judgment). But we cannot do that, as Holmes does not exist. On the other hand, Uma Thurman is a content of the totality of experience because, going around the world, we can hit against her and causally interact with her (a "possible perception"). Does Kant's view of existence account for these intuitions?

Perhaps yes – if we recognize, as Kantian specialists have stressed, that what he had to say on the subject is more complex than what is captured by the motto of existence not being a (real) predicate. Kant has Reality (*Realität*) as one of the categories of Quality in his table of the categories of judgment, and this determination of an object does seem to make a difference to it. Next, he also includes Existence/Nonexistence (*Dasein*/*Nicthsein*) in the categories of Modality. As such, existence is a contentful determination again. Thirdly, the categories of Existence and Reality are both distinct from the categories of Quantity, which are inferred from (what we would nowadays call) quantified statements, i.e., universal and particular judgments. Kant seems to have had notions of reality and existence going beyond the one of existence as a non-determining feature.[28]

The Kantian view of existence has usually been interpreted as a forerunner of the Fregean doctrine that existence is a "second level" concept or property, thus, not something that would be denoted by a "first level" predicate, a predicate of individuals (talk of first- and second- levels is to be explained very soon). But this has been largely assumed in an attempt to use the clear in order to shed light on the obscure.[29] It is, anyway, with Frege and Russell that the Parmenidean thesis has been developed into the current received view. This will be the theme of the next Chapter.

[28] See Bonevac (1982) and Schwarz (1987).

[29] "Frege, I believe [. . .] gave a clear sense to the doctrine that Kant obscurely expressed (and then obscurely defended) in the sentence '*Being* is not a real predicate'. Frege's account of the concept of existence is the correct one. It uncovers the grammatical rules according to which existential propositions are actually used, and *were* actually used by Kant. Kant did not, in the way Frege did, know how the word 'exist' is used; but he did know, as we all do, how to use it. And in discussing it he of course used it and allied expressions, 'posit', 'actual', 'object', 'given', etc., whose use can only be fully understood in the light of what Frege and his successors have said." (Williams 1981, pp. 29–30).

Chapter 2
To Exist and to Count

The philosophers we are about to meet have reinforced the Parmenidean position in two moves: (1) they have expanded the slogan "Existence is not a predicate" into the thesis that existence is (nothing but) *property-instantiation*; (2) they have also explained existence in terms of the logical notion of *quantification*. Both moves were made mainly by Frege and, derivatively, by Russell. The second is especially popular among contemporary analytic philosophers for having been embraced by Quine, who developed it into his so-called "criterion of ontological commitment".

A couple of subtleties are involved here. Firstly, theses (1) and (2) are often taken as equivalent, but they might not be *exactly* so. Secondly, what the Quinean "criterion of ontological commitment" amounts to is less obvious than it may appear at first sight. I will deal with these issues at the end of this Chapter, after exposing the two theses in some detail. Let us start with the first one.

2.1 *x* Is Blond, *x* Exists

It is usually said that, according to Frege, existence is a second order or second level property. Thus the received view on existence is often called *second order view*. Which is somewhat misleading, unless we clarify (at least) two things.

First clarification. Frege talked about functions and (then) concepts, so it should be said that existence is, for him, a second order concept. A Fregean concept is a function of a certain kind: one that maps its arguments to truth-values.[1] As an example, the concept *blonde man* is a function that delivers the value True when applied to Brad Pitt, False when applied to Barack Obama. Frege's concepts are not mental imageries or representations. Concept and object are the two fundamental categories in the Fregean ontology. And the concepts, using the so-called "mature" Frege's lexicon, are found, as far as semantics goes, at the level of what he calls

[1] See Frege (1891).

Bedeutung, not *Sinn*: they are the denotations of predicates. Thus, for the sake of uniformity, I shall mostly talk of properties instead of concepts.

Now certain properties are ascribed directly to individuals, as when we say that Brad Pitt is blond, or honest, thus attributing to him the properties of being blond and being honest. These are first order properties. Others are second order in that they are properties of properties: as when, for example, we say that honesty is rare. We are talking of a first order property (being honest, or honesty) to say that it has a property in its turn: the one of being rare. If we think of the world as ordered in a hierarchy that has at its level zero individuals that are not properties (or individuals *tout-court*, for simplicity), then properties of individuals placed at the first ontological step, and then properties of properties placed at the second step, etc., being rare works here as a second level property. In this sense, it is usually said, according to Frege existence is a second order property.

Why? Looking at our ordinary language, "exists" seems to be (what we may now call) a first order predicate, that is, a predicate standing for a property of individuals. "Brad Pitt exists": Brad Pitt is an individual, and this statement *prima facie* ascribes him the property (of individuals) of existing. In the same fashion, "Brad Pitt is blond", "Brad Pitt is honest" attribute to the same individual the property of being blond and that of being honest. According to the Fregean view, though, despite the grammatical analogy, the authentic import of the latter sentences is quite different from that of the former.

By saying that existence is not a first order, but a second order property (thus that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, "exists" is not a first order predicate, except for surface grammar), is Frege claiming that properties, as opposed to individuals, have the property of existing just like, for example, honesty has the property of being rare? Here comes the second clarification. When the typical Parmenidean philosopher maintains, following Frege, that existence is a second order property, she means that both in singular existential sentences like "Brad Pitt exists", and in general existential sentences like "Horses exist", we are ascribing a property to a property. Still, the ascription had better be phrased by claiming that we are attributing to some property, not the property of existing, but the one of being *instantiated* or *exemplified*.

Take a general existential sentence like "Horses exist". One who says that horses exist, according to Frege, is not directly making claims about this or that horse, or about each of the various horses individually taken. One is saying that a certain property, that of being a horse, is instantiated, that is, exemplified. One is thus making a statement about a first order property, and ascribes to it a second order feature. Properties (being a horse, being blond, being honest, being a good-looking man) can have instances – the latter being the things that exemplify or possess the property (horses, good-looking men like George Clooney and Brad Pitt, etc.). The same explanation goes for negative existential sentences. Take a general sentence again, "Unicorns do not exist". One who utters this (true) statement, according to Frege, is not denying a certain property to individuals, declaring of them that they are this or that. One is denying a second order property to a first order

property, to the property of being a unicorn. But again, the property that is denied had better not be phrased as the property of existing. To say that unicorns do not exist is tantamount to saying something along the lines of: "*Unicorn* has zero instances"; or "The property of being a unicorn is not exemplified". Even if this position gets labeled via the motto "Existence is a second order property" – and I shall abide by this label – the motto is thus a bit misleading.[2]

Instead, on a Fregean perspective, existence is *explained away*. In the proposed analysis for existential statements, the word "exists" may disappear and be replaced in all its occurrences by sentences in which only "is instantiated" shows up, uttered of properties. The content of existential sentences, both negative and affirmative, singular and general, has to do with this feature of properties: being exemplified. (Which brings to a possible third clarification of the received view: the expression "second order property" may be misleading also in the sense that, if there is an ontological ordering of individuals, properties, properties of properties, etc., then being instantiated or exemplified can be a property of properties of any order or level, not only of the first; in § 53 of the *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* Frege more generally says: "existence is a property of concepts").

Let us take stock. When my girlfriends think of Brad Pitt that, luckily, he exists, what they are actually thinking has to do with the instantiation of a property (which one? This is an interesting question, to which I shall return in the next Chapter). Probably, my friends do not suspect that they are thinking this way – indeed, they are likely to be convinced that they linger on a pleasant thought that deals directly with Brad Pitt or, as philosophers (though not my girlfriends) would say, is *de re about* him. This thought would be that, luckily, Brad Pitt, that very person, has a pleasant characteristic: he exists. Still, my friends think about a property; and what they think is that it is instantiated. If they think of Brad Pitt that he is a male, they are directly ascribing a property to Brad Pitt. But if they think of Brad Pitt that he exists, then, despite appearances and no matter their efforts, they have property-instantiation in mind.[3]

Or have they? Can't we say that they are thinking something of Brad Pitt also when it's about his existence? Perhaps they are implicitly and, I would say, certainly unbeknownst to them, ascribing a special feature to him: the feature of exemplifying or instantiating some property or other (also to this idea we shall

[2] "So when Frege says that existence is a property of concepts he must not be understood to be countenancing sentences of the form 'The concept *A* exists'. To suppose this would be to invite the interpretation of negative existential propositions as asserting something of the form 'The concept *A* does not exist'. Frege cannot mean this. It would simply be a way of bringing back Plato's Beard." (Williams 1981, p. 56)

[3] "Imagine checking off a list of assertions about Bill Clinton, to the effect that he is president, that he smiles a lot, that he is intelligent, that he is imprudent, that he exists. For the first four items your thought is a subject-predicate thought about a certain concrete entity, but when it comes to the fifth item your thinking suddenly goes second-order as you mentally invoke some suitable [property] to pin your existential thought upon." (McGinn 2000, p. 18).

come back in the next Chapter). Now if "Brad Pitt exists" actually means "Brad Pitt has properties", then we are not so far from Hume and Kant's position: existence is no news, or makes no difference. "Exists" is not a predicate that adds anything to the object it is ascribed to, because there is no genuine property of existing: existence just is the having of genuine properties. In philosophy, the thesis according to which the instantiation of any property implies existence is often called *serious actualism*.[4] Serious actualism entails the Parmenidean thesis that everything exists. To claim that for any object x and property P, if x instantiates P then x exists, is like claiming that all objects exist, if to be an object is to a be a property-bearer.[5]

Frege connects his view of existence with a way of addressing the paradox of non-being. In his often quoted *Dialogue with Pünjer on Existence*, Frege states, in a Kantian spirit, that "exists" had better be viewed as a mere predicate of surface grammar, "a mere auxiliary [that] language, feeling at a loss for a grammatical predicate, invented" in order to allow such sentences as "Men exist". "Exists" cannot be a substantive predicate, for it just "predicates something self-evident, so that it really has no content".[6] The statement "Leo Sachse is", meaning that Leo Sachse exists, cannot ascribe anything directly to Leo Sachse: for otherwise, to meaningfully state, e.g., that Holmes is not, we would need Holmes to be there in order to be referred to. Pünjer had proposed to interpret "x exists" as an elliptical form for something like "x is a possible object of experience". All ideas have objects, but some ideas are not "caused by something affecting the ego", and their objects cannot be experienced (the idea of an hallucinated table is Pünjer's example). Then Frege makes the checkmate move:

> Then it follows that there are objects of ideas – ideas which have not been caused by something affecting the ego – which do not exist. Now if you are using the word "exists" in the same sense as the expression "there is", then you have at the same time both asserted and denied the same predicate of the same subject.[7]

Frege's proposed equivalence of "exists" with "there is" brings us directly to his second fundamental contribution to the Parmenidean cause.

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[4] "Serious actualism is the thesis that it is not possible for an object to have a property without existing, i.e., the thesis that exemplification entails existence." (Linsky and Zalta 1994, p. 437).

[5] A serious actualist who has thoroughly explored the notion is Alvin Plantinga – see e.g., Plantinga (1983).

[6] See Frege (1884b), pp. 62 and 65. In the correspondence with Pünjer, Frege also suggests that stating the existence of x is like stating its self-identity: "x exists" works like "$x = x$" (p. 65). If everything is self-identical, as Frege surely believed, and existence is equivalent to self-identity, then the usual Parmenidean thesis follows again: everything exists. If Frege comes close to taking "exists" as a predicate of individuals in this correspondence – and he comes close to this, to the extent that he notices its being like the predicate "is self-identical" – he still takes it as a predicate trivially true of anything whatsoever. I will come back to this connection between existence and self-identity in the next Chapter.

[7] Ibid, p. 59.

2.2 Existence as Quantification

The claim that existence is (with all the aforementioned qualifications) a second order property grounds a strong analogy between the concept of existence and the concept of number. Existential and numerical ascriptions are the two examples of second order property ascription stressed by Frege. To understand the analogy, we shall discuss quantification. The modern logical treatment of quantification, which Michael Dummett claimed to be the deepest single technical improvement logic has ever undergone, is also due to Frege. And such a technical improvement has been put from the start at the service of the Parmenidean view of existence.

Let us begin with a few elucidations for non-specialists. In ordinary language, quantifiers correspond to expressions like "all", "some", "something", "everyone", "most", "many", etc., that we use to talk about things in general. They are often found in what traditional philosophy called universal sentences (the famous, and mournful, "All men are mortal"), and in particular ones ("Some men are bald"). Such expressions are called quantifiers because their role consists in telling us about quantities – in letting us know for how many things does a certain condition or property hold. If I tell my students that everyone has passed the logic exam, I am saying how many of them have passed the logic exam: all of them. If I claim that nobody really believes in Parmenides' philosophy, I am saying of how many objects does the property of really believing in Parmenides' philosophy hold: of none. If I say that some politicians are corrupt, I am talking in an undetermined way of the amount of politicians who have the property of being corrupt; and my statement is true if and only if there is at least a politician that is corrupt, not excluding that there be more than one.

Those who have attended the elementary logic course that would be needed to get the best out of this book also know that two quantifiers show up in the canonical logical notation: the universal one, represented by the "$\forall$" symbol ("inverted-a"), formalizing expressions like "all", "for each", and used to phrase universal sentences; and the existential quantifier, represented by the "$\exists$" symbol ("inverted-e"), formalizing expressions like "for some", or "there is", or "there is at least one... such that", and used to phrase particular sentences. The two are inter-definable: to say that everything has property P (that is, using symbols: $\forall xPx$, which can be read as: "For every object x, it is true that x is P") is like saying that nothing does not have property P (that is: $\neg\exists x\neg Px$; where "$\neg$" is the symbol for negation, "not"). To say that something has property P (symbols: $\exists xPx$, "For some object x, it is true that x is P") is like saying that not everything does not have P ($\neg\forall x\neg Px$). We could always use only one quantifier, given that each can be defined through the other: $\forall$ can be defined as $\neg\exists\ldots\neg$, while $\exists$ can be defined as $\neg\forall\ldots\neg$. Let us focus then on the existential quantifier, given that all that can be expressed using the universal quantifier (and expressions like "all" or "every" in ordinary language) can be adequately expressed using the existential quantifier plus negation.

Why *existential*? The dual of "universal" is not "existential", but "particular". In the traditional logical jargon, sentences like "Some men are bald" are named, as

we have said, particular. Why don't we call "∃" the particular quantifier? The Parmenidean idea behind the mainstream logical terminology is that when we make statements beginning for instance with "some", like "Some men are bald" or "Some politicians are corrupt", we are affirming the existence of bald men, or of corrupt politicians. To say that some politician is corrupt is to say that there is at least one politician who is corrupt, that is, at least one thing which is both a politician and corrupt exists. To say that some men are bald is to say something true if and only at least one bald man exists. The quantifier used to express particular sentences is named "existential", for expressions like "some", "for some", "there is", "at least one... exists", are all considered synonymous. In particular, they all have, as is said nowadays, ontological or existential *commitment* or *import*. One who utters "Some politicians are corrupt" is committed to the existence of corrupt politicians: what she says is true if and only if corrupt politicians exist.

We shall talk about the notion of ontological commitment later on, discussing Quine. Now back to Frege. Introducing (in the two-dimensional notation he preferred) the quantifier (which we currently indicate with) ∃ in his *Begriffsschrift* – the work that marked the beginning of modern logic – Frege reads it with the German *Es gibt*, something like "it is given that". But he calls sentences that begin with that quantifier, existential (*Existentialsätze*). Later on, in the *Grundlagen*, the connection between existence, quantification, and numbering is completely explicit. The first part of the book is dedicated to showing how the view that number words express properties of objects leads to absurdities. To get to grips with how number words work, Frege considers answers to questions of the kind: "How many *F*'s are there?" – for instance: "How many horses are attached to the King's carriage?". Now if one says, "The King's carriage's horses are four", from the point of view of surface grammar this is of the same form as "The King's carriage's horses are white". But whereas in the latter sentence one is ascribing distributively the property of being white to each horse, in the former one is not ascribing the property of being four to each horse. One is saying that the property of being a horse attached to the King's carriage has four instances. Number statements ascribe properties to concepts, not to objects.

Now the same goes for existence: if one says, "There are horses", i.e., "Horses exist", one is ascribing a property neither to each horse, nor to some horse or other individually taken. One is saying that the property of being a horse enjoys the property of being instantiated, that is (more cumbersome), of being such that it is not the case that the number of its instances is zero. In § 53, Frege says that "existence is analogous to number. Affirmation of existence is in fact nothing but denial of the number nought".[8]

One could go further and claim that, if the quantifier captures the notion of existence, then not only existence is analogous to number, but existence statements *are* statements of number. To be sure, an existential statement made by means of the existential quantifier, of the form "There are *F*'s", is a bit lax when it's about

[8] Frege (1884a), p. 65.

numbering or counting: it just says that the number of *F*'s is nonzero, nothing more. But other claims that are indubitably statements of number, that is, answers to questions of the form "How many *F*'s are there?", can be imprecise as well ("A few", i.e., "The number of *F*'s is not that big"; or "A lot", i.e., "The number of *F*'s is quite large"; or "Plenty", i.e., "The number of *F*'s is more than sufficient"; etc.).

2.3 Russellian Propaganda

In *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, Russell is a clear supporter of the Parmenidean cause. He accepts both the thesis that existence is not a property of individuals, and the correlative view on quantification, inherited from Frege: the notion of existence is fully captured by the quantifier. Russell formulates the Parmenidean position in terms of propositional functions.

Roughly, it could be said (and some do say) that propositional functions correspond to Frege's concepts. But Russell was sometimes a bit confused on the distinction between use and mention.[9] Such confusion affects the Russellian notion of propositional function; in the *Principia mathematica* it becomes so pervasive, that some commentators declare it difficult to understand whether the theory deals with (types of) linguistic expressions, or the objects denoted by those expressions. For simplicity, let us take Russell's propositional functions as (types of) linguistic items: for example, "*x* is a man" is a propositional function; as such, it can have a truth-value when the variable *x* is assigned an object. Let us now listen to Russell:

> When you take any propositional function and assert of it that it is possible, that it is sometimes true, that gives you the fundamental meaning of "existence". You may express it by saying that there is at least one value of *x* for which that propositional function is true. Take "*x* is a man", there is at least one value of *x* for which this is true. That is what one means by saying that "There are men", or that "Men exist". Existence is essentially a property of a propositional function. It means that that propositional function is true in at least one instance [. . .]. We have got to have some idea that we do not define, and one takes the idea of "always true", or of "sometimes true", as one's undefined idea in this matter [. . .]. It will be out of this notion of *sometimes* [. . .] that we get the notion of existence.[10]

If we translate *modo materiali*, in terms of properties, Russell is restating a Fregean idea: to say that men exist is to say that the property of being a man is instantiated at least once. What is at stake is thus a property of properties: the property, that the property of being a man possesses, of being instantiated at least once – which is expressed *modo formali* by saying: the propositional function "*x* is a man" is true for at least one assignment, to the variable *x*, of a specific object.

[9] Quine, who paid the greatest attention to this distinction, called him "the confused logician" (Quine 1970, p. 66).

[10] Russell (1918), pp. 98–9.

One cannot define every idea, but the idea of the quantifier, "sometimes true" (i.e., "there is at least one value of *x*, for which. . ."), one can take as a starting point, and then define the notion of existence by means of it.

And so Russell believes he has solved the paradox of non-being. Let us follow anew through the paradoxical argument of the last Chapter:

(P1) To deny the existence of something, one refers to that thing;
(P2) But if one refers to something, then that thing has to exist;

Thus,

(C) To deny the existence of something, that thing has to exist.

Remember the specific issue for the Parmenideans: they should account for the obvious fact that some negative existentials are true, without giving up (P2). Now it seems that we can dodge the paradox by dismissing (P1). We can say "Unicorns exist", and make a false claim, without saying anything that applies to individual unicorns:

> It is perfectly clear that when you say "Unicorns exist", you are not saying anything that would apply to any unicorns there might happen to be, because as a matter of fact there are not any, and therefore if what you say had any application to the actual individuals, it could not possibly be significant unless it were true. You can consider the proposition "Unicorns exist" and can see that it is false. It is not nonsense. Of course, if the proposition went through the general conception of the unicorn to the individual, it could not be even significant unless there were unicorns. Therefore when you say "Unicorns exist", you are not saying anything about any individual things, and the same applies when you say "Men exist".[11]

For the same reason, we can say "Unicorns do not exist", and make a true claim: we are not referring to objects that are not, but that should nevertheless be there in order to be referred to and have their being denied. Negative existentials can be meaningful and true.

Then Russell takes up again what Frege had already promoted: the equation of existence claims with certain number claims. Comparing "exists" and "is numerous", Russell says that in neither case we are dealing with predicates that stand for properties of individuals:

> If you say that "Men exist, and Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates exists", that is exactly the same sort of fallacy as it would be if you said "Men are numerous, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is numerous", because existence is a predicate of a propositional function, or derivatively of a class. When you say of a propositional function that it is numerous, you will mean that there are several values of *x* that will satisfy it. [. . .] If *x*, *y*, and *z* all satisfy a propositional function, you may say that that proposition is numerous, but *x*, *y*, and *z* severally are not numerous. Exactly the same applies to existence, that is to say that the actual things that there are in the world do not exist, or, at least, that is putting it too strongly, because that is utter nonsense. To say that they do not exist is strictly nonsense, but to say that they do exist is also strictly nonsense. It is of propositional functions that you can assert or deny existence.[12]

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

The final is a bit misleading: the Parmenidean view does not state that existence can be asserted or denied of properties (or propositional functions), in the sense that it is properties that may exist or not. On the received view, existential statements can be paraphrased away as attributions, to properties (to propositional functions), of the property of being instantiated (of being "sometimes true", "true for at last one value of x", etc.).

But the argument itself is intriguing. Russell compares the two fallacious lines of reasoning:

Men exist	Men are numerous
Socrates is a man	Socrates is a man
Socrates exists	Socrates is numerous

And Russell maintains that, because the fallacy is the same, both predicates, "exists" and "is numerous", are second order predicates, and as such produce a grammatically unacceptable conclusion. As we shall see in the next Chapter, Russell's argument might turn out to be fallacious as well: the two lines of reasoning may not amount to the *same* fallacy. Instead, we now need to examine how Russell deals with another problem – one that every philosopher will recognize as soon as she reads the title of the following section.

2.4 The Present King of France

Suppose that the Parmenidean philosopher can deny the existence of unicorns without referring to wannabe-objects that should be instances of the property of being a unicorn, thus respecting Parmenides' prohibition to refer to what is not. The problem of nonexistents seems to show up again, though, due to the fact that we apparently refer to such things also directly by calling them by name, or in general, via singular terms, like "Gandalf" or "the main character of Doyle's detective stories". Russell proposed a part of the alleged solution in *On Denoting*, one of the most famous essays of contemporary philosophy.

Here Russell deals with the issue of providing a treatment of definite descriptions. What are these? In ordinary language, it seems that individuals can be referred to not only via proper names ("Brad Pitt", "Aberdeen", etc.), and demonstratives ("this", "that"), but also through expressions beginning with a determinative article and of the form "the F", like: "the winner of the 2008 US presidential elections", "the author of *The Philosophy of Philosophy*", "the ratio of a circumference to its diameter". These expressions refer to, respectively, Barack Obama, Timothy Williamson, and the number π. They are called descriptions because it appears that via them we can refer to an individual, not calling it by name, but via a characterization, a description mentioning certain of its properties or features. And they are called definite because via them one aims at referring to one and

only one individual (the one that complies with the description). Since the US presidential elections single out one winner at a time, "the winner of the 2008 US presidential elections" picks out exactly Barack Obama and no one else. Definite descriptions are distinguished from *in*definite descriptions, that is, expressions of the form "an *F*" – like "a chief town of Scotland", which expresses a condition satisfied by several towns.[13]

When a definite description picks out exactly one object, *prima facie* it behaves in some respects like a proper name.[14] Problems (of the kind that interests us) begin with expressions like "the present king of France". Nowadays, France is not a monarchy. The Parmenidean is not allowed to say that the present king of France is a nonexistent object that would be denoted by the description, though, as for her there are no such things. What is the truth-value of statements like "The present king of France is bald", then? Should we take it as false, or maybe as neither true nor false (against the Principle of Bivalence: every well-formed declarative sentence is either true or false), because there is no object denoted by its grammatical subject? Says Russell:

> By the law of excluded middle, either "A is B" or "A is not B" must be true. Hence either "the present King of France is bald" or "the present King of France is not bald" must be true. Yet if we enumerated the things that are bald, and then the things that are not bald, we should not find the present King of France in either list. Hegelians, who love a synthesis, will probably conclude that he wears a wig.[15]

Russell's celebrated solution consists in saying that, despite grammatical appearances, "the present king of France" is not a genuine singular term. Thus, "The present king of France is bald", despite appearances, from the point of view of the authentic logical form is not a singular sentence with a subject-predicate structure. Descriptions, says Russell, are "incomplete symbols": they do not possess meaning in isolation, in the sense of being destined to autonomously denote an object. Their meaning lies in their contribution to the truth conditions of the sentences in which they appear, although such a contribution is not the one of singular terms. In Russell's words, "denoting phrases [like descriptions] never have any meaning in themselves, but every proposition in whose verbal expression they occur has a meaning".[16]

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[13] The distinction between definite and indefinite descriptions, according to some, may be a surface grammar feature of some languages, since there are others, e.g. Slavic languages, in which it is just missing. Both "The girl passed by" and "A girl passed by" would be expressed by a Russian as something like "Girl passed by".

[14] Not in all respects, as we shall see in the next Chapter.

[15] Russell (1905b), p. 48. Russell mentions the Law of Excluded Middle, but he actually formulates the Principle of Bivalence. Nowadays philosophers often introduce the caveat that the two principles can be considered equivalent only under certain assumptions. This is stressed after the development of semantic theories, like so-called supervaluationism, accepting the first but not the second. Such a distinction is marginal for our current purposes.

[16] Ibid.

To make explicit the authentic logical form of sentences that contain descriptions, thus, it is necessary to paraphrase them. Any statement whose grammatical subject is a definite description, in fact has a more complex logical form. According to Russell, sentences of the form "The *F* is *G*" are to be analyzed as multiple quantifications in conjunction, along the lines of: (a) Something is *F* (b) At most one thing is *F* (c) Some *F* is *G*.[17] "The present king of France is bald" is to become: "There is exactly one present king of France, and some present king of France is bald".

Now for the Parmenidean philosopher "something", "there is", etc., have existential import. Thus the claim that the present king of France is bald turns out to be an existentially committing statement: one is saying that exactly one thing satisfying a certain condition (presently being king of France) exists (and is bald). Since such an object does not exist, the statement is in the end false. Similarly, to say that the round square is round is to say that one (and only one) thing exists, which is round and square (and is round). This too is false, as there are no things that are round and square, i.e., no such things exist.

No violation of the Principle of Bivalence awaits us. The apparent violation was due to an ambiguity in the scope of negation. "The present king of France is bald", in the Russellian analysis, is false. Now as for "The present king of France is *not* bald", two possibilities arise: (a) it can be read as "It is not the case that (the present King of France is bald)", with negation taking wide scope over the description; and this is true, being the negation of a false sentence, as required by Bivalence; (b) or it can be read (a bit artificially) as "The present king of France is such that he is non-bald", with the description taking wide scope over negation; this is false, for the usual reason that there is no present king of France. But in reading (b), no more does the claim contradict "The present king of France is bald".

Russell already speaks in *On Denoting* of a distinction between "primary" and "secondary" occurrences of a description. The developed theory of scope, though, comes later, that is, in the *Principia mathematica*. And when it's about existential commitment, it is the scope distinction that does much of the work of (allegedly) freeing the Parmenidean from reference to nonexistent objects, having applications beyond the case of definite descriptions and Russell's proposed eliminative treatment for them. I shall come to these issues in the next Chapter.

2.5 The *x* that Pegasizes

The received view on existence reaches its most popular formulation with Quine. *On What There Is* opens with the explicit Parmenidean statement we have met in our Prologue: if according to Quine the fundamental ontological question is

[17] See Neale (1990). Neale proposes to change (c) into "Every *F* is *G*", which, while preserving the original Russellian analysis, allows Russell's theory to have wider applications. This is a point of minor importance for our purposes.

"What is there?", then the easy answer, in a word, is: "Everything". We should not be surprised to find out that "there is" and "exists", for him, mean the same.

We have also seen that Quine is aware of the paradox of non-being, labeled by him as Plato's beard. His main specific contributions to the Parmenidean effort, as synthesized in *On What There Is*, consist of (1) an extension to proper names of the Russellian tactic for the elimination of descriptions as referential devices;[18] and (2) the development of the connection between existence and quantification into a full-fledged *methodological* stance in ontology.

Let us begin with the first point. Quine draws on the strategy of *On Denoting*:

> Russell, in his theory of so-called singular descriptions, showed clearly how we might meaningfully use seeming names without supposing that there be the entities allegedly named. The names to which Russell's theory directly applies are complex descriptive names such as 'the author of *Waverley*', 'the present King of France' [. . .] The unanalysed statement 'The author of *Waverley* was a poet' contains a part, 'the author of *Waverley*', which is wrongly supposed [by the philosophers who admit non-existent objects] to demand objective reference in order to be meaningful at all. But in Russell's translation, 'Something wrote *Waverley* and was a poet and nothing else wrote *Waverley*', the burden of objective reference which had been put upon the descriptive phrase is now taken over by words of the kind that logicians call bound variables, variables of quantification, namely, words like 'something', 'nothing', 'everything'.[19]

Suppose this works for definite descriptions. What about proper names? We do not only say "The present king of France is bald". We also say: "Pegasus is a winged horse", "Holmes has inspired lots of real detectives", "Gandalf is a fictional character". Is the Parmenidean philosopher forced to claim that all names *prima facie* denoting nonexistents, like "Pegasus", or "Gandalf", simply do not denote?

According to Quine, we can extend the Russellian eliminative treatment of descriptions to proper names. We can rephrase proper names into what Quine calls "complex descriptive names", "in any way that seems adequately to single out our idea".[20] We can interpret proper names as disguised definite descriptions, also by coining *ad hoc* predicates if needed. We can reformulate "Pegasus" as "Bellerophon's winged horse", or introduce artificial predicates and descriptions, like "pegasizing", or "the *x* that pegasizes", and then apply the Russellian procedure from scratch.

In particular, we can deny the existence of something even when it appears that that something has been called by (what had been taken as a) proper name, with no need for the thing of which we are negating the existence to be in order to be referred to, and thus, without contravening Parmenides' Principle. One who states

[18] It is fair to say that the extension was already envisaged by Russell. However, it was Quine who developed and advertised it to the general philosophical public.

[19] Quine (1953), p. 181.

[20] Quine (1953), p. 182.

that Pegasus does not exist makes a claim to the effect that nothing pegasizes. Thus, concludes Quine:

> Our argument is now quite general. [It was] supposed that we could not meaningfully affirm a statement of the form 'So-and-so is not', with a simple or descriptive singular noun in place of 'so-and-so', unless so-and-so is. This supposition is now seen to be quite generally groundless, since the singular noun in question can always be expanded into a singular description, trivially or otherwise, and then analyzed out *à la* Russell.[21]

2.6 "To Be Is to Be the Value of a Variable"

Quine's second contribution to the Parmenidean cause is synthesized in the famous motto: "To be is to be the value of a (bound) variable". The motto draws on the Frege-Russell line on quantification: it is Quine's way of expressing the idea that the notion of being or existence is captured by the quantifier, as the variables Quine is referring to are essentially variables of quantification.

This does not mean that the Quinean dictum aims at literally expressing the meaning – the intension, some philosophers might want to say[22] – of being, whatever that might be. As Nathan Salmon noted, we cannot seriously intend that to be consists in enjoying the state "being the value of a variable, under some assignment of values to variables":

> When Hamlet [...] agonized over the question of whether to be or not to be, he was preoccupied with weightier matters than the question of whether or not to be the value of a variable. If there were no variables, would there be nothing? The dinosaurs had existence, but they didn't have variables.[23]

However, Quine has recapitulated in that motto a methodological strategy for ontology. He has told us that, once we eliminate descriptions and proper names via the Russellian treatment, "the burden of objective reference [...] is now taken over by words of the kind that logicians call bound variables, variables of quantification, namely, words like 'something', 'nothing', 'everything'". The "burden of objective reference", for the Parmenidean, is the burden of existence. Once we get rid of the burden of existence that descriptions and names apparently brought along, it moves on to the quantifiers.

Having claimed that the use of predicates does not commit us to the existence of universals, and that the use of singular terms like names and descriptions does not commit us to the existence of the items they were supposed to denote,

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[21] Ibid.

[22] It is controversial that the intensions of standard so-called model-theoretic semantics are fine-grained enough to generally capture meanings. But I will allow myself such loose talk at times.

[23] Salmon (1987), p. 51.

Quine asks: is there anything at all that can be said that commits us to the existence of something? As it turn out, there is:

> We can very easily involve ourselves in ontological commitments by saying, for example, that *there is something* (bound variable) which red houses and sunsets have in common; or that *there is something* which is a prime number larger than a million. But, this is, essentially, the *only* way we can involve ourselves in ontological commitments: by our use of bound variables. The use of alleged names is no criterion, for we can repudiate their namehood [...] Whatever we say with the help of names can be said in a language which shuns names altogether. To be assumed as an entity is, purely and simply, to be reckoned as the value of a variable. [...] The variables of quantification, 'something', 'nothing', 'everything', range over our whole ontology, whatever it may be; and we are convicted of a particular ontological presupposition if, and only if, the alleged presuppositum has to be reckoned among the entities over which our variables range in order to render one of our affirmations true.[24]

The dictum "To be is to be the value of a (bound) variable" is thus called the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment – or at least it is claimed that this dictum summarizes the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment. Here, "ontological commitment" has the same meaning as "existential commitment". We commit ourselves to the existence of something by saying that there is some object x, such that... x.... And a theory is committed to the entities over which the quantifiers of its sentences range – to the domain of the variables of quantification, as logicians say: this is the set of things that must exist in order for the sentences of the theory to be true.

There are several things to say about the Quinean criterion. First, it is not a criterion by means of which we can directly settle the question of what there is – in the Parmenidean sense, of what exists. It is a criterion that tells us what *must* exist *if* sentences that quantify over this or that must be true. If I say to my fellow spaceman, busy doing a space walk, "There is a hole in your space suit", what I say can be true only if at least one thing exists, which is both a hole and located in his space suit, and thus, only if holes exist. Unless, to be sure, I paraphrase that statement so to avoid quantification over holes – saying for instance that its authentic logical form, below the misleading surface grammar of ordinary language, is something like: "Your space suit is pierced". In this case I commit myself to the existence of space suits, but not to that of holes.[25]

Secondly, the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment is a zenith point of the Parmenidean position. In it, the equation of existence with quantification has become self-conscious enough to get established as the core of an ontological methodology. Given that the meaning of "exists" is fully captured by the quantifier, the ontological, i.e., existential commitments of sentences and theories are to be detected by looking at their quantificational makeup.

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[24] Quine (1953), p. 181.

[25] The mandatory reference regarding the issue of holes in ontology is the beautiful (Lewis and Lewis 1970). See also Casati and Varzi (1994), Carrara (2001), and Varzi (2001).

The third thing about the latter Quinean passage is the structure of its chief point. Quine believes he has put forth arguments for the thesis that the use of singular terms and predicates as such does not commit us ontologically (i.e., does not commit us to the existence of individuals or universals). As C.J.F. Williams and Graham Priest have emphasized,[26] Quine swiftly concludes from this that bound variables, instead, *do* commit us ontologically – this being the only way to be committed. There is no argument positively supporting the thesis that existential commitment is expressed by quantification: Quine *assumes* that a domain of quantification can encompass only existing things.

2.7 A Thin Conception of Being

Before I turn to the two subtleties flagged at the beginning of this Chapter, I conclude my review with an outline of Peter van Inwagen's theses. These are, as far as I know, the most coherent, clear, and thoroughly argued development of the Parmenidean position to be found today.

In the introductory pages to his *Ontology, Identity, and Modality*, the collection of his main essays on the topics mentioned by that title, van Inwagen traces a distinction between a *thin* and a *thick* conception of being. It is not clear (to me, at least) whether the thick conception of being entails the claim that some objects do not exist; but it is clear that van Inwagen ascribes it mainly to continental philosophy. It is also clear that the thin conception is our Parmenideanism:

> The thin conception of being is this: the concept of being is closely allied with the concept of number; to say that there are Xs is to say that the number of Xs is 1 or more – and to say nothing more profound, nothing more interesting, nothing more. [...] For [continental] philosophers, being is a "thick" concept, and they see the thin conception of being – those of them who take note of it at all – as a travesty, an evisceration of the richness of being. [...] I can only say that, in my view, it is possible to distinguish between the being and the nature of a thing – anything; anything – and that the thick conception of being is founded on the mistake of transferring what belongs properly to the nature of a chair – or of a human being or of a universal or of God – to the being of the chair. To endorse the thick conception of being is, in fact, to make (perhaps for other reasons; perhaps in a more sophisticated way) the very mistake of which Kant accused Descartes: the mistake of treating being as a "real predicate."[27]

For van Inwagen the question of the meaning of existence, as addressed in books like the one you have in your hands, needs to be dealt with at the *meta*-ontological level. This is the main idea of *Meta-Ontology*, an essay by van Inwagen that has quickly become a classic. What he means by "meta-ontology", in fact, is a discourse dealing (a) with the methodology of ontology, that is, roughly, with the

[26] See Williams (1981), pp. 156–7, Priest (2007).

[27] Van Inwagen (2001), pp. 4–5.

issue of the tools and procedures to be used in ontological investigations; and (b) with the question of the meaning (or, if one likes, the intension) of being.[28]

Quine marketed the idea that the question, "What is there?", is *the* ontological question. But this question, to stick to the jargon of intension and extension, concerns the extension of being (the universal catalogue, as some ontologists would say: the catalogue of everything there is). This being so, the question "What are we asking when we ask 'What is there?'?", is worth the title of meta-ontological question: this is the question about the meaning or sense or intension of being. Typical ontological issues are, for instance, whether or not there are sets, properties, or universals; typical meta-ontological issues are, for instance, whether being is the same as existence, or whether being is "spoken of in many ways".

Meta-Ontology contains five meta-ontological theses. Of them, we are now mainly interested in the first and third; but I will mention the fourth as well, and we'll take a look at the fifth in the next Section. The first thesis states: "Being is not an activity". Even though "to be" and "to exist" are verbs, as J.L. Austin noticed, they do not describe "something that things do all the time, like breathing – ticking over, as it were, in a metaphysical sort of way".[29] To be, to exist, is not the most general action of things – that somewhat ethereal activity which would be entailed by any other action. To be sure, for a serious actualist (and van Inwagen follows Plantinga's trail on this), the possession of any property, and thus, the performance of any activity, entails being or existence. Still this does not mean that being is the activity entailed by any other activity:

> Now I do not wish to deny that there is a most general activity that I engage in. I suppose that if I had to put a name to it, I should call it "lasting" or "enduring" or "getting older". [But] first, I would say that I share this most general activity with everything – or at least with every concrete inhabitant of the natural world. Secondly, I would say that it is just wrong to call this activity "existing" or "being" or "être" or to use any word for it that contains a root that is related to "être" or "esse" or "existere" or "to on" or "einai" or "Sein" or "be" or "am" or "is." [. . .] The vast difference between me and a table does not consist in our having vastly different sorts of being (*Dasein, dass sein*, "that it is"); it consists rather in our having vastly different sorts of *nature* (*Wesen*, *was sein*, "what it is").[30]

One of Van Inwagen's most powerful contributions to the meta-ontological debate consists in having derived from the thin conception of being an argument for the *univocity* of being. Against what many philosophers claimed (Aristotle and the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition *in primis*, but also authors like Gilbert Ryle), "to be", in the sense of "to exist", is *not* a πολλαχῶς λεγόμενον – it is not spoken of in many ways. This is the third thesis from *Meta-Ontology*, and it follows from the close alliance between existence and number that, as we know all too well, characterizes the received view.

[28] See van Inwagen (2001), p. 3.

[29] Austin (1962), p. 68.

[30] Van Inwagen (1998), pp. 14–5.

Number words used to answer the Fregean question "How many *F*'s are there?", such as "four", or "fifty", or "one thousand two hundreds fifty-four", cannot have different meanings depending on the kind of things we count via them. "The very essence of the applicability of arithmetic is that numbers may count anything":[31] if you have proved four theorems while I was listening to the Fab Four, then the number of theorems you have proved is the same as the number of historical members of the group I was listening to.

But now, there is that intimate connection between existence and number in which the Parmenidean believes: to say that horses exist is to say that the number of horses is one or more; and to say that unicorns do not exist is to say that the number of unicorns is zero. Thus, we need to be convinced that, if number words like "four" or "one thousand two hundreds fifty-four" are univocal, then "to exist" is univocal as well. This is a notable argument any Parmenidean philosopher must address, if she has problems with the thesis that being is univocal (as we shall see, the non-Parmenidean philosopher has more options here).

The fourth thesis of *Meta-Ontology* reads: "The single sense of being or existence is adequately captured by the existential quantifier of formal logic".[32] This is now well known to us and needs no rehearsal. What is interesting for our purposes is that, in van Inwagen's development, not only everything exists; but also, the relevant Parmenidean claims are consciously put forth as meta-ontological; therefore, given the meaning he gives to this adjective, (a) as theses that are somehow preliminary to ontological investigation, as they concern the correct method of ontology; and (b) as theses regarding the meaning of being. Those who make mistakes at *this* level (for instance, by stating that there are nonexistent objects) commit actual methodological errors, or errors of principle, or errors of meaning. Those giving the wrong answer to meta-ontological questions may show that they have misunderstood not (just) the extension, but the very intension or meaning of the word "being". Those who are wrong on these issues are not mistaken about whether this or that kind of things is to be included in the universal catalogue: they have misjudged the very *sense* of being.

2.8 Property-Instantiation vs. Quantification, and More on Ontological Commitment

It is finally time to get back to the two intricacies flagged at the beginning of the Chapter.

First one. I have treated the positions synthesized by the mottos "Existence is property-instantiation" and "Existence is quantification", if not as identical, as substantially alike. But are they? Both theses have Frege as their main proponent.

[31] Ibid, p. 17.

[32] Ibid, p. 18.

The continuity is patent in his case, given that for Frege the quantifiers are second-level concepts, that is, properties, as I have translated the Fregean jargon above. If a predicate (nowadays symbolized in standard logical notation as) "*F*. . ." stands for a first level concept, i.e., a function that maps its argument, an object, to the True exactly if the object falls under that concept, then the existential quantifier (ditto) "$\exists x \ldots x \ldots$", stands for a second level concept, that is, a function that maps its argument, a first level concept, to the True exactly if the argument-concept has True as its value for some object.

That said, the two positions might not be exactly equivalent, if not for Frege himself, for other Parmenidean philosophers. The existence-as-property-instantiation doctrine takes existential claims as ascribing a second level feature to an abstract object, be it a concept, or a propositional function, or a property. This makes the view possibly incompatible with nominalism, taken generically as the rejection of abstract objects.[33] The existence-as-quantification doctrine, on the other hand, looks more neutral: Quine did not like abstract objects (apart from sets, from a certain point of his career onwards), and certainly did not like properties and propositional functions, but fully embraced it. It may be the case that the two views are naturally connected to different analyses for existential statements like "Socrates exists". Perhaps a realist Parmenidean may want to analyze it along the lines of "The property of Socrateity is instantiated", or as "There is some property such that Socrates instantiates it", whereas a nominalist Parmenidean or a Quinean may prefer something less committing, like "There is an *x* such that *x* is Socrates" (we will come back to such analyses in the next Chapter).

These possible differences, though, seem to me of lesser importance, given the meta-ontological (in van Inwagen's sense) nature of the issues addressed in the present book: for these issues are, to some extent, orthogonal to such problems as realism vs. nominalism on abstract objects. A Parmenidean realist and a Parmenidean nominalist can disagree on what there is, the former asserting, the latter denying, that there are properties, concepts, or propositional functions (and *a fortiori*, higher order properties, concepts, or propositional functions). If the latter sees sticking to her denial also when she moves to the level of meta-ontological debates as a matter of philosophical rigor, she had better not talk of the meaning of being in terms of property-instantiation and second order properties, or concepts, etc. But apart from the fact that rough-and-ready *modo formali* translations seem to be available, both philosophers may well agree, if questioned, that when one affirms, and the other denies, that there are properties, they agree meta-ontologically on what they mean by "there are" – even though they might want to *specify* what they mean in different terms, given their distinct underlying *ontologies* (one may invoke properties, the other may not). I therefore conclude that, for meta-ontological purposes, it may be safely assumed that the two views of existence, as property-instantiation and as quantification, do not differ in philosophically significant ways for the purposes of our discussions.

[33] The point is raised, for instance, in van Inwagen (2006), p. 107.

Now for the second subtlety: what the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment amounts to may not be as simple an issue as I have sketched it above. First, as again van Inwagen has stressed in the paragraph of *Meta-Ontology* whose title is "Thesis 5", the idea that one can (a) translate one's theory into the canonical notation of first-order logic, (b) check the sentences that, so translated, begin with an existential quantifier, and (c) read the ontological commitments of one's theory off from these sentences, is an oversimplification. Even if theories were easily identifiable objects (and they usually aren't), it is controversial that, as some of the founding fathers of analytic philosophy had assumed, there is something like a unique, objective logical form hidden below the misleading surface grammar of language, which it is the duty of translations into a logical symbolism to uncover.

Van Inwagen grants that "sometimes, in simple cases involving little or no creativity, a refusal to accept the obvious proposal for the introduction of quantifiers and variables can border on the unintelligible".[34] That said, alternative translations of the same sentence into the canonical notation are possible, and they often uncover quite different ontological commitments. So "criterion of ontological commitment", for van Inwagen, names no more than a general *strategy*, that can be used by people involved in philosophical debates, in order to clarify their own ontological commitments via paraphrases that make their claims more transparent.

Besides, it has been said that the real ontological commitment of a theory, even if all parties agreed upon a single translation into the quantifier-variable idiom, may go beyond what is explicitly asserted in the translation. It may extend to commitments that are entailed by those sentences, the relevant entailments being a further possible source of controversy. Can one resist the suggestion that "$\exists x$(x is a donkey)" brings a commitment to the existence of living things? Or that "$\exists x$(x is a set)" entails an obligation to admit the existence of immaterial beings? In the *Ways of Paradox* collection, Quine says that by claiming that there are black swans and prime numbers larger than 100, we commit ourselves, by entailment, to the existence of physical objects and abstract entities.[35] But commitments of this kind themselves depend on one's background theory of the kinds of items at issue.[36] The standard view on them is certainly that prime numbers are abstract entities, whereas black swans are *concreta*. But non-standard philosophers might have non-standard ontological views such that, for instance, they do admit black swans as being out there in the world, but reduce them to bundles of properties or universals, therefore, to (even more) abstract aggregates of abstract objects; or may claim to have nominalistic reductions of all mathematical statements to sentences ultimately about *concreta*. They may even retain quantification on swans and numbers in their everyday talk, and maintain that they talk with the vulgar, but think with the wise – "Lo, I do keep saying that there are numbers to make your life easier, but what I really mean is. . ." and there follows a suitable paraphrase.

[34] Van Inwagen (1998), pp. 28–9.

[35] See Quine (1966), p. 128.

[36] This point has been stressed, for instance, by Chihara (1968) and Chateaubriand (1971).

Finally, the whole Quinean enterprise of ontological-commitment-detection has recently been subject to more radical criticism in Stephen Yablo's papers. Yablo has famously argued that the applicability of Quine's criterion presupposes that we can generally make a clear distinction between metaphorical and literal readings of our sentences – for even Quine would not grant that we are existentially committed also when we speak metaphorically. Before we can detect the ontological commitment of our (best) theories, we need to factor out all the embedded non-literality. According to Yablo, though, it turns out that we cannot free our (best) theoretical assertions from all traces of non-literality: not only "quantifiers are metaphorical", but also, "some metaphors are essential and presumably permanent".[37] So the whole project of a Quinean (meta-)ontology might be idle.

I will come back to issues of ontological commitment and paraphrases in the following Chapter. What has been said so far may suffice to convince of the following: discourse of "ontological commitments" should not entail that there is something like a mechanical, fool-proof translation procedure, which can lead us to uncover a hidden, unique and theoretically neutral logical form that was there from the start, waiting to be revealed, below the surface of our philosophical as well as everyday talk.

[37] Yablo (2000), p. 304. See also Yablo (1998).

Chapter 3
Troubles for the Received View

As outlined in the Prologue, showing how the conception of existence opposed to Parmenideanism can be good and useful may be more fruitful than just criticizing the received view. However, the received view has its own difficulties, the most notable of which I shall list in this chapter, in no specific order. Some problems will turn out to be more compelling than others. Taken collectively, though, they should have enough weight to move the dialectical situation to the point at which investigating the alternative becomes a promising idea. This will happen in the following parts of the book.

3.1 Existence as a Property of Individuals

The first difficulty with the received view arises in connection with the slogan "Existence is not a property (of individuals)". It is a fact of ordinary English that "exists" is a grammatical predicate of the language. Now the English predicate "exists" can correspond, even for a Parmenidean, to a first order predicate of standard logical notation, applicable to individuals. If E is such a predicate, we have it through the following definition:

$$(\mathrm{D}) \quad Ex =_{\mathrm{df}} \exists y(y = x).$$

To exist is to be identical with something or, briefly, to be something. Of course, in standard elementary logic and for the Parmenidean philosopher, this is a "dummy" predicate, having been defined through the existential quantifier – and identity, that is, two logical notions.

But considering that classical logicians and Parmenidean philosophers cannot much object to a definition along the lines of (D), can they really avoid to allow that existence is a property of individuals? According to authors like Gareth Evans or Nathan Salmon, they cannot. From the *definiens* of (D) we obtain an expression that, Salmon claims, plainly denotes the property at issue. Technically, we may use

a lambda-operator, and abstract the expression "$\lambda x.\exists y(y = x)$", which reads "the property of being an x, such that x is (identical with) something".[1] Now, Salmon says,

> Each of the notions involved in the definition of the predicate "exists" is precise and mathematically respectable; each of the expressions making up the definiens has a definite sense or content. In fact, each of the three notions involved – existential quantification, identity, and abstraction – is precise in a way that many everyday notions are not. [. . .] If a set of expressions that express concepts or attributes as their sense or content are appropriately combined to form a new expression, the compound expression thus formed has a sense or content that is determined in a certain way by the senses or contents of the combined component expressions. Hence the phrase "is identical with something", and the displayed expression, express a definite property or concept as their (shared) sense or content. This is the property or concept of *being identical with something* (or more simply, the property or concept of *being something*). It is this property or concept that is the sense or content of the predicate "exists".[2]

. . .And this is a first order concept, or a property of individuals: individuals are what the variable x can take as values in the formulas above.

Of course, the Parmenidean philosopher can answer that not much has changed. Even if we accept all of this, the property of individuals at issue, being (identical with) something, still applies to anything. Since it is a theorem of elementary logic that for every x, there is something that is x, everything exists. Existence is still quite a boring property, a blanket feature that, as Hume and Kant remarked, makes no difference.

We shall see in a couple of Sections that one may have objections in regards to the definition itself. To be sure, one need not object to (D) as such, or even to the claim that being (identical with) something is a property of individuals. The problem is whether *that* property of individuals is what we call *existence*, that is, it is that property of individuals existence is intuitively taken to be. In the meantime, though, we should underline that the claim that existence is not a first order property, a property of individuals, is not as obvious as some Parmenideans have assumed. The slogan must be taken *cum grano salis*, even within the Parmenidean view.

3.2 Transcendental Self-Refutation?

Were we to stop here, the situation would not be that bad. Still, other objections have been pressed against Parmenides' Principle (PP) that it is impossible to refer to something that does not exist. Some are of the kind one may call *transcendental*.

[1] The symbol "λ", called lambda-operator or lambda-abstractor, stands here for an operator derived from Alonzo Church's lambda-calculus, which can be used to build structured predicates out of formulas. If α is a formula and x a variable, "$\lambda x.\alpha$" can be thought of as the predicate "abstracted" from the formula, and read as: "the property of being an x, such that α".

[2] Salmon (1987), p. 64. See also the arguments in Evans (1982), Ch. 10. Also for Evans "there seems to be very strong evidence that the English word 'exists' is used, at least on some occasions, to signify a first-level concept, true of everything" (p. 345).

This is a label often used to qualify, roughly, *a priori* arguments starting from premises that state all-embracing facts concerning our thought, knowledge, or experience, and reaching substantive worldly conclusions concerning the conditions of possibility of these facts. Since certain features of our thought are unavoidably such-and-such, the world must be so-and-so; for if it weren't so-and-so, those features would not be possible.

In the case at issue the point against Parmenides' Principle would be to the effect that (PP) is "transcendentally self-refuting": it denies a condition of possibility of its own expressing a meaningful thought. The simple idea would be that, in order to think of something that it is unthinkable, we must think of that something – this being an unavoidable feature of the way our thought works. In a famous passage of the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein claims:

> For in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e., we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).[3]

One may phrase the situation in linguistic terms: (PP) is a sentence that refers to things that do not exist in order to say that we cannot refer to them. In their beautiful logic book, *First-Order Modal Logic*, Melvin Fitting and R.L. Mendelsohn dub "Deflationists" those who subscribe to what van Inwagen called the thin conception of being, and "Inflationists", those who take existence as a full-fledged, non-blanket property of individuals. Next, they introduce (PP), in the form "Things which do not exist cannot be referred to", and claim that, stated this way, it is "self-defeating":

> [PP] says that the expression "things which do not exist" cannot refer to things which do not exist. Yet [PP] does succeed, via this expression, in indicating what it is that cannot be referred to. And so, as we argued before, [PP] refers to things which do not exist. [...] In denying that certain things can be referred to, we explicitly refer to them, so that the very claiming of [PP] is its own falsification. The Deflationist solution to the Paradox [of Non-Being], which essentially involves accepting [PP], cannot even get off the ground.
>
> The more promising approach, then, would be to admit that one can speak about things that do not exist. This Inflationist solution, which has been the object of derision for so many years, therefore merits another look.[4]

What is one to say about arguments of this kind? First, one may not consider transcendental arguments convincing in general. For instance, some philosophers find objectionable the move from unavoidable features of our thinking and talking about the world, to conclusions concerning the world itself. It might be that we cannot avoid having *de re* intentional attitudes towards something, to conceive the thought that *it* cannot be intended; but that doesn't say much about nonexistent objects being out there. Perhaps our thought is just a victim of an "inevitable transcendental illusion", as a Kantian would say.

[3] Wittgenstein (1921), p. 23.

[4] Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), p. 174.

Secondly, and more importantly, the Fitting-Mendelsohn argument specifically turns on issues about who begs the question against who. The Deflationist could retort that whether one can refer to things that do not exist is precisely what is at issue. Ascribing such a reference to sentences like (PP), condensing the Deflationist theory itself in a motto, may therefore be a *petitio*. A general Parmenidean strategy to deal with negative existentials, as we have seen, consists in interpreting them in such a way that no real, full-fledged, *de re* reference to (wannabe-)objects that do not exist is needed, in the expression of the logical form and the stating of the truth conditions of those claims. It is admitted that this may require a departure from the surface grammar of natural language. But the strategy ought to be evaluated as a whole: giving to statements in which the Parmenidean position is summarized a reading, which may itself presuppose the rejection of the Parmenidean position, would be an unfair move. More fair-minded criticism of Parmenideanism, however, is on its way.

3.3 Paraphrases

Various problems for the received view derive from its having to supply systematic and plausible paraphrases of natural language statements. The paraphrases at issue need not be into canonical logical notation, though at times that may help as well. They can mostly be translations of ordinary English sentences into other (more or less) ordinary English sentences (calling them "translations", thus, may be a bit strange). The paraphrases at issue should get rid of unwelcome grammatical features of the sentences to be paraphrased away, while retaining their intuitive content and truth conditions – this being the plausibility requirement.

The sentences that need to be paraphrased because of their unwelcome features are not only existential statements, but also any statement including *prima facie* reference to nonexistent things (unless it is claimed that, in fact, those things referred to *do* exist – which the Parmenidean may want to claim at times, as we shall see). The Parmenidean needs, that is, to provide two kinds of paraphrases, corresponding to the following two disturbing linguistic facts.

The first is the many times mentioned circumstance that, on the face of it, "exists" looks like an ordinary predicate of individuals, similar to "eats" or "is red" or "is a man" or "runs". But "eats", "is red", "is a man", "runs", and tons of other similar predicates stand for genuine, full-fledged and non-blanket properties of individuals: properties like eating, being red, being a man, running. If "exists", instead, never stands for a genuine, non-blanket property of individuals, then all its occurrences must be eliminable via paraphrase, the sentences in which they appear being replaced by other sentences talking only in terms of quantification, or of property-instantiation. As the entry "Existence" of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states, "to accept the Fregean view of 'exists' as a second-level predicate is to accept that 'exists' can in fact always be rendered by 'instantiates'"; and acceptance of the Parmenidean thesis that existence is quantification entails that

"'exists' itself would be made redundant, being replaceable by the more general apparatus of quantifiers and identity".[5]

The second disturbing linguistic fact is that people seem to refer to things that do not exist all the time. They do it at times without knowing, as when one talks about things one thinks exist, whereas they do not; at times intentionally, as when one writes down novels or reports the content of some dream or hypothetical or imagined situation. People talk this way, both by calling the things at issue by name ("Gandalf is a wizard", "Holmes still inspires many real detectives", "Nessie the Loch Ness monster is searched for by many"), and by quantifying on them ("Some Marvel super-heroes wear ridiculous uniforms"). But quantification and reference, for the Parmenidean, are existentially committing: "What can be spoken of and thought must be", the old man said. So the received view should systematically paraphrase away also sentences that are not existential, that is, in which the verb "to exist" does not appear, but which display (apparent) reference to, or (apparent) quantification on, nonexistent objects.[6]

Nobody knows how to produce such systematic paraphrases. The dilemma is clear: people talk as if they were referring to nonexistents, and they use "exists" as a predicate, apparently standing for a feature of some individuals, which some others lack. Either we take these linguistic facts, and the intuitions that come with them, at face value, or we are forced to explain them away through paraphrases. The first horn is forbidden to the Parmenidean philosopher; and it is not clear how one could explain the facts away. Not only have systematic paraphrases never been supplied: nobody has ever advanced a convincing program on how this could be accomplished in all cases – Quine tried, but as we shall now see, the Quinean attempt is a failure.

3.3.1 Existential Paraphrases

Let us consider some problems afflicting paraphrases of the first kind, those concerning existential sentences. The Parmenidean strategy has often been acknowledged to achieve good success with general statements, like "Horses exist", or "Unicorns do not exist". In these cases, translations along the lines of "The number of horses is one or more", or "The property of being a unicorn has no instances",

[5] Miller (2002), Sections 3 and 5.

[6] To be sure, two alternative strategies are available to the Parmenidean here: first, she can make the surprise move of claiming that Gandalf or Marvel super-heroes do exist! (Children may be happy to know this – until they hear the full-fledged story, to be recounted later on, of exactly what the Parmenidean admits the existence of here). Second, she can say that all those statements are not literally *true*, and commit us to nothing, whether existent or not. The two strategies are not even exclusive: the Parmenidean can allow herself a combination of both. She can declare that those things exist, some claims on them are literally true, others, that would be embarrassing if taken as literally true, are not so and do not involve reference to anything. We shall come back to these issues at length.

et similia, may seem to work. How do we deal with singular existential statements, like "Uma Thurman exists", "Socrates exists", "Holmes does not exist"? Here is Barry Miller's opening remark on this, from the aforementioned *Stanford Encyclopedia* entry:

> Although "Elephants exist" can be understood as "The property of being an elephant (or the species elephant) is instantiated at least once", there are grave difficulties about regarding "Socrates exists" as "Socrates is instantiated at least once". The problem is that individuals are just not the kind of thing that ever could be instantiated. Rather than being themselves instantiable they are the kind of thing in which instantiations occur, e.g., wisdom is instantiated in Socrates, but Socrates himself cannot be instantiated in anything. Russell and Quine would certainly have recognized this, and each in his own way attempted to get round it, though with questionable success.[7]

Based on what we have seen in the last Chapter, we know what a Parmenidean philosopher could answer: when we affirm that Socrates exists, we are not saying that something instantiates Socrates, but that some property is instantiated *by* Socrates. If existence is property-instantiation, "Socrates exists" may be analyzed as the claim that Socrates instantiates this or that property, that is, there is some property P that Socrates instantiates. In second order logical symbolism making use of predicative variables, that is, variables in predicative position that can be bound by quantifiers, this would be: $\exists P(Ps)$.

However, Colin McGinn has observed that, for each object x that makes "x exists" true, the received view might need a property instantiated solely by that object. According to McGinn, it is plausible that "the existence of an individual object is said to consist in the instantiation of a property sufficient for *that object* to exist and not some other object".[8] "Socrates exists" should mean, not just that some property or other is exemplified or instantiated, but a specific, uniquely individuating one. If, for instance, it were only the property of being a man (or a Greek man, or a snub-nosed Greek man, or a snub-nosed Greek philosopher, ... etc.), then for McGinn it would not be clear why this would be sufficient to explain the meaning of "*Socrates* exists", as opposed to a sentence stating the existence of some other man (snub-nosed, Greek, philosopher...).

To this, the Parmenidean philosophers usually answer by maintaining that the property at issue would comply with the requirement if it were a "haecceistic" property, a *thisness*: a property that exactly one individual can have.[9] What would this be? Candidates like *being originated from zygote z* (z being a specific zygote), or *having been generated by the specific gametes k and t* (idem) are controversial in metaphysics (we will get back to them towards the end of this book); thus other strategies are usually preferred, with Parmenideans resorting to less contentious properties. The obvious one is that of being identical with oneself: *being identical with o* is a property that exactly object o enjoys. Uniformity of analysis between

[7] Miller (2002), Section 5. Also see Miller (1975).

[8] McGinn (2000), p. 29.

[9] On haecceitistic properties, see the classic essays Kaplan (1975), Adams (1979).

singular and general statements supports this: "Horses exist" means that the property of being a horse is instantiated; then, "Socrates exists" means that the property of being (identical with) Socrates is instantiated.

A first problem with this answer might be that some contest the status of constitutively haecceistic properties. Are things like Socrates-identity (or Socrateity?) really properties*?* Labeling as a property something defined expressly in such a way that it can be exemplified by no more than one individual may look like a trick: genuine properties are such that, in principle, it is possible that more than one individual enjoy them. It is fair to say, though, that many philosophers don't share this view (I don't: I find being identical with Socrates quite a decent property of Socrates; some call these "individual concepts", or "individual essences", a notion to which we shall return below). So it is no surprise that many, from Quine to Hintikka and others, have understood "Socrates exists" as meaning $\exists x(x = \text{Socrates})$.

This latter expression we can also read, of course, as "Something is (identical with) Socrates". To rehearse a point flagged at the end of the previous Chapter, there surely is *some* difference between the predicate "is (identical with) Socrates" and the predicate "instantiates Socrates-identity", or "instantiates the property of being (identical with) Socrates". Talk in terms of "Something is Socrates" can have, over "Something instantiates the property of being Socrates", the advantage of avoiding mention of properties and property-instantiation; this should bring relief to the nominalist Parmenidean, suspicious of Fregean or realist talk in terms of second-level concepts or properties and property-instantiation. But, as we have also seen, the difference may be of minor importance for our purposes.

What *is* important is that the characterization of existence as identity with something was seen at work a couple of Sections ago, when we brought the Parmenidean to the point of admitting that yes, existence can in the end be a property of individuals, but then it's a blanket and uninteresting feature of anything. Existence here looks close to what Wittgenstein called *formal* concepts. Examples of predications ascribing formal properties or concepts in the Wittgensteinian sense might be such claims as "o is an object" ("o" naming whatever thing you want). These predications ascribe no full-fledged, discriminating property: they just place the thing in some quite broad, or even all-encompassing, category.

Is this a good analysis? The above characterization of a logical, blanket, purely formal predicate is as such unobjectionable. This is why it has looked so good to many. The only problem is, what has been so characterized may not be what we ordinarily and intuitively call *existence*. Now old Parmenides can stamp his feet, bang the table, and insist that it *is* existence – but he would thereby face the danger of begging the question against his opponent.

A thing that is identical with something is identical with itself (what else?). A thing that is identical with itself is identical with something: $o = o$ holds, as a matter of logic, of any object o, and from this $\exists x(x = o)$ follows by existential generalization. That the existence of Socrates, on this view, turns out to consist of his identity with something or of his self-identity may lead one to be suspicious of the proposed paraphrase. When *I* say that Socrates exists, I don't mean to say that he is self-identical or identical with something: that paraphrase is strange to me – and,

I submit, to ordinary speakers of English. For how could "Socrates exists" be equivalent to, or immediately logically entailed by, a truth of logic?

"Fido exists", nowadays true of my dog, will be false when asserted after Fido's death. But in that hopefully distant future it seems that Fido will still be Fido, i.e., "Fido = Fido" will be true when asserted at that time; Fido will still be identical with something in that future.[10] Also, you may tell me that Loch Ness' Nessie is Nessie and not surprise me; infer that, by existential generalization, Nessie is something, and still not surprise me. But if you tell me that Nessie exists, this can convey pretty informative and indeed exciting news to me – in a way "Nessie is something" or "Nessie is Nessie" cannot. "Brad Pitt exists" is contingently true, for his parents could have never met; but it seems no contingency that Brad Pitt is Brad Pitt, or that Brad Pitt is something. So "is identical with something", or "is self-identical", do not seem to replace "exists" and allow to paraphrase it away in an intuitively palatable way: for counterfactual considerations speak against their picking the right intuitive meaning or, if one wants, intension:

> It is ridiculous that from $x = x$ the logician may assert 'Caesar = Caesar', withhold comment on 'Pegasus = Pegasus' [...], and ring up his archeological colleague with respect to 'Romulus = Romulus'. [...] we do not expect to hear him utter, while reading the paper over his morning coffee, 'By God, Romulus is self-identical after all!'[11]

They might not even get the right extension: the intuition here is that some things, like Mr. Pickwick, Gandalf, and Holmes, are identical with something – respectively with Mr. Pickwick, Gandalf, and Holmes, thus self-identical – despite not actually existing. Which the Parmenidean certainly can deny based on her rejection of nonexistent objects, but at the risk of producing a stalemate. If one considers non-existentially-loaded quantification as making sense (and it is likely that it does, as we shall see in detail in the next Chapter), something can be identical with Gandalf – specifically, Gandalf (who else?) – even though Gandalf does not exist. If existence is quantification, the indisputable entailment from $o = o$ to $\exists x(x = o)$ is our problem. If not, that entailment becomes innocuous again, as a logical inference of this sort is to be.

There's a variant of the Parmenidean strategy with singular existential statements, quite close to the one just described. This consists in taking "exists" as an intensional predicate, that is, one that applies to certain intensions; more precisely, to individual concepts. These can be taken as functions mapping circumstances to individuals, but we need not enter the technical details here, and perhaps an example will suffice: *president of the US* would be an individual concept, which given a circumstance as input, outputs the individual who is president of the US in that circumstance. Now suppose that some individual concepts are partial functions: for some circumstances, they do not output an object. "Socrates exists",

[10] This point is made by Miller (1975), p. 342 and p. 353: "That there is a difference between Socrates being Socrates and Socrates existing is evident from the fact that, once true, 'Socrates is Socrates' can never be false, whereas 'Socrates exists' can".

[11] Meyer and Lambert (1968), p. 10.

then, would be true in a given circumstance exactly if the individual concept corresponding to Socrates (which again might be something like Socrates' individual essence, or Socrateity) delivers an object in that circumstance.

Linguistic evidence speaks against this. To begin with, the *bona fide* intuition is, once again, that when se say "Socrates exists" we are talking about Socrates, not about features of his individual essence, or of some individual concept, or of some abstract item which would be ontologically quite different from our beloved ancient philosopher. It is strange to claim that we are actually talking, unbeknownst to us, about an individual concept's producing an output.

Next, "exists" behaves quite differently from what, according to the Montagovian classical account,[12] can be (on some uses) intensional predicates, like "changes" or "is elected".[13] If I say "The provost of Notre Dame has changed", or "The president of the US is elected every 4 years", in the natural reading I am not claiming that Rev. John Jenkins has undergone some change (though that might be entailed by what I claim); or that Obama is elected regularly, every 4 years, again and again. What I am claiming would rather be that the function *provost of Notre Dame* has come to be covered by a different person; or that who the role *president of the US* is to be conferred to is determined anew every 4 years via an election. But substituting those predicates with "exists", we get a different effect: "The provost of Notre Dame exists", or "The president of the US exists every 4 years" (?) either don't seem to ascribe features to a concept, function, or role, or are of doubtful grammaticality.

Things get worse with singular negative existentials, that is, such claims as "Holmes does not exist", or "Gandalf does not exist", or "Socrates does not exist". The analysis according to which "Socrates exists" just means that Socrates has some property, i.e., $\exists P(Ps)$, for instance, requires that we take "It is not the case that Socrates exists" as meaning that Socrates has no property at all, $\neg\exists P(Ps)$, that is, $\forall P\neg(Ps)$. This seems to entail that Socrates is a bare particular (a substratum for properties, itself devoid of any feature), which poses various problems. One is that the notion of bare particular is not quite popular among ontologists, and even suspected to be incoherent (wouldn't lacking any feature be a feature of the bare particular?).[14]

Another problem is that the paraphrase is, again, intuitively hardly acceptable – can the negation of the existence of Socrates mean something like that? When one denies that Gandalf exists, one does not seem to mean that Gandalf is a bare particular that lacks any property whatsoever; and when one claims that it is not the case that Socrates exists anymore, since he passed away more than two millennia ago, one hardly seems to mean that our beloved philosopher has become a bare particular after his death.

Some have proposed to understand singular negative existentials metalinguistically: in "Holmes does not exist", despite appearances, we are actually talking

[12] See Montague (1973).

[13] As appropriately pointed out in Moltmann (2009).

[14] The objection is as old as Sellars (1952).

of the name "Holmes". What we would be talking about are the name's historical fluctuations. And what we would be saying is that the (dominant) uses of the name do not trace back to any individual – something that could be summarized along the lines of "'Holmes' does not denote".[15]

Although this can be right in *some* cases, it has too many exceptions to work as a general account. It is easy to imagine utterances of "Socrates does not exist" that cannot plausibly be interpreted as dealing with Socrates' name's semantics. In a modal setting, Plantinga proposes to this effect a circumstance in which we are considering the contingency of Socrates' existence. When we say that "Socrates exists" is false in a possible situation in which his parents never met, and so "Socrates does not exist" is true in that situation, we are not talking about variations in the semantics of the name "Socrates". What we are talking about is Socrates' lacking the property of existing in that circumstance: we are not just saying that, in that circumstance, "Socrates" does not denote.[16] Singular negative existentials with demonstratives in place of names make the case more vivid: if one says "That woman does not exist", in the context of a movie which is talked about, or a tale, or a visual delusion, this cannot be explained as "This token use of 'that woman' does not refer"; understanding this latter sentence and understanding the former seem two different things.[17]

Besides, as Fred Kroon has noted, allegedly non-denoting terms in negative existentials often pass what he has called "term-resilience tests": that they are used, not mentioned, in such statements is confirmed from the fact that they, or anaphoric terms hooking back to them, are also used in non-existential sentences in the immediate surroundings.[18] Let me explain who Gandalf is to those of you who don't know:

> Gandalf is a wizard from Middle Earth (a fantasyland populated by elves dragons and dwarfs), struggling to save the good people of that world from an evil lord called Sauron and his army of orcs and werewolves. Of course, then, Gandalf does not exist. He is a character invented by J.R.R. Tolkien, and appears in his famous trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. He has been interpreted by Sir Ian McKellen in the cinematographic adaptation by Peter Jackson.

"Gandalf" occurs twice here, and its referent is also referred back to by two anaphoric explicit pronouns, "he", plus implicit ones. It is implausible that I have been talking all along, unmindfully, of the history of a name. But if some of these occurrences are used, Kroon says, all of them are – including the one appearing in the negative existential.

Some have proposed to deal with singular negative existentials by playing tricks with the scope of negation. As I have hinted at when talking about Russell's treatment of "The present king of France is not bald", the postulated ambiguity in

[15] See e.g. Donnellan (1974).

[16] See Plantinga (1974), pp. 146–7.

[17] The example is due to Gareth Evans: see Evans (1982), p. 344.

[18] See Kroon (2000), pp. 98–9.

the scope of negation was to do the job of avoiding a violation of Bivalence: interpreted with a predicative negation taking narrow scope over the description, the sentence is false but not the contradictory of "The present king of France is bald". Interpreted with a sentential negation taking wide scope, the sentence is true.

This is a general move available to the Parmenidean, independently from the Russellian account of definite descriptions. Perhaps Russell was right, perhaps not: descriptions in the end may, or may not, turn out to be genuine singular terms not to be explained away quantificationally.[19] But the important point for the Parmenidean is that, for any predicate, no nonexistent object can make true either it or its (predicative) negation: the present king of France can make true neither "is bald" nor "is non-bald", and Holmes can make true neither "is happy" nor "is unhappy". How about trying the same with negative existentials? We can read "Sherlock Holmes does not exist" either (a) as "Sherlock Holmes is nonexistent", or (b) as "It is not the case that Sherlock Holmes exists". Now, one may say, (a) is literally false for the usual reason that there is no Holmes to make the nonexistence predicate true; but (b) is true, and the genuine contradictory of "Sherlock Holmes exist".[20]

The first thing to notice is that, according to some philosophers, such scope distinctions cannot avoid having some property ascribed to something also in the (b)-reading. At least in this respect, thus, we have a distinction without a difference. This is, for instance, C.J.F. Williams' position in *What Is Existence?* Properties in the broad or abundant sense just are what predicables, as he calls them, stand for. Now one obtains a predicable by removing a proper name from a sentence including it. Just as "___ is nonexistent" is a predicable obtained by removing the name "Sherlock Holmes" from (a), so "It is not the case that ___ exists" is a predicable obtained by removing the same name from (b). Even when a whole sentence is negated, as in (b), then, for Williams "a property is *ipso facto* ascribed to an object". Those who deny that properties are what predicables stand for "owe us alternative accounts of *property* and *predicable*".[21]

More importantly, as the Parmenidean position on existence starts to become less obvious and more troublesome than it appeared, charges of question-begging can surface again. For the non-Parmenidean believing in nonexistent objects may accept that some singular terms of English, or some singular terms of English on some occasions of use, lack a denotation. When that happens, it may well be interesting to notice that distinctions between sentential and predicative negation, or shifts in the scope of negation, mark a difference in truth conditions in these cases. But it would be an *ad hoc* move to introduce such shifts, in the context of

[19] The Russellian thesis that definite descriptions are not genuine singular terms, and can be paraphrased away into quantificational constructions, has been the subject of controversy, famously from Strawson (1950) onwards. Some take the whole Russell/Strawson debate as a mere clash of intuitions (e.g., Thomason 1990, p. 326). For a recent defense of the view that at times descriptions work semantically like proper names, see Recanati (1993).

[20] This is the view pursued, e.g., by serious actualist Plantinga in Plantinga (1974), Ch. VIII.

[21] Williams (1981), p. 126.

the debate on existence, *just* in order to domesticate talk of nonexistent objects. For we are dealing with two independent phenomena. Designation and existence are orthogonal notions, one semantic, the other, ontological. Terms are what may or may not designate. Objects are what may or may not exist. As we shall see later, the non-Parmenidean may allow herself a variety of semantic options, having terms that denote existents, terms that denote nonexistents, and non-denoting terms as well. But admitting that "Sherlock Holmes" does denote helps her to explain how lots of plainly true claims can be made; for instance, that Sherlock Holmes is more famous than any real detective. More generally, admitting nonexistents as the denotations of singular terms allows smooth semantic treatment for a variety of sentences of ordinary language, as we are also about to see. There may be lots of non-denoting (uses of) singular terms, but that "Sherlock Holmes" is one of them in "It is not the case that Sherlock Holmes exists", and makes it true for *this* reason, needs a good deal of independent justification, to avoid a *petitio*. Even more independent justification is required to explain why we should accept another consequence of the same treatment, namely that "Sherlock Holmes is nonexistent" turns out to be *false*, when many intuitively take it as plain truth.[22]

Moving away from singular existential statements, another difficult case for the Parmenidean, according to some philosophers, is represented by "Something exists". This is a perfectly meaningful English sentence though, this time, not one that a non-philosopher is likely to utter very often. Also, it's true. Philosophers argue about everything but, with the exception of Gorgias and few others, no one has maintained the thesis that nothing exists. The few who dared – Gorgias himself, presumably – usually did not take it too seriously: after all, Gorgias was a sophist, and many authoritative interpreters like Jonathan Barnes believe that he was simply teasing Parmenides.[23] That something exists follows immediately from the fact that I exist, something Descartes helped me to be confident in, even after having made large room for skepticism about the existence of an external world.

But "Something exists" is not easily paraphrasable in a way that can help the received view. It seems difficult to find the property that would be instantiated here. What would the relevant predicate be? As our logicians Fitting and Mendelsohn say:

> There is no reason on the Deflationist view to deny that "exists" is a predicate. Is this predicate, however, redundant in classical first-order logic? More precisely, is the work done by "exists" exhausted by the existential quantifier? The answer is "No." For there is no way of saying "Something exists" [. . .] unless there is a predicate – either primitive or defined – available to do the work of "exists": it will make no sense simply to use the quantifiers.[24]

[22] David Braun has claimed: "Like most philosophers, I will assume that, other things being equal, we should not hypothesize nonexistent objects to solve semantic problems" (Braun 1993, p. 453). "Other things being equal" is at stake.

[23] See for instance Barnes (1982), p. 173.

[24] Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), p. 172.

A proposal sometimes suggested consists in saying that "Something exists" means that something is self-identical or identical with something. Again, one resorts to the dummy predicate: $Ex =_{\mathrm{df}} \exists y(y = x)$. "Something exists", thus, ought to correspond to $\exists x \exists y(y = x)$, and thus to $\exists x(x = x)$. On the other hand, it is once again unclear that this is what would be expressed by "Something exists". "Something exists" follows, for instance, from "Brad Pitt exists". Thus, if the authentic form of "Something exists" were $\exists x(x = x)$, then the authentic form of "Brad Pitt exists" may presumably be: $\exists x(x = \text{Brad Pitt})$, which brings us back to our previous problem: to claim that "*o* exists" is to be rendered as $\exists x(x = o)$ may be a *petitio* against those who have not already subscribed to the received view on quantification and existence.

Why is it so that *assuming* the quantifier to capture the notion of existence, at this stage of the dialectic, begins to beg the question against the non-Parmenidean? We have a full-fledged Parmenidean characterization of a certain notion (perhaps a family of different theories, in fact, but with decisive common points). As we shall abundantly see from the next Chapter onwards, we also have a full-fledged, non-Parmenidean characterization of a certain notion (it will also consist a family of theories, indeed, at times rather different from each other). Disagreement shows up because each party calls its own notion "existence" and, besides, tends to claim that the other party has a wrong view of existence. So apparently it is a conviction shared across the board, at least, that we have something like a true notion of existence. In fact, the disagreement consists in each party's claiming to be the one that provides the right characterization of *that* notion.

How are we to test? Well, one way of course is to check the intrinsic difficulties of each approach; this we have begun to do for Parmenideans, and we shall do at length, also for their opponents. If a theory that characterizes the notion is inconsistent, this is bad news (the first non-Parmenidean theory we shall meet in Chap. 5 will turn out to have such a small defect!). But we also test how the notion matches with our intuitions on what existence is, as they show up through the vernacular. Again, intuitions can be fallible and corrigible at times. Going against them, though, counts as a minus to begin with. Parmenideanism is starting to collect minuses. The more they are, the less one can take for granted that the notion characterized is the one we want a characterization of.

3.3.2 Names and Descriptions

Let us now turn to the paraphrases of the second kind: those involving sentences with apparent quantification on or reference to (what we would *prima facie* judge as) nonexistent things. As for reference via proper names, we have met in the previous Chapter the strategy of analyzing names like "Pegasus" and "Sherlock Holmes" as (abbreviations of) definite descriptions to which they would be semantically equivalent. Quine thought it possible to paraphrase sentences including proper names (apparently) denoting nonexistent objects into sentences in which

the names are turned into descriptions, and then to eliminate the descriptions via the Russellian quantificational strategy of *On Denoting*.

In *Naming and Necessity*, though, Saul Kripke has notoriously argued that names cannot be synonyms of definite descriptions.[25] The story is so well known that a brief summary may suffice. If proper names were synonyms of descriptions (or clusters thereof, as was believed by Searle[26] and, perhaps, by Wittgenstein), then, given a proper name *n* and a supposedly synonymous, more or less extended, description "the *F*", one should consider "*n* is the *F*" as a necessary truth. Which is confronted by a great deal of counterexamples (hence, this is often called the problem of "unwanted necessity"): "Plato is the greatest philosopher of antiquity" (Plato might have preferred horse-riding as a full-time occupation, never getting into philosophy), "Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander the Great" (Aristotle might have never gone into pedagogy), "Uma Thurman is the actress who played the main character in *Kill Bill*" (Tarantino might have given the role to Cameron Diaz), etc.

Descriptions can be used to fix the reference of a name. But the description does not express the meaning of the name even in such cases. People competent in a language use names of that language in a fully appropriate way, even though they are not able to associate a uniquely individuating description to them. Most people know about Marcus Tullius Cicero only that he was a Roman orator; but of course there have been many Roman orators; nevertheless people use "Marcus Tullius Cicero" quite successfully.

Even when people generally associate a definite description with the name, e.g., "the inventor of the theory of relativity" for "Einstein", they often cannot specify non-circularly the information encoded in the description, for they may associate to "the theory of relativity" only the description "the theory which was invented by Albert Einstein".

People may use a name competently even when they associate the wrong description to it. One of Kripke's examples is "the inventor of the A-bomb", believed by some speakers to apply to Einstein. Supposing we could single out a unique main responsible for the invention of the A-bomb, that may plausibly be Oppenheimer. But "Einstein" does not refer to Oppenheimer – even as used by the people who have that wrong belief.

Because of their different modal profiles, names and descriptions generally behave differently in contexts introduced by expressions like "it is possible that", "necessarily", etc., when one switches between *de re* modalities and their *de dicto* counterparts. To explain: a *de dicto* modality is typically found when a modal expression is prefixed to an entire sentence. One modalizes, then, on what the

[25] See Kripke (1972). This is often called "strong" descriptivism on proper names, as opposed to a weaker thesis. Weak descriptivism admits that descriptions do not give the meaning of the name, but makes two other claims: that they fix its reference, and that they express information known to the competent speaker who uses the name to refer to the right thing. Kripke grants the first, but just for some names; and rejects the second.

[26] Cfr. Searle (1958), pp. 254–5.

sentence expresses as a whole (a *proposition*, as philosophers often say today), or on its truth value: when I say that it is possible that AC Milan sells Kakà, I am saying that it is possible that "AC Milan sells Kakà" be true, or that it is possible that the proposition that AC Milan sells Kakà turns out to be true. A *de re* modality is one in which a certain modal feature is directly ascribed to a *res*, a specific object. When I say of Jorge Lorenzo that he is a possible winner of the motoGP championship, I am saying of Lorenzo that he enjoys the modal property of being possibly a winner of the motoGP championship.

In modal contexts of this kind names are insensitive to the passage from *de re* to *de dicto* and *vice versa*, while descriptions usually are not. The number eight has (*de re*) the property of being a necessarily even number, and it is necessary (*de dicto*) that eight be an even number. But even if the number of planets (which, as it happens, is eight) has the property (*de re*) of being necessarily even, it is not necessary (*de dicto*) that the number of planets be even: it could be odd – and it actually was until few years ago.[27] The Quinean idea of names like "Sherlock Holmes" or "Pegasus" being equivalent to "the detective living in Baker Street", or to things like "the *x* that pegasizes", so that one can generally substitute a name with a description and paraphrase the latter away via the Russellian strategy, thus, has few chances of success.

If, accepting Kripke's critiques to the descriptivist conception, we admit that the meaning of names is not expressed by definite descriptions, then the problem of (allegedly) non-denoting proper names like "Holmes" and "Pegasus" becomes tenacious for Parmenideans. The positive thesis naturally related to those critiques is the so-called Millian conception of the meaning of proper names, originated by John Stuart Mill: proper names are directly referential, their meaning consisting exclusively in their bearer, the object they denote (Mill used more traditional philosophical terminology, claiming that proper names have denotation, but no connotation). This semantic thesis is famously labeled the "direct reference theory" for proper names, and associated to Kripke, even though he was cautious never to commit too explicitly to it.[28]

If the meaning of a name really consists in the object denoted, then for Parmenideans names like "Sherlock Holmes", "Gandalf", etc., should be meaningless, as there are no nonexistent objects for those names to denote.[29] A (wannabe-)

[27] In Kripkean jargon, proper names like "eight" are "rigid designators": they designate the same object at all *possible worlds* (we will discuss possible worlds from Chapter 6 onwards); descriptions like "the number of planets" typically don't. Some descriptions are indeed rigid, for they are phrased in terms of necessary properties: "the second power of two" denotes the number four rigidly, as it refers to a property the number four has at all possible worlds. Some have therefore suggested that proper names could be equivalent to rigid descriptions, or "rigidified" ones. I find the view not very plausible, but will not argue for this here.

[28] For a detailed examination of the connections between the position of Kripke, the "direct reference theory", and Millianism, see Salmon (1981), Soames (2002).

[29] With the aforementioned caveat: the Parmenidean may go for the surprise claim that Holmes and Gandalf do exist after all, and "Holmes" and "Gandalf" refer to them.

linguistic sign devoid of any meaning might even be considered as a mere scrawl. The same should perhaps apply to all the (pseudo-)sentences in which such (wannabe-)names figure.

The problem becomes more pressing if we also accept the idea, of Russellian ascendance, that the objects designated by names can enter as constituents of the propositions expressed by the sentences in which those names occur. For example: "Uma Thurman is an actress" expresses the proposition that Uma Thurman is an actress, which includes Uma Thurman as its constituent. Things being so, a sentence including a non-denoting wannabe-name may not express a complete proposition: a *piece* that would be needed is literally missing. Thus, the sentence at issue cannot be truth-evaluable, or, propositions being the meanings of sentences, even fully meaningful. This goes against our strong intuition that such sentences as "Sherlock Holmes is more famous than any real detective", or "Gandalf is a grey-bearded wizard" are perfectly meaningful, some of them may be truth-evaluable as well, and even true.

Besides, the lack of denotation of any wannabe-name, within such a framework, is virulent: it deprives of meaningfulness the expressions of which that wannabe-name is part. In his famous but unpublished John Locke Lectures, Kripke reportedly argued for a treatment of sentences of the form "*Fa*", with "*a*" a (wannabe-) proper name lacking denotation, along the following lines (I am repeating here the exposition given by Gareth Evans, who attended those lectures).[30] Although "*Fa*" expresses no complete proposition, one is supposed to be able to form the description "a proposition which says of *a* that it is *F*". Here the non-denoting expression would have, as Evans reports Kripke, "a special sort of quasi-intentional use". Next, via this description one forms the sentence "There is a proposition which says of *a* that it is *F*, and that proposition is true", which itself expresses a complete proposition, and is false, given that there is no proposition complying with the description. Evans explains how Kripke puts this strategy into work to handle the most disturbing cases of reference failure.[31]

However, Evans also remarks that, apart from the mysterious status of the notion of quasi-intentional use, the strategy of embedding does not look convincing. If "*Fa*" expresses no proposition because its wannabe-name, "*a*", lacks a denotation, how can "There is a proposition which says of *a* that it is *F*" express a proposition? In the latter sentence, the wannabe-name is used, not mentioned, exactly as in "*Fa*". If the latter does not express a proposition because of the wannabe-name lacking a referent, the former is in the same situation. If the term is used, that is, one does not resort to a metalinguistic analysis in terms of "*a*"'s semantic vicissitudes as a wannabe-name that failed its task, how can reference failure not be infectious?

[30] See Evans (1982), pp. 348 ff.

[31] See Ibid, p. 349.

3.3.3 *Unfeasible Paraphrases*

Even leaving problems concerning names and descriptions aside, many *general* sentences express commitment to *prima facie* nonexistent objects, which are difficult to get rid of. Not accepting quantification on nonexistents, the Parmenidean must provide paraphrases also when these things are not directly called by name. If she abides by the Quinean "criterion of ontological commitment" (and, ordinarily, she will), she must get rid of any (apparent) quantification on nonexistent things. These are not just unwelcome ontological stuff, as abstract objects would be for a nominalist: quantification on them would just be gibberish, amounting to the claim that things that do not exist do exist.

Now this is quite a task. Quantification on seeming nonexistents can display complex structures in everyday talk. Here is a good example by van Inwagen:

> There are characters in some nineteenth-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any eighteenth-century novel.[32]

Here is one by Sir Peter Strawson:

> A good proportion of the characters listed [in the *Classical Dictionary*] are mythical, of course; but *most* of them *existed*.[33]

And yet another, by Mark Sainsbury:

> Some characters in novels are closely modelled on actual people, while others are wholly products of the literary imagination, and it is usually impossible to tell which characters fall into which of these categories by textual analysis alone.[34]

This kind of talk one may found anywhere, from journal articles, to books of literary criticism, to the mouth of a professor of English in the business of lecturing on eighteenth century literature. It is commonly uttered by speakers with assertive force, and can often be true. The truth of those sentences requires that there be (for the Parmenidean philosopher, as usual, this means: the existence of) things like mythical and purely fictional characters. There is no easy strategy to get rid of complex quantifications of this kind by paraphrasing them away.[35]

Besides the issue of nonexistent objects, this remains a general problem for "eliminativist" or reductionist ontological approaches aiming at getting rid of kinds of entities on which we commonly quantify in our daily talk, but which, for whatever reason, we might not appreciate in the philosophy room – for instance, because we have nominalist inclinations and disdain abstract objects. By accepting

[32] van Inwagen (1977), p. 302.

[33] Strawson (1967), p. 195.

[34] Sainsbury (2010), p. 101.

[35] Again, recall the caveat: an alternative option for the Parmenidean may be to admit that (purely) fictional or mythical characters really exist, and then explain their manifest ontological difference with respect to ordinary objects by saying that they are things of an exotic kind. This is carried out in the so-called *realist* theories of fictional objects, which we will meet in the next Chapters.

the Quinean criterion (and even once the provisos of the previous Chapter on the import of the criterion are factored in), reductionists are bound to provide systematic paraphrases of the ordinary sentences that would commit us to the entities at issue. Good works by Roberto Casati, Achille Varzi and Massimiliano Carrara[36] show how difficult it is to successfully tackle such enterprise in a general setting.

For our purposes, suffice to recognize that quantification on nonexistents in – common, philosophical, scientific – English can be as complex and pervasive as quantification on any other kind of controversial entities, be them properties, sets, or else; and likewise difficult to eliminate.

3.3.4 Left To Right, Right To Left

Now for a general problem, only partially surfaced in the discussion above. Even if the various kinds of required paraphrases were systematically feasible, subtle issues of question-begging may still remain. An adequate paraphrase is supposed to keep both the intuitive content and the truth-value of the paraphrased sentences.[37] Thus, if sentence P in which we refer to, or quantify on, nonexistent objects is adequately paraphrased into sentence Q, in which such references or quantifications are dispensed with, then the translation can by itself be read in reverse order. It's an old riddle: we can say that Q expresses the content of P, but also that it is P that expresses the content of Q. This is how good paraphrases work: one can read them from left to right, but also from right to left. Linguistic analysis *as such* does not settle the issue of the right direction. The existence of an ontological translation handbook, difficult as it may be to write down one, does not justify in itself reading in one verse or in the other: the privilege of either must be justified independently. This is a topic we shall come back to in the third part of the book, when I will address the issue of possible Parmenidean *backwards* translations of the non-Parmenidean position introduced there.

On the other hand, as we have seen in this Chapter, it is doubtful that the Parmenidean translations manage to preserve the content of what is paraphrased

[36] See Casati and Varzi (1994), Varzi (2001), Chapter 2, Carrara and Varzi (2001).

[37] This is not uncontroversial. Some revisionary ontological approaches only grant a looser connection between the original sentence and the required paraphrase: for instance, Sainsbury (2010), p. 102, seems to demand such a non-demanding attitude towards the paraphrases proposed by anti-realists on fictional objects. If the ontologist's aim is not so much to make clear the actual ontological import of people's everyday talk (taken as unknown to them!), as to reform our imprecise language so that it better sticks to what actually is out there, she may not want her translations to do what we normally expect from a good translation. These two attitudes, clarification vs. reformation, correspond to the distinction between *hermeneutic* and *revolutionary* ontological reconstructivism, as introduced in Burgess and Rosen (1997). Though I cannot argue it here, I think that revolutionary reconstructivism can find its test cases only in the comparison of its paraphrases with the commonsensical image of the world given by our imprecise everyday talk. Carrara and Varzi argue this extensively in the aforementioned works.

(unless, that is, one begs the question against the non-Parmenidean). In the worst cases, not preserving the correct truth-values, the Parmenidean paraphrases cannot even get to the point of being candidates for a good translation. We take various sentences with *prima facie* commitment to nonexistents as true, whereas the Russellian-Quinean treatment of names and descriptions makes all of them indiscriminately false. "Holmes lives in Baker Street" sounds in *some* sense intuitively true to us. But in the Russellian-Quinean paraphrase, it turns into something like: "There exists exactly one x that holmesizes, and some holmesizer lives in Baker Street", which is false because nothing holmesizes. An advocate of the Russell-Quine treatment might tell her story to explain independently why "Holmes lives in Baker Street" is false, despite appearances. But in the absence of further qualification, the difference – on which we immediately agree – between phrases like "Holmes lives in Baker Street" and phrases like "Holmes is a cobblestone", remains unexplained.[38] The intuition that "Holmes is a literary character introduced in Doyle's stories" is literally true is even stronger. Yet paraphrasing it would make it false as well.

I shall then conclude this round of considerations on the Parmenidean paraphrases quoting Kit Fine:

> For a variety of reasons, which I shall not go into, many philosophers have been led to underestimate the extent to which our ordinary talk commits us to non-existent objects. It has been denied that we refer to them, express propositions about them, and so on. The possibility of a naive theory has therefore not even been considered. However, [. . .] we talk about non-existent objects in much the same way as we talk about other objects. We say that a character in Hamlet is a prince, that two characters in Hamlet appear in a play of Tom Stoppard's, that "Hamlet" refers to Hamlet, and so on. It therefore appears that the possibility of a naive theory, with quantification or other reference to non-existents, should indeed be taken seriously.[39]

3.4 Intentional Problems

Another area posing problems to the Parmenidean concerns not reference through language, but reference in thought, specifically, the analysis of intentional states: those mental states that, as mentioned two Chapters ago, have the feature of focusing on a content or of being directed towards an object. In ordinary language, they are often introduced by verb phrases taking noun phrases as complement, like "thinks (of)", "worships", "admires" (these are sometimes called "intentional transitive constructions"); or by verbs complemented by sentences, possibly

[38] As John Woods has appropriately claimed: "If you say that Holmes lived in Baker Street I may wager that you are mistaken. [But] even if I were careful to hedge my bet, by counterclaiming only that Holmes did not live in Baker Street, what you say wins; what I say loses." (Woods 1974, p. 13).

[39] Fine (1982), p. 99.

introduced by a "that", like "believes", "knows", "thinks (that)", "dreams".[40] The two classes of verbs overlap: I can imagine you, but also imagine that you will come, and I can think of you, but also think that you will come, etc.

To make explicit a terminology which has already surfaced here and there in the book, let us call *de dicto* those intentional states in which the contents of the thought, or dream, or belief, etc., are (what many philosophers call) propositions, e.g., John fears that Mary might not kiss him; Don believes that the Irish will beat Stanford; Obama has dreamt that Hillary Clinton became Secretary of State; I think that the tallest spy is a spy; etc. And let us call *de re* the intentional states that directly address an object (those expressed typically by intentional transitive constructions): Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth; the ancient Greeks worshipped Zeus; Obama admires Clinton; John dreamt of the Big Bad Wolf; I am looking for my missing pair of glasses; you imagine an old friend of yours; etc.

The *de re* cases make things that do not exist badly needed. Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth and, had you asked him what he was doing, he could appropriately have answered: "Well, I'm searching for something". What he was searching for, though, didn't exist. But the Parmenidean philosopher cannot admit that we really intend *de re* (think of, imagine, represent to ourselves, worship, search for) nonexistent objects like Zeus, Holmes, or a fountain of youth, as there are no such things for her. One cannot refer, for Parmenides, to things that do not exist also in this mental sense of "to refer".

Just as one can seemingly intend *de re* nonexistents, one can seemingly intend *de dicto* false propositions (or, perhaps, states of affairs that fail to obtain). But failing to be true for propositions (or to obtain for states of affairs) may well be distinct from their failing to exist: propositions and states of affairs are things that can, so to speak, succeed or fail (in being true, or in obtaining), but they may exist in either case. In this sense, there is no problem with nonexistence for *de dicto* intentionality, analogous to the one of *de re* intentionality. Besides, according to many philosophers various *de dicto* intentional states do not entail corresponding *de re* states. Quine's example is: if I think that the tallest spy is a spy, when I have no idea who the tallest spy is but just entertain a trivial *de dicto* thought, this does not entail that I think *de re* of something that it is a spy.

However if, besides accepting that propositions are what is intended here, the Parmenidean also follows the Russellian conception of propositions, the rejection of nonexistents might bring in trouble for some *de dicto* cases as well. In that conception, as has been recalled above, a singular proposition can have individuals as its direct ontological constituents. If John believes that Gandalf is a character of the Tolkien epic, the (true) proposition that is the content of the *de dicto* intentional state would seem to have as its constituent an object, Gandalf, which does not exist.

A traditional Parmenidean strategy consists in reducing intentional objects to (of course, existent) mental representations. But it does not seem to work. Let us consider the intentional relation *x desires y* as an example. Matt desires the

[40] See e.g. Zalta (1988), pp. 7–8.

neighbour he at times encounters downstairs, that is, Matt has an intentional relationship (too bad for him, only intentional) with his neighbour. Could this relationship actually hold between the intentional agent Matt and a substitute object like, say, the mental representation of his neighbour that is in Matt's head?

Hardly. Let us take a true sentence, "There is someone who Matt desires, and who weighs 55 kg". If Matt really had his intentional relationship with a mental representation, then in the first conjunct of "Matt desires *x*, and *x* weighs 55 kg", *x* is assigned a mental representation. But then the second conjunct becomes unlikely: if Matt had a mental representation *x* of 55 kg, his head would feel a bit too heavy.

Generalizing: the problem with mental representations is that they cannot have various properties of the objects they should role-play for, existing *or* not, and with which we entertain *de re* intentional relationships. The existence, or lack thereof, of the objects at issue is orthogonal to this. The problem would surface for an analysis of *de re* intentional states in terms of the targeting of mental representations, even if one didn't resort to it with the aim of getting rid of nonexistents: the person Matt desires in the example above, for instance, is very existent.

The general intuitive view of *de re* intentional states may be that they involve mental representations. But the very intentionality at issue seems to consist in the fact that something distinct from the representation is represented by, or via, the representation (as being such-and-such and so-and-so). It may be that I can intend *de re* Uma Thurman by having my own mental representation of Uma, say, as the blonde bride of *Kill Bill*. You can intend her by representing her differently, say, as the brunette of *Pulp Fiction*. But we intend *de re* the same object, which is distinct from both representations of it taken as mental entities.

Some Parmenidean philosophers, as noted by Priest in his *Towards Non-Being*,[41] have maintained the reverse thesis that intentional relations of the kind *x desires y* are not genuine relations, as relations presuppose the existence of their *relata*. This is supported by adducing examples of relations like *x kicks y*, and maintaining that both *x* and *y* must exist in order for *x* to kick *y*. We have here what seems to be, if I may say so, a typical Parmenidean fallacy, to which we shall get back: a property of all relations is inferred from a property of some.

3.5 Fallacious Fallacy

To conclude, let us go back to Russell's diagnosis of the two fallacious arguments we met in the previous Chapter:

Men exist	Men are numerous
Socrates is a man	Socrates is a man
Socrates exists	Socrates is numerous

[41] See Priest (2005), p. 60.

The conclusion on the right is clearly unacceptable, even if both premises are true (in particular, "Men are numerous" in the natural reading means that there are many men, which, given a suitable context, is certainly true). The argument is thus fallacious. The one on the left is fallacious too (at least on one reading, as we are about to see). But this, as Priest again has noted,[42] may be due to a different reason from the one Russell wanted.

The asymmetry of the two cases is suggested, to begin with, by the fact that unlike "Socrates is numerous", "Socrates exists" makes, well, perfect sense. One may take it as false today, but it was true in the past. When Descartes claimed "Je suis", meaning that he existed, he did not state something absurd as if he had stated "Je suis nombreux". If the conclusion is meaningful, then, where does the fallacy lie? The lefty argument is indeed invalid, if one reads it as follows:

Some x is such that x is a man and x exists
Socrates is a man

Socrates exists

Its conclusion does not follow – as becomes clear comparing it with this other argument of the same form:

Some x is such that x is a man and x is brown-haired
Brad Pitt is a man

Brad Pitt is brown-haired

And this is invalid: the first premise is true (for instance, x = Obama makes it true), the second is true as well, but the conclusion is false. The two Russellian arguments' being similar *qua* invalid should not lead us to see them as similar *qua* having a meaningless conclusion. If, on the other hand, one reads the first premise of the argument on the left as a universal quantification, it is even valid:

For all x, if x is a man, then x exists
Socrates is a man

Socrates exists

[42] See Priest (2007).

Part II
Nonexistence

The metaphysical condition of having properties is quite separable from the ontological condition of existing. Predication precedes existence. Of course, anything that exists has properties, but this is because having properties is metaphysically utterly unavoidable – in a way that even death and taxes are not.

Nathan Salmon, *Existence*

Chapter 4
Existence As a Real Property

4.1 On The Meaning of Existence

What does existence consist in, if it is not what the Parmenidean takes it to be? Here comes a non-Parmenidean approach. To begin with, "exists" is a predicate of individuals just like the others – a predicate for real, not only from the point of view of our ordinary language's surface grammar. It is a predicate in the same sense that "eats", "flies", and "is a man" are. The *modo materiali*, ontological counterpart of the semantic thesis, is that existence is a genuine, non-blanket property of individuals, just as the properties of eating, flying, being a man.

That said, one expects some further characterization, on pain of leaving the notion largely unexplained. What kind of property of individuals is existence? An intuitively plausible option consists in claiming that it deals with the having of *causal* features – with taking part in causal relationships, or at least, with the disposition towards taking part in them. The motto is Alexander's famous one: "To be is to have causal powers".[1] But the idea dates back at least to Plato. Thus spoke the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist:*

> Whatever has a native power, whether of affecting anything else, or of being affected in ever so slight a degree by the most insignificant agents, even on one solitary occasion, is a real being. In short, I offer it as the definition of *beings* that they are *potency*, and nothing else.[2]

This requires additional explanations. First, I only say "intuitively plausible" for, as we shall see later, the characterization *may* turn out to be partial at the very least. Second, even leaving aside its possible incompleteness, it is not a definition. To say that to exist is to enjoy causal powers supplies a *gloss* to existence. It is not a philosophical analysis or reduction of the concept of existence, the specification of a necessary and sufficient condition *C*, such that an object exists if and only if it satisfies *C*.

[1] Alexander (1920), p. 8. The view can be found also in Castañeda (1989).

[2] Plato, *Sophist* 247d-e.

This may be taken by the Parmenidean as objectionable *per se*. Peter Geach, however, has called "actuality-sense" of existence the conception of it as a nontrivial property of individuals. After glossing it just as proposed above, he has suggested that a theorist is not to blame for leaving it undefined:

> A provisional explanation of actuality may be given thus: *x* is actual if and only if either *x* acts, or undergoes change, or both; and here I count as "acting" both the inner activities of mind, like thinking and planning, and the initiation of changes in things. [. . .] I do not think this explanation or criterion can be developed into a definition. For it is not yet clear what counts as a thing's undergoing a change; when Plato counts being thought of as a change undergone by the object of thought, most of us will feel that he is playing a trick, whether or not he also deceived himself.[3]

It may be that existence is not only undefined *de facto*, due to our lacking agreed upon characterizations of the very notions employed to elucidate it (having causal features, triggering and undergoing change). A reduction of existence to allegedly more primitive notions that don't involve existence may not be feasible in principle. Most philosophers agree on some concepts being so fundamental that we must limit ourselves to comment them via terms that help understanding. First, that there must be primitive notions is uncontroversial: if all notions were definable in terms of others, we would face either a dangerous infinite regress, or a (quite large) *circulus in definiendo*. Definitions have to come to an end.

There being primitive concepts, it is likely that there is no fool-proof decision procedure to establish which these would be. According to many, a good candidate is for instance, as logicians and mathematicians know well, the concept of set. We can say that to be a set is to be an aggregate of objects, or a collection of them, etc. We give examples and hope for the best; but the concept of set remains a primitive one. In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke has notably made a similar claim for the notion of reference, stating that "philosophical analyses of some concepts like reference, in completely different terms which make no mention of reference, are very apt to fail".[4] If reference and sethood are candidate primitives due to their basic theoretical role in our understanding of language and mathematics, then existence is so basic for our understanding of the world, that it can certainly be one as well.

In his remarkable recent essay *The Question of Ontology*, Kit Fine has ascribed a similar status to the primitive notion of *reality*. This he also takes as a full-fledged, non-blanket feature of individuals, playing in his theory a role similar to the one existence is to play in this Chapter. Fine claims he does "not see any way to define the concept of reality in essentially different terms", given that "the metaphysical circle of ideas to which it belongs is one from which there appears to be no escape". Such a notion is nevertheless fully justified, also by the fact that "we seem to have a good *intuitive* grasp of the concept".[5]

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[3] Geach (1968), pp. 7–8.

[4] Kripke (1972), p. 94.

[5] Fine (2009), p. 175.

Third explanation. That existence is a primitive is part of the non-Parmenidean view to be exposed from now on, to the effect that existence is no logic. The Parmenidean conception, once forced to admit that even from its viewpoint existence can be a property of individuals, still explains it away, defining it via the existential quantifier and identity, that is, via logical notions. But existence is not taken as a logical notion from now on: if to exist has to do with the enjoying of causal powers, whatever these actually are, they are not logical features.

Fourth, about causal powers: invoking them in a characterization of existence means leaving things – intentionally – underspecified. What does "to possess causal powers" precisely mean? Causality is one of the most controversial notions in the history of human thought. Philosophers have debated it for thousands of years; still today, incompatible theories for it are on the market.

On this issue, I am to keep a low profile and just refer you to your preferred view. The thesis that to exist is to enjoy causal powers *per se* seemingly does not commit those who maintain it to a particular explanation of causality. A certain characterization of the notion can retroact onto the extension of existence. For instance, it would be nice to maintain that to exist entails being located in space or in spacetime, or possessing a physical address.[6] Authoritative philosophers have sometimes advanced similar claims. Here is Aristotle in the *Physics*:

> For all men assume that things which are, are somewhere (for that which is not is assumed to be nowhere – for where is a goat-stag or sphinx?).[7]

And here is Hume himself, in the *Treatise of Human Nature*:

> Let us consider that no two ideas are themselves contrary, except those of existence and non-existence, which are plainly resembling, as implying both of them an idea of the object; though the latter excludes the object from all times and places, in which it is supposed not to exist.[8]

But even though the study of natural languages confirms some connections between the concepts of physical location and existence,[9] it is not uncontroversial that the having of causal features coincides with, or entails, the having of physical location. Are causal non-spatiotemporal relationships possible? Is something like noumenal causality – as a Kantian may call it – feasible? It is an obscure notion indeed; but this may depend, again, on causality being a metaphysical conundrum. If noumenal causation makes sense, then something may have causal powers, and thus exist, with no need to be physically located. You are likely to have already accepted something of the sort, if you believe in the God of the Christian tradition,

[6] For existence as physical location (as opposed to existence being a formal-logical property), see also Williamson (1990b, 2002).

[7] Aristotle, *Physics*, D, 208a 29–31.

[8] Hume (1739), I.1.5.

[9] See Williams (1981), pp. 319ff.

who apparently transcends both space and time (being also able, at will, to take part in them) and yet enjoys causal powers. If on the other hand the only possible causal interactions are those taking place in space and time, then whatever exists, being endowed with causal powers, must also be located somewhere in the physical world.

And yet, a characterization of existence in terms of (disposition to) causal interactions is explicative. It agrees with many of our common intuitions about what exists and what does not, which this perspective safeguards better than Parmenideanism (it does not agree with *all* such intuitions: this is the aspect in which the characterization may turn out to be incomplete and unsatisfactory, as we shall see). If we try to identify traits common to those quite different things that the layman considers nonexistent – Sherlock Holmes, Pegasus, Gandalf, a golden mountain, a merely possible brother, Santa Claus, George Washington, Socrates, Mr. Pickwick, or 100 imaginary thalers – we find out that one consists in the following: we cannot kick Sherlock Holmes (or kiss him), while we can kick Brad Pitt (or kiss him); we can offer Varenne some fodder, but we cannot do the same with Pegasus; we can walk around and stumble upon Uma Thurman, but we cannot (alas) walk around and stumble upon Socrates; we can climb the Alps, but no golden mountains; with 100 existing thalers (or their counterpart in up-to-date currency) we can go shopping, we can keep them in our pockets, pay at the grocery store, and receive back change. Nothing of the sort could be done with 100 merely imaginary, nonexistent thalers. Existence does seem to make a difference: we cannot causally interact with things lacking it.

One may object that (what the non-Parmenidean claims to be) nonexistents do seem, after all, to produce causal effects – and not irrelevant ones at that. I am obsessively thinking of Kirienko, a Russian secret agent who spies me, driving me mad. In fact, agent Kirienko doesn't exist – I'm just paranoid. Then I think of good detective Holmes, and for some reason this brings me relief. So aren't Holmes and the nonexistent Kirienko causing my mood to twist?

I think not. There being the medium of thought should lead us to suspect. I'd rather say that the paranoid thought of the agent and the one of Holmes are what affects my mood. These thoughts may be taken as mental representations I have of the corresponding things. Now whatever mental representations are, as we have seen in the previous Chapter, the targets of *de re* intentional states had better not be confused with the respective mental representations. Mental representations (let us assume) do exist, and can affect my mood (of course, these may still be very "high-level" descriptions of what is going on, a philosopher of mind could say; what is happening in my neurons, whether and in which sense the upper class stuff is reducible to their activity, I have no idea).

Again, a comparison with existent things might help: I can think about Brad Pitt and, for some reason unrelated to him, whom I never met and don't personally know, but related only to my paranoid nature, this drives me to suicide. One may say that the thought of Pitt has driven me to death, not Brad Pitt, despite his being an existent man. Nobody could accuse Brad Pitt of induction to suicide, or even of being unknowingly causally responsible for my suicide, even if one has a theory

of representations that makes of Pitt the "causal origin" of my representation, in some sense or other.[10]

One can easily summarize the opposition between Parmenidean and non-Parmenidean accounts by pairing their answers to three questions about the predicate "exists": Is it a predicate (standing for a property) of individuals? Is it a blanket predicate trivially true of everything? Is it definable?

"Exists" is a	*Parmenidean*	*Non-Parmenidean*
1. Predicate	Yes	Yes
2. Blanket	Yes	No
3. Definable	Yes	No

To the first question the Parmenidean answers "Yes" after reflecting upon the fact that, despite subscribing to the "Existence not a predicate" motto, her logic allows for an existence predicate of individuals in the well known way: x *exists* $=_{\mathrm{df}} \exists y(y = x)$. The Parmenidean predicate is definable, reduced to the existential quantifier and identity. Given that both quantification and identity are logical notions, it is, in a precise sense, a logical predicate. And no doubt, it is a universal predicate. If to exist means nothing more than to be something, since everything with something, everything exists. Correlatively, there is no non-blanket property of existing, similar to the property of being blond or to that of flying.

For the non-Parmenidean, "exists" is a predicate designating a genuine property of individuals: a property not all things possess, and which cannot be reduced to other properties – in particular, logical ones – through definition even though it can be glossed in the aforementioned ways.

4.2 Cambridge Property?

If to exist is a genuine property having to do with the possession of causal powers, or the (disposition to) engaging in causal processes, then it is likely that existence is not one of those properties some philosophers call *Cambridge properties*.

The first use of the notion of Cambridge property in connection to the issue of existence, as far as I know, dates back to an article by Barry Miller of thirty-something years ago.[11] Before that, Peter Geach had labelled Cambridge *change* a change that produces no qualitative or internal variation in the thing affected. Standard examples are: there's a Cambridge change in butter when the price of butter increases. Even if a change affecting the butter took place, it did not modify the butter as the object it is: the quantity, chemical composition, shape, etc., are

[10] It is yet another issue *how* one can have *de re* mental representations of nonexistent objects that cannot be their "causal origin". This is a biggish problem, to come on stage in Chapter 9.

[11] See Miller (1982), p. 183.

not altered by the increase of price. If the butter gets spoiled, this is real, non-Cambridge change, for the chemical composition and probably the shape and weight vary.

The terminology is extended to properties. Being sold at a dime per ounce is a Cambridge property of the butter, while weighing 8 oz is not. Having a certain height or weighing 55 kilos are genuine properties of mine, while being paid monthly or being mentioned in a legal document are among my Cambridge properties. The distinction may coincide with a traditional one between intrinsic properties of an object, involving nothing but the object and the way it itself is, and extrinsic ones, involving something else, or being possessed in virtue of relations to other things. An august tradition in philosophy takes extrinsic properties as, in some sense, merely apparent or not genuine features of things (*denominatio exstrinseca a natura rerum*, as the Medievals said).

As such, the distinction does not coincide with that between intuitively essential properties and intuitively contingent ones. Some properties are catalogued as genuine, non-Cambridge, on the basis of the intuitive test that losing or acquiring them would be a non-Cambridge, genuine change. The circumstances in which a thing loses or acquires them count as possible: changing my weight is possible for me, so weighing 55 kilos is a contingent feature of mine. But changing my weight makes some qualitative or intrinsic difference for me, so weighing 55 kilos counts as a genuine property of mine. Also being paid monthly is a contingent property of mine, but losing it would not make an intrinsic difference for me, in some sense of intrinsicality.

What about properties many philosophers take as essential, like being a man? It may seem that being a man is intrinsic in the sense of not involving relations with other things; my being essentially a man is my being a man in virtue of what I myself am. And perhaps it makes sense to say that if I ceased to be a man, this would make quite an intrinsic difference for me, even if there is no possible circumstance in which I am not a man – think of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and men turning into other animals, or plants: that counts as intrinsic change for sure. So being a man is not a Cambridge feature of mine. It seems difficult, on the other hand, to think of essential but Cambridge properties. Are there properties I cannot lose but such that, if I lost them, they would not make an intrinsic difference for me? These speculations turn on subtle issues about our capacity of conceiving impossible circumstances, and that this is even feasible is controversial (it's another topic to which we shall return).

Overall, the distinction between genuine-intrinsic and Cambridge properties is not easy to spell out. What use is it for the debate on existence? It so happened that, faced with the difficulties plaguing the Parmenidean conception, some authors allowed existence to be a property of individuals. But they added that, to avoid troubles with the complementary property of *non*existence, we had better say that existence is a Cambridge property. The argument goes thus: if existence were a genuine, intrinsic property, nonexistence would be as well. If things were so, people like David Londey and C.J.F. Williams claimed, we would have to face absurdities, all going back to the paradox of non-being: we would need there to be things that

are not, in order for them to bear the genuine or intrinsic property of being not. Think of a peasant that checks her herd daily, to tell apart the heads having the genuine property of existence from those having the genuine one of nonexistence; or of a situation in which, once informed that no blue buttercup exists, we check numerous blue buttercups before concluding that, indeed, none of them exists. Better to conclude that nonexistence, and thus existence, if really need be properties of individuals, are not genuine but Cambridge properties. This looks as yet another way to spell out the Humean-Kantian view that existence makes no difference.

The examples are quite funny – funny like Norman Malcolm's aforementioned case about nonexistent persons not allowed to apply for a position. Such considerations suffer from problems, though, barely concealed by their being amusing. Their absurdity originates from a deceiving choice of properties. If something has the property of belonging to a herd, or that of being a buttercup, then presumably it is a material object. It has a physical address, and we can causally interact with it. In a word: it exists. The anecdote of checking blue buttercups and finding them all nonexistent, then, is certainly amusing: the disavowed expectation produced by "blue buttercup" and the subsequent "nonexistent" makes for a well-known and studied comical effect.

The problem raised by the non-Parmenidean, however, is whether this applies to *all* properties, including ones like being a purely fictional character, or being searched for by many, or having been president of the United States. Telling apart the existent former presidents from the nonexistent ones makes a lot of sense. At the time of my writing, the existent ones are four: Jimmy Carter, George Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush. All the rest are nonexistent (with the usual proviso on the possible immortality of the soul – even a presidential soul).

We may have a case of illicit slide from "some" to "all". For the non-Parmenidean, some things do not exists; they can instantiate properties that don't entail existence; and these may occasionally be intrinsic, non-Cambridge, properties. Being a purely fictional character may belong to this group: if I were a purely fictional character, this would make quite an intrinsic difference for me.[12] Specifically, nonexistence itself seems to be genuine or intrinsic, not Cambridge. Acquiring and losing existence is intuitively not a Cambridge change: when Socrates ceased to exist, this made quite an intrinsic difference for him.

What if there was an asymmetry between existence and nonexistence? Maybe to exist is a genuine property, but not to exist is a Cambridge property. This is the position held by Barry Miller.[13] The idea is expanded as follows. That something, x, lacks a genuine property P, does not entail *per se* that x has a genuine complementary property *non-P*. This happens only in the case when P and non-P are,

[12] Some claim that there is no possible situation in which I am a purely fictional character, as we will see. If so, we cannot Cambridge-test this property by envisaging a possible situation in which I become purely fictional, and wondering how this would affect me. I think, though, that the intuition is the same as with the property of being a man: these are intrinsic features, not merely Cambridge ones, insofar as they are possessed by the thing in virtue of the way it itself is.

[13] See see Miller (1982) and Miller (2002), Section 4.

Miller says, "understood as determinates of a common determinable".[14] Which means, to speak Aristotelian: only if *P* and non-*P* are specific differences with respect to a common genus, must they both be genuine, non-Cambridge properties splitting this common genus, if either of them is.

Take the property of being red. If the property of having a colour (the genus, the determinable) applies to something, then that thing can avoid being red only by having some non-red colour – some colour different from red. If a table does not have the property of being red, it will have the genuine, non-Cambridge property of not being red, because it must have some colour or other: it may be white, or blue, or green. . . . But a square root is not red either. Yet this does not entail that it has the genuine, non-Cambridge property of not being red: a square root, being an immaterial object, lacks the property of having a colour: it does not belong in the genus of coloured things. Thus, its not being red does not entail that it has any non-red colour, different from red, and a genuine non-redness property.

Moving on to existence and nonexistence: that *x* does not exist would entail that *x* enjoys the genuine, non-Cambridge property of nonexistence, only if existence and nonexistence were "determinates of a common determinable": specifications of a common genus or property. Call this hypothetical property *O*. Just as being red means being colored in red, and being (genuinely) non-red means being colored other than red, so being existent would then mean being *O* existing, and being (genuinely) nonexistent would mean being *O* not existing. But what could this hypothetical *O* be? Ontologically speaking, Miller's argument says, there is no greater difference than that between to exist and not to exist: there can be no common genus between existents and nonexistents.

How to address this set of considerations? First, they concede quite a lot to the non-Parmenidean position: existence is a genuine, non-Cambridge property of individuals, making for an intrinsic feature (whatever that means in detail). A Parmenidean accepting to line up on this position would be a retreating one. Secondly, the argument for the asymmetry between existence and nonexistence may be resisted.

The key assumption is that there is no common genus *O* between existent and nonexistent objects. This may be rejected by the non-Parmenidean, for according to her there probably is a common genus between existent objects like Uma Thurman or Bill Clinton, and nonexistent objects like Sherlock Holmes or George Washington: they are all *objects*, property-bearers, and thereby bearers of the property *O* = being an object, or being something, or being a property-bearer. For the non-Parmenidean, "exists" is not a blanket predicate. But "is an object", or "is something", *are* blanket predicates. The entailment from being self-identical to being something, flagged in the previous Chapter, comes into play. If there is a candidate condition for a blanket feature of anything whatsoever, that is self-identity. When existence was taken as being something, that entailment was our problem. If being something, i.e., being an object, does not amount to existing, that entailment is as trivial as it has to be.

[14] Miller (2002), Section 4.

It is a further issue, how to provide an adequate logical treatment for such a notion. If we admit a set that is the extension of *O*, we may stumble upon the classical set-theoretic paradoxes of total sets. Philosophers like Dummett have rejected similar all-encompassing notions, on the basis that there is no universal set. A solution might be that of treating the extension at issue as a proper class, in the sense of the von Neumann-Bernays-Gödel set theories. Or, it could be said that the notion of object is not univocal, meaning that *object* or *thing* is not a genus, similarly to what Aristotle maintained about *being*. In this case, the common genus *O* we discussed would be missing.

On the other hand, I am inclined to reject the idea that the notion of object is not univocal. I find the idea of absolutely unrestricted quantification, and the property of being something that goes with it, quite intuitive, plausible, and unequivocal: a full-fledged genus, to keep talking classical. This just is the notion of everything without limitation, that is, of all things *qua* things: a formal or logical notion, if one wants – that which existence, for the non-Parmenidean, is not. It is an idea we resort to all the time in philosophy, precisely when we say that everything is self-identical, or that everything is either an abstract object or a concrete one, or that everything is subject to this or that law of logic. For a convincing defence of the idea, I refer you to Timothy Williamson's clever papers[15] (One had better fight one battle at a time, and it is enough of a task to defend among philosophers the idea of nonexistent objects). These remarks may be sufficient to make plausible the thought that, there being a common genus between existents and nonexistents, no asymmetry is needed between the two statuses. If one wants to stick to the difficult distinction between genuine-intrinsic and Cambridge properties, both statuses can be taken as genuine, non-Cambridge ones.

4.3 "Es gibt Gegenstände, von denen gilt, daß es dergleichen Gegenstände nicht gibt"

Those who take the route of considering existence a non-blanket property of individuals, as was stated at the outset of this Chapter, must provide an account of what property it is. Existence turning out to be irreducible to quantification, they must also provide an explanation of their own view of quantification. When one affirms that some things are nonexistent, one should state clearly what one means by "some", if not what Frege and Quine taught us.

The view of quantification that goes along with existence being a non-blanket property of individuals is both natural and intuitive to me. But intuitions only help that much when, as is the case for the Parmenidean philosopher, one has intuitions reshaped by the tradition of Frege and Quine. The philosopher who most inspires non-Parmenideans is likely to be Alexius Meinong. However, he did not help the

[15] For instance, Williamson (2003).

discussion. In his *Theory of Objects (Gegenstandstheorie)*, he came up with an intentionally puzzling expression, one that has led many to conclude that "Meinongian quantification" is gibberish:

> Those who like paradoxical modes of expression could very well say: "There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects."[16]

This certainly looks like a *contradictio in terminis*. In the canonical notation of standard logic, "... there is no such object (say, x)" becomes $\neg\exists y(y = x)$. Then, "There is some object, x, such that there is no such object" becomes $\exists x\neg\exists y(y = x)$, and this is equivalent to $\exists x\neg(x = x)$: something is not self-identical. Thus, Meinong's statement either is or immediately entails a blatant logical absurdity. So William Lycan ravages "Meinongian quantification":

> I have to take my place among those who find *Relentlessly* (i.e., *genuinely* or *primitively*) Meinongian quantification simply unintelligible. However, in saying this, I am not using the term "unintelligible" in its sneering post-Wittgensteinian use. So far as I am able to introspect, I am not expressing any tendentious philosophical *qualm*. (For this reason, my use of the term may be irrevocably misleading.) I mean that I really cannot understand Relentlessly Meinongian quantification at all; to me it is *literally* gibberish or mere noise.[17]

If the quantifier captures the sense of "exists", then to quantify on things of which it is said that they do not exist is absurd. But that to quantify on something means to commit oneself to the existence of that thing is denied by nonbelievers in the received view. For the supporters of the Meinongian position, to exist is not to be the value of a variable. Assuming the opposite, and from that concluding that Meinongian quantification proves to be unintelligible, or that it entails a logical falsity, at this point of the discussion would be another *petitio* against the Meinongian.

Meinong's statement, in fact, comes at the end of the two pivotal pages of the *Gegenstandstheorie*, in which he formulates his own Principle of the Independence of *Sosein*, the having of properties, from *Sein*, being (a principle to be discussed in next Chapter), and establishes that "the principle applies, not only to Objects which do not exist in fact, but also to Objects which could not exist because they are impossible".[18] Thus, "There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects" expresses, for Meinong, our non-Parmenidean thesis: there are objects, property-bearers, that do not exist. His (openly) paradoxical statement escapes *blatant* inconsistency once we admit that the meaning of "there are" differs in its two occurrences in that sentence. The difference may be highlighted by rephrasing the first part of the claim into "Some objects are such that..."; the second part may be rephrased as "... such objects do not *exist*".

Formally, this is easily dealt with. I will use the symbols "Λ" e "Σ" for two Meinongian quantifiers, to be read respectively "for all" and "for some": the first is

[16] Meinong (1904), p. 83.
[17] Lycan (1979), p. 290.
[18] Meinong (1904), p. 82.

the universal quantifier; the latter I shall call particular quantifier (a natural name, as "particular", we said some pages ago, is the dual of "universal"). They bear no ontological, in the sense of *existential*, commitment. It is legitimate to quantify on things like chimeras, fictional characters, etc., and to say that they all, or some of them, are . . ., not being committed to their existence.

Like the standard quantifiers, these too are inter-definable: Λ is definable as $\neg\Sigma \ldots \neg$, while Σ is definable as $\neg\Lambda \ldots \neg$. We can get rid of one by substituting it with the other plus negation. Let us now focus on the particular quantifier. As it is existentially unloaded, we should avoid reading formulas like ΣxPx as "Some x such that Px exists". Thus I have suggested to read "Σ" just as "for some" (in case: "For some x, Px"), and labelled it particular, not existential: that standard jargon is misleading in the context should be clear by now. For the same reason, I have changed the symbolism with respect to the canonical notation: using "$\exists$" for the particular quantifier may bring with the symbol the temptation of reading existential commitment in it, misleading those who attended the course of elementary (and, of course, classical) logic presupposed by this book.

In *On What There Is* Quine stated that terms like "man" or "red" don't commit us to the existence of universals (the universal *man*, the universal *red*). According to Quine, even proper names do not commit us to the existence of their bearers, as they can be eliminated extending the Russellian technique for definite descriptions. As we have seen, such an extension is a failure. For the Meinongian too, names don't commit us to the existence of their bearers, this time for quite a different reason: their bearers may not exist. "Sherlock Holmes" for the Meinongian refers to Sherlock Holmes, but Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

I am now exposing the view that even the quantifiers, against the Quinean motto, don't commit us to the existence of what we quantify on. We might then ask, what *does* commit us to the existence of something? The fast answer is: to state that it *exists*. Because not everything exists, one has explicit commitment to the existence of something, an x, when the existence of x is declared. Such existential commitment is formally expressed by a designated existence predicate, "E". Sentences like "Uma Thurman exists" (true) and "Gandalf exists" (false) are translated in symbolic notation exactly for what they seem to be in natural language, that is, atomic subject-predicate sentences in which a property is ascribed to an individual: *Eu, Eg. Simplex sigillum veri*.

Next, the existence predicate is used to recapture the Parmenidean reading of the quantifiers, thus, to define quantifiers provided with existential commitment. The universal existentially loaded quantifier – say "$\forall$", the usual symbol – says that all existing things are such that. . . Formally:

$$(\mathrm{Df}\forall)\ \forall x\alpha[x] =_{\mathrm{df}} \Lambda x(Ex \rightarrow \alpha[x]).$$

And the existential quantifier (the particular existentially loaded quantifier) says that something exists and it is such that. . . :

$$(\mathrm{Df}\exists)\ \exists x\alpha[x] =_{\mathrm{df}} \Sigma x(Ex \wedge \alpha[x]).$$

One sometimes hears that the Meinongian perspective has two couples of quantifiers, the existentially neutral and the existentially loaded ones. But this is misleading: the existentially loaded couple is just defined, thus always eliminable, via the Meinongian quantifiers and the primitive existence predicate. The Meinongian quantifiers had better be called just quantifiers. "Existentially committing quantification" is restricted quantification (and quantification, as we shall see soon, can be restricted in *various* ways). When I say "$\forall x \ldots$", I am excluding from the domain of things I'm quantifying on those that do not exist. I want to talk only about existing things, if about all of them. Dually for "$\exists x \ldots$". Now "There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects", once the first occurrence of "there are" is understood as unrestricted quantification, and the second as (negated) quantification restricted to existent stuff, expresses not a paradox, but plain non-Parmenideanism; (unrestrictedly) some things are such that they are not identical with anything in a more restricted group, the existent stuff: $\Sigma x \neg \Sigma y(Ey \wedge (y = x))$, i.e., $\Sigma x \neg Ex$, something does not exist.

The "fast answer" given above was to the effect that, once freed from the received view, there is one obvious way to explicitly commit oneself to the existence of something: declaring that it exists. The reason that was (a bit too) *fast* is that people can be considered committed to the existence of something also when they don't overtly declare its existence. In the majority of cases, on the contrary, such commitment is implicit, but easy to infer from the ordinary use of vernacular expressions of quantification, like "all", "some", "there is", etc. A physicist's very general claim to the effect that all things have mass might be disputed, but nobody would stand up to dispute it by saying that Sherlock Holmes has no mass as he doesn't exist: one would adduce examples of existing things with no mass.

The phenomenon of contextual, implicit, and conversationally understood restrictions to quantification is familiar to everybody, this last quantifier including believers in the Parmenidean view. When I say that all the beer is in the fridge,[19] I am not affirming that all the beer in the world fits into a fridge. I am, on the contrary, ignoring the largest portion of the available beer, and limiting my quantification, say, to things that are in the house. I don't need to declare my restriction explicitly: it can be easily inferred from the context.

The idea that full-fledged ontological commitment is captured not by quantification as such, but via a primitive predicate restricting "thin", ontologically not committing quantification, has been put forth in the aforementioned paper by Kit Fine, *The Question of Ontology*. Fine criticizes and rejects the Quinean meta-ontological view that equates ontological issues with quantificational issues. The logical form of "Integers exist", as expressing "thick" commitment to integers, "is not $\exists$xIx [n.b. Fine uses the standard quantifier notation], where I is the predicate for being an integer, but $\forall$x(Ix $\supset$ Ex), where E is the predicate for existence". And here, "the predicate 'exists' is being used in a 'thick', ontologically loaded sense.

[19] A famous example by David Lewis (1986), p. 3.

In saying that a particular number exists, we are not saying that there is something identical to it but saying something about its status as a genuine constituent of the world".[20]

Afterwards, Fine prefers to substitute a reality predicate for the existence predicate. But in doing so, it seems to me that he is just leaving the *word* "exist" to the Parmenidean, as he claims, "given its customary association with the thin [quantificational] sense". His reality predicate, in fact, plays a role similar to our "*E*": it is primitive, and the thick-and-loaded quantifier is expressed by means of it and the thin quantifier.[21] Thus, Fine concludes:

> The critical and distinctive aspect of ontological claims lies not in the use of the quantifier but in the appeal of a certain conception of what is real; and it is only by focusing on this concept, rather than on our understanding of quantification, that further clarification is to be achieved or disquiet over the debate is ultimately to be vindicated.[22]

4.4 There Is an "Is" in "There Is": the Argument from Italics

I will get back to the issue of contextual restrictions to quantification in the next Section. Before that, we should address an objection to Meinongian quantification, more dangerous than the fast charge of immediate self-contradiction. Our Parmenidean philosopher might now concede that Meinongian quantification is not unintelligible or "mere noise", but also rebut that the Meinongian has used a mere formal trick, devoid of linguistic substance and even in overt contrast with the way we talk.

Those saying that there are objects of which it is true that such objects do not exist are still uttering something like an analytic falsehood: they are denying facts regarding the mere meaning of words. What could "there is" mean, as used in the vernacular, if not "exists"? To quantify "particularly", that is, to say things like "There *are* things such that. . ." already is to say that those things exist. It is time to pay attention to the *italics*, so that we may call this the Argument from Italics on

[20] Fine (2009), p. 168.

[21] See Ibid, p. 170. Some terminological subtleties are in fact involved here. I have used "is real" and "exists" as largely interchangeable throughout this book, often speaking equivalently of real or existent vs. unreal or nonexistent objects. The *Oxford English Dictionary* seems to agree: the first meaning given for "real" is "actually existent" and the first meaning for "reality" is "real existence". However, Moltmann (2009) has pointed out that the reality predicate "is real" works linguistically in a different way from the existence predicate. It is not clear to me to what extent this may mirror a conceptual difference. Of course, "real" can be used e.g. as a modifier: "You are a real friend" means that you are a friend indeed or a true friend, not that you are an existent friend (as opposed to false friends of mine that would be nonexistent friends). Also the definition in the dictionary, of reality as "real existence", has "real" work more like "actual", as opposed to "merely possible"; so "real existence" would mean existence in the actual situation, or in the circumstances that actually obtain (as opposed to circumstances that are hypothetic, or counterfactual, etc.).

[22] Ibid, p. 171.

behalf of the Parmenidean. To say that there (italics flagged:) *is* something that does not exist is to challenge the sense of simple locutions of ordinary language like "there (flagged again:) *is*": no difference in meaning can be detected between "there *is*" and "exists".

Peter van Inwagen believes all of this to be so patent as to be perhaps defensible only by adducing examples, or by trying with a funny tale:

> In sum, there are no things that do not exist. This seems to me to be so obvious that I have difficulty in seeing how to argue for it. I can say only this: if you think that there are things that do not exist, give me an example of one. The right response to your example will be either "That does too exist," or "There is no such thing as that".
>
> Since I know of no way of arguing for the identity of being and existence (other than a case-by-case examination and refutation of all known attempts to give examples of non-existent objects) [. . .] I will tell you a funny story. [. . .] One day my friend Wyman told me that there was a passage on page 253 of volume IV of Meinong's *Collected Works* in which Meinong admitted that his theory of objects was inconsistent. Four hours later, after considerable fruitless searching, I stamped into Wyman's study and informed him with some heat that there was no such passage. "Ah," said Wyman, "you're wrong. There is such a passage. After all, you were looking for it: there is something you were looking for. I think I can explain your error; although there *is* such a passage, it doesn't *exist*. Your error lay in your failure to appreciate this distinction."[23]

There are many a things to say about this lovely story. To begin with, I find it quite funny. As for the rest, first, the examples of things that do not exist are the usual ones, familiar to anyone: Mr. Pickwick, Sherlock Holmes, Gandalf and, of course, Quine and van Inwagen's imaginary Wyman. To answer by putting forward the dilemma that either those things exist as well, or there are no such things, *per se*, begs the question against the Meinongian (not that *van Inwagen* begged the question: he has independent arguments against nonexistents; the question would be begged in the current dialectical context, by putting forth that point in isolation).

Secondly, van Inwagen puts at centre stage the "identity of being and existence". This is the basic issue. The reason why "There are things that do not exist" would be analytically false, albeit (allegedly) not self-contradictory in an immediately showy way as in "There are things such that there are no such things", is that, well, there is an "is" in "there is" (sorry for the pun). For a thing to have being is for there to *be* such a thing! If there *are* such things, how can those things fail to have *being*, that is to say, existence?

It is worth noting that even some non-Parmenidean philosophers, and indeed some of the neo-Meinongians we are about to meet in the following Chapters, have felt the pressure of the Argument from Italics. They have, in fact, advocated a distinction between being and existence.[24] They have granted that the expression

[23] Van Inwagen (1998), p. 16. "Wyman" is the name of the second imaginary philosopher, after McX, against whom Quine argues in *On What There Is*. Wyman is at times taken as a Meinongian, but there are several discrepancies between the position actually held by Meinong and the things that Quine, with little fair play, made Wyman to say.

[24] On this point, see e.g., Zalta (1988), pp. 103ff.

"there is" brings with it commitment to the *being* of the objects over which one quantifies. But they have retained the thesis that some objects do not exist by saying that these things have being in some form or other, despite lacking existence. Sometimes, this has been phrased as the claim that things lacking the "full-fledged" form of being we ordinarily call existence, must have an impoverished, or watered-down form of being: the one expressed by the "are" in "There are such things".

I find this intermediate position unpalatable. The non-Parmenidean may simply *accept* the "identity of being and existence", and claim that some things lack *any* form of being-or-existence. Those things do not exist and have no being whatsoever, full stop. What about the Argument from Italics, and the "is" in "there is", then? The answer is that "to be" is ambiguous, but not in a special way, postulated *ad hoc* by some weird ontological theory: just as it is used in the vernacular.

We know that "to be" can be used either absolutely (*simpliciter*, ἁπλῶς, as Aristotle said), or not. If used absolutely, it can certainly be a synonym of "to exist", even though the use, as I said some Chapters ago, is a little marginal and not very frequent in ordinary English. It is perhaps more common as philosophical or theological jargon: "I think therefore I am", or "God is", written on the highway, etc. The same goes for the negative case: Gregor Samsa, Sherlock Holmes and Gandalf *are* not – full stop. In "It is not the case that Sherlock Holmes is" (full stop), "is" is used ἁπλῶς: it means that it is not the case that Sherlock Holmes exists. We may also say "It is not the case that Sherlock Holmes has being". When "to be" is used ἁπλῶς, the Meinongian may concede the "identity of being and existence".

When "to be" is not used ἁπλῶς, it performs the tasks it plays so serviceably together with its mate, the auxiliary verb "to have". It typically helps to form predicates, e.g., as prefixed to adjectives. If the predicates so formed stand for properties, then by concatenating these predicates to noun phrases (and by asserting the result) we can ascribe those properties to the things denoted by the noun phrases. "To be" is not used ἁπλῶς or absolutely when we speak of something's being identical with something; or of something's being affected by something; or in general of something's being such-and-such and so-and-so, that is, having this or that property. *Per se*, for the non-Parmenidean this does not entail an ascription of being ἁπλῶς, that is, existence, to these things: Gandalf is identical with something – with Gandalf. Gandalf is something, he is such-and-such and so-and-so, i.e., he has properties; for instance, Gandalf is a character of *The Lord of the Rings*; is thought of by me, etc. Gandalf, however, does not have being ἁπλῶς or existence, that is: if we check his various features the one of being-or-existing turns out to be missing.

What about that "is" in "there is", then? Isn't that "is" a case of "to be" being used ἁπλῶς, therefore meaning existence? The non-Parmenidean may have a story to tell as to why it is not so. When not used to express existence, the verb "to be" performs its good task of helping to express other things – in "there is" as well. That there is an "is" in "there is" should not lead us to conclude that, in *all* cases, we ascribe being ἁπλῶς, being in the absolute sense or existence, to the things we quantify over.

First, quantificational devices have very different forms in natural languages; in lots of them, the verb "to be", or its counterparts in other languages, don't show up.

English uses "some" or "for some", where the verb "to be" does not appear, for the same purposes as "there is". The German often uses "*es gibt*" to express what we express in English by "there is"; but we would hardly conclude that, then, the Germans ascribe *given*, or *being given*, to anything they quantify on, whatever "given" means in the context. In French one typically says "*il y a*" for "there is". Here the French for "to be", "être", again does not show up. French mostly uses the verb "to have", "avoir", not the verb "to be", "être". Again, we wouldn't claim that the Frenchmen are ascribing *having*, *avoir* ἁπλῶς (?) to things, just because they quantify on them by using the expression "il y a".

Next, expressions like "there is", "for some", "il y a", "es gibt", "c'è", etc., are often used as *locative* constructions. Their proper task is to present the relevant objects, to introduce them in discourse, or to locate them in a wider context. Because of this, they are often accompanied by locational restrictions, which may be either explicit or implicit. Again, this is connected to the phenomenon of restricted quantification: "There are two trucks here (in this garage), there are others down there"; "There's a girl waiting in the car"; "There was a guy at the door this morning, looking for you"; "There's some beer (in the fridge)". Locational restrictions, on the contrary, are not that good with "exists". They are occasionally acceptable, but often get close to ungrammaticality: "Two trucks exist here (in this garage), others exist down there"; "A girl exists waiting in the car"; "A guy existed at the door this morning, looking for you"; "Some beer exists in the fridge".[25]

Such evidence has led the linguist and philosopher Moltmann to the following conclusion on how differently *there is-* and *exist-* sentences work in natural language:

> We can thus conclude that *exist* applies to a subclass of entities that can be in the domain of *there*-sentences, excluding past and metaphysically possible (but not actual) objects, events, as well as intentional objects [. . .]. The general function of *there*-sentences appears to be to locate entities within either a larger domain of beings or a domain that is explicitly or implicitly restricted, spatially, temporally, or otherwise, a function that seems to be reflected in the appearance of the locative *there*.[26]

It is not even to be ruled out that "there is", in many if not most cases, *does* encode or entail being ἁπλῶς, that is, existence. This happens when quantification is explicitly or implicitly restricted to (some of the) existent things, or when the context makes the existential commitment clear. The guy of the highway could have written "There is a God" instead of "God is" over there, still clearly meaning that God exists. In such a case, we could easily substitute "is" with "exists", also leaving the "there" there (sorry again), and preserve the intuitive content of the claim: "There exists a God". One more time, the real issue is whether this is so in all cases – and it seems not: there are lots of mythical animals, such as flying

[25] As pointed out in Moltmann (2009), locational restrictions are acceptable in the case of mass nouns or bare plurals – things work much better here: "Elephants exist both in Africa and in Asia"; "With such massive exploitation, soon gold will no longer exist in South Africa".

[26] Moltmann (2009), Section 2.3.

horses and chimeras, mentioned in ancient Greeks' folklore, but these mythical animals do not exist, i.e., they lack being ἁπλῶς, or existence.

Now back to van Inwagen's story. Its being funny may be based on the choice of its example – as was the case with other arguments considered above, concerning blue buttercups or heads in a flock. I have claimed that by asserting such things as "Socrates is sleepy", we ascribe a property to Socrates; we are not ascribing being ἁπλῶς, being-or-existence, to Socrates just because an "is" appears in "is sleepy". However, ascribing some properties to Socrates can amount to ascribing existence to him, by entailment. Some properties, like those of being a blue buttercup, or of being sleepy, etc., apparently entail existence, i.e., entail that what has those properties also has the (full-fledged, non-blanket) property of existing.

An ordinary book one can find in a library or bookstore (a concrete copy, made of printed paper) is a material object, endowed with causal features, occupying space, thereby existing.[27] When one talks of a book in a normal setting, one is implicitly interpreted as talking, by such entailment, of an existing book. Now if somebody says that there is a passage of a certain book in the library, in which... etc., context leads me to assume that talk is existentially loaded here. If something is a passage of a book, it exists as part of the book. For that solid book exists. If someone tells me that there is such a passage in a certain book by Meinong which I can find in the library, context legitimates me to assume that we are talking of existing objects: if something is a book – again, in the sense of a particular copy, just as the copy of van Inwagen's *Ontology, Identity and Modality* that currently sits on my desk – then that thing exists: it is possible to causally interact with the book, touch it, read it, throw it on somebody's head. One can go to the library, grab the book, and search for the passage. What makes the story funny is that Wyman betrays this legitimate contextual expectation with a nonexistent book, in the end unloading the existential commitment from his talk. We have, again, a case of "disavowed expectation" that makes for a well-known and studied comical effect.

That every time we quantify on something we commit ourselves, if implicitly, to its being-or-existence, is again what the Meinongian does not concede. Some more examples:

> There is something which has been sought by many, namely the site of Atlantis, but it does not exist.
>
> I thought of something I would like to give you as a Christmas gift, but I couldn't buy it for you because it doesn't exist.
>
> Some of the things you're talking about don't exist.
>
> Some of the gods are tempestuous, but of course no gods exist.[28]

[27] I speak of books just to pick up van Inwagen's example. In fact, "book" raises the difficulty that it can be used to refer to an abstract object ("Deaver's book was a major hit"), or to a concrete copy ("Bring me Deaver's book from my bedside table, please"). From now on, in this Section I'll talk only of books as *concreta*.

[28] The first example comes from Wolstertorff (1961); the second from Priest (2005); the last two from McGinn (2000).

And in many other cases in which the context clarifies that we are talking about purely fictional, envisaged, dreamed, or mythical things, no one would be induced to the misleading inference from "there is" (or "some", or "for some", etc.) to "exists". If I tell you that there are elves from Lothlorien taller than Gandalf, you will probably assume that said elves, just as Gandalf, do not exist – which means: we cannot start a travel towards a physical place that is part of this world as other places like Aberdeen or Australia are, hoping to meet them and shake hands with them.

Now for some general remarks on analyticity and supposed violations thereof. Analyticity is a controversial concept, as is well known. No matter how one sets up the notion, though, if "Everything exists" were an analytic truth, we should expect the statement that this or that thing does not exist to be manifestly meaningless and unintelligible or, at the very least, weird. We should expect "nonexistent thing" to be immediately recognized as an expression that no object can satisfy, like "iron wood" or "married bachelor".

"Everything exists" does not look like an analytic truth in this sense. Laymen understand "thing that does not exist" or "nonexistent thing" quite well, and have several things to which the expression can stick: Gandalf, Superman, etc. Laymen with a robust sense of reality, i.e., of existence, will maintain with conviction that the Cervino mountain exists, but that no golden mountains exist; that horses exist, but not winged horses; that Uma Thurman exists, but Sherlock Holmes does not.[29] The non-Parmenidean's terminology matches with the layman's underlying intuitions: "thing", or "object", signifies "bearer of properties"; something can be a property-bearer despite not existing.

The (neo-)Meinongian theories we are to discuss in the following Chapters try to show that the denial of Parmenideanism, that is, the claim that something does not exist, is ontologically, epistemically, and semantically coherent. These theories may of course fail – that is true of most, if not all, theories. If this happens, it might prove interesting to show that the failure depends effectively on the anti-Parmenidean assumption. At this stage of the discussion, though (that is, once we have witnessed some troubles affecting the received view, and how it does not represent "common sense", but at most the philosophers' common sense), denying the Meinongian the chance of defending her position on the basis of a presumed analyticity of the thesis she is negating is, I suspect, unfair.

It is reasonable to suppose that the supporter of *any* theory facing a charge of analytical falsehood may defend herself only by developing her theory, and then

[29] Now one may retort: haven't you claimed that properties like being a mountain, or a horse, or a (concrete copy of a) book, entail existence (for if something is a mountain or a horse, then it is a material object, physically located, etc. etc.)? Now you are talking of existent as well as nonexistent mountains and horses. Where did the existence-entailment go? As we shall see in the following Chapters, this is a serious point, often underestimated by (neo-)Meinongians. We have two options: either deny the existence-entailment for such properties; or accept it, and explain our talk of nonexistent mountains and horses differently. I favor the second option, and shall tell a story on why I do. But (neo-)Meinongians have often favored the first.

having the results evaluated from a holistic viewpoint of theoretical costs and benefits. Consider Platonism in the philosophy of mathematics. It could be rejected in one single move: it would be enough to state that, clearly, it is analytic that everything is a physical thing, that is, there is no such incorporeal stuff as numbers and sets *as* conceived by the Platonist. David Lewis' modal realism, that is, his claim that possible worlds are non-actual entities of a kind with the actual world, and inhabited by non-actual individuals, *possibilia* as real and existent as we are, may be swiftly rejected by stating: it is analytic that everything is actual; thus, Lewis' ontology is analytically false (some have tried such a fast rejection).[30] As it happens, though, mathematical Platonism and modal realism are respectable theories on the philosophical market, because they have been *developed*. They may be false, as many philosophers believe; and even necessarily so, because of the modal status of their key claims; but if they are, that is not because such key claims are "analytic falsehoods".

People often quote Augustin's maxim about time, that if no one asked him what time is, then he knew it, but if somebody asked, then he did not know how to explain it. Time, it is often added then, is a typical example of a philosophical concept. Similarly, we may say that treating theoretically the philosophical notion of existence is quite complicated, and this is why the Parmenidean position, as well as its opponent, have been around in philosophy for a long time. But if the layman is not asked what existence is, he will be able to use "there is" and "exists" in a wholly adequate way in most circumstances – and not always interchangeably.

4.5 "All the Beer Is in the Fridge": Contextual Restrictions

Meinong explained what he called the "prejudice in favour of the actual" (and he meant: of the existent) on the basis of our "lively interest in reality which is part of our nature", and which leads to the "exaggeration which finds the non-real a mere nothing".[31] This is very a plausible explanation, also accounting for the aforementioned phenomena of contextual restrictions of quantification.

According to Meinong, "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".[32] This smaller totality, however, is the set of things that matter more in our lives. According to the gloss to "exists" I submitted at the beginning of this Chapter, these are the things with which we can causally interact. Consequently, they are in many ways very dear to us, or very much feared by us. When we say "there is", or "for some", we usually mean to deal only with things that exist.

[30] For example, Richards (1975), Haack (1979), and Lycan (1979). We will get back to such notions as possible world and *possibile* later on.

[31] Meinong (1904), p. 79.

[32] Ibid.

Rather, we often contextually refer only to some of the things that exist. Or rather, we often refer only to some of the things that exist now (which means: the quantifiers of English are, typically, existentially loaded, restricted, and presentist). Such default restrictions, though, can be abandoned: we say that some dragons from *Harry Potter* really look sinister, or that some of the cities Kafka described are purely imaginary; no one would consider us committed to the existence of these things.

The medieval logicians, unaffected by the Parmenidean backfire in modern day post-Fregean logic, had a conception of quantification that took these contextual domain expansions as natural. In the standard doctrine of the *suppositio terminorum*, "Some S is P" is by default true if and only if something that is actually now S is P. But the ordinary *suppositio* of a term can, in intensional contexts (those introduced by expressions like "it is possible", "necessarily", etc., and by verbal tenses) also be expanded to possible, past or future objects not currently or actually existing: if I say "Some S has been P", this holds if and only if something that is or has been S, is or has been P, even though that something does not exist now ("Some monks have been knights"). If I say "Some S can be P" this holds just in case something that is or could be S is or could be P, even though that something is merely possible ("A golden mountain can be as large as Mount Ventoux").[33]

And the *suppositio* can be further expanded in intentional contexts of belief, fantasy, conjecture, hallucination, that are introduced by expressions like "believes", "fears", "hopes", etc. In these settings, it can be extended to objects that are not only actually or currently nonexistent, but also impossible. For example, my fellow countryman Paolo Veneto writes in his *Logica Magna:*

> Although the significatum of the term "chimera" does not and could not exist in reality, still the term "chimera" supposits for something in the proposition "A chimera is thought of", since it supposits for a chimera.[34]

For somebody living in the Middle Ages, a chimera is a (metaphysically) impossible object, as it collects in itself incompatible essences. For the medieval people then, in the appropriate contexts it is possible to refer to, and quantify on, objects that do not exist (anymore, yet), merely possible objects, and even impossible ones.[35] Let us listen to what Colin McGinn more recently concluded from these phenomena:

> If I speak of the object of your search as the fountain of youth, there is no implication of existence here. It is the same with "some": most of the time the [existential] implicature is in force, since generally we mean to be speaking of existent things, and this is common knowledge between us; but the general implicature can in principle be cancelled, and them "some" shows its true semantic colours as a device of pure quantification, with no existential entailments. [. . .] If you want to get existence semantically into the picture you have to say so. This is why it is not pleonastic to say "some tame tigers exist", and not contradictory

[33] This is an example from Buridan, reported by Priest (2007).

[34] Paolo Veneto, *Logica Magna*, p. 13.

[35] See Ashworth (1977), Read (2001), and Priest (2005), Section 3.7.

> to say "some superheroes do not exist" In other words, the linguistic appearances are a true guide to semantic reality: "some" does not in fact contain "exist", implicitly or explicitly, which is just how it appears. Accordingly, we need "exists" in the language in addition to "some", which is exactly what we find.[36]

Parmenideans, it was said, recognize phenomena of contextual restrictions of quantification. Many philosophical theories that would be considered victims of the "prejudice in favour of existence" by Meinong grant that, in our everyday talk, quantification is often restricted, in a way that is tacit and context-determined, to small subgroups of the things that exist (thus, according to the victims of the prejudice, of things *simpliciter*). The aforementioned Lewisian example was "All the beer is in the fridge". We don't need to add that we are referring only to the beer in the house for communication to be successful: this can be inferred from the context. We agree that if someone says "In Australia, swans are black", one is saying something true; for one means to exclude from the domain white imported swans and their descendants, and also painted swans, pseudo-swans, and so on. Surely one doesn't need to explicitly declare such exclusion: we contextually understand it. Thus, "while our modifiers tend to impose restrictions on quantifiers [. . .] a lot is left up to the pragmatic rule that what is said should be interpreted so as to be sensible. If that means adding extra tacit restrictions, or waiving some of the restrictions imposed by our modifiers, then – within limits – so be it".[37]

Some mereological theories popular in ontology admit a so-called Principle of Unrestricted (Mereological) Composition. The Principle can be formulated, for instance, by saying that, given any two things x and y, we automatically have a thing z that is the "mereological sum" of x and y, that is, whose parts are exactly the parts of x and the parts of y. This commits the mereologist subscribing to the Principle to bizarre objects, like the thing whose parts are the upper half of the Eiffel Tower I see from my balcony, the poster of Venice in the room nearby, and the keyboard of the laptop on which I am typing.

Now the mereologist explains away the peculiarity of such scattered, disconnected objects she is committed to by saying that, typically, we don't quantify on them, for they are cognitively and practically irrelevant: nobody cares about them, they don't matter in our life. In our everyday talk, we tend to restrict our quantifiers to *interesting* things, things useful for our purposes. Those are the things that count for us – we count on them – we quantify on them – for they matter in our life. Again from Lewis:

> We are happy enough with mereological sums of things that contrast with their surroundings more than they do with one another; and that are adjacent, stick together, and act jointly. [. . .] We have no name for the mereological sum of the right half of my left shoe plus the Moon plus the sum of all Her Majesty's ear-rings, except for the long and clumsy name I just gave it [. . .]. It is very sensible to ignore such a thing in our everyday thought and language. But ignoring it won't make it go away.[38]

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[36] McGinn (2000), pp. 35–36. See also Salmon (1987), pp. 56–57.

[37] Lewis (1986), p. 6.

[38] Ibid, pp. 211–213.

We tend to focus, in Austin's memorable words, on "moderate-sized specimens of dry goods", not paying too much attention to terribly small, terribly large, intermittent, too short-lived, or scattered things; and we tend to contextually restrict our quantification accordingly. An analogous remark holds for nonexistent objects: focused on the "lively interest in reality which is part of our nature", we can ignore them in the majority of cases in which we are absorbed in our daily matters, and are thus interested in those things that exist, against which we can stumble, and that can causally influence our life. But ignoring the things that do not exist won't make them go away. Some of them interest us enough that we have short and easy names for them: "Frodo", "Gandalf", "Sherlock Holmes", for example (it is a different issue, *how* can we do what we do in these cases, that is, pin a name on nonexistent things with which we have no causal interaction: this is a problem we shall discuss at length in the following).

4.6 *Concreta*, *Abstracta*, Modes of Existence

As the final task of this Chapter, it is time to pick up a point flagged at its beginning: a gloss of existence as the having of causal powers, or disposition thereof, etc., albeit intuitively plausible, may be partial, not to say inaccurate and misleading. How so?

People use the existence predicate, not only to qualify things we would *prima facie* label as *concrete*, but also things we would *prima facie* label as *abstract*. People don't just claim that Obama exists, or that horses exist, but also that integers exist. Mathematicians talk about existence, or existence-and-uniqueness, proofs in their discipline; they speak about the existence of functions such that..., etc. But integers and functions are not the right kind of thing to have causal powers, not to speak about their being physically located. When a set theorist accepts some axiom asserting the existence of some set of large cardinality within a pure theory of sets, she is certainly not accepting that that set can be causally interacted with, or is located somewhere in the physical world. A characterization of existence in terms of causal interactions is either a partial one, or, if posited as exhaustive, is refuted by how people, to begin with mathematicians, talk.

The non-Parmenidean, though, has various options here. One is to dispute the intuitive distinction between abstract and concrete objects (whatever it may amount to), or to explain it away. Another option is to accept the intuitive distinction and introduce two modes of existence, one for *abstracta* and one for *concreta*. This was the position of Meinong himself, although this may not be terminologically accurate as a way to phrase his ontology (which is by the way quite complex, and developed through different stages in different times).[39] For he did not speak in terms of abstract and concrete things. However, it seems to me that the Meinongian

[39] For a classic introduction to Meinong's thought, see Grossmann (1974).

distinction between *real* and *ideal* objects (the latter including things like numbers and geometrical figures, and perhaps things like his *objectives*, which correspond to what we nowadays call states of affairs, or propositions) may be fairly, albeit approximately, translated into the current intuitive distinction between concrete and abstract things.

For Meinong, then, there are two modes of being: existence properly so called (*Existenz*) and subsistence (*Bestand*). Things like Socrates, Gandalf, or Obama may (concretely) exist or not, whereas things like sets and functions may (exist the sense of) subsist or not.[40] Meinongian existence for *concreta* amounts to something like the having of causal powers and/or physical location. Existence-as-subsistence may be something like consistency, or coherence of the involved notion. It is in this sense that the mathematician may claim that the set of natural numbers and the operation of division by seven exist, whereas the Russell set of all non-self-membered sets, or division by zero, do not.[41] The gloss of existence as the having of causal powers and/or physical location, then, is an incomplete gloss: that is what to *concretely* exist consists in.

Another option for the non-Parmenidean is to stick to the idea that (non-Parmenidean) being-or-existence is univocal. One then declares that, just like Gandalf or Holmes, also abstract objects do not exist and have no mode of being-or-existence whatsoever. Just like purely fictional objects, also sets, numbers, and functions are nowhere to be found in the physical world, and are devoid of causal powers. But the gloss of existence as the having of causal powers and/or physical location is now taken as exhaustive. Then objects commonly taken as abstract are nonexistents, full stop.

Each option has its pros and cons, but I shall postpone a discussion of them. They will be dealt with in the following parts of the book, especially in the final Chapter, where I am to address the abstract/concrete distinction directly. Neo-Meinongian philosophers have displayed different attitudes towards the status of paradigmatic *abstracta* and the non-exhaustiveness of existence as the having of causal powers and/or physical location. We therefore need to have a closer look at their theories, before turning back to the problems just mentioned.

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[40] Actually, it is even controversial whether Meinong admitted objects that have *no* mode of being at all, or rather objects that exist, objects that subsist, and object that lack both existence and subsistence but have some third mode of being. A good discussion of the issue is in Zalta (1988), pp. 135ff. I favour the first option, embraced also by Lambert (1983), pp. 13–14; but for theoretical reasons – not as the unique exegetically right way to read Meinong's doctrine.

[41] "[Abstract objects] do indeed subsist, but [. . .] do not by any means exist [. . .]. If I say, 'it is true that the antipodes exist,' truth is ascribed not to the antipodes, but to the Objective, 'that the antipodes exist.' But this existence of the antipodes is a fact which, as everyone sees immediately, can very well have a subsistent status, but cannot be still another existent entity. [. . .] The form of being [*Sein*] with which mathematics as such is occupied is never existence [*Existenz*]. In this respect, mathematics never transcends subsistence [*Bestand*]." (Meinong 1904, pp. 79–80). Interpreting existence-as-subsistence in this way may help to explain why, for Meinong, all the objects that *existieren* also *bestehen*, whereas the converse does not hold. In order to be a concretely existing object one needs to be consistent to begin with, or to instantiate coherent, exemplifiable packages of properties.

Chapter 5
Naïve Meinongianism

The previous Chapters may have shown that Meinongianism is worth the further investigation to be pursued from now on. I have to warn, though, that this Chapter is partly a false start. The theory described here can be labeled "naïve Meinongianism" and, as we shall see, it ends up suffering from many a problem (e.g., it is inconsistent). We shall also see, however, that this naïve theory has so promising applications that trying to recover (some of) the insights it is based on is a worthy exercise.

The situation is similar to that of set theory, whose story is well known to logicians and philosophers. It starts with a theory labeled (*ex post*) as naïve, formulated by Cantor and picked up by Frege and Russell in their logicist attempt at establishing the foundations of mathematics. Naïve set theory, as Frege bitterly learned, is inconsistent: it allows the derivation of various paradoxes, like Russell's, Cantor's, and Burali-Forti's. The paradoxes originate from what is commonly known as the (Unrestricted) Principle of Comprehension or Abstraction for sets: from the intuitive idea that for any condition or property, there is a set whose members are precisely those objects that satisfy the condition or property. Set theory being so effective, many have no wish to leave Cantor's paradise. Several alternative theories are created in an effort to save as much as possible of the Cantorian construction, without incurring in inconsistencies: the Zermelo-Fraenkel (ZF) theory, for instance, or the theories of sets and classes by von Neumann, Bernays, and Gödel. All approaches have to limit in some way or other the Principle of Comprehension; and the problem is to find as painless a limitation as possible, and to adequately justify it.

Similarly, the naïve Meinongian theory we will now examine is based on an intuitive Unrestricted Comprehension Principle for objects. This very principle is deeply problematic. The neo-Meinongian theories to be explored from the next Chapter onwards represent efforts to save the basic Meinongian ideas by limiting the principle, so to avoid its unwelcome consequences. Again, the issue is to provide restricted principles that guarantee as many goods as possible, while adequately justifying the adopted restrictions, so that the new theories are not too much worse off than their naïve, inconsistent mate.

5.1 Principles of Independence and Comprehension

One difference between naïve set theory and the naïve *object theory* I shall present now is: while the former has certainly been formulated and/or subscribed by some (Frege, for example), we don't know to whom can the latter be credited. It is likely that Russell attributed it to Meinong. However, it is also doubtful that Meinong fully supported it. The naïve Meinongianism criticized by Russell (and by many after him, notably Quine) might in part be a caricature of Meinong's position.

What Meinong considers paramount to his *Gegenstandstheorie* is the Principle of Independence we have already touched upon. You may recall that version of Parmenideanism called *serious actualism*, consisting in the thesis that the having of whatever property entails existence. In direct opposition to serious actualism, the Meinongian Principle of Independence states that an object's *Sein*, its existential status, is independent from its *Sosein*, its having properties.[1] Which properties? This is a crucial problem. Meinong's own words:

> Now it would accord very well with the aforementioned prejudice in favour of existence to hold that we may speak of a *Sosein* only if a *Sein* is presupposed. There would, indeed, be little sense in calling a house large or small, a region fertile or unfertile, before one knew that the house or the land does exist, has existed, or will exist. [. . .] None of this alters the fact that the *Sosein* of an Object is not affected by its *Nichtsein*. The fact is sufficiently important to be explicitly formulated as the principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*. The area of applicability of this principle is best illustrated by consideration of the following circumstance: the principle applies, not only to Objects which do not exist in fact, but also to Objects which could not exist because they are impossible. Not only is the much heralded gold mountain made of gold, but the round square is as surely round as it is square.[2]

The idea suggested, but not explicitly stated, by Meinong seems to be that objects are *characterized* by certain properties and/or conditions, independently from whether they exist or not. Specifically, (a) whatever the properties or conditions characterizing them are, they (b) really have these features (we should take note of both points, to which we shall get back repeatedly: *whatever* property; *really* having it). Keeping the analogy with naïve set theory, we can have our Unrestricted Comprehension Principle for objects:

(UCP) For any condition $\alpha[x]$ with free variable x, some object exactly satisfies $\alpha[x]$.[3]

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[1] See Chisholm (1972, 1977), Lambert (1983). The Principle of Independence is connected by Meinong to the Principle of the *Aussersein*, or "principle of the indifference of pure Objects to being" (Meinong 1904, p. 86): being and non-being are not part of the *Sosein* of the thing.

[2] Meinong (1904), p. 82.

[3] See Parsons (1979b, 1980). Analogously, an Unrestricted Comprehension Principle for naïve set theory is expressed by saying: For any condition $\alpha[x]$ with free variable x, there is a set y of precisely the things that satisfy $\alpha[x]$: $\exists y \forall x(x \in y \leftrightarrow \alpha[x])$.

By "condition" we mean a formula expressing a "describable set of properties"[4] in the theory's language. From the (UCP) we quickly get $\Sigma x\alpha[x]$, for any condition $\alpha[x]$.[5] In fact, Russell's famous critiques to Meinong, to be discussed soon, were phrased in terms of definite descriptions. The Comprehension Principle may in such a context be stated as:

(UCP_d) Any definite description $\iota x\alpha[x]$ designates exactly one object that satisfies the description,

where "ι" is a descriptor carrying out the role of the ordinary English determinative article: "ιx" reads "the (unique) x such that…". Which gives us the schema $\alpha[\iota x\alpha[x]]$, that is: the object x satisfying condition $\alpha[x]$ is α: the golden mountain, that is, the object that satisfies the condition "x is a golden mountain", is a mountain and is made of gold. The uniqueness result can be obtained by adding to the theory with (UCP) a version of Leibniz's Law, such as: x and y are the same object if and only if they have exactly the same properties.

The idea behind the Comprehension Principle is simple (and because of this, deceivingly appealing). We specify an object by means of a bundle of properties or features – for instance: *is a detective of the Victorian age, lives in Baker Street 221b, is Moriarty's main adversary, possesses unusual observational and deductive abilities*, etc. Suppose $\alpha[x]$ is the conjunction of the corresponding predicates. Then, according to the (UCP) (+ Leibniz's Law), exactly one object is exhaustively characterized by $\alpha[x]$. Call the object thus characterized Sherlock Holmes, h. Then Sherlock Holmes has precisely the properties that characterize him: $\alpha[h]$.

A *raison d'être* for the Principle is that it explains "how we can know some of the things we do about non-existent objects: we know that objects characterized in certain ways have those properties, precisely because they *are* characterized in that way".[6] One of the main motivations adduced by Meinong in favor of his theory was a certain conception of intentionality: the feature, as we know, that some thoughts have, of being directed towards an object or content. So begins the *Gegenstandstheorie*:

> That knowing is impossible without something being known, and more generally, that judgments and ideas or presentations are impossible without being judgments about and presentations of something, is revealed to be self-evident by a quite elementary examination of these experiences.[7]

We can represent to ourselves things that lack existence, like Sherlock Holmes, Apollo, or Gandalf. And we represent them on the basis of their features and properties: the ancients imagined Apollo as the sun god, driving a flying chariot, etc. We imagine Sherlock Holmes, on the basis of Conan Doyle's stories, as a detective of the Victorian age, living in Baker Street 221b, who is Moriarty's main

[4] Zalta (1983), p. 6.

[5] The principle can be formulated in a second order formal language, with predicative variables boundable by quantifiers. If α is any condition on properties (not including free occurrences of y), the (UCP) is phrased as $\exists y\forall P(Py \leftrightarrow \alpha)$.

[6] Priest (2005), pp. vii–viii.

[7] Meinong (1904), p. 76.

adversary, with unusual observational and deductive abilities, etc. The naïve intuition is that these things should, in *some* sense, possess the properties characterizing them and in terms of which we represent them – otherwise, how could we know what we are thinking and talking about? If something exists, we can in principle causally interact with it and be perceptually acquainted with many of its features. But if the thing does not exist, then we need something like the Comprehension Principle.[8]

To be sure, we might not know precisely what kind of thing we talk and think about, i.e., the metaphysical status of these objects. Such status is controversial; philosophers debate on it, and write books like the one you are reading. The insight is that, while talking of the Victorian age detective living in Baker Street 221b, with great observational and deductive abilities, and who is Moriarty's main adversary, etc., I intend to refer to Sherlock Holmes, and I have the strong intuition that I succeed in doing what I intend to do. I am also persuaded that I am talking of the same character Doyle described in his works, and that you can do the same. You and I can even discuss and disagree on whether Sherlock Holmes has certain features or not, for example, whether he is the most famous detective in the world or not (I'm sure he is!); we have the clear intuition of constantly referring to *that* thing.

Besides, it seems that we can imagine, make things up, tell stories, etc., about things that have the most bizarre bundles of properties: impossible stories in which I wear a t-shirt with the image of a square circle, or stories of mathematical fantasiy depicting a Mad Mathematician proving the negation of Fermat's Last Theorem ($x^n + y^n = z^n$ has no solutions in positive integers when $n > 2$) – a proof that, given Andrew Wiles' result, would be actually and necessarily a nonexistent object. This seems to support the idea at the basis of the (UCP): any condition $\alpha[x]$ that incorporates and expresses a bundle of properties, however bizarre, should characterize some object.

We shall later see in detail to what extent this package of intuitions is misleading: if we don't put some restriction (a) on the *properties* at issue, and/or (b) on the *way* in which objects can have them, we get into trouble – as Russell promptly noticed. To begin with, though, let us have a look at the numerous attractive results accomplished by the naïve Meinongian theory.

5.2 Naïve, but Effective: The (UCP) at Work

5.2.1 Solving the Paradox of Non-Being

It is time to get back to the paradox of non-being. Let us repeat it one last time:

(P1) To deny the existence of something, one refers to that thing;
(P2) But if one refers to something, then that thing has to exist;

[8] Notice that an analogous line of thought may also apply for a Parmenidean philosopher accepting existing but abstract objects, like functions or concepts: we cannot kick a concept or touch a function; it is not via such empirical routes that we know what we know of those objects.

Thus,

(C) To deny the existence of something, that thing has to exist.

We know how mainstream Parmenidean strategies take issue with (P1), and the problems they face. The Meinongian rejects (P2) or, equivalently, denies Parmenides' Principle (PP): it is possible to refer to things that do not exist, think and talk about them.

One reason is that it seemingly happens, as we have abundantly seen. We think about Sherlock Holmes and Socrates, we talk about Gandalf and George Washington, but these things do not exist – some have never existed at all, some do not exist anymore. One can deny the existence of something by referring to it, without presupposing that it exists. Meinong says: "any particular thing that isn't real must at least be capable of serving as the Object for those judgments which grasp its *Nicthsein*"; and "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".[9]

Not only, then, negative existential sentences can be true, but also, a Meinongian ontology and semantics can assign them the proper truth values while preserving their grammatical form, without resorting, for instance, to any Russellian-Quinean paraphrase. Singular negative existentials, the most resilient to paraphrasing strategies, are generally what they appear to be: subject-predicate singular sentences in which a property is denied to an individual. "Hamlet does not exist" says that the individual designated by the name "Hamlet", that is, Hamlet, lacks the property of existence. In Kit Fine's words:

> Is "Hamlet" a proper name and, if so, to what does it refer? The correct answers are: Yes, it refers to Hamlet. [...] Suppose I ask: What proposition is expressed by the sentence "Hamlet does not exist"? The correct answer, in my opinion, is that it is the *genuinely singular* proposition to the effect that Hamlet has the property of not existing.[10]

Given the gloss to "(concretely) exists" advanced in the previous Chapter, this means that Hamlet lacks causal powers and/or physical location. You cannot meet him as you meet the cashier of your supermarket, or handshake with him like you do with your manager. However, you can *refer* to him:

> Meinong's proposal is that referring is intentional. Unlike the verb "hit", where if it is true that John hit Jim, Jim must exist, John can refer to Jim even though Jim does not exist. "Refer", then, is like "worship", "assume", "postulate": the object of the verb need not exist.[11]

[9] Meinong (1904), pp. 82 and 84.

[10] Fine (1982), p. 100.

[11] Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), p. 176.

5.2.2 *Fictional Things*

One of the main motivations for the Meinongian view derives from fictional objects, that is, objects mentioned and described in fantasy stories, novels, fictional narrations, operas, tales, and so on. Many philosophers include in this domain also mythical objects, i.e., objects mentioned and described in myths and legends (like Atlantis, or Troy, or Nessie of Loch Ness), or in false religions (like Buddha, Zeus, Thor, Jahweh, Allah, Shiva – I guess these cannot *all* be the True God, though one of them may be), though whether these things should properly be taken as having the same status as typical fictional objects is controversial.[12]

The central concept of fiction is likely to be that of *representation*, a slippery notion we shall talk of at length in the following Chapters. In fact, we are inclined to qualify a work of art as "fictional" to the extent to which it is representational: stories, narrations, fairy tales, come to our minds first; also movies and plays intuitively count as representational, whereas sculptures and paintings may or may not be. The interesting ontological questions arise when we have representation, for then the issue is whether *something* is represented, and what sort of thing it is. Fictional objects in this sense, as I have hinted at in the Preface, may well exist or have existed, being imported from the actual, historical world: Napoleon in *War and Peace*, Virgil in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Things like Holmes, Gandalf, and Mr. Pickwick, on the other hand, count as characteristic purely fictional objects. I shall now focus mainly on the latter, although non-purely fictional things will get some attention in due course. Within our Great Debate on the Meaning of Existence, these things deserve a long, autonomous discussion. On the one hand, the maintainers of the received view of existence have concentrated their efforts on them: there is a vast literature on fictional entities, the semantics and ontology of fiction, with competing sophisticated theories on the market.[13] On the other hand, fictional objects have proved to some extent refractory to Parmenidean treatments. The complications affecting the related theories emerge from the epicycles Parmenideans have had to introduce in order to domesticate such things.

[12] I will come back to the topic of mythical objects later on, but never provide a special account for them. Myths are difficult to deal with, for they may differ from known fictions as far as intentions are concerned. Typically a myth, at least in the early phases, is taken seriously, that is, as truthful representation: the Greeks actually believed in Zeus as the chief god. Some philosophers have distinguished the ontology and semantics of myth from that of pure fiction on this basis, whereas others have taken the appeal to intentions as too feeble and shaky a ground to make for a real difference. As we shall see, Kripke has made a case to the effect that we could never *discover* that Holmes exists or has existed. But Zeus or Thor or Allah or Buddha or Jahweh make for less straightforward cases (ask the respective believers), Troy or Nessie, even less. The reason I am not dealing with these issues more thoroughly is that they border to complex questions of epistemology – questions I am not qualified enough to address.

[13] Besides the aforementioned Sainsbury (2010), see Voltolini (2006), providing both a thorough survey and an original treatment. Voltolini has also edited a special issue of *Dialectica* (57, year 2003), entirely dedicated to these themes.

The starting point is – what else? – ordinary talk and the intuitions deposited in it: fictional things like Gandalf and Holmes render certain statements true, despite apparently not existing. "Gandalf is a wizard" and "Holmes is a detective" are singular sentences with full-fledged proper names in subject position. They also sound as if there is some truth in them; so more so for things like "Gandalf is a literary character", or "Holmes is an epitome of the Victorian age".

But our ordinary thinking and talking of such objects also displays *prima facie* incompatible intuitions. We claim, on the one hand, that Sherlock Holmes does not exist, its purely fictional status consisting in this; but on the other hand, we also claim that there is such a fictional character as Sherlock Holmes (no fast-and-ready distinction between "there is" and "exists" is allowed here, if we're playing the Parmenideans). We want to take the proposition that Holmes is a detective as in some sense true, and we appreciate its difference in truth value with the proposition that Holmes is a teddy bear. But when asked why Holmes cannot then help the police to solve crimes, we are likely to admit that, well, he is a detective but a fictional one: he cannot do such things. Mainstream theories of fictional objects privilege some of these intuitions and provide straightforward accounts for them. Given the *prima facie* inconsistencies at issue, all theories are then forced to dismiss other intuitions, or to account for them only via complicated paraphrases of the sentences involving them.

Any consistent theory of fictional objects must give up grammatical appearances somewhere: something must be paraphrased away, if not for other reasons, because we make mutually inconsistent claims on fictional things, thus not all the things we say can be literally true. But a good theory of fiction is one that resorts to as few paraphrases of our ordinary talk as possible. I have elsewhere proposed as a methodological maxim that a theory of fictional objects should depart from the literal reading of fictional discourse *only* to the extent that such reading appears to be absurd, blatantly false, or incoherent when taken at face value. This I have called Minimal Revision – a kind of Ockham's razor for theories of fiction: "Do not revise fictional discourse beyond necessity".[14] Another methodological maxim I favour is that, when revisions are needed, competent speakers should be capable of *accepting* the proposed paraphrase of their literal discourse, once the accompanying theoretical explanation of the paraphrase has been spelt out. Intuitions can be massaged, but only to some extent. This I have called the Acceptability Constraint.[15]

[14] See Berto (2011). Of course, it is another story how we can measure the amount of revision required by a certain paraphrase. A systematic procedure that provides a uniform, simple revision for a precisely individuated kind of sentences may not count as massive revisionism, even if sentences of the relevant kind are ubiquitous in fiction.

[15] Ibid. It is easy to see how the Acceptability Constraint may interact with the maxim of Minimal Revision. Suppose taking both sentences of kind A and of kind B literally generates inconsistencies; but rephrasing either kind removes the inconsistencies. We should not rephrase both, for that would go beyond minimality. Suppose that the amount of revision required can be measured as more or less equal in both cases. Then we inquiry on which between the A-paraphrases and the B-paraphrases are more acceptable and intuitively plausible, and let this be our guide in the choice.

Just with so roughly stated methodological constraints in place, the Russell-Quine treatment doesn't work: it demands expressions like "Gandalf" and "Holmes" to be considered as pseudo-names (which they are not), and replaces them with descriptions ("the wizard with the gnarled stick that…"), often coined *ad hoc* ("the *x* that holmesizes"). Furthermore, it makes all the relevant sentences false, while we would want some of them to be true: problems already addressed in Chap. 3.

However, more sophisticated Parmenidean theories are available. To explore them, we need a distinction commonly made in the philosophy of fiction. Some properties are ascribed to fictional objects *within* the narrations, stories, or tales in which they appear, both directly by the authors, and by the consumers when they take up and report the stories' contents: Holmes is a detective, and Gandalf is a wizard; Frodo arrogated to himself the ring at Mount Fate, and Gregor Samsa woke up after a night filled with uneasy dreams the morning he turned into an insect.

But fictional objects are such that we ascribe them also properties that are *external* to the narrations themselves. Readers and critics talk about fictional objects *as* fictional characters, and discuss, e.g., the historical role of a certain fictional personage in the development of a literary tradition, or the circumstances of its introduction in a story, etc. – like when we say that that the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz* symbolizes the dehumanization of the worker in industrialized societies; or that some characters of certain nineteenth century novels are described with a greater attention to the physical details than any other character from any novel from the eighteenth century; or that Holmes inspires the work of many existent detectives; or, as per the example above, that Gandalf is a literary character mentioned in J.R.R. Tolkien's books.

The literature on the ontology and semantics of fiction widely acknowledges this distinction between two varieties of property ascriptions – let us call them *intra-fictional* and *extra-fictional* respectively (because it is not clear whether any property is intrinsically intra- or intrinsically extra- fictional, we had better speak just in terms of intra- and extra-fictional property ascriptions, or of internal and external fictional discourse). It reflects the fact that fictional objects lead a double life. In the words of Kit Fine:

> On the one hand, they have certain properties within the contexts in which they appear; they love and hate, thrive and fail, and live their varied lives. On the other hand, they also relate to the real world; they are created by authors, read by readers, and compared, for better or worse, with one another and with what is real.[16]

As such, the distinction is both rough and vulnerable to counterexamples in peculiar cases.[17] In most occasions, though, it is quite intuitive, if not obvious. Holmes does not have the property of being the main literary character of Doyle's stories *in* those stories: Doyle does not ascribe it to him anywhere in the stories; nor is it entailed by anything Doyle explicitly says. Holmes is not characterized by

[16] Fine (1982), p. 97.

[17] A subtle essay challenging the distinction is Pelletier (2003).

Doyle as a purely literary character, but (if by entailment) as a real and very much existing man. Holmes is likely to be more famous than any real detective, but not in Doyle's stories, where he is not that famous; on the contrary, he prefers a detached anonymity there. *Vice versa*, Holmes possesses in the stories the property of being a detective; in the same way, within the Tolkien saga Gandalf has that of being a wizard, etc.

5.2.2.1 Realist Abstractionism

A popular family of theories can be gathered under the label of *realism* on fictional objects, as it considers those as (existing and) *abstract* objects; one may therefore call it *abstractionism* as well. The family comprises a group of at times quite different theories, developed by such authors as van Inwagen, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Amie Thomasson, Saul Kripke, and others. I will expound this position referring mainly, though not only, to van Inwagen and Thomasson.

We know that van Inwagen is a convinced Parmenidean: one of the fundamental theses in his meta-ontology is that the meaning of being is entirely captured by the quantifier; denying this amounts to having misunderstood that meaning. Van Inwagen substantially accepts the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment (albeit providing for it the soft and wise interpretation we met some Chapters ago). Now, not only we quantify on fictional objects, but also, such quantification can hardly be relieved by systematic paraphrases that avoid reference to these things. We have, thus, commitment to such objects.

Next, realist theories of fictional objects usually maintain that the apparatus of predication and ascription of properties to fictional objects is ambiguous. Extra-fictional ascriptions can typically be taken literally: it is literally true, true in the real world, that Holmes or Gandalf are purely fictional characters, and that (let us suppose so) some characters of certain nineteenth century novels have been introduced with greater attention to physical details than any character from a eighteenth century novel. Intra-fictional ascriptions possess, instead, a special status, to be labeled generically as "fictional" or "fictitious", in that they are not literally true. Realist theories of fiction differ mainly in the way they account for this status.

In Thomasson's theory, fictional objects are abstract artifacts, created by the artistic activities of the authors and storytellers. They are thus artifacts in the same sense as a table or a palm computer, but with a difference: they are abstract – which, in the context, roughly means something like "lacking spatiotemporal address". Intra-fictional ascriptions, like "Holmes is a detective" or "Gandalf the wizard took his gnarled stick" are taken as somehow incomplete, or better, as having parts that remain unspoken in ordinary communication. When we say that Gandalf is a wizard, we usually omit to add (but contextually imply) that only in the story does Gandalf have that property. "Gandalf is a wizard", then, is elliptic for:

(1) According to the story S: Gandalf is a wizard.

"According to the story S" is a sentential operator, S being in this case *The Lord of the Rings*. The truth conditions seem clear at first sight: (1) is true if and only if "Gandalf is a wizard" is a true sentence according to, or "in", the story at issue.[18] Most importantly, "According to the story S" is not factive: "According to the story S: α", α being a given sentence, can be true even though α is false. It is actually true that Gandalf is a purely fictional character created by Tolkien. Only in the context of *The Lord of the Rings*, however, and not in the real world, is it true that Gandalf is a wizard with a long beard. And rightly so: for according to realist theories, Gandalf is an abstract object. Abstract objects, of course, cannot literally be bearded wizards (or detectives, or human beings at that).

Van Inwagen also considers intra-fictional discourse as involving an aspect of pretence. At most, we can say that fictional characters *hold* the properties ascribed to them by internal fictional discourse; or that properties are intra-fictionally *ascribed to* fictional characters, ascription being a three-place relation: property *P* is ascribed to fictional character *x* somewhere in work of fiction *f*.[19]

An analogous though not exactly coincident position has seemingly been maintained by Kripke, in some lectures given at Princeton and at the University of California between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, and in the John Locke Lectures I have mentioned a couple of Chapters ago. According to Colin McGinn and Nathan Salmon, who attended some of those lectures and took notes,[20] Kripke has the following story. An author, for instance Conan Doyle, *pretends*, with no intention to deceive, to refer to someone when he writes his novels, using the name "Sherlock Holmes". The name, as originally introduced and used by Doyle in many phrases of his stories, does not refer to anything. But in so doing, an abstract object is created. "Sherlock Holmes" can then be used in extra-fictional contexts to refer to the literary character created by Doyle: "language allows a grammatical transformation – so Kripke is claimed to have claimed – of a fictional name for a person into a name of a fictional person".[21]

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[18] In fact, such fictional operators work in complex ways, and establishing exactly what is true in, or holds according to, a given story, is no easy task. An excellent article, full of subtleties, on the subject is Lewis (1978). See also Künne (1990) and, for a recent thorough discussion, Proudfoot (2006).

[19] See van Inwagen (2003), p. 146. The *holding* and *being ascribed* relations do not constitute, according to van Inwagen, special kinds of predication such as Ed Zalta's encoding of properties by abstract objects that do not exemplify them (see Zalta (1983): we will come to his notion of *encoding* in the following Chapter). It is not that fictional objects somehow have the properties ascribed to them within fictional works, but do not exemplify them. Internal fictional discourse is seemingly taken by van Inwagen as a kind of pretence (see van Inwagen 2003: 150, fn. 18).

[20] The account reported here has been taken from Salmon (1998) and McGinn (2000).

[21] Salmon (1998), p. 294. Similarly, according to Searle "by pretending to refer to a person [the author] creates a fictional person [. . .]. She does not really refer to a fictional character because there was no such antecently existing character; rather, by pretending to refer to a person she creates a fictional person. Now once that fictional character has been created, we who are standing outside the fictional story can really refer to a fictional person." (Searle 1975, p. 330). See also Schiffer (1996), p. 157, on fictional characters being created by authors that pretend to refer via fictional names.

The main pro of realism consists in its taking many sentences (those belonging to the external discourse) at face value. Realism can afford the ontological commitment entailed by these sentences: it *is* committed to fictional objects, admits them in the domain of quantification, and accounts for the peculiarities of their status (for instance, their being nowhere to be found in the physical world) by drawing on their abstractness.

On the other hand, it seems that realism, being affected by Parmenideanism, faces an obstacle difficult to overcome in negative existentials. A competent adult speaker denies in all seriousness that things like Superman, Holmes, or Cinderella exist. A father can reveal to his son that Superman does not really exist, and in so doing produces an assertion that has no element of pretence. People accept that negative existentials on literary characters can be literally true. They count as discourse external to the fiction, not as intra-fictional ascriptions. In Doyle's stories, Holmes is very much existent. If "Holmes is a fictional character" must be taken, in agreement with the realist theories, as a truth about the real world, then by the same token "Holmes does not exist" should be taken likewise: it is because Holmes is a purely fictional character that his existence is truthfully denied. Realist theories are forced to break this intuitive uniformity: Amie Thomasson admits that negative existentials on fictional characters must be literally false.[22] In a footnote to *Creatures of Fiction*, van Inwagen says that, given his theory, what to do with "Mr. Pickwick does not exist" is "a very complicated question".[23] The Acceptability Constraint is at stake.

Sometimes supporters of realist-abstractionist theories of fiction suggest that true denials of existence for fictional objects should be interpreted as cases of implicitly restricted quantification. What we are claiming is not that there is no such thing as Mr. Pickwick at all, but that Mr. Pickwick is not to be found in the domain of concrete objects, for it's an abstract thing.[24]

The answer may sound unconvincing. Negative existentials in ordinary English are most naturally interpreted as *un*qualified denials. When we use "there is" and "there is not", given the locative role of these expressions mentioned in the previous Chapter, we often have implicitly restricted quantification (if Meinongianism is right, this can be quantification restricted to existents; or anyway, to some of them). If at the zoo of Berlin one says "There are no dolphins", he probably means: there are no dolphins in this zoo. That is: taking into account only things in the zoo, none of them is a dolphin. One doesn't mean that no dolphin exists (anymore), that dolphins are extinct.

But if one says "Dolphins do not exist", one would normally mean exactly (and, luckily, falsely) that dolphins are indeed extinct, that they do not exist *simpliciter*,

[22] See Thomasson (1999), p. 111.

[23] Van Inwagen (1977), p. 308fn.

[24] See Thomasson (1999), p. 112. In Thomasson (2003), she suggests the route of the metalinguistic analysis of "Mr. Pickwick does not exist" along the lines of "'Mr. Pickwick' does not denote" – whose limits we have met a couple of Chapters ago.

not that they are not to be found in a domain of existent things of a specific kind, or located in some specific place.[25] We have also previously seen that in most cases (negative or affirmative) existential sentences cannot even cope with domain restrictions: we cannot sensibly say things like "Obama does not exist in Texas" (save perhaps as an emblematic way of saying that Texas is very much pro Republicans…); or "A man existed at the door this morning, looking for you". Those who deny the existence of Santa or the Big Bad Wolf seem not to have such qualification or restriction in mind.[26]

5.2.2.2 Fictionalism

On the opposite side of realist-abstractionist theories is *fictionalism* on fictional objects. Fictionalism maintains that any fictional discourse essentially involves an element of pretence or make-believe. It therefore promises to free us from any literally true predication involving reference to fictional objects, as well as from ontological commitment to them. For Gregory Currie, the authors of literary and artistic works produce phrases with the intention, shared by their readers, to make-believe the propositions expressed by those phrases.[27] In the powerful, general theory of representation and fiction by Kendall Walton, people play collective games of make-believe. The rules of the games specify that so-and-so must be imagined or represented or simulated.

Very roughly, one should be able to extend to all discourses apparently on fictional things the strategy of the "according to the story" non-factive fictional operator. Things "true inside the game", or "true in a certain story", are not *truths* – not even truths of a special kind. That it is fictionally true that Holmes is a detective means that it is fictional (it is a component of the game of make-believe, and is to be imagined within the game) that Holmes is a detective. In Walton's words, "Propositions that are 'true in a fictional world,' or fictional, are propositions that, in a given social context, are to be imagined as true."[28] Ambitious fictionalism aims at explaining representation in general without objects of representation, thus avoiding commitment to them (i.e., in a Parmenidean setting, to their existence). This is supported by observing that, when Doyle wrote that Holmes lived in Baker

[25] As noticed in Walton (2003). Locational restrictions with bare plurals like "Dolphins do not exist in the Baltic sea" *are* at times good, as we have seen; but the restriction had better be specified explicitly, for otherwise the claim is normally understood as unrestricted.

[26] A similar point is made in Sainsbury (2010). According to Sainsbury, Thomasson's account of denials of existence for fictional characters in terms of denial of concreteness "represents a mistake about ontological category as a mistake about whether something exists" (p. 109). If a person mistakes a material being X to which she refers via the name "X" for an immaterial thing, we wouldn't correct her by saying anything like "Look, X does not exist", but rather by telling her that X is not immaterial.

[27] See Currie (1990).

[28] Walton (1991), p. 380.

Street, he didn't actually assert the sentence expressing this proposition. Doyle just pretended, in a non-deceptive way, to perform this illocutionary act, so he was not committed to the content of his claim's being actually the case.

An objection often raised against fictionalism is that the fictional operator strategy does not seem to work in general: it produces clear-cut violations of the maxim of Minimal Revision. Gandalf, as we know, is a purely fictional character of *The Lord of the Rings*, played by Ian McKellen in Peter Jackson's movie. But if we put an "according to the story" operator in front of these ascriptions, we get:

(2) According to the story S: Gandalf is a purely fictional character;
(3) According to the story S: Gandalf is played by Ian McKallen,

and these are certainly false (contrast sentence (1) above): in *The Lord of the Rings* Gandalf is not a purely fictional character but a very existent person, and nobody else plays him.

Generalizing: true extra-fictional ascriptions to fictional characters often do not ascribe them properties those characters have in the respective stories, like the property of being a wizard. Some sentences involving fictional objects appear to be literal truths or falsities, seriously asserted without any explicit or implicit pretence. Nobody would criticize Doyle for having written the literal falsity that Holmes lived in 221b Baker Street. That's true in the story, not in the real world. But someone engaged in literary criticism may be rightly criticized (or approved) for having written that Holmes is an epitome of the values of the Victorian age. People making such claims appear to aim at saying literal truths about the actual world; they seem to make genuine assertions, and to commit themselves with no pretence. Not only the grammatical form of extra-fictional ascriptions need not be revised (Minimal Revision), but it *must* not be revised – that is, Fictionalism seems to contravene the Acceptability Constraint: it would be difficult to convince ordinary speakers that they are pretending, not only when they claim that Holmes lives in Baker Street, but also when they say that Holmes is Doyle's main literary character.[29]

These problems are easily avoided in the Meinongian perspective. Purely fictional objects are simply a kind of nonexistent objects. "Gandalf does not exist", or "Holmes does not exist", obtain the proper truth-values: they are literal truths, seriously asserted by competent speakers. On the other hand, such things can bear properties, and make the corresponding statements true – especially the extra-fictional ones, like "Gandalf is a purely fictional character", which must be true *simpliciter* in the real world. In Chap. 8 we shall see in detail how a specific form of (neo-)Meinongianism is able to supply a convincing treatment of the semantics and ontology of fiction, dissolving the difficulties affecting the Parmenidean theories.

[29] The strategy of adopting representational operators doesn't need to be dismissed – on the contrary, we shall recover it in modified form within a kind of neo-Meinongianism, where it will prove useful.

5.2.3 *Things that Were, Are, and Will Be*

Purely fictional objects make for a case on behalf of the thesis that some things do not exist. But since the beginning of this book we have seen that there may be other kinds of nonexistent objects. A domain of discourse in which the Meinongian is quite successful compared to a supporter of the Parmenidean view is that which involves past and future things.

Consider George Washington again. We have reason to believe that Washington is not part of this physical world any longer, and since quite some time, that is, he does not exist anymore. Which means that now – at the beginning of the twenty-first century – the sentence "George Washington does not exist" is true (give and take, as I said in the Prologue and elsewhere, certain religious beliefs regarding the immortality of the soul, plus perhaps the assumption that a man is identical with his soul). George Washington, today, is a nonexistent object to which, intuition says, we can refer, calling him by his proper name (I have just done this), or using definite descriptions ("the first president of the United States"). We can do it now, just as his contemporaries did at the time when he existed. Next, despite not existing now, George Washington is an object in strict accordance with the rules: he has, today, various properties, thus makes several statements true. For instance, he has the properties of having been the first president of the United States, of being mentioned in many history books, of being George Washington, etc.

Let us now consider a future object. Here's an example due to Maria Reicher: assume that in a 100 years or so there will be a first female pope, and that that pope will also be a colored woman.[30] The first female pope currently does not exist. Take the following, supposedly true, sentences:

(1) George Washington had wooden dentures;
(2) The first female pope will be black.

Again, the received view on existence must supply some sort of paraphrase for (1) and (2). Their grammatical form apparently entails that George Washington and the first female pope exist, as they are the referents of "George Washington" and "the first female pope", and make the statements true by having the relevant properties.

A classic Parmenidean rejoinder[31] would be as follows: the past and future verb tenses appearing in (1) and (2) indicate that, in making the logical form of those sentences explicit, we need to start with two temporal sentential operators, let us say, P = "it has been the case that. . ." and F = "it will be the case that. . .":

(1a) P: George Washington has wooden dentures;
(2a) F: The first female pope is black.

[30] See Reicher (2010), Section 3.3 – Reicher's is a nice and accessible introduction to the topic of nonexistents. Actually, according to some there has already been a female pope, Giovanna, who should have been in charge between 853 and 855, but I'll leave this historical complication aside.
[31] To be found e.g. in Prior (1968).

The operators are to block the inference from (1a) and (2a) to the current existence of our past and future friends. And yet, the use of temporal operators too suffers from specific problems. In the philosophical jargon, there is for instance the so-called problem of tensed plural quantification. Consider the sentence:

(3) There have been 16 popes with the name Benedict.

If we apply the temporal operator P, this will become:

(3a) P: There are 16 popes with the name Benedict.

But as David Lewis observed,[32] the translation does not preserve the truth-value in cases like this: (3a) is false, for there has not been any past time with 16 popes named Benedict simultaneously. We might produce a translation that nests several temporal operators one into the other. But Lewis objects that this would not allow an easy rendering of sentences in which infinite past and future things satisfying a certain predicate are mentioned, because this would require a construction based on infinitely nested temporal operators.[33]

Whatever one thinks of this objection, a supporter of the received view on existence also faces a problem with the relations between existent objects and nonexistent past and future ones. We have abundantly seen how the Parmenidean position typically states that relations always presuppose the existence of their *relata*. It therefore seems that there cannot be relations with things that do not exist (anymore, or yet). But there are such relations: not only I can think about George Washington; but also, it is true that I am taller than Napoleon Bonaparte was; as it is true that I am in the equivalence class determined by *being a fellow citizen of* with Casanova.

The Meinongian solution, as usual, is simple, and deeply respects our intuitions. Things can acquire or lose the genuine property of existing, just as they can acquire or lose other properties. But they are not prevented from possessing any property, or standing in any relation, at times at which they lack existence. In particular, they can enjoy modal and temporal properties. (1) and (2) are true, their grammatical form is good as it looks, and the Meinongian view does not allow to infer that George Washington or the first female pope exist (yet, or already). "George Washington" denotes the currently nonexistent first president of the United States, while "the first female pope" denotes the currently nonexistent first female pope.[34] But the nonexistent George Washington possesses, now, the property of having had

[32] See Lewis (2004).

[33] See Ibid., p. 7.

[34] Given the assumptions from the example, "the first female pope" denotes, today, an object that as of today does not satisfy (yet) the description: it is not yet a pope and not even, probably, a woman, given that it does not yet exist. We will see that such phenomena are not very problematic. They originate simply from our normally using descriptions that appeal to salient properties of objects in order to refer to them, also in circumstances, and/or times, in which those objects do not possess (anymore, or yet) those properties. Of course, these may be properties that entail existence – and most often so, for salient properties are usually of this kind.

wooden dentures, etc. Nonexistents can also acquire properties after they ceased to exist: being widely admired, for instance, is a feature people like van Gogh and Frege began to enjoy after their death (so perhaps they didn't enjoy it that much).

Now those who are into the metaphysics of time may complain that my exposition has been biased. There's a dispute in this field between so-called *presentism* and so-called *eternalism*. Presentists claim that merely past and merely future objects not currently existing do not exist, full stop. What really exists is what currently, presently exists: past and future times are close to memories or projections of imagination. Just as some things exist only in our representations, others in reality, so some things exist only in future and past times, but not presently. And just like to merely exist in imagination or memory is not to exist, so to be a mere past or future existent is not to exist. On the other hand, eternalists claim that, certainly merely past and, perhaps, also merely future objects exist and are as real as currently existing objects.[35] Eternalism usually comes with a strong analogy between space and time: just as to exist and to be spatially located in Australia entails to exist, so to exist and to be temporally located in the eighteenth century entails to exist. Time is, in a sense, as real as space, and not just the content of our imagination or memory.[36]

Now it becomes showy that the position I have sketched in this Section was Parmenidean *presentism*.[37] It is fair, albeit perhaps fast, to say that presentism sits with common sense and ordinary ways of talking: what the layman normally believes is that future things do not exist yet – they will be, but are not – and past things exist no longer – they were, but are not anymore. The cons of presentism have to do with the difficulties mentioned above – indeed, those are just common objections raised against it by eternalists.

Now the Meinongian view that some things do not exist is *per se* neutral with respect to the presentists vs. eternalists debate. The Meinongian will disagree with both parties on a Parmenidean spelling of "exist"; and she may or may not admit that the only things that exist (in her sense) are those that currently exist. The general tendency of the Meinongian to take at face value non-philosophically-compromised views of the world, commonsensical intuitions, and surface grammar, may bring her to sit with presentism; but this is not mandatory. If past and future existents exist *simpliciter*, this is no objection to nonexistent things, although one of

[35] I say "perhaps" because there may be relevant asymmetries between past and future. Some of them have to do with there being causal chains hooking back from the present to the past, which apparently lack between the future and the present. This makes more difficult, for instance, to *refer* to future things than to past things – despite my brushing the problem under the carpet, for the sake of simplicity, in the first female pope example. Perhaps past existents exist, but the universe is constantly growing, as future things pop into existence (I'm not even sure whether this position is appropriately labeled as "eternalism" in the literature). To the issue of how to refer to future things I shall come back in Chap. 9.

[36] Given such an analogy, and the analogies between time and modality, it is no surprise that the main modal realist around, namely David Lewis, was a convinced eternalist. See also Sider (1999a).

[37] See Bigelow (1996), Zimmerman (1998), Ludlow (1999), Hinchliff (2000), and Markosian (2004).

the eligible classes of such things is dismissed. Others, such as fictional, mythical, hallucinated, merely possible objects, etc., remain. If eternalism is wrong and presentism is right, though, Meinongian presentism offers easy solutions to the problems affecting Parmenidean presentism.

5.2.4 *"The Round Square Is as Round as It Is Square"*

Meinongianism is often claimed to do well also with sentences like the following:

(1) The set of all sets that don't belong to themselves belongs and does not belong to itself.
(2) The round square is round and square.
(3) The round square is round.
(4) The fountain of youth is a fountain.

Sentences of this kind seem *prima facie* true. To some, they are *a priori* true[38] and, in the case of (2), (3), and (4) they are claimed to be analytically so.[39] First, if they are true, no empirical inspection is seemingly needed to establish it. For instance, (1) is a formulation of Russell's paradox, *a priori* deducible via pure logic from the principles of naïve set theory and, in particular, from the unrestricted Comprehension Principle for sets. (1) constitutes, more accurately, the last line of a *reductio ad absurdum* of naïve set theory. Precisely (1) and (2) "are just part of the evidence we use to establish that the round square and the set of all sets which are not self-members are impossible objects".[40]

Moreover, (1)–(4), as usual, look like subject-predicate sentences with definite descriptions in subject position. But again the Parmenidean philosopher cannot just take them as such, as they would entail the existence of Russell's set, or that of a square circle. She must thus supply some kind of paraphrase, e.g., by denying that definite descriptions are genuinely referential devices and eliminating them via the Russell technique, etc. Alternatively, if the supporter of the received view takes the grammatical form of (1)–(4) as it stands, then "the set of all sets that don't belong

[38] For instance Zalta (1983), p. 3.

[39] As maintained for instance by Lambert (1983).

[40] Zalta (1983), p. 3. According to Zalta, this is a general feature of *reductio* proofs: "It is a remarkable fact that when one sets out Russell's proof [of the inconsistency of naïve set theory], one *appears* to be considering an object which turns out, in some sense, to be impossible. One appears to be reasoning about the set of all non-self-membered sets by entertaining propositions that seem to have this object as a constituent. To see this, think about the last line of the proof, namely, that the Russell set is a self-member if and only if *it* is not a self-member. [. . .] The attempts to explain [these appearances] away have not been successful. One such strategy has been to suggest that *reductio* is a derived rule and that Russell's proof could be carried out without entertaining any controversial propositions. This strategy just denies the fact. [. . .] The students of the proof by *reductio* entertain the controversial propositions. Moreover, many logicians, and quite possibly Russell himself, have found *reductio* to be the most natural argument form to employ." (Zalta 1988, p. 11).

to themselves", "the round square", and "the fountain of youth", should be taken as non-denoting descriptions. Then keeping the intuitive truth-value in all cases becomes difficult. A sentence containing a non-denoting term might be lacking a truth-value, or it might get a non-classical truth-value, or it might even be false, but that it is true is difficult to vindicate.

The problem shows up with sentences of the form "The $P_1 \wedge P_2 \wedge \ldots \wedge P_n$ is P_i", $1 \leq i \leq n$, with $P_1, P_2, \ldots, P_n$ properties such that no object exemplifying them all can exist. In this case also, the simple Meinongian solution consists in taking sentences of this form for what they look like. A round square or Russell's set are impossible objects, that is, not only they don't exist, but they cannot. As Meinong reminded us before, the Principle of Independence of *Sosein* from *Sein* applies to these things as well. The round square and Russell's set possess properties. It is, in fact, because they possess such inconsistent features as belonging and not belonging to themselves, or as being round and square – that is, it is because they make sentences like (1) and (2) true – that they are impossible, i.e., cannot exist. The status of impossible objects supervenes on these things as a spin-off of their having those features.

5.2.5 *Intentional Things*

One of the main motivations for the *Gegenstandstheorie*, as was mentioned, pivots on the notion of intentionality. When explaining the phenomena related to intentionality, Meinong claimed, the philosopher victim of the prejudice in favour of the existent risks drifting towards "psychologism", that is, "a natural or considered tendency to solve problems with predominantly psychological means".[41] Two Chapters ago we considered the problems for Parmenideanism, related to intentional *de re* states (those introduced by intentional transitive constructions: Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth, the ancient Greeks worshipped Zeus, etc.). And we also discussed the tendency, common to the received view, to reduce the targets of such intentional states to mental representations or cognitive items: "what does not exist outside of us, so one automatically thinks, must at least exist in us. Such an Object, it is supposed, belongs before the forum of psychology".[42] But Meinong was averse to such mentalistic approach:

> It is no more necessary to an Object that it be presented in order not to exist than it is in order for it to exist. Further, even if there were a reference to it, the most that could result from its being presented would be a sort of existence – "existence by way of idea" – and so, more precisely, "pseudo-existence." To express it more exactly: If I say, "Blue does not exist", I am thinking just of blue, and not at all of a presentation and the capacities it may have.[43]

[41] Meinong (1904), p. 95.

[42] Ibid. p. 96.

[43] Ibid., p. 83.

Meinong therefore rejected the idea that the *Gegenstandstheorie* be reduced to psychology, intended as the discipline concerning mental faculties and representations.[44] And with good reasons, given that, as we have seen above, mental representations cannot in general be good substitutes for objects intended *de re*: they cannot have many of the properties those objects have, whether the latters exist or not. The problem of *de re* intentionality, instead, is easily addressed in a Meinongian approach: we accept that a cognitive agent has intentional *de re* relations with full-fledged objects, things that are not mental simulacra of other things; some of them, like Uma Thurman, exist; others, like Gandalf, do not.

Meinong's general realistic attitude towards nonexistents is not mandatory for a non-Parmenidean philosopher. We have begun to see that nonexistents come in different kinds. As we shall explore in the following Chapters, the non-Parmenidean has a range of options on which among these kinds are better taken realistically, or as mind-independent, and which are better explained as mental or mind-dependent objects lacking existence. The strongly realist position (*all* nonexistents are mind-independent) is generally associated with Meinongianism, but not forced upon the non-Parmenidean by the doctrine that existence is a non-blanket property of individuals.

At the opposite side of the spectrum we find a philosopher like Colin McGinn, who admits nonexistents but has a strongly anti-realist view of them: all nonexistents are mind-dependent. They are the product of "misfired intentionality" (as when we believe something to exist, whereas it does not), or of intentional storytelling and make-believe. They are also essentially nonexistent: existents can be, intuitively, contingently so; but all nonexistents in McGinn's view are necessarily so. Existence and nonexistence would thus be asymmetrical, and related, if at all, in a way different from pairs of ordinary properties and their complements.[45] I'm not sure how feasible this view is; but we will find that there are intermediate non-Parmenidean positions as well, as far as the issues of realism and mind-dependence go; they might also turn out to be the most promising ones.

5.3 Five Problems for Naïve Meinongianism

Naïve Meinongianism seems to acquit itself quite well. It offers a single, uniform solution to a series of different problems for which the received view on existence must resort to *ad hoc* tricks and epicycles. The Meinongian view is so intuitive, and

[44] The *Gegenstandstheorie* and other works by Meinong host long and tiresome reflections on the precise position of the theory of objects in the domain of sciences. They look close to similar extended discussions by other important philosophers of the time, such as Husserl. As Grossmann (1974) has noticed, this is due to the fact that philosophers pursuing an ontological approach felt the need to justify the scientific seriousness of their enterprise; for the very possibility of metaphysics at the time was not taken for granted.

[45] See McGinn (2000).

in agreement with the layman's talk, that one may wonder how come philosophers felt the need to walk different, more tortuous paths.

However, naïve Meinongianism with its Unrestricted Comprehension Principle for objects has managed a bad reputation. For many years has it has been considered a theoretical failure. Part of the bad literature comes from the Meinongian thesis' being inextricably bound to the anti-Parmenidean statement that existence is a genuine, non-blanket property of individuals. That such a statement is not bizarre may be clear at this point of the book. But naïve Meinongianism has suffered specifically from its being based on the Unrestricted Comprehension Principle. The two theses have often been conflated: people became convinced that the unacceptability of the (UCP) made the thesis that not everything exists, or that to exist is a genuine, non-blanket property of individuals, unacceptable as well. As we will see, on the contrary, the two issues must be kept distinct. But let us start by examining the widely recognized troubles of the naïve theory.

5.3.1 The Round Square Cupola on Berkeley College

The most famous critic of Meinong was Bertrand Russell, who discussed the theory in various papers appeared in *Mind*: a review of a collection of essays published by Meinong and his students, the many times mentioned *On Denoting*, and another review of a book by Meinong.[46] Russell advanced two disruptive objections against naïve Meinongianism. The first states that (what we have labeled as) the Unrestricted Comprehension Principle entails violations of the Law of Non-Contradiction. To begin with, if $\alpha[x]$ in the unrestricted Principle can stand for any condition on properties, then one is allowed to take inconsistent conditions. Let $\alpha[x]$ = "x is a round square". Then the Principle guarantees that $\Sigma x \alpha[x]$, something is a round square. The Principle forces us to admit inconsistent objects.

Could the Meinongian answer that, while conditions like "x is a golden mountain" or "x is a winged horse" are sensible, and thus have corresponding objects (albeit not actually existing ones), conditions like "x is a round square" are simply meaningless, thus one can rule out that objects correspond to them because of the (UCP)? No because, as Quine pointed out in *On What There Is*, inconsistent or contradictory conditions look very meaningful. The polemical target there is Wyman, the straw man supposedly representing the Meinongian:

> Unlike Pegasus, the round square cupola on Berkeley College cannot be admitted even as an unactualized possible. Can we drive Wyman now to admitting also a realm of unactualizable impossibles? If so, a good many embarrassing questions could be asked about them. We might hope even to trap Wyman in contradictions, by getting him to admit that certain of these entities are at once round and square. But the wily Wyman chooses the other horn of the dilemma and concedes that it is nonsense to say that the round square

[46] Russell (1905a, b, 1907).

> cupola on Berkeley College is not. He says that the phrase "round square cupola" is meaningless.
>
> Wyman was not the first to embrace this alternative. The doctrine of the meaninglessness of contradictions runs away back. [. . .] Certainly the doctrine has no intrinsic appeal; and it has led its devotees to such quixotic extremes as that of challenging the method of proof by *reductio ad absurdum* – a challenge in which I sense a *reductio ad absurdum* of the doctrine itself. [47]

It might be retorted that the round square is round and square, but it does not follow that it is a square which is not a square (or a circle that is not circular), thus there is no immediate contradiction here. In order to block the inference, though, one needs to reject the geometric platitude that if something is a circle, then that thing is not square (and vice versa). Anyway, that doesn't change much. The Principle has no restriction on the conditions that can deliver objects. So take for $\alpha[x]$ an explicitly contradictory condition, $\alpha[x] = Px \wedge \neg Px$, P standing for whatever property, and the (UCP) guarantees that $\Sigma x(Px \wedge \neg Px)$.

A more promising answer comes from pointing out that the objects characterized by the (UCP) via inconsistent conditions do not and cannot exist. What the Principle guarantees is that something, Σx, is a square that is not a square (or a circle that is not a circle). The Meinongian quantifier however, as we know, is not to be taken as existentially compromised. This was in fact Meinong's own reply to Russell. Even if the Law of Non-Contradiction rules on all possible circumstances whatsoever, contradictory objects not only can, but must violate the Law, for otherwise why would they be contradictory? That they exist in no possible circumstance should alleviate one's worries.

This way, the issue is moved again back to the more general problem of the reasonableness of Meinongian quantification. Impossible objects, in the sense of nonexistent things that satisfy inconsistent conditions, are only a special case of the Meinongian principle of *Aussersein* according to which there can be objects, bearers of properties, that do not exist, that is, things that satisfy conditions, and in so doing make certain statements true despite not existing. That such a reference to (and such a quantification on) nonexistent objects is sensible we now have reason to seriously suspect.

On the other hand, even leaving the quantificational issue aside, Meinong's answer does not change that we should in principle be able to refer to contradictory objects also directly, via singular terms. According to the (UCP), something is characterized by the condition "x is a circle and x is not a circle" and satisfies it. With the appropriate version of Leibniz's Law, exactly one object satisfies the condition. Call this object Noncircle, n. Then, Noncircle is a circle and Noncircle is not a circle, $Cn \wedge \neg Cn$. Via such a direct reference to Noncircle, the theory commits us to assert bare contradictions of the syntactic form $\alpha \wedge \neg\alpha$; but such assertions can never be true.[48]

[47] Quine (1953), pp. 17–18.

[48] This form of the objection comes from Sainsbury (2010), p. 55.

5.3.2 Existing Golden Mountains: The Problem of Triviality

Russell may have granted Meinong's answer although, being a Parmenidean, he could not accept the move of admitting reference to, and quantification on, non-existent objects. But Russell advanced a second objection, one that is much more dangerous. This second objection is likely to be *the* main problem sympathizers of Meinong have historically had to deal with.

The naïve Comprehension Principle has no restriction on the conditions, or on the packages of properties, that can deliver objects. Now a salient feature of Meinongianism is the statement that existence is a property of individuals like any other. Let $\alpha[x]$ = "x is a mountain and x is golden and x exists", i.e., $Mx \wedge Gx \wedge Ex$. The (UCP) gives us that $\Sigma x(Mx \wedge Gx \wedge Ex)$, that is, $\exists x(Mx \wedge Gx)$, that is, a golden mountain exists. Not only is this empirically false, but also, given that the reasoning applies to any condition involving the property of existing, the (UCP) allows to prove the existence of whatever we want. This vindicates Kant's idea that the existence predicate cannot legitimately enter into definitions or characterizations, for otherwise we could define things into existence.

Things are, in fact, even worse: the (UCP) allows to prove, not only any existential statement, but anything whatsoever. Let $\alpha[x]$ be $x = x \wedge \beta$, with β standing for any sentence. Applying the (UCP) and Leibniz's Law we have that for exactly one object, say b, it is true that $b = b \wedge \beta$; from which β follows, by Conjunction Elimination. Any formalized theory including the (UCP) would be *trivial*, in the technical sense that any sentence would be derivable as a theorem.

The situation, as I said before, is analogous to what happened with the so called naïve set theory and its unrestricted Comprehension Principle for sets: an intuitively plausible principle, which led Frege's and Russell's initial logicist project to bankrupt. With the (UCP), the twofold naïve intuition is to the effect that (a) we can tell stories about, imagine, represent to ourselves mentally, etc., objects characterized by any properties and conditions, so that whatever conditions or bundles or properties seem to deliver the corresponding objects; and (b) the objects at issue literally have the properties or satisfy the conditions characterizing them. These assumptions embedded in naïve Meinongianism make it go down in flames.

One cannot hope to solve the problems while keeping the Principle in unrestricted version, by altering the underlying logic, in order to inhibit the derivation of inconsistencies, or to limit their undesirable consequences. In some non-standard theories of sets, like the *paraconsistent* set theories, the unrestricted Comprehension Principle for sets is preserved, allowing that any condition corresponds to a set, and thus allowing contradictory sets such as Russell's. Still these theories, despite being inconsistent, do not succumb to logical chaos. The main move consists in adopting a logic that rejects a classical law, commonly called *Scotus' Law* or

Pseudo-Scotus' Law, (PS).[49] The Law states that one can infer anything from a contradiction – as an inference rule, something like this:

$$\frac{\alpha, \neg\alpha}{\beta} \quad \text{(PS)}$$

By discarding (PS) (and by adopting other collateral changes with respect to classical logic), paraconsistent set theories can prove inconsistent conclusions, while preventing them from trivializing the theory.[50] That both a theorem and its negation can be deduced in the theory ("Russell's set belongs to itself", "Russell's set does not belong to itself") does not allow to derive everything.

Such stratagems cannot work with our naïve Meinongian Comprehension Principle for objects. For to deduce unacceptable consequences from the (UCP) very little is needed, as far as logic goes: if $\alpha[x]$ = "x is a mountain and x is golden and x exists", the (UCP) gives us that a golden mountain exists without the help of any further logical rule, controversial or not. Altering or weakening the logic underlying the theory is useless.

As we will see in the next Chapter, various forms of neo-Meinongianism have tried to recover the Principle in some restricted or limited form, by touching either of the two aforementioned points, that is: (a) by accepting that only *some* characterizing properties and conditions be admitted to Comprehension, or (b) by qualifying the *way* in which the characterized objects can enjoy these properties or satisfy the relevant conditions. Before we deal with this, let us have a look at the other problems affecting naïve Meinongianism. There are three more.

5.3.3 The Problem of Additional Properties

The third issue with the (UCP) comes from the "exactly" appearing in it: an object characterized by a condition $\alpha[x]$ has exactly (all and only) the properties incorporated in the condition. Suppose we accepted that Sherlock Holmes is the object characterized as having exactly the properties ascribed in Doyle's stories: a detective living in Baker Street 221b, etc. Then implausible consequences would follow. For instance, suppose that in Doyle's stories Holmes is never directly characterized as a man, meaning that "is a man" is never predicated of Holmes there. It would then follow that Holmes is not a man. This would be strange: he is (is explicitly characterized as) a detective living in London, a friend of Watson and an enemy of Moriarty, etc. – all things seemingly entailing that he is a human being. Had Doyle meant the contrary, presumably he would have told us. We have the

[49] For a nice introduction to paraconsistent logics, see Priest and Tanaka (2009). See also Bremer (2005), Berto (2006, 2007), and Berto and Priest (2008).

[50] For interesting recent results in paraconsistent set theory with unrestricted comprehension, see Weber (2010).

strong intuition that Doyle *did* characterize Holmes as a man. More: Doyle never stated that Holmes is left-handed, and never stated that Holmes is right-handed; it would follow then that Holmes is neither left- nor right-handed. But it is quite intuitive that he must be either (or ambidextrous – but Doyle doesn't say that either).

To generalize: confining objects to having only the properties explicitly characterizing them seems bizarre. They must have further properties *entailed* by the explicit characterization. "Entailment", here, doesn't just mean formal, logical consequence. There is a whole variety of, one may say, material connections between predicates (between the properties those predicates stand for) the naïve Meinongian view just ignores. Some are of the kind that could be captured by what Carnap labeled meaning postulates. They can be links between properties attested by our established theories. Or they can be more or less "analytic" connections, given by the meanings of the terms at issue: if something is a mountain, then it is extended in space; if something is red, then it must have a color; *et cetera*.

Other connections depend on factual information on the world we may want to preserve when we reconstruct what goes on in a fictional characterization. Doyle, for instance, tells us that Holmes lives in Victorian London, but never says (let us suppose) that London is in Europe. We still infer that Holmes lives in Europe: we integrate a fictional situation described in a novel keeping some default information imported from reality, unless the author explicitly states otherwise. But the naïve Meinongian theory does not legitimize these inferences – on the contrary, it excludes them: if according to the (UCP) Holmes should have exactly those properties he is characterized as having in Doyle's stories, then Holmes has the property of living in London (so Doyle says) but not that of living in Europe (or in any other continent, for that matter).

Such an essential incompleteness of naïve Meinongian objects may also give us a full-fledged paradox. Given the property of being red, by the (UCP) some object has exactly the property of being red and no other. Call it Red. Notice that, in the naïve Meinongian view, Red is not supposed to be the property of being red, or the set of red things: the property of being red and the set of red things are not red. Red is red – that is its own unique property. Our aforementioned intuitions would require that, if something is red, then it should have a color; it should be a material object, with a surface and, thus, a physical extension. But Red does not enjoy these properties. Worse, it seems that Red cannot even be referred to – otherwise, Red would have the property of being referred to, which, according to the naïve theory, it lacks. Still, Red is seemingly referred to (I appear to have just done it). As for the explicit paradox:[51] according to the naïve Meinongian theory, the object Red has as its sole property that of being red. It thus has exactly one property. This way, though, it looks like Red also has the property of having exactly one property, this second feature being different from the property of being red. Overall, Red has exactly one property (being red), but Red does not have exactly one property since it has (at least) two properties.

[51] Taken from Reicher (2010), Section 4.

5.3.4 *Existence Makes No Difference, II*

The disrespect of naïve Meinongianism for nexuses between properties is apparent when the property at issue is existence itself. The Parmenidean mottos "Existence makes no difference", or "Existence is no news", as you may recall, summarize aspects of Hume's account, or examples like Kant's 100 thalers. A variant of the mottos, though, unhappily applies also to naïve Meinongianism, despite its apparently being a conception alternative to the received view.

According to Reicher again, the theory has the disturbing consequence that when an object starts or ceases to exist, the only thing happening to it is its losing or acquiring that feature.[52] After my death, I will cease (let us suppose) to exist. In the unqualified Meinongian perspective on the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*, this *per se* will not entail that I also cease to be a man, and maybe to do the things a man typically does: touching physical objects, feeling sensations, having knowledge and thoughts. I may just turn into a nonexistent but otherwise full-fledged man. How can this be? Shouldn't I, by losing existence, become causally inert? The naïve Meinongian theory, Reicher concludes, conflicts with our intuitions on what beginning and ceasing to exist means. For the Meinongian too, despite good intentions, it would seem that existence makes no big difference.

The implausibility of the treatment of the notion of existence emerges also leaving aside considerations on beginning or ceasing to exist. It is, in fact, a special case of that aforementioned destruction of material connections between properties. Take a golden mountain. It is plausible that if something is a mountain, then it is a physical object occupying a certain region of space. Asking in which part of the world that mountain might be located is a sensible question, besides the obvious interest in the valuable metal. But if something is located somewhere in the world, then it is in principle accessible to senses – a "possible experience", a Kantian would claim –, it possesses a certain mass, etc. Then we can causally interact with it, and thus, after all, it exists. It may not hold true for all properties, as the non-Parmenidean stresses, but at least *some* properties intuitively entail existence.

If, on the contrary, we maintain that the golden mountain does not exist despite being literally a mountain and made of gold, then the Kantian and Humean challenge becomes pressing again: if existence is a non-trivial feature of things, tell us what does the difference between an existent golden mountain and an imaginary golden mountain (or between 100 merely possible thalers and 100 real ones) consists in.

5.3.5 *The Possible Fat Man in the Doorway*

The fifth problem of naïve Meinongianism and – so the Parmenideans claim – of any theory that admits nonexistent or merely possible objects, is that there are no

[52] See Ibid.

clear identity conditions or criteria for such things. The supporter of the received view who most insisted on this is Quine, so I will mainly refer to his position.

To begin with, let us see what the topic of *identity criteria* consists in. An identity criterion for objects of a certain kind K is usually taken as something of the form:

$$x = y \text{ if and only if...}$$

The identity of a criterion of identity would then be fixed by what is to replace the dots. This is supposed to provide a necessary and sufficient condition for the identity of x with y, x and y being things of kind K (of course, the *sufficiency*-direction is the important one).

Historically, the notion was introduced in Frege's *Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, but the way he puts it there has produced some ambiguities. Frege claims that "if we are to use symbol a to signify an object, we must have a criterion for deciding in all cases whether b is the same as a, even if it is not always in our power to apply this criterion".[53] Even if he talks of the use of symbols to signify things, identity criteria have been associated with the things themselves. But Frege also speaks of a criterion for "deciding" when we have a case of identity, which must be there even though sometimes we are incapable of applying it. So it is sometimes said, a bit generically, that an identity criterion (for objects of kind K) should appear in a good explanation of how we single out, recognize and distinguish the K.

However, there's a mixture of metaphysics and epistemology here, which some philosophers have traced back to Frege himself.[54] A criterion of identity is not a criterion of *identification* or *individuation*, such as for instance the checking of fingerprints by the police in order to identify a criminal. A criterion of identification or individuation is an epistemic issue: it concerns the ways in which we can decide, or come to know, whether we have a case of identity between superficially different things (e.g., things that have been introduced to us via different names). From a cognitive and also practical point of view, this can involve being able to distinguish a certain object in the context of our experience, single it out among others, or also re-identify it across time.

A criterion of identity, instead, is a metaphysical issue: it is supposed to specify the conditions under which x and y are the same object, independently of how we can decide whether they are or not the same object. In Kit Fine's words, "the problem of [the criterion of] identity is not the epistemological question of saying how *we* can identify the object"; rather, it is the "metaphysical question of what, in the real world, explains the identity of the object".[55] Criteria of identity may play important roles in the individuation of worldly stuff, but the two things should be kept distinct. Some metaphysicians hold the view that animals have their identity

[53] Frege (1884a), § 62.

[54] See e.g. Williamson (1990a), pp. 148–9.

[55] Fine (1982), p. 102.

settled by their causal origin and the gametes they come from; but it is implausible that we can single out an animal just by knowing which gametes originated it.

What is a criterion of identity good for, then? According to some philosophers, such a criterion for things of kind *K* is no less than a condition of possibility of making sensible discourses referring to the *Ks*, and of quantifying on them. Others maintain that a criterion captures and articulates what it means to be a certain thing of kind *K* rather than another; or that it should at least explain something about the identity of objects of the given kind, even when identifying them is for us cognitively complicated, or even unfeasible.[56]

Now Quine argued that, while in the business of writing down the general ontological catalogue – the catalogue of the furniture of the world – we should not admit kinds of entities for which we have no clear identity criteria: "No entity without identity" is another of his mottos. Quine maintains, for instance, that we have a criterion for material things like cats, trees, and pillows: their spatiotemporal address; *x* is the same material object as *y* if and only if *x* is located in the same place as *y* at the same time.[57] Thus, we can admit material objects in our ontology: there actually is a physical world (thank God).

Some abstract objects, namely sets, also have clear identity criteria. According to Extensionality, a basic principle of set theory, *x* is the same set as *y* if everything that belongs to (is a member or element of) *x* belongs to *y* and *vice versa*.[58] The set of houses is the same as the set of habitations, because every house is a habitation and every habitation is a house. But also sets that are determined by intuitively distinct properties can coincide. For instance (this is famously due to Frege): take the property of being an animal with kidneys and the property of being an animal with a heart. These appear to be distinct properties: having a heart doesn't seem quite the same as having kidneys. All the animals with a heart, though, are also endowed with kidneys, and *vice versa*; the set of animals with a heart and the set of animals with kidneys have exactly the same members or elements; thus, they are the same set according to Extensionality.

However, for Quine nonexistent Meinongian objects and mere *possibilia*, i.e., objects that exist in some possible circumstance or other but not in the real world, have no clear identity conditions. They should therefore not be allowed in a "safe and sane" ontology. The notion of nonexistent object itself is likely to be incoherent for, given such objects *x* and *y*, there are in general no criteria to say whether *x* is identical with *y* or not. The relevant passage from *On What There Is* is notorious:

> Wyman's slum of possibles is a breeding ground for disorderly elements. Take, for instance, the possible fat man in that doorway; and, again, the possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man, or two possible men? How do we decide? How many possible men are there in that doorway? Are there more possible thin ones than fat ones? How many of them are alike? Or would their being alike make them one? Are no two

[56] One of the most interesting books on identity criteria I am aware of is Carrara (2001).

[57] See e.g. Quine (1975).

[58] In symbols: $\forall z(z \in x \leftrightarrow z \in y) \rightarrow x = y$.

> possible things alike? Is this the same as saying that it is impossible for two things to be alike? Or, finally, is the concept of identity simply inapplicable to unactualized possibles? But what sense can be found in talking of entities which cannot meaningfully be said to be identical with themselves and distinct from one another? These elements are well-nigh incorrigible. [. . .] I feel we'd do better simply to clear Wyman's slum and be done with it.[59]

In "the possible fat man in that doorway", the qualification "possible", as used by Quine, presumably speaks for the existential situation of the (wannabe-)object at issue; ditto for "the possible bald man in that doorway". After all, I am a possible bald or fat man in the doorway myself, in the following sense: I, an existent guy, am neither bald nor fat (for I'm thin and longhaired), nor am I in the doorway (I assume Quine had in mind a specific, real doorway). But I am such that I could be fat and/or bald, and in the doorway. Thus, I am an object endowed with the modal features of being possibly fat, possibly bald, and of being possibly in the doorway. According to Quine, however, I have crystal clear identity conditions: I am identical with anything that is my spatiotemporal roommate, and with nothing else. Talking about possible fat or bald men, Quine means to give through the qualification "possible" the existential status of the (wannabe-)objects at issue. What he means are things that lack being in the actual world: things that do not exist, like Pegasus, mentioned a few lines before in the article.

The Quinean point, thus, may be phrased as follows: let $\alpha[x]$ = "x is a man and x is fat and x is in the doorway and x is nonexistent"; let $\beta[x]$ = "x is a man and x is bald and x is in the doorway and x is nonexistent". According to the Comprehension Principle of naïve Meinongianism, an object satisfies the condition $\alpha[x]$. Call it f: f is a nonexistent fat man in the doorway. Again, according to the (UCP), an object satisfies the condition $\beta[x]$. Call it b: b is a nonexistent bald man in the doorway.

Now Quine asks: is it the case that $b = f$ or not? As we know, the naïve Meinongian position encoded in the Comprehension Principle assumes that objects be characterized in terms of properties and features; and the characterized things should literally possess the properties and features ascribed to them. If things were such, the Quinean (and Parmenidean) philosopher objects, we would face characterizing conditions that are certainly distinct, like $\alpha[x]$ and $\beta[x]$; but of which we just cannot see whether they characterize the same object, or two distinct ones. And we have no *other* means to settle the issue. In the case of nonexistent (wannabe-)objects, mere *possibilia* lacking actual existence, etc. etc., with which we have no physical connections or causal interactions, all we are given are the conditions by which they are characterized; and these give no clear picture of the identity of the involved (wannabe-)objects.[60] Nonexistents are – to use

[59] Quine (1953), p. 16.

[60] This is, I take it, the common way to interpret Quine's famous point. What is less commonly noted is that the Meinongian may have a ready answer to this. If, as per the (UCP), objects have exactly the properties they are characterized as having, then f and b are distinct by Leibniz's Law: the former has the property of being fat, which the latter lacks. This reply, though, would trigger all the aforementioned problems with additional properties. Quine's point relies on our having the intuition that distinct conditions may or may not characterize the same thing.

another of Quine's famous expressions – "creatures of darkness" – obscure and non-well-defined things we had better expunge from a safe and sane ontology:

> Wyman's overpopulated universe is in many ways unlovely. It offends the aesthetic sense of us who have a taste for desert landscapes.[61]

Overall, despite the variety of its brilliant applications, naïve Meinongianism seems doomed. In the next Chapter we are going to examine the strategies undertaken by the non-Parmenidean philosophers who, remaining convinced of the goodness of the Meinongian insight, have tried to rescue it from the problems that threatened to sink it, often obtaining interesting results.

[61] Ibid.

Chapter 6
Meinongianisms of the First, Second, and Third Kind

It is a shared opinion that Russell's and Quine's critiques were a definitive demolition of Meinongianism. It is not clear, though, exactly what Russell and Quine demolished. The Parmenidean philosophers may have wanted to dismiss both (a) the claim that there are nonexistent objects, and (b) the Unrestricted Comprehension Principle, in a single move. But the two should be kept distinct.

Claim (a), as we know, is a direct denial of the received Parmenidean view. Now those maintaining that some objects do not exist are to provide some explanation of which nonexistents there are, of how they are like, and of how we relate to them, since we cannot causally interact with such things. The naïve Comprehension Principle constituted a failed attempt at providing an elucidation: we characterize these things in terms of their features and properties, and they really exemplify the features and properties they are characterized as having.

Yet the view that there are nonexistent objects does not commit one to embracing the Comprehension Principle in its unrestricted form. The former is independent from the latter, just as the claim that there are sets, supported at least *in actu exercito* by the vast majority of mathematicians and logicians, does not commit one to embracing the inconsistent unrestricted Principle of Comprehension of naïve set theory. A few philosophers have not accepted to be driven away from (what they took to be) Meinong's paradise, just as many mathematicians and logicians have not accepted to be driven away from (what they took to be) Cantor's paradise after the paradoxes of naïve set theory had shown up. Some authors have believed the idea that some things do not exist to be too intuitive, effective in its applications, and in harmony with common sense, to let it go down in flames because of the failure of the (UCP). They have therefore proposed reformulations of the naïve Meinongian object theory, rearranging or limiting the (UCP) in order to preserve as many of its benefits as possible, while avoiding its paradoxes.

Three (families of) theories can be found in the literature: three forms of (neo-) Meinongianism I will label of the first, second, and third kind. This last shall take many more pages than the first two, not just because of my personal preferences, but also because it is the most recent and least discussed. The next Chapter will be dedicated to a somewhat technical presentation of it. In two Chapters' time I will

then show how it answers to the problems of naïve Meinongianism – although I shall also consider, more briefly and by way of illustration, how the (neo-) Meinongianisms of the first and second kind address some of them.

6.1 Meinong I: The Nuclear Way

6.1.1 The Basic Ideas

Both the (neo-)Meinongianisms of the first and of the second kind originate from ideas of a brilliant pupil of Meinong's, Ernst Mally.[1] Recall the two salient features embedded in the (UCP): (a) *all* properties or conditions characterize some object, and (b) objects *literally have* the properties characterizing them. The combination of (a) and (b) makes the (UCP) detonate. The two neo-Meinongian approaches intervene, respectively, on points (a) and (b).

The first kind of theory is based on distinguishing two families of properties: *nuclear* and *extranuclear*, the terminology being traced back to J.N. Findlay.[2] Other names for the nuclear properties are: *assumptible* properties, *characterizing* properties. The idea is that only a restricted class of conditions $\alpha[x]$, those including exclusively (predicates standing for) nuclear properties, deliver objects via a comprehension principle: the *Sosein* of an object comprises the nuclear properties characterizing it. This strategy has been developed in different ways by philosophers like Terence Parsons, Richard Routley, and Dale Jacquette.[3] The Nuclear Comprehension Principle now goes as follows:

(NCP) For any nuclear condition $\alpha[x]$, with free variable x, some object satisfies $\alpha[x]$.

A "nuclear condition" is one that embeds only nuclear properties, that is, composed only of predicates designating nuclear properties.[4]

Which properties are nuclear? This is the key issue for the approach. Nuclear properties are sometimes glossed as those central to the nature of an object – to its true *Sosein*. Extranuclear properties should be more extrinsic and supervene on the nuclear. In Parsons' book *Nonexistent Objects*, still today the most popular version of Meinongianism of the first kind, the distinction is taken as primitive.

[1] See Mally (1912).

[2] See Findlay (1963).

[3] See Parsons (1979a, b, 1980, 1982), Routley (1966, 1980, 1982, 2003), and Jacquette (1989, 1996).

[4] See Parsons (1980), p. 19 and p. 74. One can formally express the (NCP) in a second order language, just as we did with the unrestricted principle of the naïve theory. Let $P!$ be a predicative variable ranging on nuclear properties, α a condition on properties with no free occurrences of y; then the (NCP) is phrased as: $\Sigma y \Lambda P!(P!y \leftrightarrow \alpha)$.

Some examples are supplied, however:[5] "is blue", "is tall", "kicked Socrates", "was kicked by Socrates", "kicked somebody", "is golden", "is a mountain", are sample predicates standing for nuclear properties. Parsons also distinguishes four types of extranuclear predicates, providing other examples:

Ontological: "exists", "is mythical", "is fictional", ...
Modal: "is possible", "is impossible", ...
Intentional: "is thought about by Meinong", "is worshipped by someone", ...
Technical: "is complete", "is consistent", ...

Parsons' theory comes with a criterion of identity for its objects, thus addressing the Quinean perplexities mentioned at the end of the previous Chapter (how effectively, we shall discuss soon). As we will verify, each neo-Meinongian theory adopts its own basic theoretical notion in the formulation of its identity criterion. In this case, the criterion states that x and y are the same object just in case they exemplify the same *nuclear* properties.[6] The criterion entails that, not only (thanks to the (NCP)) some object satisfies each nuclear condition, but also, exactly one object does.

Parsons introduces the details of his theory in a captivating way; I'll thus stick to his exposition. He begins with an intuitive mapping between existent things and non-empty sets of nuclear properties. For instance, Uma Thurman can be paired to the set of nuclear properties she enjoys – let us say: $\{P! \mid \text{Uma Thurman has } P!\}$. One can arrange all the existing objects o_1, o_2, ..., o_n in a list, in a one-to-one correspondence with the sets of their nuclear properties:

$$\begin{array}{ll} o_1 & \{P! | \mathrm{o_1 \text{ has } P!}\} \\ o_2 & \{P! | \mathrm{o_2 \text{ has } P!}\} \\ \vdots & \\ o_n & \{P! | \mathrm{o_n \text{ has } P!}\} \end{array}$$

We thereby obtain an exhaustive catalogue of existents. Next, prolonging the right side column extends the catalogue. We add sets corresponding to bundles of nuclear properties no existing object instantiates, e.g. {being a mountain, being golden, ...}. The (NCP) guarantees that some object – given the nuclear identity criterion, exactly one object, say, o_{n+1} – instantiates the package:

$$o_{n+1} \quad \{\text{being a mountain, being golden, } \ldots\}$$

Object o_{n+1} we may want to call "the golden mountain". The golden mountain is nonexistent, as it exceeds the catalogue of all that exists. If one can extend the list this way, it is possible to envisage an exhaustive catalogue of all objects,

[5] See Parsons (1980), pp. 22–3. See also Parsons (1979a), pp. 101–2.

[6] Formally, second order: $x = y \leftrightarrow \Lambda P!(P!x \leftrightarrow P!y)$.

theoretically obtainable by adding all the admissible sets of nuclear properties.[7] Some of the objects allowed by the theory are qualified as impossible: these are things such that nothing exemplifying the nuclear properties that characterize them can exist. The famous round square is a case; its impossibility is an extranuclear property supervening on the incompatible nuclear properties at issue.

In the Meinongian literature supporting the nuclear way, one can find an internal subdivision of nuclear properties, these being distinguished into *constitutive* and *consecutive*. This does not reflect a qualitative or intrinsic difference between nuclear properties: it has to do with the way objects are characterized. According to Reicher, nuclear constitutive properties are those explicitly mentioned in a characterizing condition $\alpha[x]$, while consecutive ones would be entailed by constitutive properties on the basis of a certain notion of entailment (say, implications between properties, of the kind that may be captured by things like meaning postulates).[8] Her example: if $\alpha[x]$, = "x is a mountain $\wedge$ x is golden", an object so characterized has as its nuclear constitutive properties those of being a mountain and of being made of gold. Presumably it can also have as nuclear consecutive properties those of being a material object, of having mass, of having a certain extension, etc. Allowing objects to have further (nuclear) properties besides those they are explicitly characterized as having helps the theory to address the problem of additional properties discussed in the previous Chapter, which beset naïve Meinongianism.

The distinction between nuclear and extranuclear properties allows to address other difficulties raised in that Chapter. Take for instance the paradox of incompleteness. The described instance of the paradox was to the effect that the object Red should have had exactly one property, namely being red, and more than one, as it also had the distinct property of having exactly one property. Now while being red is a typical nuclear (and in the case also constitutive) property, having exactly one (nuclear) property is an obvious *extra*nuclear feature. The (NCP) does not commit the theory to objects having exactly one property. What the theory can be committed to is objects possessing exactly one nuclear property, if it doesn't entail nuclear properties consecutive to it. Possessing some nuclear feature can entail that the object having it possesses several extranuclear properties. Even if

[7] What these are depends on one's theory of properties, specifically, on which (nuclear) properties there are – and Parsons has an articulated view on this. How comprehension principles for objects and properties interact in a general theory of nonexistent objects is a subtle issue for any kind of neo-Meinongianism. Generous principles for both objects and properties are jointly threatened by paradoxical constructions akin to the classical logical paradoxes. One such construction is the Clark-Rapaport paradox, reported in Rapaport (1978), and discussed e.g. in Zalta (1983), Appendix A, and Jacquette (1996), Chapter II. Technical solutions are usually available, though. Critics of neo-Meinongianisms have focused more on their purely philosophical difficulties. Not answering to these is taken as more troublesome for a theory of objects than being subject to a quick formal paradox (which usually has quick technical solutions).

[8] See e.g. Reicher (2010), Section 5.2.

Red's only nuclear property is (let us assume) that of being red, then Red has extranuclear properties such as that of having some nuclear property; or the counter-intentional property of being thought of by me while I'm writing these lines; *et cetera*. On the other hand, the nuclear property of being red may entail consecutive nuclear properties (such may be, for instance, that of being an extended object, or that of having a color). Then we should say that, whereas Red has been explicitly characterized only via the nuclear property of being red, it also has other nuclear properties consecutive to it. Whatever option is favoured, it never turns that Red both has and does not have exactly one property, *simul, sub eodem*.

It is crucial to the theory that existence be extranuclear. This does not allow the (NCP) to be used in *a priori* proofs of the existence of whatever one wills, as it happened with the naïve principle targeted in Russell's objection. The (NCP) guarantees that something is a golden mountain, but does not deliver existent golden mountains: $\alpha[x]$ = "x is a mountain $\wedge$ x is golden $\wedge$ x exists" is not a nuclear condition, for existence is not a nuclear property. Russell mistakenly assumed the *Sein* property of existence to be a *Sosein* property. This response to Russell is actually complicated by the so-called Watering-Down Principle of nuclear Meinongianism: I will come to this in a couple of Sections. Meanwhile, we can address a more linguistic concern produced by the definite description corresponding to that "improper" condition, $\iota x \alpha[x]$: what does the definite description "the existent golden mountain" refer to?

6.1.2 Non-Denoting Terms?

To claim that the description doesn't refer because "existent" is not a nuclear predicate, thereby admitting empty singular terms, may be taken as in conflict with some "thoroughly referential" motivation at the basis of Meinongianism. What was all the fuss about singular reference to the various flying horses, fictional detectives, possible kings, etc., good for, if Meinongianism isn't committed to the idea that any well-formed singular term (in particular, any description) denotes some object?

If we stick to this commitment, descriptions including extranuclear predicates look *prima facie* troublesome. One route taken by some nuclear Meinongians has been to claim that all descriptions do denote, but some of them denote the wrong object: one that doesn't fully satisfy the description. There can be an object designated by "the existent golden mountain", but it must have in its *Sosein* (among its constitutive properties, at least) only the nuclear properties embedded in the description. It may also turn out that "the existent golden mountain" designates the same object as "the golden mountain". In *Exploring Meinong's Jungle*, Richard Routley follows this approach. It has the seeming advantage of accounting for the intuition that we can arbitrarily refer to, describe, assume, etc., objects of any

kind: "A person can suppose anything he likes, only it won't always consistently possess all the supposed features".[9]

On the other hand, we find Parsons admitting non-denoting descriptions. Parsons' account in *Referring to Nonexistent Objects* has quite a traditional treatment of descriptions: given a condition $\alpha[x]$, "$\iota x \alpha[x]$" denotes the unique object, whether existent or not, that satisfies $\alpha[x]$, if there is one; otherwise it just doesn't denote. In the former case, a well-formed sentence of the form $\beta[\iota x \alpha[x]]$ is either true or false; in the latter, it can be taken as devoid of truth value, or perhaps as automatically false.

However, the examples of non-denoting descriptions given by Parsons may not be completely convincing. Parsons proposes two dialogues to illustrate his view.[10] The first gives a case of description that, in the context of use, is supposed not to denote: speaker A intends to refer to somebody (and an existing somebody), but s/he makes a mistake and ends up with an empty description. This is taken as a normal failure of reference, causing no theoretical difficulty for Meinongianism, nuclear or otherwise. After understanding the mistake, A treats the questions asked by B as spurious – which would justify the intuition that the corresponding declarative sentences are truth-valueless. The third character, the Outsider, is a Parmenidean troublemaker:

A: "The man in the doorway over there looks pretty silly."
Outsider: "But there is no man in the doorway over there."
A (*Looks again*) "Oh! I thought there was; I was wrong."
B: "Does he look anything like your department chairman?"
A: "Who?"
B: "The man in the doorway over there."
A: "There isn't any man there; I was mistaken about that."
B: "Well, he doesn't exist, but he's there, isn't he?"
A: "Look, I was talking about a guy who exists; that is I thought I was, but I was wrong. I wasn't talking about anybody. I can't tell you what 'he' looks like because there's no 'he' to describe."

Second dialogue:

A: "The unicorn I dreamed about last night looked pretty silly."
Outsider: "But there are no unicorns."
A: "So what?"
Outsider: "Well there aren't any unicorns, so there couldn't be any such thing as the unicorn you dreamed about last night, so 'it' couldn't possibly have looked silly."
A: "Come on, it's not a real unicorn, it's one I dreamed about."
B: "Did it look anything like your department chairman?"
A: "No, actually it looked a little bit like my hairdresser."

[9] Routley (1980), quoted in Parsons (1979b), p. 652. The same view is held by Jacquette (1996), p. 91.

[10] See Parsons (1979a), p. 96. See also Parsons (1980), p. 112.

In this second setting, A refuses the idea of not having been able to refer to anything via "the unicorn I dreamed about last night". That expression, in the context, refers to an object that happens not to exist. Consequently, questions about *it* (for instance, whom does it look like) can be appropriate. It is the Outsider who, sticking to the view that there are no nonexistents, borders to implausibility. If some singular terms can refer to nonexistents in some circumstances of use, as it seemingly happens in the second dialogue, Meinongianism is already vindicated enough.

Yet again, subtle issues in the philosophy of language are involved here. The real question, in a Meinongian setting, may be whether the referential failures at issue pertain to semantics properly (the theory of meaning), or to pragmatics (the theory of language use, taking into account the intentions behind individual speakers' utterances). Here is some, largely tentative, further discussion.[11]

Donnellan's famous referential/attributive distinction on the use of descriptions[12] shows that we can use descriptions successfully to refer to objects that don't (fully) satisfy them. During a party, I can look at a man and claim: "The man over there with the champagne in his glass is happy" – and successfully refer to a man in the corner who is, in fact, happily drinking sparkling water. Or I can look at Jones, who is on trial for Smith's murder and behaving strangely, and refer to him by claiming "The murderer of Smith is insane", even though Jones is in fact innocent and having murdered Smith is someone else's shame.

Kripke's rejoinder to Donnellan is equally well-known. This is based on a distinction between what is meant by a speaker via a particular utterance (speaker's reference, in Kripean jargon), and what is literally said (semantic reference).[13] Only the latter has to do with semantics properly, whereas investigation of the former falls in the realm of the pragmatics of language and the study of speech-acts. My intention to refer to a guy who, unbeknownst to me, has water in his glass, does not affect the proposition literally expressed by my utterance of "The man over there with the champagne in his glass is happy": this does not depend on the speaker's reference but on the description's actual denotation, which cannot be any non-champagne drinker.

Distinguishing between what is (pragmatically) meant and what is literally (semantically) expressed may account for some people's conflicting intuitions in these cases. Some have the feeling that, in some sense, I have managed to communicate something true with my claim – and this sense would be at the level of the speaker's reference; but in some other sense, I have said something false – for the man in the corner is not drinking champagne, contrary to the proposition I have literally expressed.

[11] I say "largely tentative", for the (perhaps fuzzy) border between semantics and pragmatics is also one of the borders of my competences. I am confident that ontological issues concerning a general theory of nonexistent objects are to some extent orthogonal to the linguistic issues to be discussed here.

[12] See Donnellan (1966).

[13] See Kripke (1977).

Armed with Kripke's distinction, let us go back to Parsons' account. The first dialogue motivates Parsons' admission of non-denoting descriptions by relying on speaker A's *intention* to refer to something existent – a real man A believes to have spotted in the doorway – in order to argue for reference failure (in the second dialogue, on the other hand, it is clear that the speaker aimed at referring to an unreal, nonexistent thing). Now relying in this way on speakers' intentions to determine denotations, in a Meinongian setting, may deliver less intuitive results in other cases.

Take for instance reports concerning (*de re*) intentional states, such as "I am searching for the fountain of youth", uttered by Ponce the Leon. Ponce meant to refer to a real object: it was an existent fountain he was looking for. To the extent that his individual intentions determine reference, since no fountain of youth exists, he failed to refer. On the other hand, when I report Ponce's attitude by claiming "Ponce the Leon searched for the fountain of youth", I intend to refer to a nonexistent, for I know that what he was looking for doesn't exist. So in my mouth that utterance of the description does denote.

Uniformity may demand extending the account to proper names as well. Consider the following two utterances of "The Greeks worship Zeus": (1) one is in the mouth of an ancient Greek, say, one explaining his fellow countrymen's religious customs to some barbarian. "Zeus" fails to refer here, assuming that the Greek man believes in the existence of Zeus, and so aims at referring to something existent. (2) The other is in the mouth of a contemporary teacher explaining ancient history to his pupils. Here, "Zeus" does refer; for the teacher knows that Zeus doesn't exist: by uttering that sentence, he aims at referring to a nonexistent object.

All of this may seem strange. It might be more natural for a Meinongian to say that the Greeks referred to the same thing the teacher talks about via the name "Zeus": they believed *that* thing to be real, whereas the teacher knows it isn't. Similarly, both Ponce and I manage to refer via the respective utterances of "the fountain of youth", and refer to the same thing. It is of *that* thing that he believes it exists, whereas I do not. Ponce and I can even talk to each other, with me trying to persuade him that the fountain of youth does not exist, he fiercely resisting in his conviction. It is strange to claim that we are talking past each other.[14] Attempts at referring to something believed to be existent may turn out to be successful references to a nonexistent.

Suppose a Meinongian accepts Kripke's distinction, and believes considerations on individual speakers' intentions to pertain to pragmatics only. Then phenomena commonly gathered under the rubrics of failure of reference and reference to misdescribed objects (i.e., objects not fully satisfying the relevant descriptions) are dealt with in a theory of the pragmatics of language use and of speakers' communicative intentions. We may therefore claim that, *pace* Parsons, in the first dialogue above the description "the man in the doorway over there" in A's mouth

[14] For similar criticisms of Parsons, but pointing at an anti-Meinongian direction (i.e., *neither* speaker referring to anything), see Wettstein (1984).

does refer at the level of semantics, and refers to a nonexistent object that has the properties of being a man and being in the doorway over there. The description mobilizes legitimate properties, and nuclear ones at that: some object does have them. Speaker A's reluctance to answer questions may then be explained pragmatically, as the spin-off of his frustrated intention to refer to an existent.

Many difficult problems in the philosophy of language are turned on by these considerations. For instance, is semantic reference normative with respect to speaker's reference, what the expression (semantically) refers to being what the speaker ought to refer to when she uses it? Is the distinction between speaker's meaning and semantic meaning itself so clear-cut after all? Was Kripke right in denying semantic relevance to referential uses of descriptions?[15] These are topics I happily leave to Meinongians with broader competences and interests in the semantics/pragmatics interface. Parsons himself takes the whole issue as "primarily a linguistic question, or one of formulation" for neo-Meinongian theories, not entailing "a serious ontological disagreement"[16] – and I tend to agree.

The admission of nonexistents, it seems to me, *per se* does not bring theoretical commitment to the claim that all singular terms, and in particular all definite descriptions, denote in all contexts of use, even if Parsons' example of non-denoting description turns out to be unconvincing. There are hints to the effect that, again, linguistic facts concerning (non-)designation and ontological facts concerning (non-)existence are to some extent independent. That any well-formed definite description should denote, to begin with, might turn out to be compatible with (or even advocated in some form of) Parmenideanism. This happens, for instance, in those theories of Fregean ancestry in which it is assumed that, in a logically satisfying setting, all (otherwise) non-denoting descriptions do in fact designate some conventionally assigned dummy object.

Unlike Russell, Frege took definite descriptions as authentic singular terms. "The present king of France is bald" shares the same logical form of "Uma Thurman is blond". To avoid claims like "The present king of France is bald" lacking truth-value, Frege proposed that an arbitrary *designatum* be assigned to the description, the description itself being a good candidate. After that, Carnap followed a similar path, proposing to assign a single dummy object (say, the empty set) to all (otherwise) non-denoting descriptions.[17]

Secondly, whatever the mechanisms of linguistic reference, it makes sense to say that those mechanisms *can* fail in specific circumstances. Just as there can be broken washing machines, so there can be broken (utterances of) singular terms and, as noted by Thomas Hofweber, such failures may be transversal to our

[15] For criticisms of Kripke, see e.g. Reimer (1998), Devitt (2004). For a defense, see Neale (1990), Ch. 3.

[16] Parsons (1979b), p. 653.

[17] For an exposition of Frege's and Carnap's theories about this, See e.g. Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), Ch. 12.

intention of talking about existing things.[18] Here is one example due to Fred Kroon. In a dialogue, a speaker utters the word "max" and the hearer mistakenly takes it for a proper name, "Max". It may be reasonable to think that "Max" in the circumstance does not denote, nor does any description embedding it, such as "Max's house". Even a generous Meinongian may not take $\alpha[x]$ = "x is a house owned by Max" as a legitimate (nuclear) condition in this case.[19] Overall, the statement that *some* singular terms, or perhaps, some singular terms in specific circumstances of use, designate nonexistent objects, already entails the non-Parmenidean thesis, without needing all singular terms to designate in all circumstances of use.

6.1.3 The Watering-Down Principle

The distinction between nuclear and extranuclear properties does not exhaust Meinong and Mally's rejoinder to the Russellian critique that the naïve Comprehension Principle allows one to prove *a priori* the existence of anything. Meinong also claimed that the existent golden mountain is effectively *existent*, even though it does *not exist*.[20] Russell's reply was (understandably) that he could not see a difference behind Meinong's distinction. Others, like Carnap and Gilbert Ryle, read it as a little more than a desperate move on the Meinongian side.[21]

And yet, Meinong was perhaps resorting to another technical distinction,[22] to be developed in the so-called *Watering-Down* Principle – a principle accepted in some variants of nuclear Meinongianism. The idea is that to each extranuclear property P (or, according to different versions of the theory, at least to some such properties) corresponds a nuclear property, say, $P!_W$, that would be its "watered-down" counterpart. Meinong used the word *depotenzierte* for such watered-down properties, claiming that they lacked "full-strength factuality" or "modal moment" (*das Modalmoment*).[23] The watered-down nuclear counterpart of an extranuclear property is to have the same extension of the latter with respect to existing objects: if x exists, then $P!_W x$ just in case Px.[24]

A good feature of this variant of the theory is the following. Limiting comprehension to the original nuclear properties forces severe restrictions to the objects

[18] "We are only fallible creatures and however we manage it that our words stand for things out there in the world, we can fail in cases. So even in cases where we try to talk about regular existing and concrete things there might be some errors involved that make the referential connection break down, and we end up talking about nothing." (Hofweber 2000, p. 265).

[19] See Kroon (2003). The example was brought to my attention by Alberto Voltolini.

[20] See Meinong (1915), pp. 278–82.

[21] See e.g. Carnap (1956), p. 65.

[22] Well described in Smiley (2004), pp. 104–5.

[23] See Meinong (1915), p. 266.

[24] See Parsons (1980), p. 73.

delivered by the theory. But by having watered-down counterparts of extranuclear properties, we gain an extra stock of nuclear ones; and we use them to characterize objects by means of the (NCP). Now we can have an x, characterized by "x is a mountain $\wedge$ x is golden $\wedge$ x exists", that really has the characterizing properties. Such an object, though, is not a golden mountain that exists in the sense of possessing the extranuclear property of existence. It just has a nuclear watered-down existence in its own *Sosein*. Meinong's puzzling statement, that the existent golden mountain is indeed existent but does not exist, may then mean: the existent golden mountain includes in its *Sosein* a nuclear watered-down counterpart of the (extranuclear) property of existence. But the existent golden mountain does not exist, i.e., its watered-down nuclear property of being existent lacks "full-strength factuality".

If Meinong had some version of the Watering-Down Principle in mind in his answer to Russell's objections, it is not clear whether he allowed nuclear watered-down counterparts for all extranuclear properties or only for some of them.[25] Parsons goes for the first option in his *Nonexistent Objects*. Routley and Dale Jacquette are among the nuclear Meinongians that reject the Watering-Down Principle altogether.[26] This way, one may be back to claiming either that "the existent golden mountain" does not denote, or that it denotes the wrong object: something that is a golden mountain, but does not exist. Perhaps to think *de re* about the existent round square is "falsely to assume that the round square has the superadded extranuclear property of existence"; but that towards which our thought is actually directed is, whether we like it or not, "the same intentional object as the true assumption that the round square is round, square, or nonexistent", despite the addition of "denotatively superfluous" extranuclear predicates.[27]

6.1.4 Open Problems

Nuclear Meinongianism solves some problems of the naïve theory, but other issues still lay baffling. Looking at the literature, the greatest difficulty afflicting nuclear Meinongianism is that of providing a criterion for partitioning properties between

[25] See Reicher (2010), Section 5.2. According to Parsons (1980), p. 44, "existing is not the only extranuclear property which has a watered-down version; being possible also has one. This temps one to wonder if all extranuclear properties have nuclear watered-down versions. That will depend, of course, on what 'watered-down' means. In Meinong's theory it is not clear (at least to me). He speaks of the watered-down version of a property as got by removing the 'modal moment' from 'full-strength factuality.' I am not sure what this means." See also Jacquette (1996), Chapter VI, for an exposition of the Meinongian theory of the *Modalmoment*.

[26] See Routley (1980), p. 496; Jacquette (1996), pp. 85–6.

[27] Jacquette (1996), p. 91.

nuclear and extranuclear. In *Nonexistent Objects*, several pages are devoted to explaining the distinction. As far as I know, however, neither Parsons nor any other nuclear Meinongian has supplied a clear criterion. We are only given lists of examples, or sociological remarks.[28] Priest has claimed that without a principle singling out the class all and only the nuclear properties "it is difficult to avoid the feeling that the class has been gerrymandered simply to avoid problems".[29]

Even if a defining criterion for nuclear properties came up, still a subtle doubt would linger. A motivation for the Meinongian view was that we seemingly think *de re* about objects characterized by any condition or bundle of properties, no matter whether these are later deemed as nuclear or not. And the objects at issue should in *some* sense possess the properties characterizing them: for, so the intuition goes, it is about *those* objects that we are thinking. An example proposed by Priest:[30] take an object explicitly characterized as a real, existing evil demon, DemE, and one characterized as a purely imaginary evil demon, DemF. Somebody might fear DemE, but not DemF, precisely insofar as she takes the former as actually existing (thus, for instance, as able to incinerate her), but not the latter. We fear DemE, not DemF, insofar as we think that the first fully exists in an extranuclear sense. To take its existence as a nuclear watered-down counterpart of authentic extranuclear existence does not seem satisfactory.

According to Priest, this suggests that also extranuclear properties, and in particular the property of existing, should be relevant for the identity of the objects at issue. The epicycle of nuclear watered-down counterparts of extranuclear properties might have been an attempt at recapturing this intuition. The existent round square should in some sense exist, even though it cannot exist; thus a watered-down existence lacking *Modalmoment* was ascribed to it. We will see that in the third kind of (neo-)Meinongianism the intuition can be recovered in a more effective way.

Another problem consists in nuclear Meinongianism's retaining a troublesome feature of the naïve theory: it likewise demands that objects literally and really possess the (nuclear) properties that characterize them (this has been called *literalism* by Kit Fine). Take a purely fictional object like Holmes. It is reasonable to maintain that the properties characterizing Holmes be those that Doyle ascribed him in his stories (either explicitly or consecutively). More precisely: if you call a fictional character *native* to a story or set of stories S just in case it is firstly introduced in S, then the character should have the nuclear properties ascribed to

[28] "Our historical situation yields a very rough kind of decision procedure for telling whether a predicate is nuclear or extranuclear. It's this: if everyone agrees that the predicate stands for an ordinary property of individuals, then it's a nuclear predicate, and it stands for a nuclear property. On the other hand, if everyone agrees that it doesn't stand for an ordinary property of individuals (for whatever reason), or if there's a history of controversy about whether it stands for a property of individuals, then it's an extranuclear predicate, and it does not stand for a nuclear property." (Parsons (1979a), p. 102).

[29] Priest (2005), p. 83.

[30] Ibid., p. 84.

it, explicitly or consecutively, in S.[31] Features that appear to be nuclear, like that of living in Baker Street 221b, are ascribed, intra-fictionally, to Holmes. But how can Holmes *really* possess such features? In reality, Baker Street 221b did not exist when Doyle wrote his stories. Later on, it hosted an enterprise, the Abbey Road Building Society; but it appears to never have been the house of any private detective. The literalist features of nuclear Meinongianism, by entailing that Holmes really lived in Baker Street 221b because that is how Doyle characterized him in the stories, seem to commit the theory to statements that are, in point of fact, false.

Another example, due to John Woods:[32] if in one of those stories we are told that Holmes had tea with William Gladstone (the truly existed English prime minister from the nineteenth century, incorporated, let us assume, in the fiction), this should be taken at face value, being a typical nuclear characterization. Now consider the inverse sentence: William Gladstone had tea with Holmes. Intuitively, it should express the same proposition. But it sounds false to anybody: Gladstone never had tea with Holmes, for Holmes is a purely fictional character. This general problem affects any literalist, even non-Meinongian, approach to fiction. It is indeed one of the reasons why realist-abstractionist theories of fictional objects, such as the ones mentioned in the previous Chapter, prefer to deny that intra-fictional property ascriptions be taken as literally true, and typically want a non-factive, implicit fictional operator.

Kit Fine has advanced a further objection, directed against the identity criterion for objects provided by nuclear Meinongianism: the identity of objects is entailed by their congruence with respect to nuclear properties. According to Fine, this principle demands the identification of intuitively distinct objects.[33] Take a story in which two purely fictional characters, Dum and Dee, are introduced and indiscernibly characterized: the story tells us that Dum and Dee were both fat and bald, that Dum was a farmer and so was Dee, that Dum loved pancakes and so did Dee, and so on. By the Link Hypothesis, Dum and Dee have the same nuclear properties, and by the identity criterion, they are therefore the same. But intuitively, they are not. The story may state explicitly that they are two distinct individuals.[34] They may also differ in such extra-fictional features as Dum's being admired while Dee is detested, and so on. Overall, Dum and Dee look quite distinct, but the

[31] The principle that a purely fictional character has the nuclear properties attributed to it in the stories it is native to is called the *Link Hypothesis* (see Parsons (1980), pp. 54–5; Fine (1984), pp. 101–2). Its purpose is to provide a bridge between the fictional worlds of stories and the real world: the Link Hypothesis is supposed to explain the intuition that "Holmes is a detective" or "Gandalf is a wizard" are somehow true.

[32] See Woods (1974), pp. 41–2.

[33] See Fine (1984), pp. 103–4.

[34] It may be objected that one has the property of being called "Dum", which the other, Dee, doesn't have. According to Fine (Ibid) this can be fixed by envisaging a story such that the two characters bear no name at all *within* the story – people in the story may communicate by telepathy and need no languages with names tagged to people.

identity criterion of nuclear Meinongianism identifies them. This remark by Fine might perhaps point at a problem similar to the one raised by Priest regarding DemE and DemF: properties that hold only extra-fictionally for fictional characters, as well as properties that nuclear Meinongianism labels as extranuclear, can be relevant for the identity of objects.

The Nuclear Comprehension Principle does not allow to prove the existence of anything one wills. But within nuclear Meinongianism, at least in some formulations of the theory, existence still doesn't make a big difference: nonexistents like the golden mountain may differ from some existing objects only because they lack the (extranuclear) property of existing. Suppose the nonexistent golden mountain possesses certain (nuclear) properties consecutive to that of being a mountain, for instance, that of having extension in space, that of having mass, etc. Hume and Kant could raise their hand and again ask, what the difference in terms of properties between a golden mountain endowed with the (extranuclear) property of existing, and the nonexistent golden mountain of the Meinongian, consists in. Answering that the difference lies in the fact that the first mountain has the (extranuclear) property of existing may, at this point, sound quite vacuous.

Other difficulties await those accepting the Watering-Down Principle. What exactly is the status of the nuclear counterparts of extranuclear properties? We know that a property P and its watered-down nuclear counterpart $P!_W$ are coextensive in regards to the existing objects, but this only partial coincidence looks like an *ad hoc*: its use consists in making $P!_W$ dovetail with P, so to say, as much as possible. Shouldn't we independently explain and motivate, then, the difference between P and $P!_W$ in regards to *non*existent objects? As Reicher has noted, the Meinongian answer to Russell based on the watering-down strategy may make sense, but there is no avoiding that something artificial lies behind such claims as that the existent golden mountain has watered-down existence, but does not exist.[35]

6.2 Meinong II: The Dual Copula

6.2.1 The Basic Ideas

The second kind of (neo-)Meinongianism is also based on an intuition of Ernst Mally's. In this approach a distinction is made, not between two kinds of *predicates*, but between two kinds of *predication*. These correspond to two ways in which an object can relate to its properties: a standard one and another, introduced *ex novo* in the theory. The terminology for the latter is not uniform: Mally talked of properties that *determine* objects (*Determinieren*) but that are not satisfied (*Erfüllen*) by them;[36] Rapaport, of properties that *constitute* objects but are

[35] The issue is discussed in Reicher (2005).

[36] See Mally (1912).

not exemplified by them.[37] I will adhere, though, to the jargon of Ed Zalta,[38] whose theory is by far the most developed Meinongianism of the second kind from the point of view of both formalism and applications.

According to Zalta, when we say that *x is P*, or we affirm that object *x has* property *P*, two senses of "is" or "has" need to be distinguished. (1) We can mean that *x* exemplifies *P*: this corresponds to the usual sense of the copula. (2) We can mean that *x encodes P*, the Meinongian objects of Zalta's theory being nonexistents that encode properties, that is, are somehow determined by them without exemplifying them in the ordinary sense. As the theory postulates an ambiguity in the copula of ordinary language, it has been labeled as "dual copula" Meinongianism.

The distinction between exemplification and encoding is taken as primitive. Zalta represents encoding formally by simply inverting the usual ordering of singular terms and predicate letters in atomic subject-predicate formulas: while "*Px*" says that *x* exemplifies *P*, "*xP*" says that *x* encodes *P*. Our ordinary concrete, existent objects exemplify properties but encode none. Any object encoding some property or other is labelled by Zalta as *abstract*, meaning that it is neither a mental representation nor a spatiotemporally located thing. Abstract objects encoding properties do not exist: they exemplify the property of being nonexistent. The Comprehension Principle for objects is formulated with no restrictions to specific types of properties,[39] but with reference to encoding instead of exemplification – let us label it the Dual Copula Comprehension Principle:

> (DCCP) For any condition $\alpha[x]$ with free variable x, some abstract object *encodes* exactly $\alpha[x]$.[40]

The dual copula theory has its answer to the Quinean worries on identity conditions. As it happened with nuclear Meinongianism, the basic notion of the theory – in this case, that of encoding – is embedded in the relevant identity criterion: *x* and *y* are the same (abstract) object just in case they encode exactly the same properties.[41] Taken together, (DCCP) and the identity criterion guarantee that to each bundle of properties corresponds a unique abstract object encoding precisely them. Zalta's theory has a nice and useful modal extension; in the modalized version, the criterion states that *x* and *y* are the same object just in case necessarily they encode the same properties.[42]

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[37] See Rapaport (1978).

[38] See Zalta (1983, 1988).

[39] This is not quite right: some minimal restriction is motivated by the need to avoid a version of the Clark-Rapaport paradox I referred to some footnotes ago. I will skip this complication, though.

[40] See e.g. Zalta (1988), p. 19. The (DCCP) as well is second order formally expressible: if *A* stands for the property of being abstract, α is any condition on properties expressible in the language and with no free occurrences of *y*, *P* is a predicative variable, we have: $\Sigma y(Ay \wedge \Lambda P(yP \leftrightarrow \alpha)$.

[41] Formally: $Ax \wedge Ay \rightarrow (x = y \leftrightarrow \Lambda P(xP \leftrightarrow yP))$.

[42] See Zalta (1983), p. 13 and p. 73, and Zalta (1988), p. 19. Nonexistent objects are also necessarily so, i.e., they exemplify being necessarily nonexistent: see Zalta (1983), p. 60.

The (DCCP) entails that, for any ordinary object, that is, property-bearer, x, there's one abstract nonexistent (exactly one, because of the identity criterion) encoding precisely the properties exemplified by x. Following Zalta's terminology, this can be labeled x's *blueprint* – say, b_x. Take Uma Thurman, u, and consider her blueprint, b_u. Call this b_u "Amu". Amu is not Uma: it is, indeed, quite different from her. Uma is a concrete individual located somewhere in the physical world, is an actress, wore a yellow dress in *Kill Bill*, and exists; b_u, that is, Amu, encodes the properties at issue, and all the other properties of Uma, but typically does not exemplify them: Amu *is* not an actress (in the ordinary sense of "is"), nor did Amu ever wear a yellow dress, etc. It is an abstract, nonexistent object, and things of this kind cannot wear dresses any more than π or a square root can. This doesn't prevent Amu from exemplifying certain properties: for some P, Amu *is* effectively P, in the ordinary sense of "is". It is, for instance, an abstract object, nonexistent, the thing that encodes all of Uma's properties and only them, etc.

A nonexistent can exemplify properties it encodes. Take the object encoding the property of being thought of by me on July 10th, 2010, at 11:40 PM, i.e., while I am writing these words. This is also thought of by me on July 10th, 2010, at 11:40 PM, and exemplifies that same property. Or take any abstract object encoding the property of being nonexistent: it not only encodes nonexistence, but exemplifies it, as all abstract objects according to the theory are (necessarily) nonexistent.

By maintaining that the purely fictional, literary, mythological, etc., nonexistent objects of our many aforementioned examples are all abstract objects encoding the properties that characterize them, one gets a spotless ontology. Pegasus can be taken as the abstract object encoding the properties of being a winged horse, captured by Bellerophon, etc.; Holmes, as the abstract object encoding the properties of being a detective, living in Baker Street 221b, etc.; the fountain of youth is the abstract object encoding, say, the property of being a fountain whose water preserves or restores youth. . . , etc. But Pegasus does not exemplify the property of being a winged horse; nor does Holmes exemplify that of being a detective: being abstract nonexistents, they cannot literally possess, that is exemplify, such features.[43]

One may suspect these abstract objects to be nothing more than aggregates or bundles of properties. Zalta refuses such a reduction, though. Firstly, objects are characterized or determined by the properties they encode, which cannot be said – at least, not in the same sense – for things that are sets of properties: the abstract

[43] Dual copula Meinongianism, thus, looks structurally similar to realist-abstractionist theories of fictional objects in van Inwagen-Thomasson's fashion. In both cases, one has abstract objects (with the important difference that, for realist Parmenidean theorists, they exist; in the Zaltian theory, in the standard interpretation, they do not); and in both cases, some kind of ambiguity is postulated in the structure of ordinary predication. As I have hinted at in the previous Chapter, though, according to van Inwagen his relation of (intra-fictional) ascription of properties to fictional characters does not constitute a special kind of predication, similar to Zalta's encoding: van Inwagen's existing abstract objects are not *determined* in any sense by the properties (intra-fictionally) ascribed to them.

object encoding just the property of being red is in some sense red, despite not exemplifying redness (presumably it just cannot exemplify it, being an abstract nonexistent). But the set of red things in no way has the property of which it is the extension. Secondly, as we have seen, objects can sometimes exemplify the same properties they encode. A set of properties or of sets cannot exemplify the same properties that are its elements, or cannot belong to sets that belong to it, as this would be against the Axiom of Foundation of standard set theories like ZF.[44]

The problem of additional properties that beset naïve Meinongianism can be solved as follows: even though the abstract object characterized by $\alpha[x]$ encodes exactly the properties incorporated in its characterizing condition, it can exemplify many other properties – in particular, those entailed by the properties it encodes. For instance, let $\alpha[x] =$ "x is round $\wedge$ x is square"; the abstract object supplied by this condition via the (DCCP) – let us call it "the round square" – is the unique object that encodes exactly the properties of being round and being square. But it exemplifies many other properties: for example, the property of encoding exactly (those) two properties; the counter-intentional property of having been though of (let us assume) by Bertrand Russell; that of being an abstract object; *et cetera*.

And thus the paradox of incompleteness is solved. Our friend Red is now the abstract object that encodes exactly the property of being red; but it can exemplify many other properties: that of encoding exactly one property, for instance; but also the property of *not* being red (in the ordinary sense of "being"), etc. It doesn't happen that Red has one property and more than one in the same sense of "having": Red encodes one property, but exemplifies many.

As for the two Russellian objections: the charge that the Meinongian view entails violations of the Law of Non-Contradiction is avoided, not because the object labeled "the round square", being an abstract object, does not exist, but because of the more specific reason that that object *is* not a round square, in the sense of the standard copula "is" (and thus, it *is* not a circle that is not a circle, or a square that is not a square). One can label "impossible" the abstract objects encoding packages of properties that cannot be all co-exemplified, i.e., such that in no possible circumstance some object exemplifies them all. Which does not mean, however, that such abstract nonexistents exemplify these inconsistent packs themselves, thereby violating some version of the Law of Non-Contradiction.

In the Zaltian theory, as was hinted at, each nonexistent is necessarily so. It may thus seem that all nonexistents are impossible: not only they factually do not exist, but also, they cannot. Indeed, the theory calls for a distinction between different meanings of "impossible": all nonexistents are impossible in the sense of being necessarily nonexistent, i.e., existent in no possible circumstance. Some, like the famous round square, are impossible in a stricter sense by encoding bundles of inconsistent or mutually incompatible properties, that is, properties nothing can jointly exemplify.

[44] There are, however, non-standard theories of sets admitting so-called non-well-founded sets, for which something of this sort happens: see Aczel (1988).

The problem due to the naïve Comprehension Principle's allowing to prove the existence of anything is solved analogously. According to the dual copula approach, the properties of existing, being a mountain, and being made of gold, determine an abstract object that does not exemplify them. The object labeled "the existent golden mountain" can then be taken as the unique (abstract) nonexistent encoding the properties of being a mountain, being made of gold, and existing. But the existent golden mountain does not exemplify those properties – it *is* not a mountain, made of gold, or existent, in the usual sense of "is". The (DCCP), then, does not entail the existence of golden mountains.

This Meinongianism of the second kind also has a story to tell on the problem of existence not making a difference. A Meinongian object – call it "the golden mountain" again – encoding the properties of being a mountain and being made of gold – and, say, even that of existing – has full right not to have any height, or mass, etc., and not to be accessible to senses, for it is abstract. Existence is not a trivial property, but a non-blanket feature of things. Besides, there is nothing strange in the fact that the golden mountain cannot be found in principle in any physical place: it can encode the property of existing without exemplifying it (and so without *being* existent in the ordinary sense); it can exemplify properties like that of being nonexistent, that of not being accessible to senses, etc.

Also, consider the problem of my becoming a nonexistent while retaining all my other properties mentioned in the previous Chapter. In the Meinongianism of the second kind, the nonexistent object closest to me (that is to Franz, *f*) allowed by the theory is my blueprint, b_f – call it Znarf. Znarf is the abstract object encoding precisely the properties I exemplify. It thus does not differ from me only in being nonexistent. It is, instead, quite different from me: in the usual sense of "is", Znarf is not a man, not curly-haired, not Italian, etc. – while it is an abstract object, it is thought of by me now, etc.

6.2.2 Meinongian Translations, I

Can one find systematic theoretical connections between the Meinongianisms of the first and second kind? The two approaches are *prima facie* quite different: they act on two distinct aspects of the naïve Meinongian approach that, combined, caused problems: its lack of restrictions on properties, and its allowing objects to literally exemplify the properties characterizing them. Nuclear Meinongianism postulates two kinds of properties and limits comprehension to one; dual copula Meinongianism postulates two modes of predication, so that the characterized objects do not literally possess, that is, do not exemplify, the relevant properties.

However, as remarked by Kit Fine,[45] one can find correspondences between the two approaches. Given any property *P*, the naïve theory with its Unrestricted

[45] See Fine (1984), p. 98.

Comprehension Principle delivered some object *o* exemplifying *P*. For some *o* and *P*, though, it cannot be allowed that *o* has *P* without further qualification. We can add to each subject-predicate sentence some parameter, say, φ, which works a status indicator: it tells us whether a certain kind of predication, [*Po,* φ] is ordinary or enjoys a special status. (Neo-)Meinongianisms of the first and second kind differ with respect to the nature of φ. For the encoder, the status-indicator goes with the copula, whereas for the nuclear Meinongian, it goes with the predicate.

For instance, (a) let "Sherlock Holmes is a detective" be a sample ordinary predication. The nuclear Meinongian will gloss it by saying that an object exemplifies a nuclear property: Sherlock Holmes is a nonexistent object with the nuclear property of being a detective. The dual copula Meinongian will render it by saying that the object encodes that property: "Sherlock Holmes" designates the abstract nonexistent that encodes, let us say, all and only the properties ascribed to Holmes in Doyle's stories, including that of being a detective. Next, (b) let "Sherlock Holmes has been thought of by Doyle" be a sample special-status predication. The dual copula Meinongian will typically gloss it by saying that the object exemplifies that property. The nuclear Meinongian will claim that the property at issue is an extranuclear feature of the object.

Generally speaking, nuclear properties of the Meinongianism of the first kind, like being red, having a color, possessing a shape, being a man, kicking Socrates, etc., correspond to properties the abstract objects of dual copula Meinongianism can only encode, not exemplify. Extranuclear properties of the Meinongianism of the first kind, like being thought about, being worshipped, being fictional, etc., correspond to properties that the abstract objects of the dual copula approach can also exemplify.[46] This only sets up a rough correspondence or translation schema, for the two approaches can be, and have actually been, developed in different ways.

6.2.3 Open Problems

Dual copula Meinongianism is elegant, simple in theoretical primitives and, especially in the formal developments proposed in Zalta's books, very powerful: it includes a theory of abstract properties, propositions, and worlds that provides a unified approach to a vast range of intensional and intentional phenomena.

One difficulty possibly affecting the dual copula approach is structurally analogous to the issue faced by nuclear Meinongianism when dealing with the nuclear/extranuclear partition. The two distinctions, between nuclear and extranuclear properties on one side, and between exemplification and encoding on the other, are introduced as primitives of the respective theories. As hinted at when drafting

[46] See Zalta (1983), pp. 38–9.

our "translation guideline" between the two types of theory, properties not exemplifiable by the dual copula nonexistents roughly correspond to nuclear properties of the Meinongianism of the first kind. This may signal that, just as nuclear Meinongianism is confronted with the problem of providing a principled distinction between what is nuclear and what is not, so the dual copula Meinongianism faces the issue of providing a principled distinction between what is only encodable and what is also exemplifiable. So the nuclear Meinongian's problem of telling when a property is nuclear, as opposed to extranuclear, may correspond to a dual copula Meinongian's problem with telling when an abstract nonexistent can exemplify a property, as opposed to only being allowed to encode it. In *Abstract Objects*, Zalta admits that the distinction has a "rather vague character",[47] and doesn't do more to enforce it than appealing to common sense.

However, it is controversial to what extent the very distinction between exemplifying and encoding is commonsensical. Perhaps the main issue with the dual copula approach is the double copula itself, which is the basic insight of the theory. A first objection consists in charging the distinction of *ad-hocness*. Much time has passed since Plato's *Cratylus*, and nowadays' philosophers, logicians, and linguists agree on distinguishing, as we know since Chap. 1, between different meanings or uses of "is": as the copula of predication, as expressing identity, etc. How come no one has ever noticed a basic ambiguity of the predicative copula itself, detecting a difference between "is" ascribing a property to something that exemplifies it, and "is" ascribing a property to something that encodes it without exemplification? One may wonder whether the only aim Mally had in postulating such ambiguity was that of having nonexistents related somehow to properties without exemplifying them, in order to circumvent the inconsistencies of naïve Meinongianism. It is a classic Kripkean remark that one had better not postulate ambiguities or distinctions just in order to avoid troubles – for any trouble can avoided that way.

Being interpreted by some commentators as merely stipulative, the two copulas distinction has baffled them. Even leaving the charge of *ad-hocness* aside, they have asked for further information on the *sense* in which objects characterized by means of the (DCCP) "have" the properties at issue. The initial intuition literalist-naïve Meinongianism relied on was that Sherlock Holmes had to *be* a detective living in Baker Street, the round square had to *be* round (and square), in the ordinary sense: that of exemplifying or instantiating a property, or of satisfying a certain condition, etc. Now it turns out that, for several properties P and specifically for those appearing in the relevant characterizing conditions, Meinongian objects cannot *be* P in the usual sense. In what sense, then, do they possess the characterizing properties? In what sense is the existent golden mountain a mountain, made of gold, and existent, if it cannot *be* an existent golden mountain, i.e., an exemplifier of those features? The encoding predication is believed by some to be obscure – and

[47] Ibid, p. 38.

inevitably so, having been introduced *ex novo* and as a primitive. Michael Byrd, for instance, has claimed that "the dual predication view must face the task of giving a satisfactory account of the notion of encoding", and wondered "what non-pictorial understanding can be articulated of the conditions under which '*o* encodes *F*' is true".[48]

While embracing Mally's idea on the distinction between nuclear and extranuclear properties, Meinong did not subscribe to his pupil's other idea of postulating an ambiguity in the copula. Perhaps Meinong saw in it a betrayal of the view that objects must in some sense really have or exemplify the properties characterizing them, not only encode them, whatever thing distinct from exemplification the latter means. Nuclear Meinongianism, as per its (NCP), demanded that nonexistent objects literally have their nuclear properties: that they have them as effectively as the existing objects: a golden mountain must literally be a mountain, as much as the Everest. According to the nuclear Meinongian Dale Jaquette, "Meinong's object theory is eviscerated and the independence thesis contradicted if Mally's plural modes of predication are foisted on it".[49]

Nuclear Meinongianism had to make choices on what expressions like "the existent golden mountain" denote: nothing? Something that is a golden mountain, but does not exist? A golden mountain with watered-down existence? Dual copula Meinongianism might appear to have an object for each definite description, as comprehension is not limited to specific types of properties (minimal limitations aside). This is not so, though, as also noted by Byrd:[50] take a description like "the object *x* such that *x* exemplifies goldenness, mountainhood, and existence". As there are no things that *are* (in the exemplification sense) existent golden mountains, the description cannot denote. This is not that bothersome if one accepts the view, discussed above, that Meinongianism has no automatic commitment to the thesis that all well-formed singular terms denote (in all contexts of use). Similar descriptions can simply be let go as non-denoting, or can have some other treatment. That some terms (in some contexts of use) denote nonexistents may be enough to vindicate a Meinongian ontology.

Now for a more insidious difficulty. In some cases the analysis of ordinary language statements suggested by the theory, despite returning the right truth values, has consequences some find undesirable. These follow from the two ontological features of the dual copula objects, namely their being abstract and their having their (non-)existential status necessarily. Take a negative existential like "The golden mountain does not exist". According to the theory this is true, as it should be, insofar as the description in it denotes an abstract and necessarily nonexistent item. This may sound unsatisfactory. The unsettled intuition is that a

[48] Byrd (1986), p. 247.

[49] Jacquette (1996), p. 15. Routley expresses a similar negative view in Routley (1980), pp. 457–70. Jacquette also proposes a reduction of the dual copula approach to the nuclear one (See Ibid, pp. 20–1).

[50] See Byrd (1986), p. 247.

golden mountain should be something concrete and contingently lacking existence. If we put it in the realm of *abstracta*, we seem to take it as closer to a recursive function than to any ordinary mountain.[51] We know that it does not exist for the purely metaphysical reason that objects capable of encoding are deemed as necessarily nonexistent.

Or take again "Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth". If "the fountain of youth" is to stand for an abstract, necessarily nonexistent property-encoder, then this is not what Ponce de Leon was looking for. He was searching for a concrete object, whose existence he believed in. It seems strange to say that what Ponce de Leon was looking for, unbeknownst to himself, was an abstract object. James Tomberlin has claimed that "if asked, Ponce de Leon correctly would have resisted any suggestion that the object of his search was an abstract entity rather than a concrete one".[52] Also, it seems strange that Ponce, in believing *that* object to be existent (a belief displayed by his looking for it in the physical world), was believing the impossible: he was wrong, but only accidentally so. It seems intuitive that the problem whether certain objects exist or not, as the stories of Atlantis, Troy, Bigfoot, or the Loch Ness monster show, can sometimes be an empirical issue, approached *a posteriori* and, of course, in a fallible way.

Purely fictional objects like Holmes or Gandalf make for other cases. Can these be abstract encoders of properties? I'm not sure whether it is true, as Mark Sainsbury has stated, that "authors, who ought to know, would fiercely resist the suggestion that [their characters] are abstract". But it seems that we typically don't think of Holmes or Gandalf as *abstracta*, of which works of fiction claim things that look (in Gilbert Ryle's terminology) like "category mistakes" for they could not possibly hold of *abstracta*, such as their being detectives, or wizards, or their wearing a deerstalker. "As readers, we imagine Holmes in all his deerstalker glory". If a theory of fictional characters takes such objects seriously, as Meinongianism typically does, then "the nature of the objects [that are to be those characters according to the theory] should not be resistant to the possession of the properties imagination ascribes".[53]

The dual copula theorist can follow a more tortuous path to account for at least some of these intuitions. She can maintain, for instance, that "Sherlock Holmes does not exist" is to be analyzed along the following lines: no concrete object exists, of which the abstract object denoted by "Sherlock Holmes", that is, the object encoding certain properties (those ascribed in Doyle's stories), is the *blueprint*.[54] As for poor Ponce, he might indeed have intended an abstract object encoding certain properties, such as being a fountain and spurting anti-aging water. This does

[51] Perhaps it is time to stress again that I'm taking for granted a plain view of the opposition between *concreta* and *abstracta*. The wider discussion of the abstract/concrete distinction, promised several pages ago, will have to wait until Chap. 9.

[52] Tomberlin (1996), p. 275.

[53] See Sainsbury (2010), p. 111–3. The same objection can apply to realist theories of fiction, *à la* van Inwagen-Thomasson, that take them as existent abstract artifacts.

[54] See Zalta (1983), pp. 50–1.

not entail that he represented that object as abstract: the feature of being abstract has no bear on Ponce's conception of what he was looking for.

Can such rejoinders undermine the naturalness of the dual copula Meinongian approach to negative existentials, intentional contexts, etc.? I think not. As we have begun to see, it may well be that no coherent theory can take at face value *all* ordinary language claims whose analyses are at stake in the dispute between Parmenideans and their opponents, and the intuitions that come with them. Again, a holistic evaluation suggests itself, and there are no knock-down arguments. As Francesco Orilia said, whatever one ultimately thinks of nuclear and dual copula Meinongianism,

> One can anyway draw a lesson from the neo-Meinongians' attempts. Their approach certainly addresses the relevant data in a more satisfactory way than the [Russell-Quine] theory of descriptions. We may add that it addresses them more satisfactorily than Frege's semantic dualism [. . .]. In a sense, the onus of the proof after the neo-Meinongian effort is on those who want to defend actualism.[55]

6.3 Meinong III: Modal Meinongianism

The (neo-)Meinongianism of the third kind is newer than the other two and less explored in its entailments, applications, and difficulties. It is based on three pillars: (1) a modal semantics including non-normal worlds, also known as *im*possible worlds; (2) a Comprehension Principe with no restrictions on the properties that can characterize objects, and no double copula or special predication; and (3) an intuitive distinction between properties that entail existence and properties that do not.

World semantics including non-normal or impossible worlds are fairly common today, albeit perhaps not among non-specialists, and have numerous applications.[56] I have found an anticipation of the new Comprehension Principle, which is likely to be the key idea of the third kind of Meinongian strategy, in works by Kit Fine;[57] but it comes mainly from brilliant insights by Daniel Nolan and Nick Griffin,[58] developed by Graham Priest in his *Towards non-Being*.[59] Lastly, the idea that some properties entail existence while others don't has already surfaced in previous Chapters. It is isomorphic to the theory exposed by Linsky and Zalta in an influent article published some 15 years ago (and to which we shall come back),[60] but has

[55] Orilia (2002), p. 175 (my translation from Italian).

[56] See for example the special issue 38(1997) of the *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, entirely devoted to impossible worlds; see also Priest (1992) and Berto (2006), Chs. 6 and 9, and, for a general introduction, Berto (2009).

[57] See Fine (1982 and 1984).

[58] See Nolan (1998) and Griffin (1998).

[59] See Priest (2005).

[60] See Linsky and Zalta (1994).

been developed, again, by Priest in *Towards non-Being*. Let us check the three pillars, one at a time.

6.3.1 The Other Worlds Strategy

6.3.1.1 Possible Worlds

To understand what a non-normal or impossible world is, one may need to know what a possible world is to begin with. Here is a fast introduction for those not familiar with the notion (if you are, you may skip this Section).

When philosophers and logicians talk of our "actual world", as opposed to other merely possible worlds, by the former they don't mean the Earth, or the solar system, or our current times. Even the most remote galaxies belong to the actual world in this sense, ancient Romans and men of the future belong to it as well. The actual world is taken as the most general and comprehensive way in which things are. In the actual world, Caesar crossed the Rubicon, I wear a black t-shirt while typing these words on my laptop, the Parisian sky I see from my window is cloudy, and Berlusconi is Prime Minister of my native country after Veltroni lost the elections. But things could be different in many ways: a beautiful sun may be shining on Paris today, Caesar might have hesitated in front of the Rubicon and not have crossed it, my t-shirt might be white instead of black, and Veltroni might have won the elections.

Let us then call "possible worlds" these alternative ways in which things could be: situations that in some respects resemble the actual world (for instance, a world where Veltroni has won the elections is still a world in which there are elections and Veltroni is a candidate, just as at the actual world), but that differ in other aspects. Contemporary modal logic – the logic of such expressions as "necessarily", "possibly", "contingently", etc. – leverages on Leibniz's insight that what is necessary is what holds or obtains at all possible worlds, that is, no matter how things turn out, and what is possible is what holds or obtains in at least one possible world (and what is contingent is what obtains at some worlds but not others, etc.). Necessity and possibility can be seen as quantifications on worlds, that is, given our intuitive characterization above, on ways things can be. Logical laws, for example, have traditionally been taken as principles that hold at all possible worlds, that is, however things may turn out. No matter what may happen, it will never happen that A is not identical with A, or that a contradiction turns out to be true: these things obtain in no possible circumstance.

The intuition of possible worlds can be made precise via simple mathematical techniques. By means of modest set-theoretic tools, one can build formal models representing structures of worlds (we shall have a taste of this in the next Chapter); these models supply precise characterizations of such notions as necessity, possibility, contingency, and of many other modal concepts as well. Possible worlds have enjoyed an impressive variety of applications in contemporary philosophy: from the representation of ontological categories often labeled as intensional, like those of

property and proposition, to the study of counterfactual conditionals, to the definition of notions like those of supervenience, essence, ontological dependence, causality.[61]

6.3.1.2 Impossible Worlds

Are there, besides ways things can be, also ways things can*not* be? Some think there are. We often talk about impossibilities, that is, about ways things cannot be, in a *relative* or restricted sense. If you are stuck in a traffic jam in Paris Montparnasse at 2 PM, and your flight is leaving from airport Charles De Gaulle at 2:30 PM, you may moan: "There is no way that I can make it to the airport in time". What you mean is that, given the timing, the means of transport available, the known physical limitations, and other circumstances, it is impossible for you to reach the airport in time. Yet intuitively this is not unrestrictedly, absolutely impossible: if you had Star Trek's transporter, you could make it. But a Star Trek world in which you can be instantaneously disassembled into atoms, and re-assembled exactly with the same atomic structure in a different place, is a world quite different from ours. Some may doubt that such a world is physically possible. We can, however, *envisage* it: the Star Trek stories, for instance, describe a world with effective transporters. Generalizing, it is not difficult to represent to ourselves or conceive of worlds in which fundamental physical and biological laws do not apply: a world in which John Kennedy dies both on November 22th, 1962 and on August 18th, 1967, or one in which John Kennedy, on November 22th, 1962, is both in Dallas and Portland. Such worlds might be deemed physically and biologically impossible.

These are not the impossible worlds we are interested in yet. For even if they can be deemed "impossible" in such restricted senses, they are not absolutely impossible: they still count as *possible* worlds, taking "possible" in an absolutely unrestricted sense (or at least, these are our *bona fide* intuitions; the claim that fictional worlds, such as Star Trek's, are unrestrictedly possible turns on some subtle issues; we shall get to them later on in the book). The worlds we are interested in are not possible, with "possible" understood in a completely unrestricted sense. Take the set of all (unrestrictedly) possible worlds, that is, all ways things can be: the worlds we are interested in are not in there.

These worlds are therefore often called *logically* impossible worlds, for the good reason that logical laws, such as the Law of Identity or the Law of Non-Contradiction, are assumed to be the most general and topic-neutral: they hold at all (unrestrictedly) possible worlds. But philosophers debate on whether there are other kinds of necessity, coextensive with logical necessity on the totality of possible worlds (two such candidate unrestricted necessities being the mathematical and the metaphysical). For this reason, I will often talk about impossible worlds *simpliciter*, understood as worlds that are not possible with respect to an unrestricted notion of possibility, no matter how this is further characterized.

[61] The best book on the subject I am aware of is by far Divers (2002).

Some believe that considering worlds in which logical laws fail is outrageous: logical laws hold, by definition, at all worlds – even when these turn out to be physically or biologically impossible: no matter how things may be, a contradiction can never obtain. But it is of ways things can*not* be that we are talking now. One may not be willing to question the Law of Non-Contradiction, and nevertheless admit that, just as there are various ways the world could be, so there are various ways the world could not be. According to authors like Greg Restall, if there were no ways the world could not be, it would follow that *everything* is possible, something very few are willing to admit.[62] Not everything is possible, that is, some things just can't happen. Anything that just can't happen must be an impossibility. And these ways the world could not be are impossible worlds.[63]

For a less terse motivation, consider debates on alternative logics. Within minimal logic both the Law of Excluded Middle and Scotus' Law, discussed in the previous Chapter, fail to hold. Excluded Middle also fails in intuitionistic logic, whereas Scotus' Law doesn't. It looks like we refer to such circumstances when we evaluate conditionals like "If intuitionistic logic were right, then Scotus' Law would fail" (false), or "If intuitionistic logic were right, then the Law of Excluded Middle would fail" (true). Understanding a non-classical logic, like intuitionism, or minimal logic, or quantum logic, involves knowing how things would be if one of these logics were correct. But if classical logic is the right one (sorry), these are then ways in which things cannot (absolutely) be, that is, impossible worlds.

Or take a world, w_1, at which Fermat's Last Theorem holds, but angles are trisected with ruler and compass; and take a world, w_2, in which Fermat's Last Theorem fails, but angles (and cube roots) behave more sensibly. According to some philosophers, w_1 and w_2 are two different ways in which the world absolutely might not be (provided mathematical necessity is unrestricted). We seem able to make discriminations about what goes on in impossible situations. Some have proposed to adopt impossible worlds as a natural extension of possible worlds theories. And impossible worlds have various applications, in the formal semantics for non-standard modal logics, in the study of the notion of propositional content, in modeling inconsistent belief states, various so-called hyper-intensional notions, etc.[64]

[62] With some exceptions, e.g., Mortensen (1989).

[63] For similar justifications of impossible worlds, see Salmon (1984), Yagisawa (1988), Restall (1997), and Beall and van Fraassen (2003).

[64] On these themes, see Priest (2001), Chapters 4, 9, 10, 18, 23, 24. A note for logical maniacs: non-normal worlds were introduced by Kripke in order to provide world semantics for modal logics (called "non-normal" in their turn) weaker than the basic normal modal system K, such as C. I. Lewis' systems S2 and S3: see Kripke (1965). Kripke's non-normal worlds are such that the modal operators of necessity and possibility behave at them in an anomalous way: all necessitations are false, and all possibilizations are true. One may then pictorially describe Kripke's non-normal worlds as worlds where nothing is necessary, and everything is possible. In the next Chapter we will meet non-normal or impossible worlds of more anarchic kinds.

6.3.2 QCP

The most important move in the (neo-)Meinongianism of the third kind consists in proposing a new Comprehension Principle for objects, not limited to properties of a certain kind as in nuclear Meinongianism, nor prescribing a special sense in which objects can have the characterizing properties as in dual copula Meinongianism. The instances of this new Qualified Comprehension Principle, as I shall call it, are to hold, not necessarily at this world, but at *others*; thus, Reicher has labeled the Meinongianism of the third kind "the other worlds strategy".[65] Given any condition $\alpha[x]$, some object is characterized by it. But it has its characterizing properties, not necessarily at the actual world, but at others – at the worlds that realize the characterization:

(QCP) For any condition $\alpha[x]$ with free variable x, some object satisfies $\alpha[x]$ *at some world*.

Explicit reference to worlds in the (QCP) motivates calling this kind of Meinongianism "modal". The insight is that the having of properties by objects be suitably modally qualified. I have elsewhere proposed to speak of a Modal Meinongian Metaphysics (MMM).[66]

We know that nonexistent objects are, typically, the target of intentional states, cognitive representations, fantasies, conjectures, etc. One key motivation for the introduction of nonexistent objects by Meinong was to provide a uniform treatment of the phenomenon of intentionality. Hence comes the Priestian justification of the modal Meinongian's (QCP):

> Cognitive agents represent the world to themselves in certain ways. These may not, in fact, be accurate representations of this world, but they may, none the less, be accurate representations of a *different* world. For example, if I imagine Sherlock Holmes, I represent the situation much as Victorian London (so, in particular, for example, there are no airplanes); but where there is a detective that lives in Baker St, and so on. The way I represent the world to be is not an accurate representation of our world. But our world could have been like that; there *is* a world that is like that.[67]

There are indeed several worlds that are like that, for representations are generally incomplete in many aspects (we will get back to this phenomenon). The

[65] See Reicher (2010), Section 5.1.

[66] See Berto (2008, 2011). I find an anticipation of the (QCP) in a comprehension principle for objects proposed by Kit Fine in his critical discussion of nuclear Meinongianism: "For any class of properties, there is an object and a context such that the object is native to that context and has in that context exactly the properties of the class" (Fine 1984, p. 138). Leaving the *nativeness* of the object aside, Kit Fine's "contexts" bear some resemblance to worlds that are occasionally inconsistent and/or incomplete. Fine claims that, by parameterizing the having of properties by objects to contexts, one needs no restrictions on the properties that can appear in the characterizing conditions, so that "the whole apparatus of nuclear properties can drop out as so much idle machinery" (p. 139). See also Fine (1982), pp. 108–9.

[67] Priest (2005), p. 84.

characterized objects, therefore, can always have the properties characterizing them and satisfy the relevant condition $\alpha[x]$. "Have" or "satisfy" here means *exemplify*, not a purposely-coined relationship like that of encoding. And this holds for properties of any kind, not just for a special set of nuclear features.

6.3.2.1 Conceivability and Possibility

I have used the word "representation" for the phenomenon at center stage here. I will also use the word "conception". I'm employing these two terms as generics for a range of intentional human activities, all involving the depiction of scenarios, situations, or circumstances, which count as their contents. I find these intentional activities recorded in ordinary language by a vast set of expressions: imagining, mentally visualizing, picturing, fancying, envisioning, envisaging; perhaps also: intuiting, speculating, conjecturing, supposing, describing to oneself; maybe also: pretending, make-believing, simulating. The notions of representation and conception are notoriously elusive and ambiguous; entire philosophies have been devoted to explore them – from the medieval theories of intentionality to the Brentanian ones, from Husserl's phenomenology to the current cognitive sciences.

I take a dim view on such intentional phenomena, and leave their serious investigation to phenomenologists, philosophers of mind, neuroscientists, etc. It is not clear to me, for instance, if and to what extent some of the aforementioned activities are related to others, or reducible to others; which are the borders between one and another, and whether these borders are fuzzy. What I am certain of, is that humans are animals that are capable of *representing*: they conceive things as being such-and-such and so-and-so, imagine situations. These situations can be more or less complex and articulated; they can be complying with reality, or not; they can involve real things in unreal configurations or settings, and unreal things as well.

It is a famous Humean motto that whatever is ("clearly and distinctly") conceivable is possible. *Ex contrapositione*, the impossible cannot be conceived or represented. What is meant here is the absolutely impossible, of course (the *Treatise*, I, ii, 2: "*Nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible*"). The motto has been variously inherited in the empiricist tradition. For example, in *Positivismus und Realismus* Moritz Schlick maintained that, while the merely practically impossible is still conceivable, the logically impossible, such as an explicit inconsistency, is simply unthinkable.

On the other hand, one may already have suspected which role impossible worlds are to play in our modal Meinongianism. Their task is to help us modeling our conceiving and representing absolute impossibilities, such as the famous round square. This Meinongianism is committed to the absolutely impossible being conceivable, representable, and describable. The idea that any characterization is realized at some world extends to inconsistent characterizations, ones that are impossible, even in a strictly logical sense: for *any* condition $\alpha[x]$ whatsoever, there must be some world at which it is realized.

Now the debate on whether and in which sense conceivability entails possibility (let us briefly call "conc-poss" the alleged entailment) is hot in contemporary philosophy.[68] This is so especially because of conc-poss arguments purporting to refute reductionist claims in the philosophy of mind: from the conceivability, under appropriate conditions, of consciousness as distinct from physically-based mental functions, one infers the possible occurrence of such a scenario, and from this (via the widely accepted necessity of identity and distinctness), its actuality. It is therefore worth spending a few words on the issue, to make the Meinongianism we are now exploring palatable in this respect.

The modal Meinongian need not deny the weaker claim that our managing to ("clearly and distinctly") represent to ourselves a situation may often provide good, albeit defeasible, hints to the effect that what we have conceived is possible; as Yablo says, "in slogan form: *conceiving involves the appearance of possibility*".[69] There need be no hard problem with this. What needs to be argued against is the stronger claim that conceivability is an infallible guide to absolute possibility, for we just cannot conceive the absolutely impossible. And this, I think, can be done.

Prima facie, the post-Kripkean acceptance that, contrary to what the philosophical tradition believed, there are *a posteriori* necessities, may seem to support the view that conceivability does not entail possibility. Some necessary identities, such as Hesperus being Phosphorus or water being H_2O, can be empirical discoveries. Couldn't we conceive of things as being otherwise, and so conceive the impossible? It seems easily imaginable that water may have turned out to have a different chemical constitution. At the time of *The Meaning of Meaning*, Putnam was confident on this; not only can we conceive the impossible, but even be rationally justified in believing its being possible and, indeed, actual:

> We can perfectly well imagine having experiences that would convince us (and that would make it rational to believe that) water isn't H_2O. In that sense, it is conceivable that water isn't H_2O. It is conceivable but it isn't logically possible! Conceivability is no proof of logical possibility [...] Human intuition has no privileged access to metaphysical necessity.[70]

Things many not be that easy for the conc-poss denier, though. Consider another open problem concerning the various intentional activities mentioned above: which among them involve some privileged, if not infallible, access to and evaluation of their own contents? A famous example adapted from Wittgenstein:[71] I claim that I imagine Aberdeen University's King's College being on fire. Does it make sense for you to ask me, how can I be sure it's *King's College* that I am imagining? I may

[68] A beautiful collection of essays on the topic is Gendler and Hawthorne (2002).

[69] Yablo (1993), p. 5.

[70] Putnam (1975), p. 233.

[71] See Wittgenstein (1958), p. 39.

take your qualm as disrespectful of my first person authority on the matter. I know the building, I've been teaching in there; I know it is *that* thing that I represent to myself as being on fire; and above all, it is me who does the imagining, so in which sense am I corrigible?

Nevertheless, for various forms of conceivability or representational activity, the doubt makes sense. Some mental representations may be compatible with their authors' making errors in appreciating the represented content. Specifically, they may involve misidentifications. *A posteriori* necessary truths often give us something like an "illusion of contingency": the illusion to the effect that, since it may have turned out, on empirical investigation, that Hesperus is not Phosphorus or that water is not H_2O, then these matters are contingent. Kripke explains the illusion by resorting to "intentional doppelgangers". We can believe we are imagining a possible scenario in which water is not H_2O. What we actually have, though, is an intentional situation qualitatively identical to one we may find ourselves in, and in which we imagine some fluid that has the same phenomenal features of water (say, a colourless, odourless, tasteless liquid, etc.), without being H_2O. We can also imagine having cherished that watery stuff with the name "water". But such a representation is not one of an impossibility, that is, of (what we actually refer to as) *water* not being what it necessarily has to be, i.e., H_2O. It is the representation of a liquid phenomenally like water, and even called "water" in the counterfactual situation, which is not H_2O. This is a possible scenario. The illusion comes from misjudging our own representation, misidentifying that doppelganger of water with water. So the loose sentence "Water may not have been H_2O" is charitably not to be taken as the genuine description of an easily representable impossibility. It is a mistaken attempt at expressing the following: there's a possible situation in which we experience something that has the external appearance of water, or all the phenomenal properties originally known to hold of water, and even call it "water" – without it being H_2O.

If Kripke's point generalizes, then one has an all-too-easy way to defend conc-poss: every time one conceives a putative counterexample to an established unrestricted necessity, say, that Water = H_2O, it can be retorted: it wasn't water that you were actually representing to yourself. Each time you think you are conceiving an impossibility, you are misjudging what you conceive. Assume for the sake of the argument that material constitution is metaphysically necessary for physical objects. I claim I imagine Aberdeen's King's College being made of ice (as opposed to what it's actually made of, i.e., mostly stone). Now the question, how can I be sure it's *King's College* that I am imagining, makes much sense. For, so the defender of conc-poss says, I may be under the wrong impression that I am genuinely conceiving a metaphysical impossibility. What I am actually doing, though, is representing to myself a genuine possibility concerning an intentional doppelganger of (what we, at the actual world, call) King's College: some counterpart of King's College, resembling it in external shape and details, but made of ice. Next, I misidentify this doppelganger with King's College. This gives me the illusion of managing to conceive a metaphysical impossibility.

But does Kripke's point generalize seamlessly? I think not. The strategy of redescribing represented wannabe-impossibilities as represented possibilities + misidentification or misjudgment just won't work in all cases. One such case, forcefully provided by Crispin Wright,[72] is that of first-person counterpossible conjectures.

If Kripke is right, I am essentially a human being, and necessarily tied to my actual biological originators, my parents. But I can represent myself as having been born from different parents, say, my cousin's. I can also characterize and represent myself, say by putting myself at center stage in a fantasy story, as not being human but an elf, an alien, a monkey, or a sycamore tree. Can these seemingly impossible scenarios be explained away as possible situations involving an intentional doppelganger of mine, which I mistakenly identify with myself? It seems not. For I do not individuate myself by means of phenomenal, surface appearances, as I individuate water by its external appearances of colorless, tasteless liquid. When I represent myself in a clearly possible counterfactual situation, such as my being in the Grand Canyon instead of Paris, "no mode of presentation of the self need feature in the exercise before it can count as presenting a scenario in which *I* am in the Grand Canyon".[73] The same goes for my counterpossible representing myself as a sycamore tree or a monkey: this is not redescribable as my representing a doppelganger which is a monkey, and mistakenly taking the substitute to be me. I imagine *myself* in this case as well.

Another setting in which Kripkean redescription doesn't appear to be available is with mathematical conjectures and impossibilities. It seems that we can represent necessary truths of mathematics whose truth-value we ignore as false, or *vice versa*. A mathematician may genuinely conceive that Goldbach's conjecture (every even integer > 2 is the sum of two primes) is wrong: she can work under this assumption, and try to see what may follow from it. Now suppose that the conjecture is indeed true. If mathematical necessity is unrestricted, then it is unrestrictedly impossible for some even number (larger than two) not to be the sum of two primes. Still, we cannot seemingly redescribe the mathematician's representation of the relevant impossibility as the conceiving of a false doppelganger of the conjecture. What could such a doppelganger be?

Proven conjectures, such as Fermat's Last Theorem, make the case even more vivid. Take a competent, but skeptic mathematician, who imagines she can find some mistake in Andrew Wiles' proof, or even direct counterexamples to the Theorem. The person understands the content of the Theorem pretty well: it's a simple claim on Diophantine equations. It is implausible to redescribe the situation as the mathematician's imagining counterexamples to an intentional duplicate of Fermat's Theorem. There appears to be no content-misidentification going on here.

[72] See Wright (2002).

[73] Ibid, p. 436.

I take it that one can conclude from these cases, again with Wright, that "for a large class of impossibilities, there are still determinate ways things would seem if they obtained".[74] This seems enough to sustain our view that we can represent or conceive impossibilities.

The epistemology of modality is a difficult subject (especially when one is, like myself, not an epistemologist by training). I'd tentatively claim, though, that what we have, rather than a special faculty giving us infallible access to genuine possibilities, are more modest modal *intuitions*: non-reflexive beliefs on what is and isn't possible, not supported as such by conclusive evidence. Just as we have intuitions more or less on anything, we have some on modalities. And just as intuitions more or less on anything can be fallible and revisable, so can modal ones.[75]

In the third part of the book I shall introduce, in a more formal setting, a representability or conceivability operator whose semantics will require worlds of the most bizarre kinds to be representationally accessible. Once the formalism is in place, we will be able to explore its applications. Before entering into the details, though, something needs to be said on the third pillar of modal Meinongianism.

6.3.3 Existence-Entailments

The idea that some, but not all properties are existence-entailing, in fact, has already surfaced various times. Let us delve into the issue in greater detail.[76] Recall *serious actualism*: the claim that the having of any property entails existence. Serious actualism is a way to express deep Parmenideanism: to say that everything possessing properties exists is to say that everything exists, if we accept that everything has properties. *Vice versa*, the Meinongian thesis that some things, that is, some property-bearers or *Sosein*-bearers, are nonexistent or lacking *Sein*, is a direct denial of serious actualism. "All properties entail existence" and "No property entails existence" are contraries, not contradictories; they leave logical room for intermediate claims. "Some properties entail existence (while others don't)" expresses such an intermediate position which, while being itself a contradictory of serious actualism, may be the most plausible stance one is to take on the issue.

[74] Ibid, p. 437.

[75] An authoritative essay on these topics is Bealer (2002).

[76] As hinted at above, I have found the idea in Linsky and Zalta (1994). In fact, they talk about properties that entail *concreteness*, not existence. Their view, however, is largely isomorphic to the modal Meinongianism I am introducing, and it is easy to supply a (partial) translation from one to the other. To such issues of translation, that constitute a complex topic especially for modal Meinongianism, I will get back in Chap. 9.

We have seen reasons to suspect that many arguments against existence being a non-blanket property of individuals are based on *ad hoc* examples of properties that entail existence. The reason why Malcolm's "Nonexistent candidates are advised not to apply" sounds preposterous, or "Tame tigers exist" does not seem to work like "Tame tigers growl", is that properties like being a tiger or being a candidate are naturally viewed as entailing the existence of what enjoys them. In order to apply for a job, one needs to be capable of doing various things involving causal interactions in the physical world. Only an existing object can make it. If a friend tells us about someone applying for a job, we assume that our interlocutor is talking about someone real, with no need for the existential commitment to be explicitly expressed: being a candidate for a job is a property that entails existence.

When somebody begins a sentence, "Tame tigers. . .", we take for granted by default that she is talking about existing objects. We have what we may call a postulate, that forges our linguistic and conceptual competence – something along the lines of: If something is a tiger, then it is a physical object, a space-occupier; it has a certain mass, interacts with the surrounding physical world, etc. Overall, it thus exists. Concluding the sentence with an ". . . exist", then, may in many contexts sound pleonastic, if not misleading (in some special but not infrequent contexts, on the other hand, it may also *not* sound thus: I will get back to this). In our ordinary talk, we often use the particular quantifier with the conversational intention to rule out that all things of a certain kind possess a property ("*Some* politicians are thieves" – uttered by a politician speaking in defense of a part of the category he belongs to). In ordinary contexts, to claim that some tame tigers exist can sound like claiming that some triangles are geometrical figures. The notion of an existent tiger, or that of an existent candidate, don't look that different from the notion of a tiger or that of a candidate. This gives to the Humean view that existence makes no difference its plausibility.

However, why suppose all properties to be like that? To legitimate the non-Parmenidean view that some bearers of properties are nonexistent, one only needs some properties not to entail existence. A (presentist) Meinongian may claim, for example, that the currently nonexistent Plato has, as of today, such features as: being Aristocles; having been called that way because of his large shoulders; being in my thoughts as I'm writing these lines; being such that all western philosophy, according to Whitehead, is but a footnote to his dialogues; etc. This view has been nicely supported by Nathan Salmon:

> [The] principle that existence is a pre-condition for having properties – that existence precedes suchness – underlies the Kantian doctrine that existence is not itself a property (or "predicate"). It, like the Kantian doctrine it supports, is a confused and misguided prejudice. Undoubtedly, existence is a prerequisite for a very wide range of ordinary properties – being blue in color, having such-and-such mass, writing *Waverley*. But the sweeping doctrine that existence universally precedes suchness has very clear counter-examples in which an object from one circumstance has properties in another circumstance in virtue of the properties it has in the original circumstance. Socrates does not exist in my present circumstance, yet he has numerous properties here – for example, being mentioned and discussed by me. Walter Scott, who no longer exists, currently has the property of having written *Waverley*. He did exist when he had the property of writing *Waverley*,

> of course, but as every author knows, the property of writing something is very different from the property of having written it. Among their differences is the fact that the former requires existence.[77]

In the modal Meinongian setting, existence is, again, a property of individuals, and not of all of them. But now, it gets relativized to worlds: some things, like Sherlock Holmes, or a golden mountain, or a possible sister of mine, do not exist at this world, but exist at others. Some things, like Scott, have existed, thus they exist at other times. Some things, like you, me, or Uma Thurman, exist at this world, but not at others (this is our intuition of our own contingency, meaning the contingency of our existence: "I could have never been born" – a sentence often taken as true – means: there are possible worlds at which I have never been born, and thus, I do not exist). When we talk about nonexistent objects without further qualification, we normally mean to refer to objects that do not exist at this world of ours, and/or presently, like Holmes, Gandalf, a golden mountain, or Scott.

Accepting that some but not all properties entail existence demands a certain limitation of the Principle of Independence of naïve Meinongianism – of the idea that *Sosein*, the possession of properties, is independent from *Sein*, from the existential status. At least some properties are not independent from *Sein*, for they entail it. This limitation causes also, as we shall see, some complications; but in exchange it gives us many a theoretical benefit. When embedded in a modal framework like the one I started to delineate, and combined with our new Qualified Comprehension Principle, it demands that an object not existing at our actual world and/or currently not possess, here and/or now, properties that entail existence. *Vice versa*, if an actual nonexistent is characterized by some condition $\alpha[x]$ that incorporates existence-entailing predicates, then it can satisfy the characterization, and have the relevant properties, not at this world, but only at others: at those that realize the characterization.

Holmes is represented in Doyle's stories as a detective, who lives in Baker Street 221b, etc. Holmes has the properties that characterize him, not at this world, but at the worlds that make Doyle's stories true. At those worlds, Holmes exists: being a detective, living in Baker Street, etc., arguably are properties that entail existence. Similarly, I can dream about a white unicorn, envisage it as an animal similar to a horse, running around with a horn on its head. What I have dreamt, though, does not run around in any place of the actual world: it does so only in the world(s) of my dreams.

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[77] Salmon (1998), pp. 290–1. Similarly, Murray Kiteley says: "The doctrine, that predication entails existence (. . .) is meretricious. Its false appeal comes from the inability to distinguish the truistic observation 'If you are going to talk (predicate, refer, state), you have got to talk about something' from the quite erroneous statement 'Whatever you talk about (predicate of, refer to, make statements about) must exist'. The first of these statements, when a statement, is genuinely truistic. It comes to little more than a gratuitous observation on the fundamentally subject-predicate character of our talk. (. . .) The second of these statements is a false observation on what we can talk about, an observation which cannot, I should think, be corrected by the expedient of giving everything honorary existence, *in intellectu* or elsewhere." (Kiteley 1964, p. 366).

This combination of the (QCP) and the notion of existence-entailing property accounts for the plausible idea that Holmes, being a nonexistent object at the actual world, can neither kick nor be kicked by anyone here; nor can he be found anywhere (not even in London, 221b Baker Street); nor presumably can he have thoughts here – whereas he can be thought of by existent readers of Doyle's stories like us. If Doyle's stories represent Holmes as (let us suppose) kissing Watson, then the (QCP) tells us that Holmes effectively kisses Watson, *at* the worlds that realize the stories; at those worlds, Holmes really exists.

Is it reasonable to suppose existence-entailments to be necessary, that is, holding at all possible worlds (at the metaphysically possible ones, perhaps – but for the sake of simplicity, let us assume metaphysical necessity to be coextensive with logical, unrestricted necessity). Statements like "If something is a tiger, then it exists" seem to capture something of the meaning of "tiger": they look close, as already said, to Carnapian meaning postulates. As such they can capture necessary nexuses between properties: nexuses that hold at all possible worlds.

Now for a linguistic subtlety. "Tame tigers [understood: *still*] exist" may sound non-trivial in a context in which certain tigers in a group, after a long captivity, have been released free in the jungle. After a while, we check and find that some still survive, whereas others are dead and no more existent. Why call the latters "tigers", then? Being a tiger is existence-entailing, "If something is a tiger, then it exists" being even sponsored as kind of a meaning postulate. Why talk of past-existent (therefore, currently nonexistent) *tigers*, then?

I think we simply have unstable linguistic habits, mirroring shaky intuitions on when it is appropriate to use existence-entailing predicates. We say on the one hand, for instance, that Walter Scott *was* a Scottish writer: nonexistents can hardly be writers *in actu*, and Walter Scott has ceased to exist a long ago. On the other hand, we also perceive "Walter Scott is a Scottish writer" as retaining much of its truth today (contrast "Walter Scott is an Irish general"). We may felicitously refer to Walter Scott, today, as "the Scottish writer who composed *Waverley*". We appropriately call a past tiger, dead and buried some time ago, a tiger, in the right circumstances. I think we allow ourselves to describe objects via predicates that express contextually distinctive, important, or salient features, even when the objects don't currently make those predicates true. Existence-entailing features, of course, can be quite salient. Compare the habit of calling "president" a former president of some nation, say the United States, even when, having finished the mandate, calling that person a president is, strictly speaking, false: *semel abbas, semper abbas*.

For an example projecting onto the future, take Brontë's Jane Eyre, being called (indeed, calling herself) "Mrs Rochester" the evening before her marriage. This is quite successful reference, even if, strictly speaking, Jane is to start satisfying the condition of being married to Rochester only the day after.[78] In fact, in the story the marriage does not even take place the day after! Being Rochester's wife is to remain

[78] I picked up the example from Yablo (1987).

(in the story) an unrealized possibility for Jane. Which shows that what happens across times also happens across worlds. We successfully refer to Holmes as Doyle's detective. Now being a detective is a property Holmes cannot have at the actual world: you have to exist to be one. The modal Meinongian view prescribes, as we have seen, that Holmes be a detective at the worlds at which Doyle's stories are realized, and the actual one is not among them. This doesn't make our referring to Holmes via the description "Doyle's detective" less felicitous: being a detective is one of the most salient features for Holmes, despite his not actually being such.

How to account for these felicitous uses of predicates that are actually currently false of the relevant objects is, yet again, a delicate issue in the philosophy of language, and I take a soft view on this. Perhaps "the president (of the US)" semantically refers only to whoever currently actually is the president. Perhaps contextually successful reference to the former president Jimmy Carter in "The president is busy, he's writing his Camp David memories", uttered at the phone by a member of Carter's entourage, must be located in the pragmatics of referential uses of descriptions, at the level of speakers' meaning (in the Kripkean sense). If this is so, certainly lots of speakers talk this way.

What properties can nonexistents of our world have here? Which properties, in general, are existence-entailing, and which aren't? We already met various examples. Logical properties seem not to be existence-entailing: Holmes does not exist at the actual world and yet, at this world, he is self-identical (Holmes is, after all, identical with Holmes – what else?). The same seems to hold for counter-intentional properties – those having to do with being the object of some intentional state: Holmes cannot actually think about anybody, nor can he admire anyone at this world, because he does not exist. But Holmes can be thought of by me, and admired by his readers. Nonexistent gods can be worshipped, the nonexistent Santa can be mentally addressed by children begging for presents. If we like negative properties, nonexistents can have plenty: to begin with, nonexistence. Next, they can have such properties as not having mass, spatial or perhaps spatiotemporal location, not being visible, not being coloured, etc. Nonexistents can also currently possess the feature of having had certain properties in the past: George Washington has, today, the property of having had wooden teeth; Plato has, today, the property of having had large shoulders. Analogously, they naturally have modal properties, having to do with the having of properties at other worlds. In reality, Holmes is a purely fictional character, while, as already noted, at the worlds that realize Doyle's stories, he's not: he is a detective living in Baker Street 221b there. So Holmes has such properties as being a detective living in Baker Street 221b at those worlds.

The distinction between properties that entail existence and properties that do not is, no doubt, merely intuitive. I wouldn't be able to indicate a general criterion to distinguish between the two kinds, and I guess people have different and fuzzy views on this. Does modal Meinongianism face a problem analogous to that of the distinction between nuclear and extranuclear properties, or that between exemplifiable and encodable ones?

I think not. The naïve-intuitive perspective about the Comprehension Principle for objects has it that (a) all properties are admissible, and (b) objects really

exemplify the properties characterizing them. As the naïve principle must go, the other two forms of Meinongianism *introduce* the nuclear/extranuclear and the exemplification/encoding distinctions respectively. Because these distinctions are ontological postulates advanced just in order to solve the problems of the naïve view, the lack of a criterion to demarcate between nuclear and extranuclear properties, or between what can be exemplified and what can only be encoded, makes the distinctions look *ad hoc*, and perhaps obscure. We ask for a criterion *in order to* better understand the respective theories, and alleviate the element of artificiality.

But that some properties entail existence, and others do not, *is*, or so I submit, the naïve-intuitive view about properties (and existence). Not the view of those philosophers bewitched by serious actualism and Parmenideanism, to be sure. But the distinction has not been introduced or postulated *ad hoc*. People believe, or so I submit, that we can think about, represent, and imagine, things that do not exist, like Gandalf and Holmes, perhaps Walter Scott and George Washington. Being thought of, represented, or imagined, do not entail existence. People also believe that we cannot kick these things for they do not exist, that is, being kicked entails existence. The theory just gathers this bunch of common opinions; not providing a criterion, it mirrors and respects the instability of our intuitions in specific cases.

These informal explanations should give an initial idea as to how modal Meinongianism works and how it is founded. It is now time to develop the theory in a formally more precise way, and to see how it can be applied to specific issues. We will do these two things in the next two Chapters.

Part III
Close Encounters (with Nonexistents) of the Third Kind

It is only by standing outside of reality that we are able to occupy a standpoint from which the constitution of reality can be adequately described.

- Kit Fine, *The Question of Ontology*

Chapter 7
Conceiving the Impossible

In this third part of the book we delve deeper into modal Meinongianism. In this Chapter, we have a more formal approach to the theory; in the following Chap. 8, we will examine how it answers to the five problems of naïve Meinongianism and gets applied specifically to the semantics and ontology of fictional discourse; and Chap. 9 will be devoted to the theory's main difficulties and open problems.

I shall now do what I have avoided, or limited as much as possible, in the previous Chapters: I will step into a more technical kind of exposition. The formalism proposed in this Chapter is, in fact, just a generalization of ordinary possible worlds semantics (in quite a simple version, moreover). Anyone familiar with it should easily grasp the proposed extension. It might be more difficult to digest for those not versed in logic, or familiar only with propositional or elementary first-order logic. Even if you don't make your way through the formalism, though, I think you will manage to appreciate the philosophical issues raised by it. I also think such an approach is worth pursuing independently: Meinongianism has had the misfortune of being swiftly liquidated by Parmenidean philosophers criticizing childlike versions of the theory, or ones that were only superficially known. On the other hand, a more systematic theory makes its own *real* open problems more transparent.

7.1 ®

The following formal framework derives from Priest's *Towards Non-Being*. Yet I have imported in it techniques developed in other works on non-standard modal semantics, introduced modifications and, also, simplifications. Priest's semantics aims at supplying a complete formal treatment of intentional phenomena. Only a subset of the issues dealt with in his theory is relevant here, namely those having to do with nonexistent objects specifically. As we have abundantly seen, intentionality provides one of the motivations for Meinongianism. On the other hand, some of the well-known problems related to intentional contexts, such as accounting for the

apparent failure in them of certain basic inferential patterns, are orthogonal to the ontological issue of nonexistence: they arise independently from the existential status of the involved objects. It is a consequence of the focus of this book on the notion of existence, as distinct from the study of intentionality, that some of the complications introduced by Priest in his semantics are not relevant here; and the mathematical apparatus can be simplified accordingly.[1]

To begin with, we need a formal language, and we will use a fully standard one: a first-order language, L, with individual variables: x, y, z (should more be needed, indexed ones: x_1, x_2, ... , x_n); individual constants: m, n, o (should more be needed, indexed ones: o_1, o_2, ... , o_n); n-place predicative constants or predicates: F, G, H (etc.: $F_1, F_2, \ldots, F_n$); we have a designated one-place predicate, E; the usual logical connectives, negation $\neg$, conjunction $\wedge$, disjunction $\vee$, the conditional $\rightarrow$; the two Meinongian quantifiers, Λ and Σ; the two standard alethic modal operators for necessity $\Box$ and possibility $\Diamond$ (we are not making much use of these, but occasionally, they shall be handy); a sentential operator ® (a somewhat commercial symbol); and we have round brackets as auxiliary symbols. Individual constants and variables are singular terms. If t_1, ..., t_n are singular terms and P is any n-place predicate, then $Pt_1 \ldots t_n$ is an atomic formula. If α and β are formulas, then $\neg\alpha$, $(\alpha \wedge \beta)$, $(\alpha \vee \beta)$, $(\alpha \rightarrow \beta)$, $\Box\alpha$, $\Diamond\alpha$, and $®\alpha$ are formulas; outermost brackets are normally omitted in formulas. If α is a formula and x is a variable, then $\Lambda x\alpha$ and $\Sigma x\alpha$ are formulas, closed and open formulas being defined as usual.

The only piece of notational novelty is ®, which I shall call the *representation operator*. The intuitive reading of "®α" will be something like "It is represented that α", or "It is conceived that α", representation or conception being understood as

[1] The important simplification concerns Priest's account of identity and, specifically, its modeling the failure of the Substitutivity of Identicals in intentional *de dicto*-propositional contexts. Priest represents this using a modal semantics with quantification on individual concepts, that is, functions from worlds to individuals (though he does not employ this standard terminology: he reads the model in terms of mappings from worlds to "world-slices", analogous to mappings from times to time-slices in four-dimensionalist metaphysics). The model follows the lines of so-called "contingent identity" systems for modal logic (Hughes and Cresswell 1968, pp. 198–9; Bressan 1972; Parks 1974). As he sets things up, identity is invariant across *possible* worlds, thus validating the necessity of identity: if Hesperus is Phosphorus, then necessarily Hesperus is Phosphorus, and if water is H_2O, then necessarily water is H_2O. However, the ancients did not know that water is H_2O, and believed that Hesperus and Phosphorus were distinct. This is modeled by having identities vary at some impossible worlds, which are essentially realizations of the relevant intentional states. I have not phrased the semantics below this way, but via a simpler model with traditional objectual quantification. Accounting for the failure of the Substitutivity of Identicals in intentional contexts is an essential task when one provides a general logic of intentionality, but less central when we aim at dealing with the issue of nonexistence. Such puzzles of intentionality arise independently from the issue whether the involved objects are existent or not: the ancient Greeks could believe that Hesperus is distinct from Phosphorus, and ignored that water is H_2O. But Hesperus, that is, Phosphorus, was and is the very existent planet Venus, and water, that is, H_2O, is a very existent substance. The same holds also when we have, not *de dicto* intentional phenomena, but *de re* ones, introduced by intentional transitive constructions: I can admire Cassius Clay without admiring Muhammad Ali, but they are the very same, and very existent, three-time world heavyweight champion.

a generic for the representational intentional activities mentioned in the previous Chapter – from imagining, to picturing, to envisaging, etc.

The first obvious question is, conceived or represented by who? In epistemic logic, various operators are considered, that are to symbolize belief, knowledge, etc. Normally the logics characterizing the behavior of such operators are multi-modal, that is, an epistemic sentential operator, say K, comes with a subscript standing for the subject of the cognitive activity: "$K_c\alpha$", with K representing knowledge or belief, is to be read as "Cognitive agent c knows/believes that α". Priest too formulates his intentional operators in this way[2]; but agent c is mostly carried around as a parameter, and does not do much work in the theory – in particular, no work pertaining the problems we deal with in this book. I thus simplify the exposition by omitting it.

7.2 The Model

An *interpretation* of L is an ordered septuple $<$ P, I, E, @, R, D, $v>$, the intuitive reading of whose members is as follows. P is the set of possible worlds; I and E are two sets of non-normal worlds of two kinds, the *intensionally* and *extensionally* impossible ones respectively (what this means, we will see soon); P, I and E are disjoint, W = P ∪ I ∪ E is the totality of worlds *simpliciter*. @ is the actual world, this whole real setting so dear to us (or, better, its foster in the formalism). We assume that @ ∈ P, the actual world is possible. Distinguishing the actual world would be useless if the semantics only was to provide us with characterizations of logical consequence and validity; but @ is to perform other tasks, as we will see. $R \subseteq$ W x W is a binary relation on the whole set of worlds. If $<w_1, w_2> \in R$ (with $w_1, w_2 \in$ W), we also write this as w_1Rw_2 and claim that w_2 is *representationally accessible* or, briefly, R-accessible, from w_1 (what this means, we will also see soon). D is a (non-empty) set of objects. v is a function assigning denotations to the descriptive constant symbols of the language:

If c is an individual constant, then $v(c) \in$ D;
If P is a n-place predicate and $w \in$ W, then $v(P, w)$ is a pair $<v + (P, w), v\text{-}(P, w)>$, with $v + (P, w) \subseteq D^n$, $v\text{-}(P, w) \subseteq D^n$,

where $D^n = \{<d_1, \ldots, d_n> \mid d_1, \ldots, d_n \in D\}$, the set of n-tuples of members of D ($<d>$ is stipulated to be just d, so D^1 is D). To each pair of n-place atomic predicate P and world w, v assigns what we shall call an extension or positive extension $v + (P, w)$, and an anti-extension or negative extension, $v\text{-}(P, w)$. Intuitively, the extension of P at w is the set of (n-tuples of) things of which P is true there, the anti-extension is the set of (n-tuples of) things of which P is false there. No such double assignment is required in classical, bivalent modal semantics: if at each world all predicates are either true or false of the relevant (n-tuples of) objects,

[2] See Priest (2005), p. 9.

but never both, anti-extensions can be read off from extensions. We can recover the classical setting by imposing the following double clause – let us call it the Classicality Condition:

$$\text{(CC) If } w \in \mathrm{P}, \text{ then for any } n\text{-ary predicate } P, v+(P,w) \cap v-(P,w) = \varnothing$$
$$v+(P,w) \cup v-(P,w) = \mathrm{D}^n$$

At possible worlds the extension and anti-extension of each predicate are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive.

Next, we need the usual assignments of denotations to variables. If a is an assignment (a map from the variables to D), then v_a is the suitably parameterized denotation function, so that we have denotations for all singular terms:

$$\text{If } c \text{ is an individual constant, then } v_a(c) = v(c);$$
$$\text{If } x \text{ is a variable, then } v_a(x) = a(x).$$

Next, we read "w ||-$^{+}_{a}$ α" as "α is true at world w with respect to assignment a", and "w ||-$^{-}_{a}$ α" as "α is false at world w with respect to assignment a" (and an interpretation, but this I will often take for granted and omit to mention; I will also often omit the assignment subscript, when it is understood that we deal with closed formulas, for which distinct assignments make no difference).

The truth and falsity conditions for atomic formulas are, "iff" being short for "if and only if":

$$w||-^{+}_{a} Pt_1 \ldots t_n \text{ iff } <v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v+(P,w)$$
$$w||-^{-}_{a} Pt_1 \ldots t_n \text{ iff } <v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v-(P,w).$$

The extensional logical vocabulary[3] has straightforward clauses at all $w \in \mathrm{P} \cup \mathrm{I}$:

$$w||-^{+}_{a} \neg\alpha \text{ iff } w||-^{-}_{a} \alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}_{a} \neg\alpha \text{ iff } w||-^{+}_{a} \alpha$$

$$w||-^{+}_{a} \alpha \wedge \beta \text{ iff } w||-^{+}_{a} \alpha \text{ and } w||-^{+}_{a} \beta$$
$$w||-^{-}_{a} \alpha \wedge \beta \text{ iff } w||-^{-}_{a} \alpha \text{ or } w||-^{-}_{a} \beta$$

$$w||-^{+}_{a} \alpha \vee \beta \text{ iff } w||-^{+}_{a} \alpha \text{ or } w||-^{+}_{a} \beta$$
$$w||-^{-}_{a} \alpha \vee \beta \text{ iff } w||-^{-}_{a} \alpha \text{ and } w||-^{-}_{a} \beta$$

[3] Where a logical operator is called "extensional", as usual, when the truth conditions of formulas containing it as the main operator are spelt with no reference to worlds different from the one of evaluation.

$$w||-^{+}{}_{a}\Lambda x\alpha \text{ iff for all d } \in \text{D}, w||-^{+}{}_{a}(x/\text{d})\alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}{}_{a}\Lambda x\alpha \text{ iff for some d} \in \text{D}, w||-^{-}{}_{a}(x/\text{d})\alpha$$

$$w||-^{+}{}_{a}\Sigma x\alpha \text{ iff for some d} \in \text{D}, w||-^{+}{}_{a}(x/\text{d})\alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}{}_{a}\Sigma x\alpha \text{ iff for all d} \in \text{D}, w||-^{-}{}_{a}(x/\text{d})\alpha$$

In the clauses for the quantifiers, "$a(x/\text{d})$" stands for the assignment that agrees with a on all variables, except for its assigning to x the object d. As for the modals, we have the following for all $w \in \text{P}$:

$$w||-^{+}{}_{a}\Box\alpha \text{ iff for all } w_1 \in \text{P}, w_1||-^{+}{}_{a}\alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}{}_{a}\Box\alpha \text{ iff for some } w_1 \in \text{P}, w_1||-^{-}{}_{a}\alpha$$

$$w||-^{+}{}_{a}\Diamond\alpha \text{ iff for some } w_1 \in \text{P}, w_1||-^{+}{}_{a}\alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}{}_{a}\Diamond\alpha \text{ iff for all } w_1 \in \text{P}, w_1||-^{-}{}_{a}\alpha$$

The clauses for the modal operators have world quantifiers restricted to items in P: unrestricted necessity/possibility has to be truth at all/some *possible* world(s).

The conditional is a tricky business independently, and different settings are available. We can of course have the material conditional, say, "$\supset$", defined the usual way: $\alpha \supset \beta =_{\text{df}} \neg\alpha \vee \beta$. Next, we can have a more vertebrate intensional conditional by stating that, at all $w \in \text{P}$:

$$w||-^{+}{}_{a}\alpha \rightarrow \beta \text{ iff for all } w_1 \in \text{P} \cup \text{I} \text{ such that } w_1||-^{+}{}_{a}\alpha, w_1||-^{+}{}_{a}\beta.$$
$$w||-^{-}{}_{a}\alpha \rightarrow \beta \text{ iff for some } w_1 \in \text{P} \cup \text{I}, w_1||-^{+}{}_{a}\alpha \text{ and } w_1||-^{-}{}_{a}\beta.$$

I'll come below to why we may want the world quantifiers to range on $\text{P} \cup \text{I}$ here. Apart from this, everything works familiarly enough as far as worlds in P are concerned, the main change with respect to standard modal semantics being that truth and falsity conditions are spelt separately. But even this does not change much at possible worlds. The (CC) dictates that, at each $w \in \text{P}$, any predicate P is either true or false of the relevant object (or n-tuple thereof), but not both. That no atomic formula is both true and false or neither true nor false entails that no formula is, as can be checked recursively. Overall, there are no so-called truth-value gluts or gaps at possible worlds.[4] This reflects in the model the idea that possible worlds

[4] A technical note, which may be skipped without loss of continuity. If one wants the world quantifiers in the clauses for $\rightarrow$ to range on $\text{P} \cup \text{I}$, one needs, in fact, a couple of extra assumptions on the falsity conditions for $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$ to rule out gaps and gluts from possible worlds, specifically: if $w \in \text{P}$, then $w \Vdash^{-}_{a} \alpha \rightarrow \beta$ iff: (1) For some $w_1 \in \text{P} \cup \text{I}$, $w_1 \Vdash^{+}_{a} \alpha$ and $w_1 \Vdash^{-}_{a} \beta$ and it is not the case that $w \Vdash^{+}_{a} \alpha \rightarrow \beta$; (2) (For some $w_1 \in \text{P} \cup \text{I}$, $w_1 \Vdash^{+}_{a} \alpha$ and $w_1 \Vdash^{-}_{a} \beta$) or it is not the case that $w \Vdash^{+}_{a} \alpha \rightarrow \beta$. A similar proviso is needed to rule out gaps and gluts for ®, given that its clauses, which we are about to meet, also allow access to impossible worlds.

have to be, as is often said, consistent and maximal. In particular, given the (CC), if $w \in P$ then $w \Vdash^{+}_{a} \neg\alpha$ if and only if it is not the case that $w \Vdash^{+}_{a} \alpha$: at possible worlds negation works "homophonically", the classical way. And since $@ \in P$, truth *simpliciter* behaves in an orthodox way with respect to negation.

Things get more exciting at impossible worlds. At points in I, v treats complex formulas of the form $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$, $\Box\alpha$, and $\Diamond\alpha$ essentially as *atomic*: their truth-values are not determined recursively, but directly assigned by v in an arbitrary way. At points in E, not only the intensional operators, but *all* complex formulas are treated as atomic and behave arbitrarily: $\alpha \vee \beta$ may turn out to be true even though both α and β are false, etc.[5] Hence the denominations for the two kinds of worlds: at intensionally impossible worlds, only the conditional and the modals are anarchic; at extensionally impossible worlds, also the extensional vocabulary behaves arbitrarily.[6]

It may be objected that the semantics distorts the meanings of logical words, or at the every least, introduces some unwelcome ambiguity: if a formula of the form $\alpha \vee \neg\alpha$ is evaluated as false at some world, then it does not express, there, the proposition that either α or not-α. Now the charge of unwanted ambiguity may perhaps be a problem if truth conditions for the logical words were spelt non-uniformly across *possible* worlds: if one claims that $\alpha \vee \neg\alpha$ can fail, you wonder whether her negation, and/or perhaps her disjunction, means the same as yours

[5] Another technical note, skippable without loss of continuity. We want the syntax of various complex formulas to be semantically neglected at impossible worlds: this is what "treating them as atomic" amounts to. But if, for instance, conditionals $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$ are simply assigned arbitrary truth values, we may have that $Fm \rightarrow Gm$ gets a different value from $Fn \rightarrow Gn$ even though m and n happen to denote the same thing, which would interact badly with the quantifiers. We fix this as follows. Each formula α is associated with one of the form $M[x_1, \ldots, x_n]$, the formula's *matrix*. One obtains the matrix of α by replacing each occurrence in α of a free term (either an individual constant, or a variable free in the formula), from left to right, with a distinct variable $x_1, \ldots, x_n$, in this order, these being indexed as the least variables greater than all the variables bound in α in some canonical ordering. One gets back the original formula from its matrix via a number of reverse substitutions (which number may be zero: a formula may already be its own matrix, if it has the proper structure). Then, what happens at impossible worlds is, in fact, the following. v assigns there to each matrix M of the relevant kind (a conditional or modal matrix at points in I, any matrix at points in E) pairs of subsets of D^n, that is, extensions and antiextensions: if w is an impossible world and M the relevant matrix, $v(M, w) = <v^+(M, w), v^-(M, w)>$. with $v^+(M, w)$, $v^-(M, w) \subseteq D^n$. Next, if $M[x_1, \ldots, x_n]$ is a matrix and $t_1, \ldots, t_n$ the susbstitutable terms, we have the following truth conditions for its substitution instances:

$$w \Vdash^{+}_{a} M[t_1, \ldots, t_n] \text{ iff } <v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v^+(M, w)$$
$$w \Vdash^{-}_{a} M[t_1, \ldots, t_n] \text{ iff } <v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v^-(M, w).$$

See Priest (2005), pp. 17–8, for an exposition of the matrix strategy, and pp. 26–9 for a proof that the semantics work as expected. For the sake of brevity, I shall keep talking of "treating complex formulas as atomic" at impossible worlds; but it is this matrix procedure that is implied.

[6] In *Towards non-Being*, Priest calls these *open* worlds, meaning that they are not closed under any non-trivial logical consequence relation; but they deserve to be called impossible worlds if anything does.

(Quine notoriously raised such a qualm about non-classical logicians). But in the setting above, a failure of Excluded Middle is a way things cannot be. A way things *can* be is someone's thinking or believing that Excluded Middle fails (as the existence of intuitionists shows). Impossible worlds, that is, ways things cannot be, are introduced to deal with such thoughts.

The idea of having complex formulas behave as atomic at some worlds comes from classic work in epistemic logic by Rantala,[7] who introduced non-normal worlds to provide formal semantics that make logical omniscience fail for epistemic operators (I shall say a few more words on what this means later). We use impossible worlds for similar, but more general, purposes. Such worlds are to be accessible via the binary R when the truth conditions for ® are at issue. At $w \in$ P:

$$w||-^{+}{}_{a}\text{®}\alpha \text{ iff for all } w_1 \in \text{W such that } wRw_1, w_1||-^{+}{}_{a}\alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}{}_{a}\text{®}\alpha \text{ iff for some } w_1 \in \text{W such that } wRw_1, w_1||-^{-}{}_{a}\alpha$$

The intuitive explanation goes as follows. The semantics for ® is similar to the ordinary binary accessibility semantics for the modal operators of standard modal logic. "wRw_1" ("w_1 is R-accessible from w"), should be read intuitively as the claim that at w_1 things are as they are conceived or represented to be at w. It is represented that α (at w) just in case α is true at all w_1 where things are as they are represented to be. We shall talk at length of how to spell this out in the following, but for a reassuring initial example: if ®α is your dreaming that you win the lottery, then (an R-accessible) w_1 is a fine world at which your dream comes true. The key difference between the usual binary accessibility for ordinary modalities and R-accessibility is precisely in the broader set of accessible worlds: representation allows us to access impossibilities.

Logical consequence is defined as in ordinary modal logics with a designated base world: if S is a set of formulas,

S ⊨ α iff for every interpretation <P, I, E, @, R, D, v>, and assignment a, if @ ||-$^{+}_{a}$ β for all β ∈ S, then @ ||-$^{+}_{a}$ α.

As for logical validity:

⊨ α iff ∅ ⊨ α, i.e., for every interpretation <P, I, E, @, R, D, v>, and assignment a, @ ||-$^{+}_{a}$ α.

Logical consequence is truth preservation at the base world, that is, the actual world @, in all interpretations (and assignments); logical validity is truth at @ in all interpretations (and assignments). Logical consequence may also be defined as truth preservation at all *possible* worlds in all interpretations (and ditto for logical validity). In this respect, the semantics has nothing to differentiate @ from the other w's (provided $w \in$ P: we are dealing with what logically holds, that is, what holds at worlds where logic is *not* different). But as I said before, I highlighted (the lieutenant for) the actual world because @ has other tasks to carry out.

[7] See Rantala (1982). Something of the sort also happens to modal formulas in some semantics for very weak modal logics, like S0.5, due to Cresswell (1966).

The definitions of logical validity and consequence are, thus, fully standard. The model validates, for instance, the S5 principles for $\Box$ e $\Diamond$. We may introduce another accessibility relation and use it for the clauses of the modal operators; which alethic modalities we have, though, makes little difference for our Meinongian aims, and S5 helps to keep things simple.

As for $\rightarrow$, having world quantifiers range on $P \cup I$ in its semantic clauses makes of it a *relevant* conditional, in the sense of fulfilling the so-called weak condition of relevance, also called Variable Sharing Property, advertised in relevant logic:

(VSP) If $\vDash \alpha \rightarrow \beta$, then α and β share some predicate or propositional parameter.

In particular, this arrangement makes "irrelevant" entailments like $\alpha \rightarrow (\beta \rightarrow \beta)$ fail: just take a $w \in I$ where α is true but $\beta \rightarrow \beta$ is false. This is good if we believe that in a valid conditional antecedent and consequent should not be disengaged, that is, they should display some content connection.[8] How the conditional has to work, though, is not our main concern here: we could have had the world quantifiers in its clauses range only on P, which would have made of it a standard strict conditional *à la* C.I. Lewis: $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$ is true at w ($\in$ P) just in case at all possible worlds where α is true, β is true.

Now that we have the basics in place, I am to comment on the philosophical import of the formalism in the following four sections. These will deal, respectively, with the sub-distinction between the two kinds of impossible worlds; the anarchic behavior of ®; its interaction with the Qualified Comprehension Principle; and the Meinongian conception of quantification and existence that comes with the model.

7.3 Two Kinds of Impossible Worlds

Apart from the conditional, there are other collateral reasons for flagging items in I among the impossible worlds, that is, less anarchic worlds where only the intensional logical vocabulary has a deviant behavior. The distinction between intensionally and extensionally impossible worlds mirrors the presence of two positions in the current debate on the subject. The first may be labeled as the "Australasian stance", for it is (typically) favored by paraconsistent and relevant logicians.[9] In the Australasian approach, worlds are constituents of interpretations of some paraconsistent logic or other, which imposes to them some logical structure: they are closed under a paraconsistent consequence relation, weaker than classical consequence relation. Since this position draws on the conception of

[8] A gentle and readable introduction to relevant logics (my favourite kind of paraconsistent logics) is Mares (2006). A classic, broader survey is Dunn (1986).

[9] See e.g. Restall (1997), Mares (1997), and Goble (2006).

impossible worlds as worlds where logical laws may fail, it is naturally allied to the idea that, at (the admissible) impossible worlds, only intensional operators, such as a strict or relevant conditional, and the box and diamond, behave in non-standard fashion. After all, it is the behavior of such operators that concerns the laws of logic. The truth conditions for conjunction, disjunction, or the quantifiers, should thus remain the same as in possible worlds.

A more radical view on impossible worlds may be labeled as the "American stance", since it reflects the opinion of some north-American theorists.[10] The American stance focuses on the definition of impossible worlds as ways things could not be, and adopts what we may call an unrestricted comprehension principle for worlds – roughly: For *any* way the world could not be, there is some impossible world which is like that. This can deliver particularly anarchic worlds, not closed under any non-trivial notion of logical consequence.

A convincing philosophical defense of the American stance is due, ironically, to the Australian Daniel Nolan.[11] His first reason for it is that one can avoid altering (or had better not alter) too much the logic, and may even stick to a classical notion of logical consequence. If any principle whatsoever can be broken at some impossible world or other, weakening our logical consequence to make room for such worlds, and to provide a logic that holds in *every* situation, possible or not, will be pointless. His second reason is that those who make room only for some impossibilities would have to provide a principled distinction between impossibilities that obtain at some impossible world, and impossibilities that obtain at no worlds at all. This looks like an uncomfortable halfway position, subject to "slippery slope" arguments. Further reasons for putting no *a priori* restrictions on impossibilities come from our representational modal Meinongian setting, as we are about to see.

7.4 The (Non-)Logic of Representation

An important part of the debate in epistemic logic consists in discussing which logical principles should characterize the epistemic operators at issue, so to mirror at best the corresponding intuitive notions. Some views are straightforward, for instance, knowledge being factive: if someone knows that it is raining, then it is the case that it is raining. If K is *knows that*, it should sustain the entailment from $K_c\alpha$ to α for any α and c (the same does not apply if K is *believes that*: one can believe falsities). These inferences are captured syntactically, by adding logical principles as axioms or, perhaps, rules of inference, and semantically, by imposing corresponding conditions on the admissible interpretations, so that the axioms or rules turn out to be validated. For instance, one takes $K_c\alpha \rightarrow \alpha$ as an axiom schema,

[10] See e.g. Vander Laan (1997) and Zalta (1997).

[11] See Nolan (1997).

and all its instances turn out to be valid, i.e., true at all worlds of all interpretations where the relevant accessibility relation is reflexive, each world accessing itself.

Other inferences are more controversial. Is it right that if I know something (say, that it is raining), then I automatically know that I know it (I know that I know that it is raining)? Must K allow the entailment from $K_c\alpha$ to $K_cK_c\alpha$ (this is the so-called Principle of Positive Introspection)? While this turns on debates concerning our intuitions about knowledge, it is not difficult to vindicate the inference, if we like, by tampering with accessibility between worlds (in this case, just have it be transitive). But basic logical inferences apparently *fail* in epistemic and intentional contexts, and their failure is more difficult to handle. This is the cluster of problems gathered under the aforementioned label of "logical omniscience".[12] When modeled in standard Kripkean possible worlds frames, knowledge (or belief) turns out to be closed under entailment, that is, the following holds:

$$(\mathrm{Cl})\alpha \rightarrow \beta, K_c\alpha \models K_c\beta$$

One knows (believes) all the things entailed by the things one knows (believes). Also, all valid formulas turn out to be known (believed):

$$(\mathrm{Val})\ \text{If} \models \alpha, \ \text{then} \models K_c\alpha$$

And beliefs form a consistent set, that is, it cannot be the case that both a formula and its negation are believed:

$$(\mathrm{Cons}) \models \neg(K_c\alpha \wedge K_c\neg\alpha)$$

Taken together, these principles deliver an idealized notion of knowledge (belief), not mirroring the actual status of human, finite and fallible cognitive agents. I know Peano's axioms as basic truths of arithmetic, and Peano's axioms entail (let us suppose) Goldbach's conjecture; but I do not know whether Goldbach's conjecture is true or not. With other intentional states such as belief or desire, even broad consistency is at stake. I desire the barrel to be full; and if the barrel is full, my wife cannot be drunk. But I do not wish my wife to be sober: I want a full barrel and a drunken wife (it's an old and unfair proverb). My desires are irrational, but this is the way I am: sometimes, I desire the impossible.[13]

Rantala's non-normal worlds were proposed to deal with these phenomena: despite being logically impossible, and not closed under any non-trivial consequence relation, they can be seen as viable epistemic alternatives by imperfect cognitive agents. By allowing such worlds to be accessible in the evaluation of formulas including intentional-epistemic operators, one can destroy their unwelcome closure

[12] For an extensive survey of this topic, see Fagin et al. (1993), Ch. 9.

[13] What is desired in this case may not be a logical impossibility. I just couldn't refrain from mentioning the proverb.

features, thereby dispensing with (Cl), (Val), and (Cons). As for (Cl), for instance, and referring to the formal setting introduced above: assume that $\vDash \alpha \rightarrow \beta$. Then at all worlds in $P \cup I$ where α holds, β holds. But there can be an impossible world, w, at which α holds and β fails. If $@Rw$ (for cognitive agent c), then we can have that $@ \Vdash^{+}_{a} K_c\alpha$, but it is not the case that $@ \Vdash^{+}_{a} K_c\beta$. Similarly for consistency: when the relevant R-accessible worlds are inconsistent worlds where both α and $\neg\alpha$ are true, we can have $@ \Vdash^{+}_{a} K_c\alpha \wedge K_c\neg\alpha$.

A similar story is to be told for ®. By accessing impossible worlds of any kind on the one hand, and by not having constraints on its R-accessibility relation on the other, ® has quite a poor logic – one may indeed wonder whether it's worth being called a logic at all.[14] What is doing the interesting work here, though, is not the logic but the semantics. We are interested in the general form of the latter and, above all, its ontological interpretation. Modal Meinongianism puts at center stage the idea of objects that do not exist (at the actual world) but bear properties, many of which are representational. And representability or conceivability had better be, generally speaking, quite anarchic.

The intuition is that when imagination is unleashed, we can conceive or represent (envisage stories about, etc.) objects characterized by (bundles of) properties more or less of any kind. We want worlds that realize the ways in which things are represented. In particular, we may take into account extravagant Meinongian conditions delivering objects that are inconsistent, non-adjunctive, non-prime, etc. $\alpha[x]$ can be "x is a round square", "x is and is not round", "x is either red or blue but x is not red and not blue", *et cetera*. Besides the similarities there is, in fact, a philosophical disanalogy between ® and more traditional epistemic and intentional notions. That we are fallible and at times logically incoherent as cognitive agents can certainly be seen as a defect, due to our finite and imperfect nature. This is not so when it's about representing and conceiving: in this case, logical fantasy is, generally speaking, a gift (or so I view it).

Even if intentional operators are generally quite anarchic, depending on the kind of representation we want to model we may need to impose various constraints on ®. In order to have it express specific intentional activities under the generic umbrella of conceivability, say, *mentally representing a scenario* as opposed to *hallucinating*, we may demand more structure. When one mentally represents a scenario, say, engaging in speculations on the next move of the financial markets, one's representation must have some more or less minimal coherence, that is, be closed under some, however weaker-than-classical, notion of logical consequence. This is proved by the fact that people sensibly argue on how things are, and on what follows from what, in the relevant scenarios. They accept or reject some things as holding (and, in particular, some things as holding as a consequence of other things holding) in the situations at hand. Even when we represent to ourselves the

[14] Some inferences still hold, though; for instance, those concerning the quantifiers: if I imagine that a specific object, Holmes, is a detective, then certainly something is such that I imagine its being a detective, $®Dh \vDash \Sigma x®Dx$ (see Priest 2005, p. 24).

impossible, we generally believe we can draw inferences from what we explicitly represented; as we have seen we can, for example, argue and disagree about what would follow if a certain logical or mathematical principle failed.

One way to achieve a more vertebrate behavior for ® would be to place appropriate constraints on R-accessibility. We can then have ® model different species of representation depending on the constraints at issue, just as in ordinary modal logic we can have □ model different species of necessity by placing appropriate constraints on the relevant accessibility relation. If there is something like *truthful representation*, which is factive, for instance, we stipulate its *R* to be reflexive.

Another way would be to make sub-distinctions between impossible worlds of various kinds. One may then allow only impossible worlds that are closed under some form of entailment to be R-accessible, for instance, worlds in I. This gives interesting results: representation then only accesses typical worlds of relevant logics, which are occasionally inconsistent or incomplete, and can also violate some logical laws, but are nevertheless adjunctive and prime (conjunction and disjunction behave standardly there). Then ® becomes closed under relevant entailment: if $\vDash \alpha \rightarrow \beta$, and @ $\Vdash^{+}_{a}$ ®α, then @ $\Vdash^{+}_{a}$ ®β. This kind of "relevant conceivability" brings a form of logical omniscience for *relevant* consequences of what is represented. However, inconsistent representation is still allowed, i.e., (Cons) fails, as well as (Val), i.e., not all logically valid formulae are conceived.[15]

Further constraints may be needed if we want ® to interact properly with the Qualified Comprehension Principle of modal Meinongianism – and to this we now turn.

7.5 (QCP) and Representation

How does the (QCP) square with the machinery above? In naïve as well as nuclear Meinongianism, any (nuclear) condition characterized some object, but with no proviso on worlds at which the object had the relevant properties. In particular, for any (nuclear) condition α[*x*], calling *o* an object characterized by it, we have (in our newly introduced notation) that @ $\Vdash^{+}$ α[*o*]: objects literally and actually have the properties characterizing them. This literalism spells troubles, as we saw in the previous Chapter: it gives us factual falsities, like Holmes' really living (or having

[15] The closest antecedent to this in the literature, as far as I know, is Levesque's (1984) logic of explicit and implicit belief. Yet another issue, which I leave open here, is whether there are interesting representational operators requiring particular, as opposed to universal, quantification on worlds in their semantic clauses. Epistemic operators come with duals: K_c, *c knows that*, requiring quantification on all epistemically accessible worlds, has the natural dual *it may be, for all c knows, that*. Some duals have a simpler intuitive reading than others, though. In the case of ®, we may have something like *being compatible with what is represented*.

lived) in Baker Street 221b because Doyle represented him as such; or implausible consequences, like Holmes' actually being a man, but a nonexistent one.

In modal Meinongianism, on the other hand, if an object o is characterized (at the actual world) as $\alpha[x]$, then all we have in general is that @ $\Vdash^{+}$ ®$\alpha[o]$. Characterization is fundamentally representational. Given the semantics of the representation operator, this entails only that, for all worlds w that realize the way in which things are represented (at @), that is, for all w such that @Rw, $w \Vdash^{+} \alpha[o]$. As prescribed by the (QCP), things do have the features that show up in their characterizing conditions, but, ® not being factive, not necessarily at @: they only have them at the R-accessible worlds that realize the characterization – which might not even be possible ones.

Sherlock Holmes, then, is represented (at @), by Doyle and his readers, as a detective living in Baker Street, gifted with acute observational and logical skills, etc. But Holmes does not possess those features at @; in particular because being a detective, living in Baker Street, etc., are all properties that entail existence, while Holmes does not exist. However, Holmes has those properties at the worlds that make the relevant representational characterizations true. We respect the intuition that objects really have, in some sense, the properties characterizing them – this is why we know what we talk about when we talk of them. "In some sense" now has a precise *sense*. It means: at the worlds realizing the representation.

But which are the right worlds? That is: under which conditions does a world count as such that things are at it as they are represented? We said above that, even if intentional operators are in general anarchic, we may want to impose constraints on ® for specific purposes. We want the relevant representations to be closed under some notion of logical consequence, so that if ®α, and β is a consequence of α, then ®β. In general, objects represented in a certain way may have *further* properties besides those they are explicitly represented as having. Some such properties will just follow on the basis of the entailments mandated by the logic for ®. From the fact that Tolkien represents Gandalf as a friend of Bilbo and Bilbo as a pipe-smoker, we can infer that Gandalf is represented as being friends with a pipe-smoker even though (let us suppose so) Tolkien never says that explicitly.

On the other hand, what holds in a representation in many cases goes beyond both what is explicitly represented and what is entailed by logical implication. For while making inferences on what holds and what doesn't hold in a representation, we often import information from actuality, which we want to retain when assessing what goes on in a certain represented situation. What the relevant information is depends on our background knowledge of reality; but may also depend on our beliefs (even mistaken beliefs!). The legitimacy of importing them can rely on *ceteris paribus* and default clauses. Again, the case of fictional representation makes the point evident, and has been extensively studied.[16] Doyle never explicitly represents (let us suppose) Holmes as living in Europe, or as having lungs. We are inclined to take these things as holding at all worlds that realize

[16] See the already mentioned Lewis (1978), Künne (1990), and Proudfoot (2006).

Doyle's characterization of Holmes, though: we integrate the explicit representation with information imported from actuality. Now Doyle certainly characterizes Holmes as a man living in London. At the actual world, London is in Europe and, if something is a normally endowed man, then it has lungs. Doyle says nothing against this, so, absent contrary indications from the author, the import is legitimate.

We should exclude from the R-accessible worlds that matter in evaluating what holds in the representation those worlds that, despite making true what is explicitly represented, add gratuitous changes with respect to actuality: we must exclude worlds that differ from @ more than required. Holmes is represented by Doyle as walking through London; we infer that Holmes is represented as walking through a European city. All worlds where Holmes walks through London but London is in Africa must be ruled out, for that would be a departure from actuality not mandated by what Doyle explicitly claims. London's being in Europe has to be held fixed across the worlds where things are as they are represented. This means that, to some extent, representations (of this kind) are about the real world as well. For what holds in a representation depends on what holds at the R-accessible worlds, where things are as represented. And which worlds these are depends also, to some extent, on how our world is.

Even if this is worked out in a satisfactory way, we cannot expect precise answers to all the questions we may ask concerning a represented object. Is Holmes, as characterized in Doyle's stories, right-handed or left-handed? Doyle doesn't say. And, intuitively, it is not the case that worlds where Holmes is left-handed generally differ from @ more than worlds where he is right-handed, or *vice versa*. Representation typically under-represents. We will come back to this phenomenon, and how to deal with it within modal Meinongianism, in the next Chapter.

Providing a detailed account of the workings of the representation operator, especially of how one is to select the worlds that are relevant to address what holds in a certain representation, is overall a difficult issue. Part of the difficulty is similar to the one of the standard treatment of counterfactuals *à la* Stalnaker-Lewis, where a counterfactual "If it were the case that α, then it would be the case that β" is true just in case the world(s) most similar to the actual world that make(s) the antecedent true, make(s) the consequent true as well. We need to invoke some notion of similarity between worlds, having to take into account worlds with minimal differences from actuality in certain respects. And this notion is notoriously slippery. The task becomes exceptionally tricky when we have to consider the intentions and beliefs of those who do the representing. Sometimes, for instance, an author of a work of fiction can make claims that, later on, turn out to be false in the story, or can make claims that are subtly ironic, etc.

There is one reason, luckily, for not investigating further into this here: how operators of this kind should work is, to a large extent, immaterial as far as the main topic of this book, namely nonexistent objects, is concerned. The objects endowed with representational properties may be taken by a philosopher of a more Parmenidean inclination, for instance, as existent abstract objects, as per the realist-abstractionist theories of fictional objects. As noted by Sainsbury, it is symptomatic that Lewis, to whom we owe one of the subtlest accounts of truth-in-fiction in terms

of non-factive operators quantifying on worlds, left the issue of the ontological status of fictional characters at the margins in his paper.[17] This, despite the fact that he had, as is well known, strongly opinionated views on the ontology of worlds and their inhabitants. How to set up the proper behavior of a representation operator is to a large extent independent from the ontological-existential status of the involved objects. To be sure, that *some* coherent account is feasible is a presupposition of modal Meinongianism.

7.6 Quantification and Existence-Entailments

Our model above is *constant domain* modal semantics, D being the unique domain of the quantifiers. Those interested in debates in modal logic know the heated one on the relative merits of constant and *variable* domain models, the latter being models where the domain of quantification can vary from one world to another. It is fair to say that one option does not impose itself over the other merely at the level of the formal machinery; for either setting can formally simulate the other.[18] The real issues have to do with the philosophical interpretation of the models, and with the facts we aim at representing by means of them (an eminent issue of *applied*, as opposed to *pure*, semantics, as philosophers of logic also say).[19]

We shall see in the last Chapter that there may be unpleasant, but understandable, reasons to switch to variable domains also in a modal Meinongian context, in order to represent certain phenomena concerning some nonexistents. *Prima facie*, though, having a constant domain is the natural option for a non-Parmenidean. One of the reasons traditionally adduced for taking the domain of the quantifiers as variable across worlds, having different worlds mappable to different sets of objects, is to represent contingent existence. What exists at this world, say, Uma Thurman, does not exist at other possible worlds where Uma Thurman's parents never meet. *Vice versa* (and perhaps more controversially) what does not exist at this world can exist at others: a never-born sister of mine does not exist but could; mountains made of gold do not exist but appear to be possibly existent; and Gandalf does not exist but, in the world of *The Lord of The Rings*, he does.[20]

[17] See Sainsbury (2010), p. 74.

[18] For formal translation techniques that embed variable domains into constant ones and *vice versa*, see Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), Chs. 4 and 8.

[19] The terminology, as far as I know, comes from Plantinga (1974), and has become somewhat standard after its adoption in classic textbooks, such as Kirwan (1978) and Haack (1978). One may take the interpretation introduced in Sect. 7.2 as a mere set-theoretic construction including a bunch of mathematical items. Such would be pure semantics. It becomes applied when we provide the interpretation with what I have called an "intuitive reading", that is, we explain what the items in the structure are to represent: worlds of various kinds, relations between them, etc.

[20] Again, I'm bracketing for now the issue whether purely fictional objects, are contingently nonexistent, i.e., existent at some possible worlds.

Now in a Parmenidean conception of existence as quantification, if we let the domain be constant across all worlds, we have to admit that what is included in the domain of quantification at one world, and thus exists there, exists at all worlds. To exist at all (possible) worlds is to exist necessarily; thus, all that exists at some world exists necessarily, against the intuition of contingency. Instead, in a variable domain setting the latter can be recaptured by representing contingency as domain variation across worlds, while having the quantifiers of the formal language range, at each world, only on what exists at that world.[21]

As we know well, though, existence for the Meinongian is not quantification. We can quantify on things that do not exist: this is what our Meinongian Λ and Σ are seen as doing. Existential commitment is made explicit by means of the predicate E of L flagged above, which, as you might have guessed, is the existence predicate. This is used in the definitions of the existentially loaded quantifiers as restricted quantifiers we already know – let us repeat them[22]:

$$(\mathrm{Df}\forall)\ \ \forall x\alpha[x] =_{\mathrm{df}} \Lambda x(Ex \rightarrow \alpha[x])$$

$$(\mathrm{Df}\exists)\ \ \exists x\alpha[x] =_{\mathrm{df}} \Sigma x(Ex \wedge \alpha[x]).$$

In the modal setting, the objects existent at a world, w, are just those in $v + (E, w)$. That object o exists at world w_1, but not at world w_2, is represented by having o satisfy the existence predicate at w_1, but not at w_2. The supporter of the received view on existence cannot follow this route: as she identifies existence with quantification, and denies its being a non-blanket property of individuals, she needs to render the intuition of contingency by differentiating the world domains, and representing what exists at a world as what is quantified on at that world.

It has been observed that standard variable domain (applied) modal semantics, too, is compromised with quantification on nonexistents more than a Parmenidean philosopher may be willing to admit. Object language actualist quantifiers may well range, at each world, only on what exists at that world. We seem to have, however, commitment to mere *possibilia* in the (meta-)language in which the semantics is

[21] Object language quantification in variable domain (applied) modal semantics is often called *actualist* quantification. It is sometimes claimed that we can recapture the intuition of contingency in a constant domain setting, by allowing the unique domain for the quantifiers to open up to mere *possibilia* that exist only at worlds different from the actual, like a merely possible sister or a golden mountain. This latter is called *possibilist* quantification, and the associated ontological conception is therefore called possibilism. Does possibilism differ relevantly from Meinongianism, taken as the non-Parmenidean claim that there are nonexistent objects? Just as for something to be possibly but not actually blue is for it not to be blue, one may claim, so for something to be possibly but not actually existent is for it not to be existent. Possibilism, then, would seem to be committed to the claim that some things do not exist. Perhaps the main intuitive difference between Meinongianism and possibilism would then be that the latter does not admit objects that could not exist, that is, that exist at no possible world.

[22] The intensional conditional $\rightarrow$, in fact, may turn out to be too strong for many purposes, so that one prefers $\supset$. We don't need to discuss this further issue here.

phrased: there are objects in the domains of other worlds that are not in the domain of the actual one. The point has been raised by Linsky and Zalta and, independently, by Williamson.[23] Even when the only thing officially showing up in a varying domain interpretation is, say, a domain-assigning function, δ, mapping each world w in W to the set $\delta(w)$ which is the respective domain, it always makes sense to speak of the union of all these sets, $D = \cup\{\delta(w) | \ w \in W\}$. Such D is naturally interpreted as including merely possible objects as members (all the things in the domain of some world or other, but not of the actual one). These mere *possibilia* look very much like nonexistents the semantics is committed to.

Williamson also considers the option of resorting to a metalanguage that is itself modal. He reasonably observes that this would make us lose the advantages of an extensional, set-theoretic semantics for the modal object language. In particular, when issues concerning the validity of modal formulas are raised, a metalanguage that seems to just rephrase a controversial object language modal principle is likely not to be of much help.

There is another existential task the formalism above accomplishes nicely: it can represent existence-entailments, as per the third pillar of modal Meinongeanism. If what I said in the previous Chapter about existence-entailing properties is right, we can assume that, if an n-place predicate P of L is existence-entailing in i-th position, it is so at all possible worlds:

$$\text{If } w \in \text{P}, \text{ then if} <\text{d}_1, \ldots, \text{d}_i, \ldots, \text{d}_n> \in v + (P, w), \text{ then } \text{d}_i \in v + (E, w).$$

Existential entailments may be treated, it was claimed, as similar to meaning postulates fixing the semantics of some predicates and, in particular, their connections to the existence predicate. Meaning postulates are usually taken as necessary truths. Thus, if Sherlock Holmes thinks about Pegasus at w, Holmes must exist at w, even though Pegasus need not also exist there. But if Holmes kisses Watson at w, then at w both Holmes and Watson exist. And this always applies when $w \in$ P. Things may be different at impossible worlds: we may have nonexistent thinkers and kissers there. Rather bizarre, one may claim; but this is how impossible worlds are.

[23] See Linsky and Zalta (1994) and Williamson (1998).

Chapter 8
Nonexistents of the Third Kind at Work

Two Chapters ago we met modal Meinongianism for the first time, and in the previous Chapter we have seen the theory formally developed via the tools of world semantics. It is now time to put the nonexistents of the third kind at work. To begin with, we will look at the modal Meinongian answers to the problems affecting naïve Meinongianism. We shall then examine a paradigmatic application of the theory: its treatment of the ontology and semantics of fictional discourse.

8.1 Answers to the Five Problems

8.1.1 Answers to the Russellian Objections

The reply to the charge that Meinongianism admits inconsistent objects, thereby violating the Law of Non-Contradiction, relies on the impossible worlds of the theory. According to the (QCP), an object characterized by a given condition $\alpha[x]$ satisfies it at some world. If something is represented as a round square, or as a circle that is not a circle, then it does have the inconsistent features it is characterized as having – but the (QCP) does not require it to have them at the actual world @. The Classicality Condition (CC) imposed on worlds in P of (acceptable) interpretations entails that an object characterized by a condition $\alpha[x] = Px \wedge \neg Px$ cannot even satisfy it at any possible world, for no true sentence can have a true negation there.

The round square cupola of Berkeley College will then be round and square, or round and not round, but only at some *im*possible world.[1] There is no need to

[1] And we felicitously refer to it (at @) via the expression "the round square cupola of Berkeley College", even though it is not round and square at @, for the reasons we have explored two Chapters ago: we felicitously refer to objects by means of descriptions objects may not satisfy at the actual world or at the current time; we tend to privilege salient features of the things we talk about, even when they don't actually possess them, or don't currently possess them.

distinguish two kinds of predication and claim, as in dual copula Meinongianism, that objects like the round square cupola of Berkeley College encode the properties of being round and of being square without exemplifying them. Our inconsistent objects now instantiate or exemplify their inconsistent properties – but not at any possible world. Berkeley College's round square cupola is round and square in the good old sense of "is" – at the worlds that realize the characterization; and these are impossible for sure. An object *o*'s being represented as a non-circular circle does not force us to *assert*, that is, to posit as true at @, that $Co \wedge \neg Co$: this holds only at the R-accessible worlds, which will be, in the case, impossible. The (QCP) by itself does not commit the theory to actually or possibly true contradictions.

The general spin-off is that, in the modal Meinongian framework, objects are not consistent or inconsistent *per se* or intrinsically, in the following sense: by supervening to representational characterizations, consistency and inconsistency are discharged to the worlds. *Obiectus tantum obiectus*: I can tell a story in which *I* am an inconsistent object – for example, a logical fantasy in which I turn out to both have and not have blue eyes, *simul sub eodem*. Things will be so, though, only at some impossible-inconsistent worlds.

Along the same lines goes the answer to the Russellian problem of triviality. Take again $\alpha[x] = Mx \wedge Gx \wedge Ex$, "*x* a mountain $\wedge$ *x* is golden $\wedge$ *x* exists". This characterizes some object. Call it *m*. Again, the (QCP) has it that *m* satisfies $\alpha[x]$ at some world, but not necessarily the actual. $@ \Vdash^{+} \mathrm{R}(Mm \wedge Gm \wedge Em)$, that is, *m* is conceived or represented (at the actual world) as an existing golden mountain. Then given the semantics of R, for all *w* such that $@Rw$ (i.e., all worlds that realize the way in which things are represented), $w \Vdash^{+} Mm \wedge Gm \wedge Em$ – but @ need not be one of them. We cannot define or call into existence something by simply characterizing it as existing, and the Kantian-Russellian concerns disappear. One can dream or imagine that something exists, but that doesn't make it existent.

Also, let $\alpha[x]$ be $x = x \wedge \beta$, with β arbitrary, and call the characterized object *b*. Again, $b = b \wedge \beta$ does not automatically obtain at the actual world @, but only at some world, that might also not be possible. This also holds when β embeds an operator, like the box $\Box$ of unrestricted necessity, requiring quantification on all possible worlds in its semantic clauses. Let β be $\Box\gamma$, so that $\alpha[x]$ now is $x = x \wedge \Box\gamma$, and call again *b* the characterized object. Then according to the (QCP), $b = b \wedge \Box\gamma$ holds at some world, *w*. One cannot infer from this, though, that γ is true, that is, it holds at @: for *w* may well be an *im*possible world – and certainly so if γ is not a necessary truth. We cannot assume the truth conditions of an intensional operator like $\Box$ to be uniform across all worlds, impossible ones included. Otherwise, we may have things that hold at all worlds whatsoever; but housetraining the totality of worlds in this way is out of question.

Impossible worlds help, in a similar way, with the following potential problem. One may suspect that in some cases objects cannot have the properties they are represented as having, at some world or other, as required by the (QCP). This may appear to be so with objects characterized by conditions embedding explicit reference to worlds and, in particular, to the *actual* world. It is well known that the expression "actually", as a world-pointer meaning the same as "at the

actual world", can work as a rigidifier for descriptions and property-ascriptions in general: I am, contingently, brown-haired, i.e., I am brown-haired at @ but not at other possible worlds; but then I am necessarily brown-haired-at-the-actual-world. Now let us import a world-pointing device in our object language L, by adding to it a sentential operator, "*Act*", whose intuitive reading is something like "actually", or "it is actually the case that". The natural truth conditions for *Act* would seem to be the following:

$$w||-^{+}{}_{a}Act\,\alpha \text{ if and only if} @||-^{+}{}_{a}\alpha$$

$$w||-^{-}{}_{a}Act\,\alpha \text{ if and only if} @||-^{-}{}_{a}\alpha$$

"It is actually the case that α" is true at a world if and only if α is true at the actual world (*ditto* for the falsity clause).[2] Now let's embed our new friend in a characterizing condition. If $\beta[x]$ = "x is a winged horse", then let $\alpha[x] = Act\ \beta[x]$ = "It is actually the case that x is a winged horse". Considering $\alpha[x]$, the (QCP) gives us something, call it b, which, at some world w, has the property of actually being a winged horse. Since $w \Vdash^{+} Act\ \beta[b]$, then $@ \Vdash^{+} \beta[b]$. This will not do: the (QCP) cannot deliver real winged horses by *fiat*. Worse, triviality seems to reappear: let $\alpha[x]$ be $x = x \wedge Act\ \beta$, with β arbitrary. Let b be again the characterized object. Then by the (QCP), at some world w, $b = b \wedge Act\ \beta$, so at the actual world, β. Overall, it seems that we need to reintroduce some limitation to the (QCP).[3]

However, this is not in fact needed – and for reasons similar to the ones concerning the necessity operator. As pointed out by Priest,[4] the clauses for *Act* above are fine only if w is a *possible* world. *Act* is an operator whose semantics involves a world shift and, again, we cannot postulate the truth conditions of such operators to be uniform unrestrictedly across all worlds. If α is false at @, then *Act* α is not a necessary truth; but if w is an impossible world, *Act* α can hold at it even if α does not hold at @. *Act* α must have different truth conditions at impossible worlds (one may take it as atomic there, via the usual matrix treatment).

[2] So phrased, *Act* does not correspond to the world-pointing use of "actually" taken as a modal indexical; *Act* has been so formulated for the sake of the argument. Sentences containing indexicals can express different contents in different contexts of use. In the standard Kaplanian treatment, to give their semantics we need a double indexing, taking into account not only worlds of evaluation, but also contexts of use. In the case of the indexical "actually", the relevant contexts are worlds themselves: when embedded in an expression used at a world, "actually" picks out that very world. Used in the context of world w_1, "It is actually the case that α" is true at w, iff α, as used at w_1, is true at w_1, and false otherwise. $w_1 = @$ is a special case.

[3] An objection to this effect, directed against Priest's Meinongian treatment of fictional objects, is in Sauchelli (2011).

[4] See Priest (2007), Section 3.3.

Given $\alpha[x]$ = "It is actually the case that x is a winged horse", therefore, we still have, as required by the (QCP), that something has, at some world, the property of being a winged horse at @. But this doesn't give us a real winged horse. The intuition is simple: one may imagine his dreams to be realized, but unfortunately, that doesn't make them real. Given a condition, $\beta[x]$, we can imagine that it obtains *simpliciter*, that is, that it holds at the actual world, and form a new condition $\alpha[x] = Act\ \beta[x]$. But this does not automatically guarantee its realization, as it would happen if the truth conditions for *Act* were uniform across all worlds.

As for world-pointers, and especially pointers to actuality, being included in a representation, I suspect characterizations of this kind to be more an exception than the rule. We usually do not conceive or represent things having reference to worlds embedded in the representation, though at times they may be implicit in what we represent (for instance: a writer of pure fiction may make it clear that she aims at ruling out the actual world from the set of circumstances where things are as represented by her story; this may make a difference between fiction and myth – a point to which I shall return in the next Chapter). This is supported by the following remark: we can often grasp the content of a representation without having any clue as to the worlds at which it is supposed to hold, or even while being misguided on this; we can mistake fiction for reality, or *vice versa*. Here is Mark Sainsbury:

> A documentary might be mistaken for an ordinary drama-movie, or vice versa. An interesting feature of these mistakes is that they are consistent with the consumers grasping the content of the work. The movie shows a scene of rioters in Chechnya; that is made plain (they are certainly rioting, and the streets signs and buildings are distinctive of Chechnya). This does not tell us whether we are in the realm of fact or fiction, documentary or drama.[5]

We don't know whether what is represented obtains at the actual world or not, but we understand the represented content quite well. It seems, therefore, that the representation brings no reference to worlds embedded in it, and in particular to the actual one. According to Sainsbury, this shows that "there is no distinctive species of meaning, 'fictional meaning', distinct from everyday meaning".[6]

[5] Sainsbury (2010), p. 5.

[6] Ibid. Perhaps there's some lesson in modal epistemology to be learned from this – though the following remark is just a tentative one. We can explore *a priori* the realm of possibilities (and impossibilities) via our representational faculties. We can represent objects as being such-and-such, and the (QCP) tells us *a priori* that there are circumstances at which things are as we conceive them. What we may not in general stipulate *a priori* is that what is conceived is possible, and, *a fortiori*, that it obtains. For any condition $\alpha[x]$, in the modal-Meinongian theory some object satisfies $\alpha[x]$ at some world w. What we may not stipulate *a priori* is that w is a possible world, and, *a fortiori*, that $w = @$. In David Lewis' words, "what we do find out by observation is what possibilities *we* are: which worlds may be ours, which of their inhabitants may be ourselves" (Lewis 1986, p. 112). I am aware, though, that such claims may be vulnerable to counterexamples, for instance, from putative cases of *a priori* contingency.

8.1.2 *Existence Making Again a Difference, Incompleteness Dissolved*

The notion of existence-entailment for properties solves the problem naïve Meinongianism had with existence making no difference. The modal Meinongian theory does not entail, for example, that when something ceases to exist, it just loses the property of existence while the rest stays unchanged. For the Meinongianism of the third kind, lots of properties bring existence with them, at the actual world as well as at any possible one. Here as well as in our possible surroundings, once something ceases to exist, it bids farewell to many enjoyable features. When I cease to exist, I will no longer be able to walk through the Jardins de Luxembourg in the autumn, nor to perceive the world around me, nor even to be a man – assuming all those properties entail existence. On the other hand, I will not cease to be a property-bearer: I will be remembered by my beloved ones (or so I hope); I will retain the property of having been born in Venice, Italy; that of being myself; etc. etc.

Existence, thus, makes a difference again: lacking it, an object can neither entertain causal relations, nor do anything at all, nor place itself somewhere in the physical world. In Nathan Salmon's words:

> A merely possible [i.e. actually nonexistent] individual does not live and learn; it does not feel pleasure and pain, or know joy and sorrow; it does not laugh or cry; it does not even lie still at rest. [...]. The properties of merely possible individuals, and of impossible individuals, are inert; they include only such unimpressive characteristics as being referred to, not being a native Californian, and possibly existing or necessarily not existing. Not an enviable resume. The mere property of existing, once it is acquired, opens up a galaxy of new possibilities.[7]

The problem of additional properties is addressed by admitting that, as we have seen already, objects characterized by a condition $\alpha[x]$ need not possess, at the relevant worlds, only the properties explicitly appearing in the characterization. They may also possess the properties entailed by the former, according to an entailment relation under which we want the conceivability operator ® to be closed in our favorite setting, plus also default and *ceteris paribus* clauses, etc.

It is now easy to deal with the paradox of incompleteness that, according to Reicher, beset naïve Meinongianism. Let Red be characterized explicitly as something that has *exclusively* the property of being red, that is, $\alpha[x]$ = "x is red and x does not possess other properties".[8] Red can realize the characterization, but only at impossible worlds: there is no possible circumstance in which an object can have just one property.

[7] Salmon (1987), pp. 97–8.

[8] Not that this can be expressed in the formal L introduced in the previous Chapter, since it is a first-order language, whereas the condition embeds a quantification on properties. This is of minor importance for our purposes, though.

This last point shows that a distinction is to be made between two quite different kinds of incompleteness: incomplete representations and representations of (say, *de re*) incomplete objects. The former comes from the wide-ranging fact that, generally speaking, representation under-represents. When I conceive of a situation, I usually do not represent all its details; sometimes I have the feeling that I just *cannot* fill in all details, because this would be too difficult or time-consuming a task to perform. When I try to foresee the next movements of the financial markets, I want to imagine a rich, realistic circumstance involving lots of banks, brokers around the world, phone calls, displacements of real and virtual money, etc. I cannot figure this out in all detail, but I want the details to be there in the following sense: I certainly would *not* allow the inference from the incompleteness of my representation to the *de re* incompleteness of the represented objects. I have not imagined Wall Street brick by brick; this does not mean that Wall Street is, in my representation, a vague object with a *de re* indeterminate number of bricks.

This ordinary incompleteness takes place also when an author tells a fictional story. Back to our old example: is Holmes left-handed or right-handed? Doyle never tells us. This does not entail that he meant Holmes to be a *de re* underdetermined or vague object as far as dominant hand issues go. On the contrary, we may safely assume the worlds that make the stories true not to be such that Holmes is an incomplete individual in this respect, for this would be a gratuitous change. First, Holmes is characterized as a man and, by default assumption imported from the actual world, men ordinarily are either left-handed or right-handed (or ambidextrous). Doyle says nothing to ban this. Thus, Holmes, h, is represented (in Doyle's stories), if implicitly, as either left-handed, L, or right-handed, R (or ambidextrous): @ $\Vdash^{+}$ ®$(Lh \vee Rh)$. Given the semantics of ®, this means that, for all worlds, w, such that @Rw, that is, for all worlds where things are as they are represented to be (in Doyle's stories), $w \Vdash^{+} Lh \vee Rh$: Holmes is right-handed or left-handed (or ambidextrous). Doyle doesn't tell us more, that is, representation under-represents in this respect: it is not the case that @ $\Vdash^{+}$ ®Lh and it is not the case that @ $\Vdash^{+}$ ®Rh. Again given the semantics of ®, this means that at some of the worlds that realize the representation, Holmes is not left-handed, and at some he is not right-handed. Overall, this kind of incompleteness is thus explained via quantification on worlds.

Quite a different phenomenon is at issue when something is directly characterized *as* incomplete. Our characterization of Red, explicitly represented as being only red, makes for a rather extreme case. For another one, take the fantasy story of the Incomplete Man I'll start to make up right now:

> The Incomplete Man was neither left-handed nor right-handed; he was neither precisely here nor precisely there, for his body had fuzzy borders; he had no precise height or weight – for instance, he was neither 1,80 m tall, nor not 1,80 m tall; due to his vague and almost translucent constitution, much he suffered in his youth, passing completely unnoticed among ordinary, complete girls (sometimes *through* them)...

... And so on. It seems clear that the object at issue is represented as substantively incomplete. This entails, as far as our modal Meinongian framework goes,

that the story cannot be realized under any possible circumstance – for given the (CC), at no possible world can any object make a predicate neither true nor false.

In this case as well, thus, traditional problems due to the incompleteness of typical Meinongian objects are solved by discharging the twofold incompleteness of the relevant characterizations to the world apparatus. Ordinary representational incompleteness is underspecificity. This entails having a multiplicity of different worlds where the representation is realized, which may fill up the unspecified details in different ways in (sort of) a supervaluational fashion. Special, and normally deliberate, incompleteness of objects characterized as *de re* vague things entails the characterization's holding only at impossible worlds; for that's the only place where objects can be *de re* incomplete. The two kinds of incompleteness can overlap: my short story of the Incomplete Man is very much incomplete in the ordinary sense as well, leaving it open, for instance, whether any of the complete girls whose path he crossed was left-handed.

Just as objects are in a sense not inconsistent *per se* or intrinsically, so they are not *per se* or intrinsically incomplete. Given the (CC), just as nothing makes a predicate both true and false at any possible world, so nothing makes it neither true nor false. There is no room for incomplete objects having neither a property nor its complement at @, or at any possible world. The Incomplete Man is, in fact, quite complete around here. On the other hand, I can tell a story in which *I* am an incomplete object, neither 1,80 m tall nor not, and neither here nor there, the worlds at which the story holds being impossible for sure. Again, *obiectus tantum obiectus*.

8.1.3 Same Properties, Same Worlds, Same Things

Let us now discuss how the theory answers to the request for an identity criterion for nonexistents. Just as the two other kinds of Meinongianism, also the third one embeds its central notion in the criterion. For the nuclear Meinongian, x and y were the same object if and only if they had the same nuclear properties. For the dual copula Meinongian, x and y were the same (abstract) object if and only if they encoded the same properties. The other worlds strategy of Priest's *Towards Non-Being* includes the notion of *world* in its identity criterion, thereby embodying modality into it. The intuition is that an object is the object it is because it has the properties it has at the worlds where it has them: x and y are the same object if and only if they have the same properties at each world.

The criterion is presented by Priest as totally general: it applies to existents as well as nonexistents. There is no need, then, to have a specific criterion of identity for nonexistents, as it happens with abstract nonexistent objects in the dual copula Meinongianism. But the criterion must, in fact, be qualified. Firstly, in order to avoid trivialization, properties embedding identity itself must be excluded. Secondly, Priest takes the world quantifier in the criterion as ranging on (what, in his account, corresponds to) our worlds in $P \cup I$, excluding the extensionally

impossible worlds in E. This is motivated by his general approach to intentionality, specifically, his making the Substitutivity of Identicals fail in the context of propositional intentional operators.[9]

Let us now check how the criterion is applied to specific cases. We know that in the modal Meinongian setting objects can have, at the worlds that realize the relevant characterization, properties beyond those they are explicitly represented as having. It may be natural to think any property whose status remains undetermined also after the consequences of a characterization have been drawn to vary arbitrarily across worlds. But Priest prefers to regiment this intuition, limiting the variation on the basis of constraints imposed by actually *existing* objects. He proposes to this effect what he calls the *Principle of Freedom*, which I will (re)state here as follows:

(PF) Given an object o, characterized by the condition $\alpha[x]$, for any property P not included in $\alpha[x]$ nor consequent upon it, there will be worlds (not in E) realizing the characterization in question, at which o has P, and worlds (not in E) at which o lacks P, save for restrictions imposed by facts about actually existing objects.[10]

The *raison d'être* of the constraint in (PF) is clarified by the following example: suppose that an object, o, is characterized by the condition $\alpha[x] =$ "x is thought of by me", which then, given the (QCP), is satisfied by o at some worlds – those that realize the characterization. Suppose the actual world is one of them; then we have: @ $\Vdash^{+}$ $\alpha[o]$. Now, as it happens, the thing I am thinking about just is Holmes, h: @ $\Vdash^{+}$ $o = h$. This entails that for all worlds (not in E), each property of Holmes is

[9] See Priest (2005), pp. 44–5 and 87–8. As hinted at in the previous Chapter, Priest's treatment of identity is based on a modal semantics with quantification on individual concepts, that is, functions from worlds to individuals. "$w \Vdash^{+} a = b$", in this setting, means that the individual concepts denoted by "a" and "b" output the same individual given input w. Each individual concept, c, maps each world in P and in I to the same individual @ is mapped to, i.e., for each $w \in \mathrm{P} \cup \mathrm{I}$, $c(w) = c$ (@). By so imposing, identity turns out to be necessary. Identities can nevertheless vary at impossible worlds in E, the extensionally impossible ones, which are accessible when intentional operators are involved. So even though $a = b$ does entail $\Box(a = b)$, that is, identicals are necessarily so, we can have that ®$(a \neq b)$: Hesperus is Phosphorus, and necessarily so, but the ancient Greeks could conceive Hesperus and Phosphorus to be distinct. Now I have not included the identity predicate as a designated predicate of our formal language L in the previous Chapter: as was claimed there, issues concerning the behavior of identity in intentional contexts are independent from the existential status of the involved objects, thus marginal for the purposes of this book. However, since we are talking of identity and identity criteria, it may be worth noting that the Substitutivity of Identicals can also fail in our simplified model, for conditions $\alpha[x]$ with x in the scope of our intentional ®. Suppose that Jack the Ripper, j, was, as a matter of fact, Prince Edward, e. I write a novel in which they are represented as distinct characters: Edward lives in Buckingham Palace, Jack lives in Wapping. It is represented that the Prince lives in the Palace. It is not represented that Jack does. So even if $j = e$, it can happen that $\alpha[x/j]$, but it is not the case that $\alpha[x/e]$, when the substitution is in the scope of ®. I owe to Graham Priest both the remark and the nice example.

[10] See Ibid, p. 89.

a property of *o* and *vice versa*. In particular, for all worlds (not in E) that realize the characterization, each property of Holmes is also a property of *o* and *vice versa*. This is so even if the properties at issue are *not* entailed, explicitly or implicitly, by the relevant characterization. The variability of the properties of *o* is constrained by things hat really exist, specifically, me and my thoughts.

The (PF) is meant to guarantee that objects characterized by distinct and not reciprocally entailing conditions can in general be effectively distinct, unless facts about actual existents determine otherwise. Objects characterized by conditions that do not entail each other will normally be different because, according to the identity criterion for objects, things differing in the properties they have at some world (not in E) will be really distinct.[11]

Now, the criterion discriminates nonexistent objects from any existent mate. For example, it is certainly plausible to say that there are worlds at which Brad Pitt satisfies exactly the representation of Holmes supplied in Doyle's stories (if we consider this to be metaphysically impossible for some reason, no harm done: those will be impossible worlds). Yet Sherlock Holmes is not Brad Pitt: for the latter has, at the actual world, at least one property that the former lacks – most noticeably, existence. But the criterion also allows distinguishing between intuitively distinct *non*existents. Holmes is not George Washington: even if neither exists nowadays, the latter has, at the actual world, the property of having existed, that is, of being a past existent, a feature the former lacks.

With the help of the (PF), the criterion discriminates between intuitively distinct nonexistents of the same kind, like purely fictional objects. No danger, for instance, that Holmes turns out to be Gandalf. At the worlds that realize the narration of *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf is a grey-bearded wizard and, at the worlds that realize the Doyle stories, Holmes is a detective. Neither representation apparently entails that both Gandalf and Holmes are grey-bearded wizards, or that both are detectives. Nor do facts concerning existent objects alter this. The (PF) can be applied: there will be worlds (not in E) at which Gandalf is a grey-bearded wizard but Holmes isn't, and worlds (not in E) at which Holmes is a detective but Gandalf isn't, for these features of them can vary arbitrarily. And this is why the two, according to the criterion of identity, are distinct.[12]

Can the way these issues are settled in modal Meinongianism satisfy the most exigent about identity criteria? One may doubt it. I will come to a discussion of the residual difficulties, though, in the last Chapter, devoted to the open problems of modal Meinongianism. Before that, let us now review how the theory can be applied to the semantics and ontology of fictional discourse.

[11] In fact, in Priest's account characterizations can be context-dependent and, in particular, dependent on speakers' intentions, in a way that complicates matters when the (PF) gets applied (see Priest 2005, pp. 112–3). I shall not deal with this, though.

[12] See Ibid, pp. 89–90.

8.2 Fiction

We know that one of the main motivations for Meinongianism originates from fictional objects. We shall now see how modal Meinongianism can treat the semantics and ontology of fictional discourse in a better way than the realist-abstractionist and fictionalist perspectives discussed in Chap. 5. Various aspects of this treatment, indeed, were already *in nuce* in the overall exposition of the modal Meinongian view above: they are embedded in the general conception of nonexistents of the third kind.

8.2.1 Intra-Fiction, Extra-Fiction

Let us begin with purely fictional objects: these are accounted for as objects that lack existence at the actual world, where they can nevertheless bear properties not entailing existence. They bear representational properties, and have the properties they are represented as having, at the worlds that realize the fictional representations. To begin with, therefore, the theory solves more straightforwardly than realist abstractionism the issue of the truth of negative existential statements on fictional objects. Just as per the other forms of Meinongianism, "Sherlock Holmes does not exist" expresses the literally true proposition that Holmes is nonexistent.

Second, all sentences concerning Holmes, whether they constitute – following Chap. 5's jargon – intra-fictional or extra-fictional ascriptions, refer to one and the same thing: Holmes. In particular, sentences expressing extra-fictional ascriptions, like "Holmes is a fictional character", "Holmes was interpreted by Robert Downey, Jr., in the recent 2009 movie", or "Holmes is a typical epitome of the Victorian age", can be taken at face value. They need no paraphrase at all, nor must they bear any implicit in-the-story operator. They are literally true, holding at the actual world. Being an epitome, or a fictional character interpreted by existing actors, are not existence-entailing properties. Just like many other features, such as being self-identical, or more famous than you and me, they can be had by Holmes at @, even though he does not exist here.

The situation is different in the case of intra-fictional discourse and property-ascription. This requires to be paraphrased. Intra-fictional property ascriptions carried out in Doyle's novels, or by those who report their contents, must be taken as true or false *according to* the relevant (fictional) representation. They have an implicitly prefixed representation operator. Sherlock Holmes is characterized as a detective in Doyle's stories, but he cannot be a detective at the actual world, as this is an existence-entailing property (were he a detective, he would be such that we can in principle meet him, for he would have some physical location, and causal powers – all things Holmes does not possess at @).

All this squares with the Qualified Comprehension Principle and with the formal semantics exposed in the previous Chapter. At the actual world, it is represented (by Doyle, then by his readers) that Holmes, h, is a detective, D: @ $\Vdash^{+}$ ®Dh.

According to the (QCP), this just entails that Holmes is a detective at the worlds that realize the representation: given a w such that $@Rw$, $w \Vdash^{+} Dh$. Our many times mentioned intuition that "Holmes is a detective" must in some sense be true, unlike "Holmes is a cobblestone", is explained by claiming that the former is true at the worlds that realize the relevant representation as per Doyle's stories, while the latter isn't (selecting the right worlds, as we have seen, is a tricky business, but this is another story).

The third kind of Meinongianism behaves differently from the literalist approaches of naïve and nuclear Meinongeanism, and comes closer to dual copula Meinongianism in having a strongly representational approach to fiction. Does this need to paraphrase intra-fictional ascriptions count as a disadvantage with respect to literalism, as far as the maxim of Minimal Revision of Chap. 5 goes? I think not.

First, *something* must be paraphrased in any account of fictional discourse, on pain of lapsing into incoherences and implausible consequences. Now the (QCP), being formulated with reference to circumstances, that is, worlds at which objects have the properties that characterize them, avoids the problems connected with literalism. ® not being factive, by default there is no export activity of intra-fictional ascriptions to the actual world. No factual falsities are thus entailed by the theory: Holmes lives in 221b Baker Street – but only in the Doyle worlds, not at @.

Secondly, paraphrases that just add prefixes along the lines of "it is represented (in such-and-such story) that", in this context, count as minimal. In our ordinary talk, we seamlessly move back and forth between truth *simpliciter* and truth relative to a presupposition (or truth according to someone, or truth in a certain view, etc.) – so much so that the proviso is often omitted in the vernacular. Whether it's one or the other can be easily detected from contextual information. The conference speaker, a scholar of ancient mythology, describes Zeus as inhabiting the top of mount Olympus and as the king of all gods. It is clear to the audience that she is speaking of what is the case according to the Greek mythology, not of what is the case. "It is represented in the story that" does not need to appear explicitly; but we know it's there. Which doesn't rule out that, at times, its not being uttered can be misleading, or at least puzzling. For a case connected to our examples, here are the very first words of the Wikipedia entry on 221b Baker Street: "221b Baker Street is the London residence of the famous literary detective Sherlock Holmes", full stop.[13]

Thirdly, besides Minimal Revision, modal Meinongianism does not violate the Acceptability Constraint of Chap. 5 either. For competent speakers would readily accept the proposed integration for intra-fictional ascriptions. They would do so, I submit, for they don't *believe* such claims as "Holmes lived in 221b Baker Street" to be literally true. It is generally agreed that, if someone believed something like this, he would stand in need of being corrected by those who know better. For instance (I trust a similar example is due to van Inwagen), think of a London

[13] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/221B_Baker_Street

policeman explaining to a tourist asking him where 221b Baker Street, the famous residence of Sherlock Holmes, is located (perhaps the guy had a quick look at the Wikipedia entry): "Sir, Sherlock Holmes has never existed: it's just a fictional character due to the novelist Arthur Conan Doyle. Baker Street, well that does exist – it's just down there; but Holmes didn't really live there; he did, only according to Doyle's stories".

Modal Meinongianism does justice also to the fact, often remarked by authors like Searle, Kripke, or van Inwagen, that intra-fictional ascriptions are not, typically, assertions made by the authors of works of fiction, or also by those that report their contents. To assert (that) α is to posit α (or its content, etc.) as holding at the actual world, something Doyle typically did not do when he wrote his stories. Nobody could sensibly reproach Doyle for having written that Holmes lived in 221b Baker Street, thus stating a factual falsity: Doyle didn't want this claim to be true of the real world, and did not mean to cheat anybody.

While departing from traditional Meinongianism as far as internal fictional discourse is concerned, the Meinongianism of the third kind differs from fictionalism and from those forms of realist abstractionism in which reference to fictional objects in intra-fictional discourse is purely ficticious, or pretend-reference. One of the few inferences involving ® allowed by the formal semantics of the last Chapter, even without any further formal constraint, is Particular Generalization (the non-existentially-committing, Meinongian version of Existential Generalization). If it is represented in Doyle's stories that Holmes, is a detective, then something is such that it is represented as a detective in Doyle's stories: $\mathrm{®}Dh \vDash \Sigma x \mathrm{®}Dx$. Even if ® has been introduced as a sentential operator, a *de dicto-de re* switch should, in general, be allowed by default, insofar as we have to do with full-fledged, albeit nonexistent, objects. "Holmes", h, being a rigid designator, it is natural to move from "It is represented (in Doyle's stories) that Holmes is a detective", to "Holmes is such that he is represented (in Doyle's stories) as a detective"; which may be settled formally, for instance, by adding to the semantics some clause for λ-abstraction: $[\lambda x.\mathrm{®}D(x)]h$. We are effectively stating, of the nonexistent (at @) Holmes, that he has the property of being represented-as-a-detective (in Doyle's stories). A fictional-representational element is still present, in that Holmes does not have the property of being a detective at @. However, we have real, not fictional, reference to the thing called Holmes.

"Sherlock Holmes", then, always denotes Sherlock Holmes, both in intra-fictional and in extra-fictional contexts. This makes some difference with respect to those realist-abstractionist accounts of fictional objects, such as Kripke's or Searle's, in which, as you may recall, Doyle is taken as pretending to refer by originally using the name "Sherlock Holmes", for in writing his stories he just produces pseudo-assertions. But after the abstract object Holmes is created, that is, brought into existence, by the authorial activity, then "Sherlock Holmes" can be used for full-fledged reference to that object in extra-fictional discourse, to say literally true things like "Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character".

In the modal Meinongian perspective, the name "Sherlock Holmes" refers from the very beginning, in all the relevant contexts, and to a unique object. That unique

object, namely Sherlock Holmes, as represented in Doyle's stories, is a brilliant detective with amazing powers of observation and deduction, living in 221 Baker Street. As a matter of fact though, that is, in reality, it's a purely fictional character that does not exist and, in spite of this, happens to be much more famous than any real detective. Holmes possesses the properties in the former group at the worlds that realize Doyle's stories, those in the latter group, at @.

There is another aspect in which modal Meinongianism *may* do better than both realist abstractionism and dual copula Meinongianism, as far as fictional objects are concerned. Both the latter theories treat purely fictional objects as *abstracta* – in the case of dual copula Meinongianism, as typically encoding the properties intra-fictionally ascribed to them. The difficulty, flagged several pages ago, was to the effect that we don't think of Holmes as an abstract object – as more like a square root than a man; for otherwise, how are we supposed to imagine him (we typically say "him", not "it") as smoking a pipe, or as a detective? Mark Sainsbury objected to the abstractionist perspective, that we can easily imagine Holmes smoking his pipe and wearing his deerstalker; but abstractionism makes of him something whose very nature resists this exercise of imagination.

Now the initial thought is that modal Meinongianism *may* do better, insofar as it treats *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, not as a sequence of sentences ascribing to abstract entities typical properties of *concreta*; but as a sequence of sentences that, albeit usually factually false (that is, false at @), are about objects which do have the properties ascribed to them, at the worlds that make the story true.

I have twice flagged the "may", though, for a couple of qualifications are in order. The first has to do, again, with the slippery nature of *abstracta*. As we shall see in the many-times announced discourses of the final Chapter, the abstract/concrete distinction is under pressure in a broadly Meinongian setting. This is so especially in the case of the modal Meinongian's nonexistents of the third kind: precisely their being largely endowed with representational properties may make it difficult for the modal Meinongian to spell out their difference with *abstracta*.

The second qualification has to do, again, with the slippery nature of representation: even if the abstract/concrete distinction is made clear, I am not sure that representing an abstract object as endowed with properties typical of concrete things involves some kind of distinctive imaginative resistance. This is especially so in a modal Meinongian setting in which we are supposedly capable of representing absolute impossibilities and logically impossible situations. If I can conceive or represent a vague object like my Incomplete Man above, or a failure of Excluded Middle, etc., then I may be expected to be able to conceive of abstract objects as endowed with such properties as smoking a pipe.

8.2.2 Elementary My Dear Watson: Difficult Cases Brilliantly Solved

Here are some specific cases in which modal Meinongianism appears to do well with fictional objects. To begin with, get back to John Woods' example of two

Chapters ago: why does "Holmes had tea with Gladstone" have the flavor of truth to our ears (assuming we have found the sentence in one of Doyle's stories), whereas "Gladstone had tea with Holmes" sounds plain false, even if the two sentences supposedly express the same proposition?

The first words of a sentence can contribute substantively to fixing the presuppositions and context of evaluation for the proposition the sentence expresses. Now the first phrase starts by referring to Holmes' having tea. We tend to assume that the claim ought to be evaluated in the context of Doyle's stories about Holmes – which, for the modal Meinongian, means: at the worlds that make those stories true, worlds that do not include @ (it is there that Holmes exists, not at @; so it is there that he can have tea, for this is an existence-entailing feature). An implicit "it is represented (in Doyle's stories) that" is prefixed. The phrase is true just in case Holmes had tea with Gladstone at the worlds that realize what is represented in Doyle's stories. The second phrase begins with Gladstone, an actually existed historical character. We therefore take @ as the relevant context of evaluation. And here in reality, of course, Gladstone has never had tea with Holmes; for at no time did the latter exist at @.

Another merit of modal Meinongianism is its supplying an intuitive treatment of discourse concerning *non*-purely-fictional objects that figure in fiction: things like Napoleon, Virgil, or the city of London, which really exist or have existed, but are imported in the representations. This follows from the fact that also intra-fictional discourse, despite requiring a non-factive implicit representation operator, generally allows the aforementioned *de dicto-de re* switch. Internal fictional discourse along the lines of "Holmes lives in London" needs qualification: that's true according to the representation, not in reality. What is true is the claim "It is represented (in Doyle's stories) that Holmes lives in London", $\text{®}L(h, l)$, "l" standing for London, "L" for the two-place relation of living in. But we can move to "London is represented (in Doyle's stories) as such that Holmes lives in it" (abstracting: $[\lambda x. \text{®}L(h, x)]l$). "London" refers back to the unique real London, so dear to us (and to Pierre). Doyle was fictionally characterizing that quite existent city as such that Holmes inhabited *it*.

As a consequence, there's no need, for instance, to treat "Napoleon" as ambiguous, as it happens in forms of realist abstractionism *à la* van Inwagen:[14] (a) normally denoting the historical character, i.e., the concrete and (formerly) real man; but also (b) referring to a quite different abstract object, when the name occurs in extra-fictional discourse on the literary character of *War and Peace*; and, perhaps, also (c) denoting nothing at all, when it occurs in the intra-fictional discourse of *War and Peace*. Such ambiguities seem to be introduced *ad hoc*, because they are not confirmed by the intuitive data: competent speakers have no sense of the postulated ambiguity. As the Wikipedia entry on *War and Peace* claims: "There are approximately 160 real persons named or referred to in *War and Peace*".[15]

[14] See van Inwagen (1977), p. 51.

[15] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_and_Peace

According to the modal Meinongian, "Napoleon" denotes in all those contexts, and it always denotes one and the same thing: Napoleon, the well-known historical character – say, currently a nonexistent object, but one that has existed in the past, specifically, from 1769 to 1821. This is simplicity itself. For (a) when we read in a modern history book that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, this is literally true, true at @, of the one and only Napoleon; (b) when literary critics claim that the Napoleon of *War and Peace* is representative of Tolstoj's historical realism, they are referring again to the one and only Napoleon; and the proposition they express is (let us assume) literally true – true at the actual world. This does not entail that Napoleon is a *purely* fictional and never existed character, like Holmes; being an object mentioned and described in works of fiction is a property that does not entail existence, but also does not preclude it (you can make of *me* an object mentioned and described in a work of fiction, by embedding me in some novel and ascribing to me properties I may lack at @, but I have at the worlds that realize your novel; luckily, this would not deprive me of real existence). Lastly, (c) when "Napoleon" occurs in internal fictional discourse, such as the phrases composing *War and Peace*, the name still refers to that same individual, which is now the subject of intra-fictional property-ascriptions. The ascribed properties are instantiated by him at the worlds that realize Tolstoj's characterization. Some of these properties Napoleon can have, or have had, also at the actual world: for example, that of being the self-proclaimed emperor of France; others, like (let us suppose) that of loving strawberry jam, he can have at the worlds that realize the characterization, but not at @.

Or take Virgil, who is both a really existed poet, and one of the main characters of Dante's *Comedy*. We are always talking of the same Virgil. At the actual world he has (or has had) the properties ascribed to him by historians and biographers (of course, insofar as they got it right). *He*, exactly that same Virgil, can have different properties at worlds distinct from @; for instance, he goes along with Dante in the circles of hell. That only happens, though, at the worlds that realize the representation of the *Comedy*.

Or take a case involving cross-contextual ascriptions, reputed difficult to deal with in the current theories of fiction:

(1) Shakespeare's Caesar is more vigorous than the historical Caesar, and less ridiculous than Asterix's Caesar.

According to our modal Meinongian theory, in (1) "Caesar" denotes the same individual in its three occurrences: (1) is true if and only if Caesar (*that* unique guy) is represented by Shakespeare as more vigorous than he actually was – that is, Caesar overall is more vigorous at the worlds that realize Shakespeare's characterization than he was in reality. At the Shakespeare worlds, *he* also happens to be less ridiculous than *he* is when represented by Goscinny and Uderzo.

Here's another cross-contextual alleged troublemaker (involving, in this case, only purely fictional things):

(2) Sherlock Holmes is taller than Bilbo Baggins.

Some have the intuition that (2) is in some sense true (I do). How to explain this? Both Holmes and Bilbo being nonexistent objects at the actual world, they lack any height here. Otherwise, they would presumably occupy some physical region; we would be so lucky as to be able, in principle, to meet them, and even to measure their respective heights directly. (2) cannot be literally true. So how can one felicitously assertively utter (2)? Here one needs to massage intuitions a bit, but this can still be done, I believe, in accordance with the Acceptability Constraint.

I take it that one who asserts (2) is, in fact, in the business of comparing the height of Holmes to that of Bilbo, *as per* the relevant respective characterizations. One takes into account how the two are represented in the stories characterizing them, that is, respectively, Doyle's and Tolkien's novels. To complicate matters further, neither Doyle nor Tolkien give precise indications (let us assume) on the height of the respective heroes. This further assumption makes for one of the cases in which the relevant representations may import information by default from the actual world (that they *are* to have a determinate height in the stories can be safely supposed; for unlike my Incomplete Man in the ugly short story I told you some pages ago, neither Doyle nor Tolkien made of their heroes vague objects in this respect).

Then we reason as follows, in (kind of) a supervaluational way. Holmes is represented by Doyle as a normal human being from the point of view of physical height: we have no clue to the contrary. Holmes may have, to be sure, different heights at different worlds realizing the Doyle representation, given that the fictional characterization under-represents here. But all must be, arguably, within the range of normal heights (however we want to set this) for human beings of @: this we can import from actuality. Tolkien represents Bilbo as a normal hobbit, as far as height is concerned (no clues to the contrary). Also Bilbo can have different heights at different Lord-of-the-Rings worlds, given the assumed underspecificity of the characterization. But all should be within the range of normal hobbit heights – and Tolkien does say something on this: hobbits are described in Tolkien's saga as quite smaller than humans, even smaller than dwarves, which are themselves represented as shorter than men. Thus we can explain that intuition to the effect that (2) sounds as somehow true: it's all about worlds selection: each height Holmes has at the Doyle-worlds makes for a larger number than any height Bilbo has at the Tolkien-worlds.

A couple of final remarks on fiction. The examples might superficially suggest that the distinction between properties that entail existence and properties that do not just overlaps that between intra-fictionally and extra-fictionally ascribed properties. This is not so, though. We can certainly intra-fictionally ascribe to fictional characters properties that do not entail existence. In one of his stories Doyle can ascribe to Holmes the property of being thought of by Moriarty.

But also, we can intra-fictionally ascribe properties that do not entail existence to characters that do not exist even at the worlds that realize the representation. Here's my story about a purely fictional (at @) girl, Pamela, who falls in love with a purely fictional (at @, and also at the worlds of my story) character, Prince Roland, the protagonist of a novel Pamela is reading (at the worlds of my story). Not only

Prince Roland does not exist at the actual world (just as the book Pam reads in my story); but also, Prince Roland does not exist at the worlds that realize my story (whereas the book Pamela is reading does). Roland is a nonexistent, purely fictional object even there, but one with whom Pamela falls in love. Several properties that do not entail existence, like that of being a purely fictional character and that of being loved by Pam, can thus be intra-fictionally ascribed to Prince Roland.

A similar case is often mentioned in the literature on fiction: Gonzago in *Hamlet*. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet really exists, but Gonzago is purely fictional: just like my Prince Roland, he does not exist also in the Shakespearian story. Shakespeare represents Hamlet as existing, thus, Hamlet exists in the representationally accessible worlds where things are as per Shakespeare's story. At those worlds, Gonzago does not exist. But he exists at the worlds that make true the representation embedded into the representation Shakespeare's drama consists in. Embeddings can be iterated, as suggested in such movies as *Inception*. Dreams within dreams (within dreams, within dreams, ...) in general appear not to be problematic for modal Meinongianism.

We have concentrated long enough on the many goods delivered by modal Meinongianism. In the next Chapter, for the sake of fairness, we move on to its open problems.

Chapter 9
Open Problems

Our modal Meinongian theory faces difficulties and open questions too. Being so recent a theory, its critical discussion is still in its infancy. This Chapter is devoted to problems that have surfaced, proposing in broad outline strategies to address them. The discussion will at times prove to be inconclusive, however. I hope to do better when, and if, I find the time to write an *Existence As a Real Property, Part II*. The main aim of this Chapter is indeed explorative: it helps to locate the immediate troubles of a new research program (and I do find modal Meinongianism quite innovative in the landscape of non-Parmenidean ontologies); and suggests possible ways to protect its core ideas.

9.1 Meinongian Translations, II

9.1.1 Meinongianism as Platonism?

A first group of difficulties originates from the claim that modal Meinongianism collapses under translation into a liberal form of Platonism or abstractionism. The objection can in fact be directed at any form of Meinongianism, and has actually been raised by David Lewis against Richard Routley's nuclear version of the view. The form the objection takes in the case of modal Meinongianism is especially interesting, though. Its nonexistents of the third kind often play their theoretical functions by being bearers of representational properties in a modal setting. This makes the theory largely isomorphic to a fully Parmenidean one, in which similar functions are played by existent *abstracta*.

Let us start with the objection raised against Meinongianism by Lewis. A Meinongian, Lewis says, all in all is one who phrases her ontological position using a weird language. Recall that the issue of (non-)Parmenideanism is more meta-ontological than ontological in nature: more than with the extension of "being", it has to do with its sense or meaning. More than with the question of what there is, it deals

with the question of the meaning of "there is" in that former question. Talking about meaning and sense, as we have seen throughout this book, linguistic concerns are expected to arise. And some will involve issues of translatability.

When we translate the Meinongian view into the standard philosophical vernacular – which we are entitled to do, according to Lewis, if we want to make that view fully intelligible in Parmenidean terms – we are left with a generous ultra-realism or ultra-Platonism. People on both sides of the debate use such metaphors as those of Meinongian jungles versus Quinean deserts, of rich and profligate versus poor or sober ontologies, etc. That's because the Meinongian is indisputably committed to, or in favor of, a bunch of objects more sober (Parmenidean) ontologies just reject. True, those objects do not exist for her. Still, she *accepts* them. Qualifying the accepted things as nonexistent does not make her ontology look any more sober.

Now a Meinongian accepting an object in her ontology, that is, allowing it to be included in the domain of Meinongian quantification, looks pretty much like a Platonist claiming that that thing exists: speaking Parmenidean, quantification always counts as existentially loaded. A Meinongian claiming than an object exists, that is, it has causal powers and/or physical address, looks pretty much like a Platonist claiming that that thing is *concrete* (and, of course, exists).[1] The translation is thus easy:

Meinongian	Platonist
x is an object	*x exists*
x exists	*x is concrete*

Much should be said about this objection. For a first, fast answer, recall that paraphrase puzzle we met several Chapters ago: if a good translation is to preserve synonymy (which is controversial, but defensible), then translation manuals, if they are any good, are symmetrical. There being a translation schema such as the one above, by itself, is therefore neither here nor there. At the current stage of the dialectic, to privilege one direction over the other is question-begging, pending independent arguments to favor the Platonic reduction. It might be said that, more than Meinongianism being reducible to Platonism, it is Platonism that is reducible to Meinongianism. Indeed, there may be independent arguments for this. One may have been persuaded by the discussion in the first part of our book that philosophical vernacular is not vernacular *tout-court*; that it is indeed the Meinongian, not the Parmenidean, who speaks ordinary people's ordinary English. Platonism may be an intuitively appealing and commonsensical view – only, phrased in deviant philosophical jargon. The Parmenidean feeling the need to re-translate Meinongianism back into this deviant jargon may have spent too much time in philosophy classrooms.

[1] See Lewis (1990). Burgess and Rosen (1997) basically follow Lewis in dismissing Meinongianism via translation.

On the other hand, as pointed out by Priest, the translation may not even be good.[2] When it's about modal Meinongianism specifically, the points of discrepancy can be easily specified. First, the (QCP) has it that, for unrestrictedly any condition $\alpha[x]$, some object satisfies it at some world. But a Platonist would not normally allow whichever condition to be satisfied by an existent object (in some circumstance or other). Some extreme forms of Platonism get close to this. One is Mark Balaguer's full-blooded Platonism in the philosophy of mathematics. This relies on the philosophical spin-offs of metalogical results such as completeness proofs, which entail that a consistent formal theory has a model, thus, a domain of objects of which it is true.[3]

Something similar happens in the Italian philosopher Emanuele Severino's neo-Parmenidean ontology.[4] Many pages ago I said that labeling "neo-Parmenideanism" Severino's position is a little out of place: for Parmenides (at least, in the standard Platonic-Aristotelian interpretation) none of the objects of our ordinary experience exists. According to Severino, on the other hand, everything exists. Even more, everything always exists, as in the Severinian conception everything is eternal. What Severino calls in his works existence or being *simpliciter*, or existence "in a transcendental sense", corresponds to self-identity: the being or existence unrestrictedly shared by all things at all times just is their being themselves, that is, their being something, or their being what they are (and not something else).

Things that for the Meinongian lack being and/or existence, like Gandalf or Holmes, exist in the Severinian sense: after all, Holmes is self-identical, it's Holmes, nothing else. When Severino says that x has being or exists "in a transcendental sense", the Meinongian says that x is an object, something, a thing. What the Meinongian calls existence may correspond to what Severino considers a specification of existence: the *esse in rerum natura*. This depends on such features as the having of causal powers or physical location, which, also according to Severino, Holmes does not possess.[5]

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[2] See Priest (2005), pp. 153ff.

[3] See Balaguer (1995).

[4] See Severino (1958, 1972). Severino's works are not quite famous, for he writes in Italian and *italica non leguntur*. If you can read the language, though, they are worth your philosophical time.

[5] See in particular the *Postscript* to *Ritornare a Parmenide*, in Severino (1972). The eirenic interpretation obtained via translation does not change that Severino might object to the Meinongian what he objects more or less to any other Western philosopher: by assuming that things can change their properties, one is committed to claiming that things can become different from themselves, and in the outcome of this becoming, *be* different from themselves, that is, non-self-identical. According to Severino, there are reasons to believe that no parameterization, indexing of properties, counterpart-theoretic account, or four-dimentional approach can alleviate this. Explicit belief in things' changing and becoming (and in our capacity to cause them to change and become) is implicit entailed belief in the identifiably of non-identicals. The Meinongian is immersed in it as much as the philosophers I have labeled in this book as Parmenideans, that is, the followers of the received view. For an original and more positive interpretation of Severino's theory, see Tarca (2001).

In any case, the reduction of Meinongianism to Balaguer's super-Platonism, or to Severino's ontology, still is not quite perfect. For the Meinongian can typically take for $\alpha[x]$ also an inconsistent condition, like "x is a round square", etc. The non-literalist Meinongianism of the third kind demands these conditions to have objects satisfying them, albeit only at the impossible worlds of the model. On the other hand, for the ultra-Platonist there is no modeling of inconsistent theories: nothing satisfies the property of being a round square under any circumstance. As Quine once claimed, the Platonist's diet is such that she can digest everything, *except* for contradictions.

What if we coin a super-duper-Platonism in which any condition, even inconsistent ones, characterizes some existing object? (I am not aware of a similar position in literature; but a strongly paraconsistent philosopher with strongly Platonic sympathies may come up with something of the sort). Then our translation manual will improve a bit, but, as noted by Priest, it is the Platonist who keeps conceding stuff. And "this is reason to say that the sort of Platonism that is left is really noneism [that is, Meinongianism *à la* Routley-Priest] in disguise, and not vice versa".[6]

And yet, something still lingers; for modal Meinongianism, as hinted at above, is more prone than other Meinongian theories to a more sophisticated form of the objection from translation. In order to address it, it is finally time to dwell into the distinction between *abstracta* and *concreta*.

9.1.2 Modal Meinongianism as Abstractionism?

It is natural to think of many Meinongian objects that they do not exist, but could. Unlike a round square – so the initial intuition goes – a golden mountain looks perfectly possible: just think of a big lump of gold, in the shape of a mountain. Some nonexistents are contingently so, that is, such that there are possible worlds at which they exist: they are (mere) *possibilia*.

It is also intuitive that purely fictional objects like Sherlock Holmes share this status; but we shall later see that the intuition has been contested, mainly on the basis of arguments put forward by Kripke. In any case, almost everybody agrees that some existing objects might not have existed. One would be me, for instance, had my parents never met: there is a possible circumstance in which things go this way, and I am never born. The intuition is reinforced if we consider the analogy between possibilities and times, and the case of past existents: George Washington is currently nonexistent, but he existed in the past, etc.

How would a Parmenidean translation handbook handle this? We may want to say that some objects are "contingently nonconcrete": there are things that are not concrete but that might have been. Some objects are "contingently concrete": there

[6] Priest (2005), p. 154.

are things that are concrete but may not have been, like me; and perhaps, some objects are "past concrete": there are things that were concrete in the past, like George Washington. As "existent" is the opposite of "nonexistent," so "abstract" is the opposite of "concrete". It would follow that, according to the translation, there are "contingently abstract" objects: objects that are abstract in certain possible worlds, but concrete at others; perhaps "currently abstract" objects that are abstract today, but were concrete in the past; and so on.

Now there is an abstractionist theory that maintains something like this. It has been put forward by Ed Zalta and Bernard Linsky in some influential essays.[7] The very idea of existence-entailing properties, as I said already, may be traced back to them. But Linsky and Zalta talk about *concreteness*-entailing properties. After examining the complications of variable domain Kripke semantics for quantified modal logic as a strategy to defend actualism, Linsky and Zalta propose to get back to quantified modal logic in its simplest version, namely with constant domain semantics. To alleviate the eerie feeling in the face of controversial modal claims validated by ordinary constant domain semantics (for example, that everything exists necessarily), they propose an alternative philosophical interpretation of the formal setting. Just read it as follows: everything exists necessarily, that is, at all worlds; but some objects are contingently (non-)concrete, that is, concrete at some worlds but not at others. Barack Obama exists at all worlds, but never mind, for he's not concrete at some. Down there, he does nothing of the sort usually expected from *concreta*: he does not occupy a physical space, nor does he have causal interactions, or concreteness-entailing properties like that of being president of the United States, or that of occasionally playing basket. Instead, he can possess typical properties of abstract objects, like that of being self-identical, that of being immaterial, etc.

Now this looks *quite* similar to modal Meinongianism. Linsky and Zalta's constant domain semantics, so interpreted, is largely isomorphic to the Meinongian theory formally developed in our Chap. 7: one goes back to reading the unrestricted particular quantifier Σ as existentially loaded, and the existence predicate E as picking, at each world, not the set of things that exist there, but that of the local *concreta*.

The isomorphism is not faultless. A first issue is that even in the case of Linsky and Zalta's theory, the structural similarity with modal Meinongianism is not perfect: we lack appropriate counterparts of impossible nonexistent objects, that is, things that satisfy broadly inconsistent conditions, and do so at impossible worlds. This may be fixed by expanding the admissible interpretations in order to have them include impossible worlds. But a deeper doubt is in order.

Intuitively, the abstract/concrete distinction is not a contingent matter. Being abstract and being concrete seem to be intrinsic features of objects. Not so for existence and nonexistence, about which we have a clear intuition that they are

[7] Linsky and Zalta (1994, 1996). A structurally similar view is exposed in Williamson (1998, 2002), in the context of his defense of absolutely unrestricted quantification, though he prefers a more sober vocabulary than Linsky and Zalta's.

contingent features of things, or of most of them. The intuition is so strong that it is standardly shared across the board, by both Parmenideans and Meinongians, who disagree so thoroughly on (the rest of) the theory of existence. Indeed, it is in order to save the intuitive view, while at the same time not allowing existence to be a genuine non-blanket property of individuals, that the Parmenidean may want to move towards varying domains. John Divers has taken as "manifest" that "the idea that there is a category of entities for which concreteness is contingent is metaphysically queer", adding that "contingently non-concrete individuals [. . .] are not the stuff of safe and sane ontology".[8]

Modal Meinongianism does much better in this respect. This gives further independent evidence for reversing the proposed reductive translation: do not read the unrestricted quantifier as existentially loaded, and see the predicate *E* as expressing existence, not concreteness. It is modal Meinongianism that has the right vocabulary and calls things by their name. Certainly, in the modal Meinongian framework there are worlds at which I *am* an abstract object (a square root, for instance); or at which Obama is turned into a recursive function. But those are not possible worlds. The translation of "existent" as "concrete" and of "nonexistent" as "abstract" loses intuitive grip.

9.2 *Abstracta* and *Concreta*, Again

9.2.1 Lewis' Four Ways

We are not done yet with *abstracta* and *concreta* in connection to modal Meinongianism. The representational rendering of many nonexistents of the third kind makes them look borderline: is Sherlock Holmes more like you and me, or more like a square root? Unfortunately, "concrete" and "abstract" are highly ambiguous, if not equivocal, terms – not only as used by ordinary speakers, but also in the philosophical arena. There are a few points of general agreement, sustained by strong intuitions. The abstract/concrete distinction should be, all hands agree, exhaustive and exclusive: everything is either concrete or abstract, nothing is both. Besides, as we said, bearing either status seems to be an intrinsic, fundamental characteristic of every object. Furthermore, we are able to come up with paradigm instances of either kind at will. Beyond this, not much is settled: we often have robust intuitions on whether to classify presented objects as abstract or concrete but, if questioned, we may not know how to explain what makes for concreteness and what for abstractness.

One of the most interesting discussions on the topic is the one by David Lewis in *On the Plurality of Worlds*, so much so that some literature surveying the subject

[8] Divers (2002), p. 215.

just sticks to his quadruple distinction of meanings.[9] In fact, more than meanings, Lewis mentions four "ways" to mark the distinction between abstract and concrete. We are interested in looking at how our nonexistents of the third kind place themselves in regards to these ways.

We may begin with what Lewis calls the *Way of Example*. This just provides paradigmatic cases: *abstracta* are things like numbers, functions, sets, properties, concepts, Lewis' *On the Plurality of Worlds*; *concreta* are things like tables, donkeys, people, the heavily annotated copy of Lewis' *On the Plurality of Worlds* that sits on my desk.

In a sense, this is the worst way to go. It does not provide any criterion, thus is not really enlightening: "there are just too many ways that numbers differ from donkeys, *et al*, and we still are none the wiser about where to put a border between donkey-like and number-like".[10] This doesn't mean that the Way of Example has no philosophical work to do. For the other ways are naturally tested against this one: our intuitions about what is concrete and what is abstract provide the relevant examples; then the candidate criteria are evaluated on the basis of their complying with the intuitive cases. Furthermore, what if the abstract/concrete distinction were just primitive? Then we may in principle lack a criterion that definitionally reduces it to other notions. We could not, for instance, reduce it to (non-)spatiality, that is, to the presence/absence of this feature. The best we could do, then, would just be to add examples and hope for the best.

Whatever we think of it, if we stick to the Way of Example the vast majority of our paradigmatic nonexistent objects – past existents, fictional objects, mythical objects, mere *possibilia* – count as *concreta*. The intuition is that Holmes, Pegasus, a golden mountain, or George Washington, all look more similar to Uma Thurman, Varenne, the Everest, or Barack Obama than to a square root or to the set of primes. This is part of what made (neo-)Meinongianism, at least in some of its versions (the nuclear and modal ones, less the dual copula version), look like an intuitively plausible treatment of these objects, once one took away the Parmenidean glasses.

Another way to mark the distinction between abstract and concrete put forth by Lewis is the *Way of Conflation*. According to this the distinction is not primitive and must be reduced to something else. It coincides, in fact, with some other, allegedly better understood, distinction in metaphysics: that between universals and particulars, or that between sets and individuals. On its base, our typical Meinongian objects would count again as concrete: Holmes, Mr. Pickwick, and George Washington are traditionally taken by Meinongians of all varieties as individuals, not sets, and they count as particular objects, not as properties or aggregates thereof. This is part of what allows to treat the semantics of their names, "Holmes," "Mr. Pickwick", etc., in the uniform and natural way proper to Meinongianism, and to provide an intuitive treatment of our *de re* intentional relations with the objects that bear those names, as expressed by intentional transitive constructions.

[9] See e.g. Rosen (2001).

[10] Lewis (1986), p. 82.

Then comes the *Way of Negation*. According to this, abstract objects lack certain features that (paradigmatic cases of) concrete objects possess, but do not get a positive characterization. Abstract objects are supposed to be non-mental things, not perceivable via the senses (thus, for example, Frege characterized the inhabitants of his "third realm"). The Way of Negation is commonly pursued in the literature. Now here we have a view that seemingly makes our nonexistent objects count as abstract. A salient feature shared by Holmes, Mr. Pickwick, a golden mountain, Gandalf, but also by George Washington, as he is no more, is that they are not perceivable by our senses (it is more complex an issue whether all of them count as non-mental or mind-independent; past existents certainly are; but the status of fictional objects is more dubious – this is a topic we shall come back to).

On the other hand, this contrasts with the other aforementioned strong intuition of ours: abstractness must be an intrinsic feature of whatever has it. Then if abstractness amounts to non-perceivability, abstract objects should be fundamentally or intrinsically non-perceivable. But it is contingent that George Washington is currently non-perceivable, for he was perceivable in the past; or that a golden mountain is actually non-perceivable, for it intuitively is, at the worlds where it exists; perhaps the same should be said of Holmes and Gandalf, too (perhaps not, as we shall soon see). Furthermore, the Way of Negation also has intrinsic problems of its own. One is that it does not agree in all cases with our intuitions and with the Way of Example. As Gideon Rosen has noted, there are unobservable physical entities like quarks and electrons that would count as abstract under the Way of Negation, for they are neither mental nor perceivable. But this clashes with intuitions and the Way of Example: such physical stuff should be more like you and me, since it's what we are made of, than like concepts and functions.[11]

The negation at issue in the Way of Negation may be amended by saying: abstract objects lack physical address. It makes no sense to wonder whether π is in Europe or Asia. Lack of physical location is proper to our nonexistents too, as we know well, so they should count again as abstract under this criterion. But this emendation too suffers from problems when tested against intuitions. For an example due again to Rosen, take the game of chess. *Prima facie*, it would be natural to take it (the game, not the many particular games that are played) as abstract: after all, it is not a physical object, nor has it any mass, etc. However, men have invented the game of chess, which in this sense should not count as mind-independent; moreover, it has been most likely invented in India in a specifiable place at a certain time. It has later been introduced in Persia around the seventh century, and than has moved to Europe, etc. Other paradigmatic abstract objects are sets, but for some philosophers (David Lewis included) at least some sets – typically, those "impure" sets with *concreta* as members – may have a precise spatiotemporal location: they may be exactly where their members are. My singleton is exactly where I am; the set of men is scattered in all the physical regions occupied by men, and only in those. The same could be said of the property of being

[11] See Rosen (2001).

a man, or about the universal *man*: they could be located just where their instances are. Fans of the Way of Conflation may see as a bad aspect of the Way of Negation its not agreeing with their favourite Way on things like universals and sets. *Vice versa*, Rosen mentions certain microscopic objects of quantum physics that should count as concrete (again, they are physical objects after all), but that are believed not to possess a determinate spatiotemporal location. Take an electron whose position has not been measured for some time; then the question "Where is it now?" has no determinate reply. These negative characterizations, in the end, do not agree with all the intuitive cases.

The fourth way mentioned by Lewis, and the one he himself seems to favor, is the *Way of Abstraction*. "Abstraction" here is taken as the name given by an ancient and venerable philosophical tradition to a kind of (traditionally not better defined) mental operation: that of forming concepts, or representations, starting from the consideration of concrete objects, and omitting (doing without, or *abstracting* from) some features that differentiate them. Abstract things obtained this way, in Lewis' depiction, are such that an incomplete description of certain concrete objects can be a complete characterization of corresponding abstract objects. I can completely characterize *Italian citizen* as "animal belonging to the human species, born in the geographical region politically labeled 'Italy' and/or possessing an Italian passport after having been naturalized, and. . ."; this will be a largely incomplete description of myself, a concrete object and Italian citizen – and of many millions of concrete objects that are like me in these respects.

A first problem with this Way is its calling into play a mental process, abstraction, which despite its long tradition is still psychologically not well understood.[12] Secondly, it ascribes to objects we would intuitively classify as abstract characteristics they cannot possess, unless certain substantive ontological theories are endorsed – theories not everybody agrees on. Sets intuitively count as abstract, but not everyone would agree on their being obtained by means of mental processes of abstraction, whatever this may amount to: the realist-Platonist ideology about sets usually takes them as independent from the activities of the human mind.

Be what may of the intrinsic merits of the Way of Abstraction, on its basis the typical Meinongian objects do not seem to count as abstract, if we look at nuclear Meinongianism, or also at dual copula Meinongianism: neither Parsons' nonexistent objects, nor Zalta's (though qualified as "abstract") are mental products, obtained by means of abstraction as the mental process implicated in the fourth Way (this, on the other hand, could be amended by telling a story along the lines of abstraction not *producing* all its objects, sometimes only allowing us to *grasp* them).

In the Meinongianism of the third kind, the abstract/concrete distinction itself, so understood, may *lose* some grip. Grant that objects that are abstract in this sense,

[12] Which doesn't mean that logically and metaphysically plausible accounts of abstraction as such have not been provided by contemporary philosophy – two names one has to mention are Crispin Wright (1983) and Bob Hale (1987).

that is, obtained (or grasped?) via some removal of properties and characteristics from *concreta* are incomplete, that is, such that for some predicate (expressing the corresponding property) *P*, they are neither *P* nor not-*P*. Now in our modal Meinongianism completeness and incompleteness in this sense are not intrinsic features of objects. They depend on the worlds at which we take them, that is, on how we represent them. In the formal semantics introduced two Chapters above, at all possible worlds, any predicate *P* is either true or false of each object, but not both – this is the Classicality Condition imposed on possible worlds. Thus, any object is just complete (and consistent) *simpliciter* (that is, at @) with respect to all properties.

Instead, there are worlds at which *I* can be an incomplete object: I can tell, again, a logical fiction story in which I am neither *P* nor not-*P* for some *P* (for example, neither 1,80 m tall nor not so). According to the Qualified Comprehension Principle, there will be worlds at which I have the features of *de re* incompleteness at issue; these, then, will be impossible worlds. Would I normally count as abstract at those worlds? On the one hand, admitting it would not go, this time, against our famous strong intuition on the intrinsic character of abstractness and concreteness: for I still count as concrete at all possible worlds; my being an incomplete-abstract object is a way things cannot possibly be, just as my being π, or the exponentiation function. Is there a distinction to be made between these two ways I can only be at impossible worlds? I have no idea. Unsurprisingly, intuitions begin to go astray in so far-fetched circumstances.

Overall, the issue of the relation between nonexistent objects (of the third kind in particular) and the abstract/concrete distinction is quite tangled! I won't try to untangle it further here, and will stop after these mixed remarks. If I had to draw a general moral, I'd say that, once again, there are no knock-down arguments to go one way or another: each choice calls into play previous theoretical options from other fields, and which stance one takes on these is a delicate matter in its turn.

9.2.2 Existence, Subsistence, Counterpossibles

We are not *yet* done with *abstracta* and *concreta* (sorry), for we need to return to a point briefly discussed at the end of Chap. 4. Whatever our ideas about the abstract/concrete distinction, a lot of objects are intuitively abstract: functions, concepts, sets... Our Meinongian account of the third kind has had, up to now, little to say about them. Can it be seamlessly exported to paradigmatically abstract objects? Or, at least, does it have implications as to the status of these objects? Do they exist and, if so, in what sense? And what is their connection, if any, with objects like Holmes, Gandalf, Socrates, George Washington, a golden mountain, etc., that have accompanied us since the beginning of this book?

One strategy to answer these questions resorts to the terminology and concepts of traditional Meinongianism. Recall from Chap. 4 that, for Meinong, there basically are two modes of being, which he called existence for *concreta* and

subsistence for *abstracta*. Such a distinction gains plausibility via the strong aforementioned intuition that abstractness and concreteness are exclusive, exhaustive, and intrinsic features of objects. The world is sharply split into two kinds of inhabitants, so basically different that no trespassing from one kind to the other is allowed in any possible circumstance. It is reasonable for the two kinds to have different modes of being. We could admit, then, that "to exist" is not univocal. Paradigmatically concrete objects like me, Uma Thurman, the mount Everest, or the city of Venice, exist; things like Holmes, Gandalf, Socrates, a golden mountain, and George Washington count as their mates lacking that property: this is existence glossed as the having of causal powers and/or physical location. Paradigmatically abstract objects like numbers and functions exist in the sense of subsisting, and subsistence is a mode of being that does not require causal interactions or physical availability.

Among the pros of this option is its sticking to common talk. Paradigmatically abstract objects do exist, in their own way. Mathematicians talk of existence-and-uniqueness proofs, and may wonder whether an even number that is not the sum of two primes exists. If existence for *abstracta*, namely subsistence, is basically coherence of a notion, this may also account for their claiming that division by zero and the Burali-Forti set do not exist. Overall, we have a modal Meinongian treatment for *concreta*, combined with what looks like a Platonic attitude towards *abstracta*.

Is admitting two modes of being (or, in general, is *being* being not univocal) a con in itself? It certainly is a con in terms of theoretical simplicity or, as Quine would say, "ideological" economy. It cannot be a con, though, in the sense of having to face supposedly knock-down arguments, like van Inwagen's one in defence of his meta-ontological Thesis Three, mentioned in Chap. 2. If the *Parmenidean*, for whom existence is quantification, wants to maintain the view (historically esteemed, and accepted by such philosophers as Aristotle and Ryle) that being is not univocal, then *she* must resist the van Inwagen argument. But that argument, if it works, applies only to the Parmenidean conception of being-or-existence. If existence statements are just like number statements, since number words are univocal, "exists" is as well. No such an obstacle, though, opposes the Meinongian wishing to argue for two different kinds of existence. For the non-Parmenidean, existence doesn't have to do with counting, quantifying, and numbering, for we can count, and quantify on, things that do not exist. Number words may be univocal, but that does not affect the non-Parmenidean existences.

This is not, however, how modal Meinongianism has *de facto* been developed. Priest's favorite form of Meinongianism, called noneism (after the name given by Routley to his own Meinongian approach), only accepts existence glossed as the having of causal powers. If to exist is just this, then paradigmatically abstract objects like π or a recursive function do not exist *simpliciter*, exactly like Holmes. Here the pro of the theory is uniformity or theoretical simplicity in its ideology. Univocal Meinongianism *à la* Routley-Priest supplies a general ontological view that is simple, uniform and, in its own way, even frugal. At the actual world, only some concrete objects exist: those with causal powers, or rather (in Routley's

version), those with causal powers now, that is, which presently exist. All the rest – fictional objects, past and future objects, mere *possibilia,* and abstract objects of any kind – just does not exist.

One con is linguistic revisionism, on pain of being refuted by the mathematician's existentially loaded talk. Meinongianism was supposed to have the advantage of taking at face value existential statements the Parmenidean had to paraphrase away, thereby stumbling upon the various troubles we know. Now the noneist or univocist Meinongian needs to explain away talk of existence-and-uniqueness proofs, of axioms stating the existence of this or that set, etc. Is she thereby going to waste one of the main theoretical advantages of taking existence as a genuine property of individuals?

Another issue for the univocist is how to recapture the intuitive distinction between *abstracta* and *concreta*. Holmes and division by seven seem to be things of rather different kinds. They are alike in being nonexistent. How do they differ? An initial thought may be that the difference between things like Holmes or a golden mountain, and things like square roots, lies in the fact that the first two do not exist but could, while square roots could not. The difference between (paradigmatically) concrete and (paradigmatically) abstract objects would then be that things of the former kind are contingently nonexistent, while things of the latter kind are necessarily nonexistent.

But this would not be a good classification. First, there still is that foreshadowed doubt about purely fictional objects like Holmes, specifically, that they might turn out not to be *possible* objects. If Holmes is necessarily nonexistent, how does *he* differ from a square root? Besides, some objects are necessarily nonexistent for sure, on the basis of the modal Meinongian theory, just because they have inconsistent properties, even though we would want to count them as intuitively concrete. Take a t-shirt which is red and not red. Both the t-shirt and the number two are, according to the theory, necessarily nonexistent. They appear to belong, though, to quite different kinds: the t-shirt is a concrete object prevented from possible existence due to its inconsistency; the number two is an abstract and perfectly consistent object.

In *Towards Non-Being* then, Priest puts forward a more sophisticated counterfactual criterion along the following lines:

(C) An abstract object is an object such that, *even if* it existed, it would not have causal interactions. A concrete (and nonexistent) object is an object such that, if it existed, it would have causal interactions.[13]

Now for all the (paradigmatically) abstract objects and for some (paradigmatically) concrete objects, the conditionals in (C) count, in fact, not only as counterfactual, but as counterpossible, that is, such that their antecedents are impossible. If abstract objects are necessarily nonexistent, that is, nonexistent at all possible worlds, then a world at which a given abstract object exists is an impossible one. This is no big trouble, in a context sympathetic to impossible worlds, relevant

[13] See Priest (2005), pp. 136–7.

conditionals, etc. Counterpossible conditionals can be evaluated via a small extension of the normal treatment of counterfactual conditionals *à la* Stalnaker-Lewis:[14] they count as true just if, at the world(s) most similar to the actual world at which the antecedent is true, the consequent is as well. Only, we have impossible worlds on the market too. Now it makes sense to say that an impossible world, say w_1, at which the number two exists and has no causal powers is more similar to @ than an impossible world, w_2, at which the number two exists and can be held in one's hand and kicked. w_1 may indeed be similar to a relatively familiar Platonic world. w_2 looks more peculiar. This would make the first conditional in (C) true.

Following the same line of reasoning, the second conditional in (C) seems to be true for paradigmatically concrete objects – also necessarily nonexistent ones, like the inconsistent t-shirt. The t-shirt is necessary nonexistent because of its inconsistency. On the other hand, a world at which one wears the inconsistent t-shirt seems more similar to the actual world than a world at which it cannot be put on, despite existing, because it is abstract and there are no causal interactions with it.

A possible problem with this Priestian strategy is that existence has been described by the univocist Meinongian or noneist precisely (just) *as* the having of causal powers. It may not seem very clear, then, what it means exactly to consider a situation in which an object exists, but cannot have causal interactions, in a definitional context like that of (C). One may claim that, even if to exist is to have causal powers, there may well be impossible worlds at which something exists without having causal features (for the usual reason: for any way in which things cannot be, one may want some world at which things are that way). But the need to resort to these worlds in order to provide a characterization of abstract objects in opposition to concrete objects may make the twofold definition in (C) opaque.

9.3 Extensionally Indiscernible Objects?

Some of the open problems of modal Meinongianism come from the criterion of identity for objects, stated by claiming, as you may recall, that $x = y$ if and only if x and y have the same properties at all worlds (save for those in E). A first qualm with the criterion comes from the thought that it involves some form of the Identity of Indiscernibles[15] – a controversial principle, as is well known.[16] The modal Meinongian may provide an account of identity that takes it as a primitive notion. But a more specific reason of dissatisfaction for some philosophers may be the

[14] Similar extensions are proposed in Nolan (1997), Mares (1997).

[15] "The identity of an object supervenes on the properties it has", says Priest (2005), p. 88. Later on, we have that "to share some properties [. . .] is not sufficient for sharing all properties, and so being identical" (p. 114).

[16] See Black (1952) for forceful and famous criticisms; see also Wiggins (2001), Ch. 1, Ladyman (2005).

following. Given the Meinongian idea of existence (for *concreta*, at the very least) as disposition to causal interactivity, and/or physical availability, no account of the identity of nonexistents can involve such notions. However, many philosophers only accept identity criteria that refer to causal and/or spatial or spatiotemporal features – at least for *concreta*:[17] being in the same place at the same time, for instance. Therefore, it may be that no account of the identity of nonexistent objects is acceptable for them.

Call x and y *extensionally indiscernible* just in case they are distinct, but indiscernible with respect to all their general non-modal properties, that is, roughly, general properties expressible without using modal terms. Modal Meinongianism is committed to extensionally indiscernible nonexistent objects: things that lack existence (at @), are indiscernible if one looks at their extensional features, but are claimed to be distinct via the modal Meinongian identity criterion, on the ground of their having different properties at other worlds. Take two such distinct things, a and b, endowed with the same general non-modal properties: both are, say, fictional characters, both are nonexistents, both are self-identical, both appear in such-and-such novels, etc.; and of course, both have – vacuously – the same causal interactions, physical location, mass, weight, etc.. By assumption it is not the case that $a = b$, so they must differ in intensional or intentional features: one is, say, a detective at some world $w \neq @$ but not the other, etc. To distinguish nonexistents one sometimes can, so to speak, only (conceptually) glimpse at other-worldly goings-on.[18]

Now extensionally indiscernible objects may be unpalatable for many. How can (allegedly) two such objects be claimed to be numerically distinct only on the basis of differences at *other* worlds? This is especially objectionable if one subscribes to the so-called Modal Supervenience (MS) thesis.[19] This claims, in a slogan: "No modal differences without actual differences". To ground differences at the actual world on merely modal intuitions to put the cart before the horse, for modal differences in their turn have to be grounded on actual differences.

The examples targeted in the literature are supposedly coincident but distinct things like a statue, s, and the lump of clay, c, the statue is made of. Some ontologists claim that s and c are distinct, for s could survive small parts replacement, whereas c couldn't; s didn't exist before the sculptor made it, whereas c did; and so on.[20] But, supporters of MS ask, how can s and c differ in their general modal properties when they coincide in their general non-modal properties? They have the same shape, size, weight, colour, physical location, etc. Where could modal

[17] Abstract objects are a different story, of course. A Quinean extensionalist can accept sets on the ground that they have purely extensional identity conditions: x and y are the same set just in case they have the same members.

[18] See Priest (2005), p. 89 and pp. 112-3 for examples of such non-extensional applications of the identity criterion.

[19] To be found in various forms in Levey (1997), Sider (1999b), and Olson (2001).

[20] See Johnston (1992), Baker (1997), Thomson (1998).

differences burst out from?[21] Generalizing: how could one resort to modal, temporal, or intentional differences, that is, features whose specification involves reference to other worlds or times, to settle the issue whether *s* and *c* are the same at @? How could one decide on identities and differences by (conceptually) peeking at other worlds, before settling the issue of the identity of things at *this* world? We cannot look at the modal features of things in order to establish identities and differences, before we have identified and distinguished such things: we cannot glimpse at *their* modal properties before we have ascertained whether *they* are the same or not.

To be sure: the claims above are understood in terms of an existing statue and an existing lump of clay. However, the subscriber to MS may just want to rule out nonexistents on the same grounds. For the objection applies to the nonexistents *a* and *b* mentioned above, as it does to the existents *s* and *c*: how could we discern the extensionally indiscernible nonexistents *a* and *b* by resorting to differences at other worlds, before we have settled the problem of their identity at @?

The modal Meinongian can react by disputing MS directly, claiming that the persuasion that modal properties must be based on non-modal ones is groundless: it depends on a mixture of epistemic and metaphysical intuitions which is itself tangled.[22] Or, the Meinongian can just declare that exigent Parmenideans on identity criteria now demand too much also for (most of) their own ontologies. An alternative reply to Quinean requests for criteria can consist in a decidedly deflationist attitude. Why should we accept the Quinean motto "No entity without identity" as a general criterion for the admissibility of kinds of things? Again, the question is independent from the issue of nonexistents: Parmenideans not willing to allow nonexistent objects have refused to submit to the Quinean ban also for considered undoubtedly existing things. The policy adopted by many philosophers inclined towards property-realism, etc., has often consisted in de-emphasizing the Quinean motto. The use of identity criteria as principles of ontological legitimation/prohibition has been taken as problematic, and, according to many, the criteria themselves are not a good *explicans* of the concept of identity for objects of a certain kind.[23]

This may hold in particular for many material (thus existent) objects of our real world. If you read again the passage with Quine's allegations against *possibilia* reported in Chap. 5 (the fat and bald men in the doorway), you may then appreciate

[21] Lewis in *On the Plurality of Worlds*: "We have one thing. What we have two of, besides names for it, are ways of representing. [. . .] It reeks of double counting to say that here we have a dishpan, and we also have a dishpan-shaped bit of plastic that is just where the dishpan is, weighs just what the dishpan weighs (why don't the two together weigh twice as much?), and so on. This multiplication of entities is absurd on its face" (Lewis (1986), p. 252).

[22] In the context of a defence of mere *possibilia* as legitimate objects, Williamson (1998) argues this way against a version of MS. We cannot easily *pictorially* imagine the modal properties of a thing, but this does not mean that we cannot have a good independent conceptual grasp of them.

[23] See for instance Loux (1978), Jubien (1996), Strawson (1997), Carrara (2001).

the parody Richard Routley makes of it in his "On What There Is – Not" (consider that "entity" means existent object here):

> The slum of entities is a breeding ground for disorderly elements. Take, for instance, the cloud in the sky above; and, again, the adjacent cloud in the sky. Are they the same cloud or two clouds? How are we to decide? How many clouds are there in the sky? Are there more cumulus than nimbus? How many of them are alike? Or would their being alike make them one? [. . .] Is the concept of identity simply inapplicable to clouds? But what sense can be found in talking of entities which cannot meaningfully be said to be identical with themselves and distinct from one another? These elements are well-nigh incorrigible [. . .] I feel we'd do better to clear the slum of entities and be done with it.[24]

We do not have clear criteria to tell when x and y are one and the same cloud and when they are distinct; we lack clear-cut criteria for counting clouds. But clouds look like very existent things of our world, and nobody would consider the concept of cloud incoherent. Similarly, we lack clear-cut criteria to tell where the Everest begins and the surrounding territories end, or how many players the coach of the Fighting Irish can replace before it becomes a different team; this does not make the concepts of mountain and football team incoherent. The Parmenidean philosophers disagree, as we have just seen, on whether distinct material (thus existent) objects can be co-located, that is, whether two objects can inhabit the same spatial region at the same time or not, also when no fuzzy geographical borders are at issue: give them a precisely carved physical region; they'll argue on the number of things in there and how to count them. Besides the very existing statue and lump of clay hypothesized above, other puzzling cases are popular in the (Parmenidean) philosophical literature: is Tibbles the cat identical with the mereological sum of all and only the parts of Tibbles the cat? Is the sandwich with ham identical with the aggregate of bread and ham?[25] Similar riddles arise for issues of diachronic identity. As noted by Kripke, there is no agreement on the answer to these questions, even though all the involved objects are taken as existent. This suggests that the ordinary notion of material (thus existent) object comes with no shared identity criteria in the Quinean sense. However, continues Kripke, this does not render the ordinary notion of material object incoherent.[26]

French and Krause, on the other hand, have extended these considerations beyond the moderate-sized specimens of dry goods of our everyday experience. For analogous problems might show up also for claims regarding the subatomic particles of contemporary physics.[27] We face an already observed phenomenon: these issues are largely orthogonal to the distinction between existents and nonexistents. It is therefore difficult to base on them arguments *specifically* against nonexistents without begging questions or producing charges of *tu quoque*.

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[24] Routley (1982), p. 421.

[25] A classical collection of essays on this is Rea (1997).

[26] See Kripke (1978).

[27] See French and Krause (1995).

Indeed, the serious problems for our Meinongian objects may not come from the metaphysical problem of (the criterion of) identity, but from the connected, but distinct, broadly epistemic problem of *individuation*. This gives, in my opinion, *the* trouble *par excellence* of modal Meinongianism – and to it we now turn.

9.4 The Selection Problem

A recent and clever formulation of the problem is due to Mark Sainsbury, who labeled it the "Selection Problem"[28] (SP) and took it as a distress for Meinongianism in general. Modal Meinongianism is certainly affected. Meinongian theories are naturally prone to a *realist* perspective on nonexistents; we have already explored the attitude of Meinong himself on this, in Chap. 5. It is now time to be more careful on how to spell this out. There are sophisticated definitions of realism and anti-realism on the philosophical market, but a rough characterization may be the following: to be a realist *about* some kind of things is to maintain that such things exist, and have the features they have, apart from, and antecedently to, anyone's thought of them. Our thoughts, beliefs, and theories concerning such objects are just made true by them, insofar as they accurately describe the objects' features. Now to be a realist about nonexistents cannot mean that these objects exist independently of us, or in general of the activity of rational beings and cognitive agents – given that they do not exist. It can mean, though, that nonexistent objects do not depend on us, in that they are what they are, and in general have the properties they have, autonomously from us.

The formal semantics of two Chapters ago *encourages* a similar realist view. The formalism itself does not mandate such reading, to be sure – this is an eminent issue of applied semantics. But given the realist propensity (in the aforementioned sense) of Meinongians, a world-invariant domain can be interpreted as the set of all objects, easily seen as being, so to speak, already there. When a cognitive agent thinks of a nonexistent object and pins a name on it, this looks more like picking out the object from this pre-determined, unique domain, than like producing it. Objects, existent or not, are what they are independently from our referring to them – both in the intentional sense of "referring" (thinking about them, remembering them, focusing on them, representing them, etc.), and in the linguistic sense (pinning a name on them, mentioning them, talking about them).

How can these activities of ours take place, then? We cannot have ordinary causal interactions with nonexistents. Being devoid of physical location, they are nowhere to be found in the material world. If, however, they are already there and endowed with their properties as per the realist view on them, we are expected to pick them out somehow: in order to give a name to a nonexistent, characterize it, and make true claims on it, one needs to single *it* out in the domain of the totality of objects. How? This is the Selection Problem.

[28] See Sainsbury (2010), Chapter 3.

A structurally similar problem affects various Parmenidean theories. Objections of this kind have been raised against Platonism on abstract (and existent) objects. They have been raised also against nonactualist views of *concreta*, where by a nonactualist (as distinct from the Meinongian) we mean a philosopher who does not believe in nonexistent objects, but believes in the reality and mind-independency of objects that are residents of worlds distinct from the actual one. The typical nonactualist is David Lewis: Lewisian *possibilia* exist, are located in concrete worlds of a kind with ours, but causally and spatiotemporally isolated from ours. One may then just claim that whatever solution to the SP is available to these Parmenidean theories may also apply to realistically conceived nonexistents. To some extent this is indeed so, but we need to explore the issue in greater detail to establish it; and some qualifications are in order.

To begin with, the SP has a cognitive and a linguistic side, on the basis of the deliberate ambiguity of the verb "to refer", as used throughout this book. The two are closely connected, and I will mostly address them as one; but they may come apart in some respects. Cognitively speaking, the SP concerns the phenomenological individuation of the relevant objects: how can we single out things we cannot perceive via our senses or causally interact with, selecting them in the mind-independent world, and distinguishing them from other objects?

This is not an issue of identity criteria. As we know, it is controversial that having clear identity criteria is a prerequisite for admission in a safe and sane ontology: it may be a philosophical myth, also when we deal with existing objects. Even if it isn't, the main Meinongian theories on the market have their own identity criteria: objects sharing the same set of nuclear properties are identical; (abstract) objects encoding the same properties are identical; objects that have the same properties at the same worlds are identical; etc. It is debatable whether these do their job properly, as we have seen; but then very few identity criteria are uncontroversial, especially when they involve concrete, material and perfectly existing objects. It may also be granted that good identity criteria can help us in our cognitive practices of individuation in various cases. Still, the issue is now epistemic, not metaphysical – and the two should be kept distinct, as seen in Chap. 5. If Sherlock Holmes was what he was, and had his features (at various worlds) independently from Doyle, how could Doyle single out exactly *that* object in a bunch of nonexistents and think about *it*, in order to write his stories?

This is only made worse by the generosity of Meinongian comprehension principles for objects. If they deliver things like the nonexistent Holmes, they are likely to deliver things extremely similar to Holmes: for instance, a detective precisely like Holmes, save that he lives in Dover Street. Weren't there too many things quite like Holmes to allow for a specific one to be picked out by Doyle? Nonexistent Meinongian objects were motivated, among other things, by the phenomenon of *de re* intentionality, and deemed capable of smoothly accounting for it. Their being realistically conceived, though, seems to prevent them from fulfilling this very function. Linsky and Zalta have thus claimed:

> There are good reasons for not using 'possible objects' [meaning objects that lack existence at the actual world] of any sort in the analysis of intentionality, the most important being that there are too many candidates to choose from as the object of a *de re* intentional attitude. Which of the many things that could have been a fountain of youth (or which of the

> many possible fountains of youth) was the unique object of Ponce de Leon's search? If it is possible that a fountain could confer eternal youth, then certainly many different 'possible fountains' could have.[29]

On the linguistic side, the SP concerns the way in which we can refer to nonexistents via the ordinary referential devices: how can we pin a name, for instance, on a thing that doesn't exist? Assume there are three kinds of singular terms: names, demonstratives, and descriptions. It is natural to claim that reference is secured to names depending upon prior successful reference via demonstratives or descriptions. Due to their lack of causal and spatiotemporal features, reference to nonexistents via demonstratives cannot take place, so this way is precluded. If we are to pin a name on a nonexistent, we need to single the thing out by means of a definite description. Can we do that in general?

It seems not. Descriptions like "the golden mountain", "the oldest talking donkey", or "the winged horse captured by Bellerophon", traditionally taken by the Meinongian as referring to typical nonexistents, apply to just too many things. This speaks – so the objection goes – against the descriptions' successfully achieving singular reference. There may be lots of numerically distinct winged horses captured by Bellerophon out there: they all have in common the properties of being horses, of having wings, etc., but they differ in other features (one is an inch longer than the other, both are a few grams heavier than a third one, and so on). Which one is the Pegasus we meant to refer to? Have we christened as "Pegasus" a great deal of horses simultaneously, possibly an infinity of them? It is more plausible to say that we have failed in our intention of dubbing exactly one thing. Our attempt to descriptively single out a unique object to be named "Pegasus" has ended up in a failure of reference. Meinongians want to do justice to our intuition that we can talk about nonexistents, refer to them via proper names like "Pegasus", and take pride in the superiority of their position when compared to (attempted) eliminative paraphrases *à la* Russell-Quine. But this intuition is made difficult to vindicate by the Meinongian account of these very things.

The strongest form of the SP-based objection adds that Meinongian quantification on nonexistents is unworkable in its turn. The idea, of Fregean ascendency, is that quantification on objects in a domain is possible only on the presupposition that singular reference to the elements of the domain via singular terms is available. If this latter is impracticable, then we have no legitimate objects on which to quantify. The Quinean motto that to be is to be the value of a (bound) variable is thus vindicated: the existentially neutral quantification of the Meinongians is not really meaningful.

9.4.1 Franz, Narfz, and Ranfz

The Meinongian line of response may begin by picking up the last issue: it is dubious that quantification is dependent upon singular reference. The Russellian-Quinean

[29] Linsky and Zalta (1996), p. 286.

approach to singular terms itself suggests turning tables around. It is a fact of ordinary language that people quantify on things that, *prima facie*, do not exist. The meaningfulness of ordinary talk should not be put at stake by our potential inability of referring to these things by means of singular terms. Besides, we are talking of a realist attitude towards nonexistents: in general, they are what they are independently from our language and our thought processes. Now serious realism, whether Meinongian or Parmenidean, requires that ontological and cognitive-linguistic issues be clearly distinguished: whether there are such objects is one thing, how we can pick them out and achieve singular reference to them is another. We may not be able to individuate and give a name to existent objects like subatomic particles, etc. There are many cases in which we can make general claims rendered true by the features of objects we cannot establish singular reference to.

This does not touch the core of the SP. The initial point was to stick to our intuitions to the effect that we can think *de re* of things like Sherlock Holmes and Gandalf, pin names on them, and make true claims on them. It is this fact hat becomes inexplicable if one follows the Meinongian view that these things, on the one hand, do not exist, on the other are independent from us as far as their features are concerned.

The right preliminary move consists in stressing that, as we have seen throughout this book, nonexistents can be quite different from one another. There are many kinds of existent objects; if existence is not univocal, there are also different ways for them to exist. So there are many ways for a thing not to exist; even if nonexistence is univocal, there are many kinds of nonexistent objects. For a Meinongian presentist something may not exist after having existed, or not exist yet; or something may not exist despite being possibly existent; or perhaps insofar as its existence has been postulated in some false theory or set of beliefs; or because it's purely fictional.

Now the SP is, at most, significant for some of this stuff, not all of it. There clearly is no selection issue for past existents. George Washington does not currently exist; still he is the bearer of several properties. There is no problem with reference to this full-fledged nonexistent, mind-independent property-bearer via the proper name "George Washington", and with making true statements about him, such as that George Washington is believed to have had wooden teeth. If something like the so-called causal theory of reference is right, we have a causal chain, starting with George Washington's baptism by his parents who gave him his name, and continuing via the speakers' intentions to use "George Washington" to refer to the same person that was so christened. This works also nowadays, when Washington no longer exists. In Fitting and Mendelsohn's words:

> George Washington does not exist *now*. As a result, we have a rigid designator, "George Washington", that rigidly designates a nonexistent and further, one whose baptismal ceremony took place in another (earlier) world in the model, but not the actual (present) one. This further underscores the correctness of separating out the issues of rigidity and existence. [...] In another temporal world, the man exists and is so baptized; we intend to maintain that reference even though the man no longer exists. We can speak about him even though he doesn't exist.[30]

[30] Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), p. 237.

The SP may be successfully addressed also for certain future objects. We cannot have causal chains moving forward to reach up to them. In *Quantifying In*, though, David Kaplan has baptized "Newman-1" the first newborn of the twenty-second century.[31] Newman-1 looks like a future, currently nonexistent object to which we manage to refer via that name. Why? Unlike "George Washington", the reference for "Newman-1" is not established by the causal history of the world up to now. And the future is open, unless we are determinists. According to philosophers like Nathan Salmon, though, the relevant facts regarding the currently nonexistent individual today designated as "Newman-1" are at least semantically, if not causally, fixed:

> Kaplan fixed the reference of "Newman-1" *semantically* not by means of the description "the future person who is unpreventably going to be born first in the 22nd century", but by "the future person who *will* be born first in the 22nd century". The name's reference is even *causally* fixed to the extent that, given the way in which Kaplan introduced the name, it is already settled that the name now refers to whichever future individual will turn out to be the first child born in the 22nd century if there will be such an individual (and that the name is nonreferring otherwise).[32]

This would mean that both the residual causal indeterminacy and our current ignorance on who is to be the first baby born in the twenty-second century do not prevent that very thing from currently being the uniquely individuated referent of "Newman-1"; "nor – Salmon adds – does that future individual's present nonexistence impugn this fact, any more than Socrates' present nonexistence impugns the fact that 'Socrates' refers to him".[33]

Now for a less remote case. Suppose I have here at my hand all the stuff needed to build an Ikea bookshelf. This includes both the materials I am going to use – wooden planks, nails, etc. – and the project specifying in all detail how the construction is to be carried out. I realize exactly which thing I plan to bring to existence, I can seemingly also intend it *de re*: I can mentally visualize the bookshelf, and this looks like a mental representation pointing *de re* at *it*. I can quantify on it, for instance, saying that there's something I want to have built by tomorrow, and that that thing is going to be assembled out of this and that stuff. I can also pin a name on it, say, "Georgina". I can then claim something like "Georgina, you're going to be ready for my books by tomorrow". I can refer to Georgina even if it's currently nonexistent, and looks like a merely future object.[34]

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[31] See Kaplan (1969), p. 135.

[32] Salmon (1998), p. 289.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Some mereologist may retort that Georgina does currently exist: after all, Georgina *is* that stuff, and that stuff is currently existent. It's just not unified and arranged in the right way yet, so calling it a bookshelf may sound strange. This reply may look more implausible if we consider that, by parity of reasoning, it should be applied to Kaplan's Newman-1. By some principle of mass-energy conservation, the stuff Newman-1 is going to be made of already exists, only in an extremely scattered form. So Newman-1, the first born of the XXII Century, already exists despite not having been born yet. Which sounds a bit weird.

One may cast doubts on Georgina's status of future object. Assuming again that the future is open, it is not currently causally predetermined that I will unpreventably build Georgina in the future. So suppose I never manage to execute my plan for whatever reason. Then Georgina is to remain a mere *possibile*: a nonexistent at any time at the actual world that, however, exists at other possible worlds. So much the better for the Meinongian, then: as it seems, we can have singular reference to mere *possibilia*.

Smart philosophers have come up with clever techniques for referring to *possibilia* more far-fetched than Georgina. Most procedures allow assembling definite descriptions that intuitively refer to exactly one *possibile*. Roughly, this is based on building upon recombinations of descriptive accounts of actuality. Here's a couple of examples. The first is a method due, as far as I know, to John Divers; it was devised to show how one can single out and refer to existent *possibilia* in the context of Lewisian modal realism, but it can be easily transposed into Meinongian terms. The trick consists in building definite descriptions that uniquely single out worlds, starting from the actual one. Pick a proper part of the actual world and call it p. Take the condition $\alpha[x]$ = "x is a world and x is a perfect duplicate of p". This picks out at least one thing. If there are no numerically distinct but indiscernible worlds, then $\alpha[x]$ picks out exactly one thing – nothing else is a world and a perfect duplicate of p.

Then we can expand the process, by combinatorially building more and more complex singular terms that refer to worlds – say, descriptions of the kind: "the world that consists exactly of duplicates of parts *k, l, m,* ... , of actuality, standing in such-and-such relations". Then, according to Divers, we can employ this stock of descriptions to achieve singular reference to *possibilia* (that is, in the modal Meinongian translation, nonexistents at the actual world) characterized as the unique objects having such-and-such features at the worlds we have singled out via these descriptions – e.g., "the oldest talking donkey at world w", where "w" stands for (an abbreviation of) a description that uniquely refers to a world. Given that no talking donkeys exist in reality, the description picks out one nonexistent.[35]

[35] See Divers (2002), p. 82. Notice the assumption: there must be no indiscernible worlds. If numerically distinct worlds can represent exactly the same possibilities (or, we may expand, impossibilities), the technique does not work. On the other hand, Divers maintains that there are reasons of theoretical economy to rule out indiscernible worlds. Divers' technique, as I said, is applied in the context of Lewis' modal realism on worlds. I have been silent about the ontological status of possible and impossible worlds within modal Meinongianism. I furnished a mathematical representation intuitively interpreted as comprising them in Chap. 7, but I left the very notion of world ontologically uninterpreted. One natural option may be to take worlds other than the actual as nonexistent objects (Priest goes for this in *Towards Non-Being*). They may as well be abstract objects of some kind, though – for instance, states of affairs; in this case, a world's not actually obtaining would not by itself speak against its existence. The existential status of worlds may then flow out of a general Meinongian theory of abstract objects as subsistent entities, etc. This is another issue that will have to wait for an *Existence As a Real Property II* to be dealt with. For some considerations on how the admission of impossible worlds may affect a general theory of the metaphysical status of worlds, see Berto (2010).

Another approach aiming at providing unique reference to mere *possibilia* comes from the works of David Kaplan and Nathan Salmon.[36] Let gamete *s* be a specific sperm cell of my father's that hasn't been so lucky (so to speak) as the sperm cell I come from in finding an ovum to combine with. Let gamete *o* be a specific ovum of my mother's that hasn't been so lucky as the ovum I come from in mating with some spermatozoon. Call "Narfz" the unique possible individual that would have originated from *s* and *o*, had they united in the appropriate way to form a zygote (and add the appropriate clauses in order to rule out the case of monozygotic twins). This description is claimed to pick out exactly one individual. Narfz looks very much as a *possibile*, for there are possible circumstances where things go as per what is embedded in the description I have just written. There are (metaphysically and/or physically and/or biologically) possible worlds where Narfz has various existence-entailing properties, among which that of being a man and that of having been born from my parents. But that individual has never been born, so it's an unactualized *possibile*. In the real world, Narfz has various properties as well, like that of having been just baptized by me with that name, or that of being a man at those worlds. Narfz is a nonexistent brother of mine.

We seem to refer also to nonexistents whose existence is rendered (at least biologically, but maybe physically, and maybe also metaphysically) impossible by the causal history of the world. Take the individual that would have originated from the ovum of my mother's from which, as a matter of fact, I was born, had it united with sperm cell *s* in the appropriate way to form a zygote. Call this individual "Ranfz". One may call Ranfz a trans-world brother of mine, or something like that. We are biologically (maybe physically, and perhaps metaphysically) incompossible: my conception has rendered the ovum from which I was born unavailable to be fecundated by *s*. All in all, it seems that we can successfully refer to several merely possible nonexistents.

9.4.2 The pièce de résistance: Purely Fictional Objects

Even if one accepted the picture so far, the case of *purely fictional* nonexistents is harder to address. For here we usually lack the (however feeble) hooks to the actual world that would allow us to fix a unique reference for the relevant singular terms. These things do not exist, have never existed in the past, nor are they future objects in the way Newman-1 or Georgina may be taken as being. In the case of my Ikea bookshelf or my nonexistent brothers, we get seemingly working descriptions by resorting to appropriately described recombinations of precisely individuated parts of actuality. One can get to individuate Narfz, starting from specific gametes that are existent, or past existent, at the actual world; one can get to refer to Georgina, starting from the pieces of wood and structural project that, to speak Aristotelian,

[36] See Kaplan (1973), Salmon (1987, 1998).

are to make for its matter and form. Once selected one such individual by means of a description, a proper name can be assigned to it. Thence the name shall refer (rigidly) to that individual. It is unclear, however, how this might be extended to Sherlock Holmes or to Gandalf. It is therefore not clear how, if Holmes and Gandalf are what the Meinongian theory says they are, we could do what we should be able to do: individuating the objects at issue among a large bunch of mind-independent, realistically conceived nonexistents, and pinning names on them. This is bad news since our old friends Sherlock Holmes, Gandalf, Mr. Pickwick, etc., were taken as nonexistents *par excellence*.

One way of addressing the SP for purely fictional nonexistents, attempted by nuclear Meinongians, consists in taking them at face value as *de re incomplete* objects.[37] Holmes has exactly the nuclear properties ascribed to him in the Doyle stories, while being undetermined with respect to any other property. Now the nuclear identity criterion can help: we single out Holmes as the unique object identical to whatever has exactly the nuclear properties ascribed in the Doyle stories. This radical incompleteness makes of Holmes an impossible object for sure for he is, say, neither 1,80 m tall nor not, etc., and such a thing can exist at no possible world. But then one may just live with this.

The reply will not make Sainsbury happy. What it does not explain is how Doyle managed to single out Holmes to begin with, when he had not written his stories yet. If Holmes was already out there, Doyle should have managed to single *it* out just in order to even begin to pin features on him, writing down the first sentence of *A Study in Scarlet*. This requires something like an initial "purely intentional act of individuation", and it is hard to see how this is to take place.[38]

9.4.3 Kripke on Holmes and Unicorns

Something like the SP may have prompted a famous remark by Kripke, in which he retracts his previous claim that Sherlock Holmes is an object that *de facto* does not exist, but might:

> The mere discovery that there was indeed a detective with exploits like those of Sherlock Holmes would not show that Conan Doyle was writing *about* this man; it is theoretically possible, though in practice fantastically unlikely, thad Doyle was writing pure fiction with only a coincidental resemblance to the actual man. (See the characteristic disclaimer: 'The characters in this work are fictional, and any resemblance to anyone, living or dead, is purely accidental.') Similarly, I hold the metaphysical view that, granted that there is no Sherlock Holmes, one cannot say of any possible person, that he would have been Sherlock Holmes, had he existed. Several distinct possible people, and even actual ones such as Darwin or Jack the Ripper, might have performed the exploits of Holmes, but there is none of whom we can say that he would have been Holmes had he performed these exploits.

[37] For such a strategy, see Yagisawa (2009), Section 5.

[38] See Sainsbury (2010), pp. 60–1. An antecedent of these critical remarks is in Hunter (1981).

> For if so, which one? I thus could no longer write, as I once did, that "Holmes does not exist, but in other states of affairs, he would have existed". [. . .] The quoted assertion gives the erroneous impression that a fictional name such as "Holmes" names a particular possible-but-non-actual individual.[39]

I've never found this passage crystal clear. Fitting and Mendelsohn conjectured that here "Kripke appears to believe that proper names can only be introduced for existents" and, if this is what he had in mind, I agree with them that "the view is not quite right"[40] – we have seen several counterexamples above. It seems to me, though, that Kripke was making three other, perhaps overlapping points.

The first looks indeed as a way to formulate the SP: there are too many different possible things that have, at some world or other, all the properties ascribed to Holmes. Translated in modal Meinongian terms: there are too many nonexistents, realistically conceived, that are out there and can count as Holmes-candidates, for they make the characterization of Holmes provided by Doyle true, at this or that world.

The second point is that, even if we stumbled upon a real individual, that is, an existing object of the actual world, which fully satisfied the characterization of Holmes in Doyle's stories – a detective who smoked the pipe, lived in Baker Street 221b, etc. etc. – that man could not *be* Sherlock Holmes. One reason for this would be that Doyle *meant* to write purely fictional stories. As Kripke reminds us, these often embed the proviso that any resemblance with real people is merely accidental.

If one wants to stick to this intuition, though, there's an easy way to accommodate it within modal Meinongianism: accept purely fictional representations such that the actual world, @, is ruled out as a candidate for realizing them. A specification of the representation operator, ®, that makes it suitable for this task, shall just add a postulate on the relevant R-accessibility relation. We have previously claimed that, to characterize a notion of truthful representation which we take to be factive, we stipulate its R to be reflexive. Conversely, to have "®α" express something like "It is represented as holding *only* fictionally that α", we stipulate that it is not the case that $@R@$.[41]

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[39] Kripke (1972), p. 158.

[40] See Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), p. 242.

[41] This also calls into play a possible distinction between purely fictional and mythical. Things like Zeus or Thor have been treated by humans in a distinct way from things like Holmes and Gandalf. For those who represented Zeus or Thor as being such-and-such often believed these things to have the features ascribed to them at the actual world: the Greeks worshipped Zeus, and took him to be an existent God ruling the same world they lived in. The representational acts concerning mythical objects, at least initially (that is, before people come to disbelief the representation as *mere* myth), do not seem to come with a clause ruling out actuality as a candidate for realizing them. "®α" when ® is to express mythical (as opposed, perhaps, to purely fictional) representation that α, should not have its semantics phrased by ruling out that $@R@$.

To rehearse a point considered in the last Chapter, though, it seems to me that people normally don't think or speak with world-pointers embedded, even implicitly, in characterizations. Otherwise, we could not make discoveries, which intuitively we can. Pick again "Troy": people argue whether Schliemann actually discovered Troy, but it wouldn't seem fair to raise skeptical doubts along the lines of "How can you tell whether one has discovered Troy, as opposed to fools' Troy?", and even less fair to infer from the supposed unavailability of a conclusive answer that Troy exists at no possible world.

But there's a third important point seemingly made by Kripke: purely fictional objects do not exist, not only as a matter of fact, but necessarily. His previous, now rejected claim was to the effect that, although Holmes does not exist, there are other possible worlds where he does. So now the right claim to be made would be that there is no possible world at which Holmes exists. This is supported by Kripke's pairing the Holmes case with his famous remarks on unicorns (unicorns may count more as mythical than as purely fictional; but let us bracket this). The commonsensical view has it that unicorns, despite not existing, are possible objects if anything is. "Unicorn" is taken as a kind term standing for an animal species, just like "tiger". Now Kripke applies his general view of natural kind notions: these come with essential but generally not manifest features that make for the identity of the instances (for animals like tigers, say, their genetic structure and origin), as opposed to phenomenologically manifest features that can be used to fix the reference, but are contingent (for animals like tigers, stereotypical features of their external shape, like being a four-legged animal with yellow and black stripes, etc.). Unicorns should have, therefore, essential features that make for the identity of the species, differentiating it from any other species. These would rule out a horse that, for some reason, has a horn-shaped protuberance on its head as a candidate unicorn: that would belong to the species *horse*, not to the species *unicorn*.

The myth, however, says nothing about the genetic composition or evolutionary history of unicorns. Unicorns are only described by means of their phenomenal features, such as being horses-lookalike with a horn on the forehead, etc. Now just like many different things may satisfy the Holmes characterization but this doesn't make any of them Holmes (for if so, which one?), so things of quite different species may satisfy the characterization of unicorns provided by the myth, but this doesn't make any of them count as instances of the species *unicorn*. We cannot in principle distinguish fools' unicorns from unicorns, as we can in principle distinguish fools' gold from gold: there just is no fact of the matter. Kripke seemingly concludes that there could be no unicorns, i.e., there is no possible world at which unicorns exist.[42]

The argument concerning unicorns as a natural kind may be contested on general anti-essentialist grounds.[43] But the view that purely fictional objects like Holmes are nonexistent *possibilia*, despite looking pretty intuitive, should not be taken

[42] This is a way to phrase Kripke's point, as it is usually received. I only say "seemingly", though, for in *Naming and Necessity* he seems to stop short of endorsing the inference from our being in principle *unable to specify* the circumstances under which a given animal counts as a unicorn, to unicorns being impossible: "Perhaps according to me the truth should not be put in terms of saying that it is necessary that there should be no unicorns, but just that we can't say under what circumstances there would have been unicorns" (Kripke 1972, p. 24). Later on in the *Addenda*, he presents the remark on unicorns as including the "metaphysical thesis" that "no counterfactual situation is properly describable as one in which there would have been unicorns", and the "epistemological thesis" that no discovery of actual animals with the phenomenal appearance of unicorns would constitute a proof that they are unicorns (p. 156).

[43] Or as presupposing some narrow biologically-based essentialism: see e.g. Dupre (1993) for an alternative view of how the notion of living species actually works in biological sciences.

for granted. Now a modal Meinongian may accept that all purely fictional characters are impossible objects, in that they do not exist at any possible world. Since most works of fiction represent most of their characters, if by entailment, as existing, then it seems that the situations depicted in such works are automatically deemed impossible: all the worlds that realize the relevant representations, and make the respective stories true, are impossible worlds, for they have as existent objects that could not possibly be so. This would sound counterintuitive to some. Kripke himself, who is generally respectful of commonsensical intuitions, admits that he has a hard time convincing people that there might not have been unicorns. The situations represented in many works of realistic fiction appear to be possible: think for instance about Verga's verism and his *Malavoglia*. The story is factually false, and embodies purely fictional characters in quite realistic circumstances. They are, to be sure, represented as existing, and the relevant circumstances don't look as logically or metaphysically impossible.

Two different ways to address this intricate situation can be pursued by the modal Meinongian, depending on whether she stoutly wants to stick to a realist view of purely fictional nonexistents, or is willing to switch to an anti-realist (in a sense to be explained) account for them. I will explore these two options in the following two Sections.

9.4.4 De re Representation, Mental Pointing

The conservative realist modal Meinongian option is likely to have to invoke some special *de re* representational access to things we have no causal connection to. We can pick out these things via sort of a mental act of pointing (Priest calls this "primitive intentionality").[44] I am sympathetic to this view, but I am sure naturalistically inclined philosophers will see it as a desperate move by their own standards. I'll just push it as far as it has to go.

The realist modal Meinongian may start by invoking our undeniable ability to individuate and select objects phenomenologically given to our thought. We can mentally point at the relevant objects and focus our attention on them. That this can be done in general is not controversial: close your eyes; imagine your mom and dad standing next to each other; then focus on dad. What is controversial is that something of the sort can be done with purely fictional objects. Here's an introspective experiment. After reading this sentence, close your eyes and imagine Sherlock Holmes, in all his deerstalker glory, smoking a pipe, looking through his magnifying glass at some potentially revealing footprint; next to him is Watson in a white suit, more elegantly dressed than Holmes, tall, strongly built and with his small moustache, looking at his old friend with unusual indulgence. Now, eyes closed, and on with the imagination.

[44] See Priest (2005), p. 142.

. . . Done? Now, after reading this sentence close again your eyes and focus your attention on Holmes only, forgetting Watson.

. . . Done? If the experiment went as it should, it seems you have been able, first, to represent the two characters, then to select one of them in your attention preferring it to the other. The intuition shared by the majority of people I tried the experiment with is to the effect that they had a *de re* thought picking out a specific object, and that it was the same object picked out by many other Doyle readers. However, the characterization I provided was partial and incomplete: many distinct fictional men with a deerstalker, smoking a pipe, etc., could satisfy it – people different from each other with respect to various other features. Your mental representations of Holmes were probably different, too, from one another, and different from mine. Someone imagined Holmes slightly fatter, someone a little thinner, etc. That the same thing can be intended *de re* even when different representations of it are involved is not under discussion here, though. For it takes place also with perfectly existing objects: if I imagine Uma Thurman, and you too, our mental representations of Uma will be a little different. This can be easily checked by describing the way we have portrayed Uma in words (say, I visualize her as blonde, in a yellow dress, and with a Hattori Hanzo blade, as per *Kill Bill*; you have her brunette and with different dresses, close to the *Pulp Fiction* look); but they are *de re* representations and what is represented is, in both cases, Uma.

It could be said that the extension to the case of Holmes is wrong, and our intuitive belief that things work as with Uma is fallacious: I have not been able to make you imagine and represent to yourself *anything de re*, and *a fortiori*, not the same object I was supposed to have in mind. For unlike the Uma Thurman case, here we lack a stock of causally determined sensory perceptions of the object, starting from which we form the relevant *de re* representation with the accompanying act of mental pointing.

The conservative Meinongian may need a convoluted rejoinder to this.[45] If *de re* representation and mental individuation presuppose some direct perceptual relation to an object causally impinging on the intentional agent (what Russellian terminology would call, I guess, acquaintance), then there are lots of intuitively *de re* representations picking out objects, which are difficult to account for, even when the intentional targets are perfectly existent. Even the Uma Thurman case may become problematic: for, after all, I've never had any immediate causal interaction with Uma, nor have I ever perceived her just as I have perceived my dad. My knowledge of Uma is mediated by complex causal intermediaries, passing through recorded images, etc. In his Cartesian epistemological phase, Russell may have pointed at skeptic arguments: perhaps Uma is just a visual illusion;

[45] What follows has been inspired by a couple of brilliant papers by Robin Jeshion on *de re* belief without acquaintance, and especially by Jeshion (2002), although with a different goal from hers, as we will see.

perhaps what we believe to be records of Uma in *Kill Bill* are computer-generated images, etc.

Similar difficult cases involve our getting information from someone who has had direct causal interactions with something that never came into our own perceptual field. You tell me about your dad, whom I never met, talking about his personality and his physical aspect at length. Don't I manage, at some point, to form a *de re* representation of the man in my mind? Intuition says yes. It is not that I only have a *de dicto* attitude concerning whoever satisfies the characterization you are providing. But how can this be explained, since I lack perceptual acquaintance with your dad?

Some philosophers try to save the insight that we can have such *de re* thoughts that focus on the right object, by resorting to longer causal chains hooking back to the thing. Your dad was the causal origin of the whole process. You were directly perceptually connected with him, and you pass on information about him. This sounds unsatisfactory: it leaves unexplained how information via communication produces in me my own *de re* intentional representational targeting of your dad. What we have, as far as causation goes, may be described as your having perceived your dad, and your passing information on your dad to me via the sound waves of your voice impinging upon my ears. Causation is underspecific: how is the obtaining of these causal relations to specifically explain my seeming capacity of intending *de re* your dad as well (as opposed to having a mere *de dicto* attitude)?

In short: if the paradigm of *de re* representation is causally-driven perception, it can become increasingly difficult to export it to other intuitively good cases of *de re* representation: past things, reported things, introspective things, future things, abstract things, . . . ; at some point, the paradigm looks stretched. Given this, how about accepting that *de re* representation of something need not necessarily require causal connectedness to the thing?[46] Some Parmenidean philosophers have advanced such a view for abstract (and allegedly) existent objects, like functions and numbers: perhaps I have *de re* conceptions, representations, and beliefs, about π, and what I focus on is a determinate object – the same thing you focus on when you are computing its decimal expansion.[47]

[46] These remarks are employed here to make a stronger (thus, more controversial) point than Jeshion's. Her view is that we can have acquaintanceless *de re* representations, and in particular, beliefs. The *de re* nature of such intentional states, though, depends on her account on their structure and cognitive role. Roughly: the function played by a belief in our overall intentional activity, together with its structure as kind of a mental pointer, make for its being *de re*. But this by itself may not require there being an object that is pointed to. Jeshion (2002) considers the remark, taken as an objection, that without an acquaintance condition we could have *de re* beliefs about nonexistents. Rather than just accepting the fact, Jeshion retorts by "admitting the possibility of a *de re* belief about nothing (paradoxical as it may sound!)" (p 73). Of course, the realist Meinongian would rather say that a *de re* belief is, by definition, a belief about something; and Yes, we really have *de re* beliefs about nonexistents.

[47] See Parsons (not Terence, but Charles) (1979, 1993), for a defense of the view that we can have *de re* mental representations of mathematical entities we have no causal connections with, via a specific kind of intuition.

Two things this view does not entail: first, that we have clear-cut criteria for determining *when* we have authentic *de re* representational attitudes towards nonexistents or, for that matter, towards existents as well. It may be that this comes by degrees, again, due to the usual slippery nature of intentional activities. I give you a terse input: "Think about Julius, the inventor of the zip" (the example is due to Gareth Evans); you are very unlikely to be able to conceive or represent anything specific. We may not be able to mentally point at an object characterized via poor conditions – we may just have *de dicto* attitudes on whatever satisfies the condition. With long and detailed representations like those provided by Doyle's stories, the feeling that we can focus *de re* on Holmes is much stronger.[48]

Second, the view does not entail that mental individuation is in any way infallible or giving us a way to settle all individuation questions of the kind "Are we pointing at the same thing, or not?". This is an issue intrinsic to *realism* and, again, orthogonal to the existence or nonexistence of the involved things. We can have in our hands an old picture of man, *a*, taken in 1960, and a recent picture of a man, *b*, taken in 2010. Are we looking at the same man? Well they are a bit similar, and there's the appropriate difference of age between the two but, who knows?[49] The same remark holds synchronically: suppose two images of man *a* and of man *b,* taken simultaneously. Is *a* the same as *b,* portrayed from two distinct viewpoints, or are they distinct individuals? We may never manage to settle the issue, even though only very existing things are involved. This depends on *a* (and *b*)'s being real objects, not produced by our mental activities and independent from them; not on their existential status.

9.4.5 Ontologically Dependent Nonexistents

Providing a better characterization of the intentional phenomenon just depicted is a task I gladly leave to phenomenologists and cognitive scientists. I wish there were a physicalistic explanation for our ability to mentally represent a scenario, form a *de re* representation and single out an object, that respects the intuitive description of the fact. Until that is forthcoming, though, my propaganda for a phenomenon I believe in is likely to leave philosophers of a reductionist or naturalistic attitude unmoved: how can mental content, however detailed, be capable to pick out *all by itself* an extra-mental object? Invoking an intentional faculty ("noetic rays", David Lewis once jokingly claimed), capable of giving us some *de re* access to objects we have no causal acquaintance with, I am aware, is likely to be an unacceptable

[48] Nor does the story require for us to have mental or intentional individuation of something, that we have knowledge of who or what the thing is. *Knowing who* is usually taken as context-dependent, the relevant contexts being, if Boër and Lycan (1986) are right, the relevant speakers' (and cognitive agents') purposes. Mental individuation does not seem to be context-dependent in this way.

[49] The example is from Priest (2010).

move for the mainstream naturalized epistemology. If modal Meinongianism is committed to something like this to grant us cognitive access to its most classical nonexistent objects, then it seems quite a difficult doctrine to naturalize and, indeed, a metaphysical conundrum. A critic of traditional metaphysics like Kant believed that intellectual intuition, that is, direct *de re* representational access to objects not gained via sensory perception, requires no less than an infinite, Godlike intellect.

On the other hand, the standoff may not be due to the Meinongian thesis itself, that is, to the claim that purely fictional objects are nonexistent. It may depend on the *realist* (in the aforementioned sense) attitude many Meinongians have traditionally held indiscriminately for all kinds of nonexistents. Maybe we face the SP because we assume that all nonexistents are what they are, and generally have the properties they have, independently from our cognitive activities. If there are distinct ways for a thing not to exist, or perhaps distinct kinds of nonexistent objects, then a Meinongian may explore an *anti-realist* account for the class of purely fictional nonexistents.[50] It is specifically for them, as we have seen, that the SP is pressing.

Besides, unlike past and future existents as well as mere *possibilia*, purely fictional characters bear a special relation to the authors that originally introduced them. Meinongians have traditionally stressed the intuitiveness of their account, which preserves most of our ordinary discourse and the commonsensical ontology that goes with it, beginning with the literal truth of such claims as "Holmes doesn't exist". We also ordinarily make such claims as "Doyle *created* Holmes", however. But realist Meinongians on fictional objects have preferred to read these ones metaphorically, not taking ordinary language at face value. Says Terence Parsons:

> I have said that, in a popular sense, an author creates characters, but this too is hard to analyze. It does not mean, for example, that the author brings those characters into existence, for they do not exist. Nor does he or she make them objects, for they were objects before they appeared in the stories.[51]

What if we now take the commonsensical creationist intuitions at face value, too? What follows is a sketch of how this might be sorted out.

We should start with the philosophical terminology itself. The realism on nonexistents commonly attributed to Meinongians cannot mean, as we have seen, that their favorite objects exist independently from thinking minds, for they do not exist. Similarly for antirealism: one cannot *create* purely fictional nonexistents like Holmes and Gandalf, if by "to create" one means "to bring into existence". The insight should be that some nonexistent objects are not what they are, do not have the properties and features they have just on their own, and are not available in the domain of quantification and reference independently from other objects.

[50] One of the first attempts at this I know of is Priest (2010). There is, in fact, a peculiar non-Parmenidean view, the one by Colin McGinn I mentioned various Chapters ago, which makes all nonexistents mind-dependent, as by-products of misfired intentionality or fictive intentions; but I will not venture into a detailed exposition of this.

[51] Parsons (1980), p. 188.

Purely fictional nonexistents depend for their identity, their properties and features on someone else: the authors of the relevant fictional representations. Some nonexistents – the purely fictional ones – supervene at a given world (and time) on the features and activities of intentional agents. Holmes is available to be referred to, and as an object in the domain of quantification of the actual world, as a result of Doyle's narrative and inventive activities. It is thanks to these activities that Holmes has intra-fictional features like those of being a detective, or of living in Baker St 221b; in the modal Meinongian approach, he has them at the worlds that realize the Doyle stories.

A natural way to highlight the difference with the realist approach is via a counterfactual claim: had Doyle not thought about and written his detective stories (for example, for he devoted himself to politics instead of writing fiction), Holmes would not have been in the domain of quantification at the actual world @. This doesn't change that, at @, Holmes does not *exist*: we still cannot kick him, nor run past him, nor find him anywhere in our physical world. Doyle conferred to Holmes various features, but not that of existing (at @). If we believe "created" to mean or entail "brought to existence", we will only be allowed to say that Holmes ontologically depends on Doyle. If we accept that one can create a fictional character without conferring existence to it, we will also dare say that Doyle created Holmes.

Isn't the anti-realist Meinongian playing the linguistic revisionist now, against the spirit of Meinongianism? Isn't she even challenging the English vocabulary itself? Not quite. To begin with, it has been granted throughout this book that not *all* ordinary talk of nonexistents can be taken at face value, although most of it should be. Something must be given somewhere, if not for other reasons, because we at times make inconsistent claims on such things as fictional objects: not everything we say, therefore, can be true.

And here the inconsistency is patent. People ordinarily make the following three claims:

(a) Holmes does not exist;
(b) Holmes was created by Doyle;
(c) To create is to bring into existence.

The three are jointly incompatible so *something* needs to be done in this case: all solutions are bound to be tortuous in some respect. Realist-abstractionist Parmenideans taking fictional objects as existent and abstract need to account for (a) non-literally, while typically (though not necessarily) taking (b) and (c) at face value. Traditional, realist Meinongians address (b) – that's the one that gets treated non-literally. Now we are tampering with (c). As for reasons for going this way, here are some.

First, realist abstractionists on fictional characters claiming that these are abstract entities, brought into existence by the activity of authors, often draw on loose analogies: just as the craftsman creates, i.e., brings into existence, a chair, or a woman gives birth to her baby, so Doyle creates Holmes, etc. But there's an obvious difference between the two kinds of processes. Once the chair has been created, it is

there for us to stumble upon it, find it in the room, grab it, sit on it, kick it, etc. (don't do that with the baby!) None of these things can be done with Holmes. Unlike a mother with her baby, Doyle does not endow Holmes with a real body and mind. Even after he has been created by Doyle, he is still nowhere to be found in the physical world.[52] Shortly: after the chair or the baby have been created, they exist; after Holmes has been created, he still doesn't.[53]

Secondly, as Harry Deutsch has observed, authorial or artistic creation can have little to do with bringing into existence – also when it does require that some things be brought into existence. One cannot create an artistic painting if one doesn't bring it into existence. But the process of putting paint on a background, thereby creating painted canvas, can have little to do with the creativity involved in creating an artistic painting, that is, in the creation of an artwork: "the concept of artistic creation is not even *approximated* by the crude ontological notion of bringing things into existence".[54] This is why, Deutsch stresses, good dictionaries don't usually list only "bringing into existence" as the meaning of "creating", but have (at least) another definition, in which to create is *to invent via (or in) one's imagination*.

What is distinctive of creativity in the artistic sense, it seems, is the idea of making up things (contrast this with finding them out). This is mirrored in our intuitions to the effect that the author who created a fictional character, in a sense, could not be wrong: Doyle stipulated what Holmes had to be like, so that it wouldn't make sense to blame him for providing an incorrect description of Holmes. Doyle said that Holmes was a detective: could he have been wrong on this?

This remark is different from the aforementioned one about Doyle not making assertions on Holmes, i.e., not positing things as true at the actual world, when he made his intra-fictional ascriptions. Doyle cannot be blamed for saying that Holmes lived in Baker Street, for he didn't mean that to hold at the actual world. However, *we* can be blamed if we make up a story, which is clearly meant to be on the very Holmes of Doyle's and to continue his saga, but we state in it that Holmes always lived in Dover Street. We are to be blamed, even if we don't posit this as true, that is, at holding at the actual world. The creative freedom of the original author, in a setting to which the fictional character is native (to use Kit Fine's terminology again), does not hold for people picking up a character that has already been

[52] Of course the realist abstractionist Parmenidean can retort that the kind of creation involving Holmes consists in bringing into existence an abstract object, so it's no surprise that it is devoid of physical location, etc. I guess I have talked about the trade-off between nonexistence and abstractness long enough. If the case for preferring the Meinongian treatment of fictional objects over the Parmenidean abstractionist-realist one has been convincing so far, I hope it's not going to be overthrown now.

[53] The view that purely fictional nonexistents are created without being brought to existence has been put forth also by Kit Fine (1982), pp. 131. Unfortunately (for my terminological preferences), Fine distinguishes here between being and existence, and claims that fictional characters are brought into being without being brought into existence. Otherwise, the account is structurally similar to the one sketched here.

[54] Deutsch (1991), p. 211.

introduced, and writing down a story into which the character is imported. If I set out to write a new story on Holmes, with the explicit aim of referring back to Doyle's character, then I had better avoid declaring that Holmes has never been a detective. There is a sense in which I am limited, much more than Doyle, in making up things on Holmes. In the anti-realist Meinongian perspective, this just depends on Holmes not having been created by me (in the non-existence-conferring sense), but by Doyle. It was Doyle who made Holmes available to be referred to at the actual world; I just picked up that reference. Once they have been created, reference to purely fictional nonexistents is a public phenomenon, and people are corrigible on this.

Now back to the SP. It should be clear in which sense, in the anti-realist version of Meinongianism, the issue does not arise. In the realist account, it was requested for Doyle to be the first to have selected a certain ontologically independent object among the vast number of nonexistents, singling it out via some "primitively intentional" act, and baptizing it "Sherlock Holmes", despite lacking causal acquaintance with the object. In the antirealist approach, Doyle created Holmes, in the artistic, non-existential meaning of "created" (again, if one just cannot accept the idea that there is a non-existence-conferring sense of creation, we'll just say that Holmes ontologically supervenes on Doyle's representational activities). It is thanks to Doyle's creativity as a fantasy writer, that Holmes is available for reference and quantification at @. There is no selection problem, for Doyle's cognitive faculties did not have to select some nonexistent that was already there. It has been enough for Doyle to think, say circa 1886, that he was willing to write a crime story, told neither from the viewpoint of policemen, nor from that of criminals; and that he wanted his main character to be a smart private citizen, and one who loved forensics, and. . . . Doyle didn't need to select, only to imagine and represent and, perhaps, to start writing.[55] He had no difficulties in introducing the name "Sherlock Holmes" to denote the relevant object – nor do we have problems in using "Sherlock Holmes", with the intention of referring to the very same object produced, characterized and christened by Doyle, in a referentially successful way.

Anti-realist Meinongianism on purely fictional objects may also do justice to the third Kripkean point mentioned above: fictional objects like Holmes are not only nonexistent, but necessarily so. Mind-independent, realistically taken nonexistents, like past and future existents and *possibilia*, exist at other possible worlds and/or times: their existential status is fully contingent. But purely fictional nonexistents produced by authors may enjoy their (non-)existential condition at all possible worlds. Being purely fictional would then count as an intrinsic or sortal-kind property: being dependent upon Doyle's authorial creativity, Holmes can dismiss his purely fictional status, and obtain real existence, in no possible circumstance.

[55] I say "perhaps" because maybe fictional characters can be created with no need for anything to be brought into existence as the required material support. Perhaps representing in my mind some fancy character is enough, even if I never write down a story, and I never even talk with anyone about it, keeping it for my private thoughts.

And since they were created by intentional agents, their identity intrinsically depends on the authors. This is why, even if we discovered an actually existing individual satisfying the characterization of Holmes, as per the relevant stories, we could rule out the possibility that that individual is Holmes: no mind-independent individual is identical with a production of the mind at any possible world. In Kit Fine's words:

> The property of being ficticious would appear to be a categorical property of an object. It says what sort of thing the object is and hence applies essentially to it. Now, necessarily, no ficticious object exists. So if a ficticious object *could* exist, it would still be ficticious and hence not exist. Therefore no ficticious object can exist.[56]

Admittedly, this is still a very rough account of the process of authorial creation. The process itself might be mysterious and difficult to explain – but now, this is not a problem specific to Meinongianism (it may show up also for Parmenidean realist-abstractionist theories, for which Holmes is an abstract object brought into existence by Doyle's artistic activity). The relevant point is that purely fictional characters now need not be selected from a ready-made domain. Fictional nonexistent objects are individuated by the acts that make them available for reference and quantification. These are (largely) representational acts performed by existing intentional agents, and in this sense the former objects supervene on the latter.

One remark, due again to Priest,[57] on the properties of purely fictional objects, antirealistically taken. The idea of ontological dependency of some nonexistent objects, that supervene (at a certain time and world) on the cognitive and representational activity of existents (there), does not entail that purely fictional nonexistents *only* have the properties they are explicitly represented as having, according to the respective authors and stories. Despite depending on Doyle's intentions so tightly, the anti-realistically conceived Holmes can have further properties over and above them. Doyle never explicitly tells us in his stories (let us suppose) whether Holmes lived in Europe. However, in the stories Holmes is a detective living in London, and at the actual world London is in Europe. It is therefore natural to claim that, at the worlds that realize Doyle's stories, Holmes has the property of living in Europe, even though Doyle hasn't ascribed it to him explicitly. *Prima facie* it still seems, therefore, that the complex entailments concerning what is true-in-the-story still hold in the antirealist version of the theory.

Can purely fictional objects drop out of the domain of a world, not being available anymore for further reference to them?[58] Perhaps yes. Suppose all the cognitive agents at a world forget about character x, all the copies of the relevant texts on x are destroyed, etc. It could be hypothesized that the domain shrinks. Nonexistents of this kind, in the antirealist account, supervene to existents and, in a similar situation, x would come to lack its mundane ontological support.

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[56] Fine (1984), p. 127.

[57] See Priest (2010), Section 2.

[58] I think this nice question is due to Shahid Rahman.

A potential problem for the creationist-antirealist perspective is the following. It is natural, as we have seen, to phrase the ontological dependence of purely fictional characters upon their authors in counterfactual terms. To claim that Holmes came to inhabit the domain of objects at @ in virtue of Doyle's actions is to claim that, had Doyle not performed his inventive and story-telling activities, Holmes wouldn't have been around. However, one of the mainstream accounts of causation is phrased precisely in counterfactual terms: event A causing event B if and only if, had A not occurred, B would not have occurred. The ontological dependence claim concerning Doyle and Holmes now may sound as a *causal* claim. That "in virtue of Doyle's actions" sounds like saying that Doyle's doing this and that caused Holmes' being available and endowed with this or that property. But the Meinongian wanted Holmes' nonexistence to consist in his being devoid of the capacity to enter into causal relations, even passively. How could Doyle produce causal effects involving something devoid of causal features? The anti-realist Meinongian may just point at the intrinsic, well-known difficulties of the counterfactual account of causation,[59] embrace some other account, or claim neutrality (as I have, in Chap. 4). This however remains, if not a serious trouble, another topic for further investigation.

9.4.6 Variable Domain Pills

Just as the constant domain formal semantics of Chap. 7 suggested, despite not mandating, a realistic reading for the ontological status of objects, so it may be natural to model the anti-realist perspective by resorting to a kind of variable domain semantics. The domain of objects available at a world is not fixed, but modifiable and partly determined by the behavior of local existents.[60] Purely fictional nonexistents supervene on the (intentional) activity of existents at a given world (we could talk about < world, time > ordered pairs: the domains can now change across time as nonexistents are created, but let us skip this for the sake of simplicity).

We may ring the changes by having interpretations as octuples, <P, I, E, @, R, D, d, v>. P, I, E, @, R, and D are as per Chap. 7. We have the additional d: a domain-assigning function mapping each $w \in$ W to a subset of D, the set of its objects: $d(w) \subseteq$ D comprises the things available for reference and quantification

[59] For a survey, see Menzies (2008).

[60] A similar route is taken by Kit Fine in his creationist account of nonexistent fictional objects: "We represented the domain of ficticious objects as being constant from world to world. This must now be given up. There will be a ficticious object such as Holmes in the domain of a given world only so long as Conan Doyle (or perhaps another author) does the right things" (Fine 1984, p. 132).

at w. If c is an individual constant, then $v(c) \in$ D;[61] if P is a n-place predicate and $w \in$ W, then $v(P, w)$ is a pair $< v + (P, w), v\text{-}(P, w)>$, with $v + (P, w) \subseteq d(w)^n$, $v\text{-}(P, w) \subseteq d(w)^n$, and assignments work accordingly. Now recall the clauses for atomic formulas of Chap. 7, that is:

$$w||-^{+}_{a} Pt_1 \ldots t_n \text{ iff } <v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v + (P, w)$$
$$w||-^{-}_{a} Pt_1 \ldots t_n \text{ iff } <v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v - (P, w).$$

These now entail that, if $v_a(t) \notin d(w)$, that is, an individual term t does not denote an object in the domain of world w, then any atomic sentence including t turns out to be devoid of truth value at w, for $v_a(t)$ is neither in the extension nor in the anti-extension of any predicate there. No property can be truthfully or falsely ascribed, at a world, to something that is not available in the domain of that world. So we can have truth-value gaps at $w \in$ P. One may find this plausible: at a world w at which Doyle does not create Holmes, no object in $d(w)$ is denoted by "Holmes". Therefore, any atomic sentence including the name is truth-valueless at w, including "Holmes does not exist".

One may prefer, on the other hand, to have all atomic formulas with a term whose denotation is not in $d(w)$ to be automatically false at w. This can be obtained by modifying the falsity clause for atomic formulas:

$$w||-^{-}_{a} Pt_1 \ldots t_n \text{ iff } <v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v - (P, w), \text{ or } v_a(t_1) \notin d(w), \text{ or } \ldots,$$
$$\text{or } v_a(t_n) \notin d(w).$$

Now "Holmes exists" is false at w when "Holmes" does not denote an object in $d(w)$, which sounds plausible. However one likes to have it, the objects that exist at world w are those in $v + (E, w) \subseteq d(w)$: being included in the domain of a world is not sufficient for existing there. Something can be available in the domain of quantification of a world without existing (there), just as Holmes is, thanks to Doyle, available at our world despite being nonexistent (here).

Talking of quantification, while the other clauses for complex formulas are as in Chap. 7, those for the quantifiers now go as follows:

$$w||-^{+}_{a} \Lambda x\alpha \text{ iff for all d} \in d(w), w||-^{+}_{a} (x/\text{d})\,\alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}_{a} \Lambda x\alpha \text{ iff for some d} \in d(w), w||-^{-}_{a} (x/\text{d})\,\alpha$$

$$w||-^{+}_{a} \Sigma x\alpha \text{ iff for some d} \in d(w), w||-^{+}_{a} (x/\text{d})\,\alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}_{a} \Sigma x\alpha \text{ iff for all d} \in d(w), w||-^{-}_{a} (x/\text{d})\,\alpha$$

[61] This is artificial: all individual constants denote, but given a world, it may happen that what a constant denotes is not in the domain of that world. Another way to go is to have a partial interpretation function and non-denoting terms – to which, as we know from previous Chapters, Meinongianism may be entitled despite what people claim. I won't go through the formal details of this further option, though.

Priest suggests to add a constraint on (what corresponds, in his system, to our) R-accessibility, along the following lines.[62] Let us call it the Monotonicity Constraint:

(MC) If wRw_1, then $d(w) \subseteq d(w_1)$.

If two worlds are such that one is R-accessible from the other, then the domain of the latter must be included in the domain of the former. The motivation for the MC is the following: take the sentence "It is represented (in Doyle's stories) that Holmes is a detective", $®Dh$. This may be true at a world w only if Holmes is available at that world, even though he does not exist there. Now recall the twofold clause for the representation operator:

$$w||-^{+}{}_{a}®\alpha \text{ iff for all } w_1 \in \text{W such that } wRw_1, w_1||-^{+}{}_{a}\,\alpha$$
$$w||-^{-}{}_{a}®\alpha \text{ iff for some } w_1 \in \text{W such that } wRw_1, w_1||-^{-}{}_{a}\,\alpha$$

This would entail that if $v(h) \in d(w_1)$, $v(h) \notin d(w)$, and wRw_1, that sentence could be true at w. The MC avoids this: something, existent or not, cannot be represented as such-and-such at a world, if it is not available at the domain of that world. Other, more articulated settings are no doubt feasible (I mentioned the option of going for a partial logic with non-denoting terms). But these can be skipped here: the tricky part is the philosophical motivation for going anti-realist on some nonexistents, not the choice of a formal setting to represent this option.

9.5 Epilogue

Further details and different arrangements are certainly possible, but we may stop here. Gilbert Ryle once said that "*Gegenstandstheorie* [...] is dead, buried and not going to be resurrected".[63] A common depiction of contemporary ontology basically conforms to Ryle's harsh judgment. Metaphysicians are divided between presentists and eternalists on the nature of time, realists and nominalists on abstract objects, friends and foes of identity criteria, supporters and enemies of colocated objects, etc. All of them, though, share the mainstream Parmenidean view of existence. Moreover, besides these various philosophical parties come the Meinongians: a small minority considered only as those with a deviant conception of existence – and this is it.

I have tried to picture a different situation. That some things are existent, others nonexistent, is the way non-philosophers take the world to be: this is the starting, commonsensical intuition. As often happens with commonsensical views of the world, taken at face value the naïve-intuitive perspective may not provide precise answers to doubts raised by severe philosophical scrutiny; it may leave special problems unsettled; and even prove occasionally inconsistent. A philosopher can

[62] See Priest (2010), Sections 3 and 4.

[63] Ryle (1973), p. 255.

then dispense with it, and go Parmenidean. Otherwise, she can stick to the intuition, and apply philosophical tools to make it sophisticated. Then the ecosphere of nonexistents opens up. And these things manifest an interesting and rich ontological structure: they are not like Hegel's night, in which all cows are black.

To account for such structure, theorists have a variety of options. A Meinongian can accept that some singular terms of natural language lack denotation (others will denote existents, others yet, nonexistents); she may also want all terms to denote – as some Parmenideans have wanted as well, anyway. And nonexistents may come in as rich a variety of kinds as existents. Some of them may be purely fictional; others mythical, if they are distinct from the formers; others yet, past existents, and others, future ones; others, merely possible ones. Towards all of them the Meinongian may have a realist attitude, or she may go constructivist for some of them, taking them as mind-dependent.

Nor need the Meinongian consider all of the above as nonexistent: she may grant, for instance, that past objects, or future ones, or both, do currently exist. She may perhaps claim the same for mere *possibilia*, and place nonexistents only in the realm of intentionality – in the worlds of our dreams, stories, and myths. Just like some Parmenideans, she may want "exists" to be univocal, meaning only one thing – though not quite the one her Parmenidean mate means. Or, she may claim that that word is not univocal, and different kinds of things can have different ways of existing. She may opt for this or that criterion of identity for objects, or have different criteria for things of different kinds, or – again, like some of her Parmenidean mates – just despise the philosophical plea for identity criteria. Each of these Meinongian options will have its pros and cons when it's about intuitiveness, explanatory power, simplicity, or bullets to bite – just as happens for the many, different, and reciprocally conflicting Parmenidean ontologies. Each one, to be sure, will face its troubles – like *any* philosophical view I know of. This is simply the by-product of the fact that, sociologically or by definition, philosophers will just keep arguing.

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