The Modern Semantic Principles Behind Gilson's Existential Interpretation of Aquinas (1)

Forthcoming *Studia Gilsoniana*

Abstract: Gilson's *Being and Some Philosophers* (*BSP*) has been widely influential well beyond Thomistic circles, but its modern historical sources and logical consequences call for further investigation. The first part of this two-part article explores three modern semantic assumptions or principles without which *BSP*'s innovative theory of existential judgment cannot be fully appreciated—the existential neutrality of the copula ubiquitous among modern logicians; Kant's introduction of a positing or "thetic" function of judgment, the understanding of which evolved in nineteenth-century logic; and the distinction between predication and assertion, generally accepted by late nineteenth century logicians. Part two of this paper offers a rereading of Gilson's *BSP* as an implicit critique of and alternative to Maritain's synthesis of Aquinas with these modern developments.

Étienne Gilson's *Being and Some Philosophers* (=*BSP*)[1] has exercised a profound influence over the fields of medieval philosophy and theology and of ancient and medieval semantics. Charles Kahn's seminal essay on the absence of the notion of existence from Hellenic thought, for instance, cites with approval Gilson's historical claim that this notion first arose distinctly in the Arabic, medieval milieu due to the Biblical-Quranic doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.[2] Likewise, when offering his own revisionist, existential interpretation of Aristotelian semantics, against Kahn's competing theory, Lambert Marie de Rijk paraphrases with approval Gilson's claim that "in its existential use the verb 'be' is the verb *par excellence*, not because it affirms some attribute of a subject, but because it posits the subject itself, as agent of what he [=Gilson] calls 'the primary act of existence', and hence as a possible subject-substrate to the

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[1] Étienne Gilson, *L'être et l'essence* [Being and essence] (Paris: Vrin, 1948; 2nd ed., 1962); translated as *Being and Some Philosophers* [=*BSP*], 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952). Citations are to the English edition though occasional interpolations are added from the French.

[2] Charles Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'To Be' and the Concept of Being," in *Essays on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–40, at 39.

secondary acts signified by other (adjectival) verbs."[3] Barry Miller's attempt within mainstream analytic philosophy to supplement the standard Frege-Russell notion of existence with one of existence as a positive, individual property is premised, in large part, on his basically Gilsonian reading of the history of existence and Aquinas's place within it.[4]

Gilson's work is ostensibly one of Thomistic exegesis—a selective, historical survey of philosophies of being from the presocratics to Kierkegaard, culminating in Chs. 5–6 with a solution to the perennial problem of existence *ad mentem Thomae*. But does the packaging of *BSP* reflect the work's true nature? Peter Geach seems not to think so. He asserts that Gilson's understanding of the verb "exists" in *BSP* reflects the influence of David Hume and Franz Brentano, not that of the thirteenth-century friar.[5] He does not, however, elaborate on this accusation and it seems to have been largely overlooked by subsequent scholarship. I maintain that Geach was basically right about the modern provenance of Gilson's semantic theory although I do not endorse or even address his alternative Fregean reading of Aquinas.[6] In this two-part paper, I offer a preliminary, but admittedly incomplete excursion into the modern sources of Gilson's existential semantics. At the end of part two of this paper, I outline the sort of

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[3] Cf. Lambert Marie de Rijk, *Aristotle: Semantics and Ontology*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1:37n104.

[4] See Barry Miller, "'Exists' and Existence," *The Review of Metaphysics* 40, no. 2 (1986): 237–70; Barry Miller, *The Fullness of Being: A New Paradigm for Existence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), esp. 13–17.

[5] Peter Geach, "Assertion," in *Logic Matters* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 250–69, at 263. For a complementary, but very different study of the origins of Gilson's existential reading of Aquinas that sees Gilson as overly indebted to Avicenna, see Lawrence Dewan, "Gilson and the *Actus essendi*," *Maritain Studies* 15 (1999): 70–96.

[6] Peter Geach, "Form and Existence" and "What Actually Exists," in *God and the Soul*, 2nd ed. (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1969), 53–64 and 65ff., respectively; Peter Geach, "Aquinas," in *Three Philosophers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1961), 88–91. Geach was followed by Hermann Weidemann, "The Logic of Being in Thomas Aquinas," in *The Logic of Being*, ed. Simo Knuuttila and Jaakko Hintikka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1986), 181–200; Miller, *Fullness of Being*; Giovanni Ventimiglia, *Aquinas after Frege* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), esp. 34–55; Brian Davies, "Aquinas, God, and Being," *The Monist* 80, no. 4 (1997): 500–20; Brian Davies, "The Action of God," in *Mind, Method, and Morality: Essays in Honour of Anthony Kenny*, ed. John Cottingham and Peter Hacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 165–84; Turner Nevitt, "How to Be an Analytic Existential Thomist," *The Thomist* 82, no. 3 (2018): 321–52; Patrick Lee, "Existential Propositions in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 52, no. 4 (1988): 605–26 (who is inspired by Geach's transformation of the grammatical subject of existence into a predicate, but otherwise presents a very different understanding of "be" from Geach); Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

research program needed to confirm, supplement, and qualify the results I have so far reached. The modern sources I do take up here are, I believe, sufficient to establish one point—namely, that there is something very different going on in *BSP* than meets the eye. Gilson's work is one of original philosophizing, inspired by some of Aquinas's assertions, but engaged primarily with competing psychologico-logical theories from the long nineteenth century, not the thirteenth. In particular, I argue that we can trace a specific line of critical dialogue—of thesis, antithesis, modification, and synthesis—from Franz Brentano through Alexander Pfänder and Jacques Maritain to Étienne Gilson. This dialogue has deeper roots in the logico-semantic innovations of Descartes, Kant, and Fichte.

Contemporary readers of *BSP* of the Thomistic persuasion are likely to gloss over some of its more extravagant metaphysical claims, such as the efficient causal character of the act of existence, as perhaps over-indulgent, but ultimately unimportant poetic flourishes from an unquestionably skilled stylist. A closer examination of *BSP*'s historical setting excludes such expedients. Gilson really means what he says. While a correct interpretation of Aquinas is not directly at issue in this paper, it is hoped that its contextualization of Gilson's reading of him forces contemporary expositors of his thought to question some of the now commonplace assumptions about him, such as the distinction between existential and attributive judgments or the causal character of being (*esse*), that, I argue, arise from Gilson's radical metaphysical commitments. Greater attention to what Gilson actually means in *BSP* will help exegetes of Thomas's thought think through whether his interpretations can actually be accepted and, if not, what the implications are. For historians of ancient and medieval philosophy generally, it is hoped that this paper's attention to an understudied period in the history of thinking about

existence will occasion further reflection on the meaning of phrases, such as "positing in the world" and "act of existence," which enjoy frequent usage in contemporary scholarship.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first considers the modern background for Gilson's semantic theory and existential metaphysics in *BSP*. The second part applies the conclusions of the first part to Gilson and Maritain's existential Thomism, showing how *BSP* functions as a corrective to Maritain's initial attempt to read Aquinas in light of modern logical theories and tracing the implications of this discovery. In the first part of this paper, I address three major developments in modern semantic theory without which Gilson's existential metaphysics and semantics in *BSP* cannot be understood. These three developments correspond to the three sections in the first part of the paper. First, there is the ubiquitous assumption of the existential neutrality of the copula "is" and of predication (§1). Apart from outside considerations, true predication does not depend on the subject or predicate corresponding to anything outside the mind. Second, Kant introduces a distinction between two kinds of "positing" (*setzen*) to explain existential judgments on the Humean assumption that "exists" is not a predicate (§2). Finally, modern logicians increasingly recognize a distinction between assertion and predication, often attributed to Descartes (§3).

1. The Existential Neutral Copula

One of the most consistent assumptions in modern theories of judgment is that, absent outside considerations, it is indifferent to the truth of propositions of the form "S is P" whether they are about anything outside the mind. In modern parlance, the copula "is" is taken to be existentially neutral. The often-implicit presupposition, here, is that these propositions are about ideas or concepts, not extramental things. Of course, if propositions are ultimately about

extramental things, not concepts, it will make a great difference either to the truth or meaning of the proposition, "Man is a rational animal," whether or not anything outside the mind corresponds to the subject and predicate terms.

Let us look at a few illustrative examples of the modern, existentially neutral understanding of the verb "is." The authors of the *Port Royal Logic* (PRL), Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, distinguish two kinds of truths (*verités*): "The ones which regard only the nature of things and their immutable essence, independent of their existence and the others which regard existing things [*choses existantes*]—in particular, human and contingent affairs."[7] In a similar vein, Hume classifies all the necessary truths of geometry, arithmetic, and algebra as mere "relations of ideas," as opposed to matters of fact.[8] In Meditation V, Descartes argues from the fact that we can demonstrate properties of triangles even if "no such figure exists, or has ever existed, anywhere outside my thought" to the conclusion that there are "immutable natures" or "essences" independent of existence and of human invention.[9] Kant insists that "is," as a copula, only posits the predicate in relation to the subject, but does not entail that the subject itself exists

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[7] Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La logique, ou, L'art de penser: countenant, outre ses règles communes, plusieurs observations nouvelles, propres à former le jugement* [The logic, or, the art of thinking: containing, beside the common rules, many new observations pertinent to the formation of judgment] [=PRL], ed. Pierre Clair and François Girbal, 2nd rev., Bibliothèque des textes philosophiques (Paris: Vrin, 1981), IV, c.13, 339. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange embraces almost this exact distinction when he exemplifies a judgment of existence (*jugement d'existence*) with the sentences, "I think," "Peter has good sight," and "Peter is blind," and contrasts such judgments with those about nature, such as ones about the laws of thought or the judgment, "Man is a rational animal" or "Blindness is an evil." Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le sens du mystère et le clair-obscur intellectuel, nature et surnaturel* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1934), 83–84; translated as *The Sense of Mystery: Clarity and Obscurity in the Intellectual Life*, trans. Matthew Minerd (Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2017), 105–6. He quotes with approval Fr. Sertillanges's remark that "*Truth is not a relation of us to things*. It is a relation from ourselves to ourselves, in a correspondence of adequation with things … Even when the essences represent only a work of the mind on the mysterious noumenon, this judgment, 'Man is a rational animal,' would not be less true, taken in its own place" (pp. 104–5).

[8] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*, ed. Tom Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), sect.4, pt.1, p.24.

[9] René Descartes, *Meditations*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), V, 45 (64); cf. Arnauld, *Fourth Objection*, 149 (212); Descartes, *Fourth Reply*, 169 (243).

or is posited absolutely outside the mind (a distinction we return to in greater detail in the next
section).

> If I say: "God is omnipotent" all that is being thought is the logical relation between God
> and omnipotence, for the latter is a characteristic mark of the former. Nothing further is
> being posited here. Whether God is, that is to say, whether God is posited absolutely or
> exists, is not contained in the original assertion at all.[10]

James Stuart Mill uses affirmations about fictional creatures to show that existence is only
signified by the copula unintentionally,[11] and John Stuart Mill uses similar examples to show it is
not signified at all, except by those who are confused.[12] Drobisch preserved the existential
neutrality of categorical propositions by making them implicit hypotheticals with an existential
antecedent, as, for example, "If there is a Cyclops, then it is one-eyed."[13] Brentano obtains the
same existential neutrality by making universal affirmative propositions into negative existential
ones about a privative subject.[14]

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[10] Immanuel Kant, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, in
Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770, ed. and trans. by David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1992), 119 (2:74).

[11] James Mill, *An Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* [=*APHM*], 2 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock,
1829), I, ch.4, sect.4, 126–27.

[12] John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of
Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation*, 2 vols. (London: John W. Parker, 1843), I, ch.4, 104.

[13] Moritz Wilhelm Drobisch, *Neue Darstellung der Logik nach ihren einfachsten Verhältnissen, mit Rücksicht auf
Mathematik und Naturwissenschaft* [New account of logic according to its simplest conditions, in respect of
mathematics and natural science], 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Voss, 1863), 59–60: "The judgments, 'God is just,' or 'the soul
is not transitory,' no more include the claims that a God exists, or that there are souls than 'the Cyclops are one-
eyed,' 'the Furies have snakes for hair,' or 'Ghosts appear at night' unconditionally posit the subjects: Cyclops,
Furies, Ghosts. Rather, all these judgments say only that *if* one posits the subject then the predicate applies as a
determination of its features [*Beschaffenheiten*]. … This important point was first recognized by Herbart"; quoted
and trans. Wayne Martin, *Theories of Judgment: Psychology, Logic, Phenomenology*, Modern European Philosophy
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59.

[14] For the principal works of Brentano touching on the meaning of "be," see Franz Brentano, *Von der mannigfachen
Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (Freiburg: Herder, 1862); trans. Rolf George as *On the Several Senses of
Being in Aristotle*, ed. Rolf George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Franz Brentano, *Psychologie
vom Empirischen Standpunkt* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humbolt, 1874); translated into French by Maurice
de Gandillac as *Psychologie du point de vue empirique* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1944); translated into English by
Antos Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, and Linda McAlister as *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, ed. Oskar Kraus
and Linda McAlister (London: Routledge, 1995); Franz Brentano, *Vom Ursprung Sittlicber Erkenntnis* (Leipzig:
Duncker & Humblot, 1889; 3rd ed., Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1934); translated from the third edition by Roderick
Chisholm and Elizabeth Schneewind as *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, ed. Oskar Kraus and
Roderick Chisholm (New York: Routledge, 2009). All citations are to the English translations, unless otherwise
noted. For the transformation of the square of opposition, see Brentano, *Psychology*, 165–66.

2. Positing and Predicating

While the existentially neutral copula is ubiquitous among modern philosophers, the thesis that "exists" is not a predicate and that existence does not correspond to any idea has, if acknowledged at all, remained both controversial and vague. The thesis can be clarified by considering its various instantiations and its possible roots in the Cartesian project of universal doubt as well as what it looks like for this thesis to be absent. Let's first consider some influential modern logicians completely unaware of the thesis that "exists" is not a predicate or existence an idea: the Port Royal logicians and the two Mills.

For the authors of the PRL, the verb "is"—called the "substantive verb"— "notes the action of my spirit which affirms" or, with the negative particle, that denies.[15] All propositions have two terms,[16] and can be analyzed into three parts: the subject, the predicate, and the substantive verb. For instance, "God exists" (*Dieu existe*) means "God is existent" (*Dieu est existant*), and "God loves man" means "God is a lover of man."[17] When the substantive verb is said alone, as in the proposition, "I am," it "ceases to be purely substantive because there is joined to it the most general of attributes [*le plus general des attributs*], which is being [*l'être*] since 'I am' means 'I am a being [*un être*]; I am a thing [*une chose*].'"[18] No clarification is given as to what this most general of attributes is since "being" (*l'être*) and "existence" (*l'existence*) are assumed at the outset to be clear and distinct concepts.[19]

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[15] PRL II, c.3, 113.
[16] PRL II, c.3, 113.
[17] PRL II, c.3, 114.
[18] PRL II, c.3, 114.
[19] Cf. PRL I, c.9, 71.

A very similar analysis of existential propositions is found in the 1829 and 1843 logic texts of James and John Stuart Mill. These works, however, shed slightly more light on the meaning of "existence" as the most general of attributes. Pointing to affirmative propositions about fictional creatures, both Mills warn of a radical equivocity in the verb "is," which, they say, can either be "the Copula" or signify "the grand idea of EXISTENCE."[20] James holds that "is" always unintentionally has both these meanings so that when we say, "I am EXISTING," we signify existence twice over—once in the predicate, once in the copula.[21] John, however, holds that the notion of the copula can be disjoined from that of existence. But what does "existence" mean? In one section of his work, John identifies "existence" with the most general predicates or categories: "The necessity of an enumeration of the Existences, as the basis of Logic, did not escape the attention of the schoolmen," and he goes on to identify these with the "highest Predicates" or ten categories of Aristotle, though he takes Aristotle's list itself to be naïve.[22] On the other hand, when James Mill speaks about "belief in the existence of external objects,"[23] he uses the phrases "existences," *substrat(a)*, and external objects interchangeably, which suggests an understanding of "existence" as signifying being outside the mind or what has being outside the mind. The framework for speaking about "existence" is no longer the Aristotelian project of classifying predicates or intelligible notes, but of addressing the modern, post-Cartesian problem of overcoming skepticism to get outside the mind.[24] For the two Mills, the grand idea of

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[20] Cf. James Mill, *An Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* [=*APHM*], 2 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1829), I, ch.4, sect.4, 126–27; John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation*, 2 vols. (London: John W. Parker, 1843), I, ch.4, 104.

[21] Mill, *APHM*, I, ch.4, sect.4, 126–27.

[22] Mill, *System of Logic*, I, ch.3, 59–60; see also 102 ("This, until a better can be suggested, must serve us as a substitute for the abortive Classification of Existences, termed the Categories of Aristotle").

[23] Mill, *APHM*, I, ch.11, 254–308, at 260 (for this exact expression).

[24] Cf. Kahn, *Essays on Being*, 141: "Nevertheless, the central position of this notion [i.e., existence] in modern philosophy is, I submit, closely correlated with skeptical concerns. … This evidence from early Greek literature suggests that such general assertions and denials of existence do not arise spontaneously in ordinary discourse. They

existence always hovers ambiguously between these two philosophical worlds—that of Aristotle and Descartes.

Hume seems to have seen better what the Cartesian project entails with regard to existence. Unlike for the PRL or the two Mills, for him, existence is not an idea or attribute, and existential propositions are not composed of subject and predicate terms: "in the proposition, *God is*, or indeed any other, which regards existence, the idea of existence is no distinct idea."[25] Though he doesn't say how he reached this conclusion, it is plausible that it was a necessary consequence of the Cartesian project of beginning philosophy by doubting the connection between existence and every idea. With this starting point, it seems inevitable that "existence" must be deprived of all eidetic content. However Hume reached his famous thesis that existence is not an idea, Kant—in both his early essay on the ontological argument (1763) and his first *Critique* (1st ed., 1781; 2nd ed., 1787)[26]—accepted it and, unlike Hume, strove to reconcile it with the traditional understanding of judgment as an act of the "composing" (*synthesis*) or "dividing" (*diairesis*) of two parts.[27] To do this, Kant distinguished two ways of "positing" (*setzen*) something in judgment: absolutely and relatively. Relative positing is just predication—

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are a product of enlightened speculation; they arise as a challenge to traditional belief and originally concern only the gods and mythological creatures. The centrality of more general questions of existence in modern philosophy might well be regarded as a historical deviation, due to the radical influence of skepticism (for Descartes and his followers) and hence the dominant role of epistemology in the post-Cartesian tradition."

[25] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*, trans. David Fate Norton and Mary Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), I, pt.3, sect.7, 67n20; for Kant on "existence" as no predicate or idea, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pt.2, div.2, bk.2, ch.3, sect.4, 567 (A596/B624); Immanuel Kant, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, ed. and trans. by David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 117 (2:72). For a good summary of Hume's debt to Descartes (though not on this precise point) and contribution to the development of non-predicative logic in Brentano and Frege, see Richard Cobb-Stevens, *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), esp. 104–5, 109–11.

[26] For the dating of Kant's works, see the guide to abbreviations in Paul Guyer and Allen Wood ed., *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, vol. 1, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, xxiii–xxviii.

[27] See Martin, *Theories of Judgment*, 43–55, who frames Kant's analysis of existential judgments in this way. Though I agree with Martin on this point, I think he overstates the inconsistency of Kant's interpretation of existential judgments both between the early essay and the first *Critique* and within the first *Critique* itself.

the positing of the predicate in relation to the subject.[28] Absolute positing, however, is the mental correlate of "God uttering His almighty 'Let there be' over a possible world" without, thereby, "grant[ing] any new determinations to the whole" or any "new predicate."[29] In the early essay, this act of absolute positing takes for its object the subject of a proposition. Though the details of his account change slightly, in both his early essay and the first *Critique*, he includes both kinds of positing within his analysis of existential judgments, thereby breaking with Hume's one-term interpretation of these.[30]

As Wayne Martin has already narrated, although Kant himself never abandoned the categorical interpretation of existential judgments, his introduction of the absolute positing function of judgment alongside that of the traditional relative positing one (predicating) allowed Fichte and his intellectual heirs in the Herbartian school to reinterpret the existential judgment as a one-term, "thetic" judgment (*thetische Urtheile*)—a class of judgment contradistinguished from the traditional, predicative (i.e., "categorical") one, in which, as the Herbartian school interpreted it, we simply posit a lone predicate term.[31]

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[28] Kant, *Only Possible Argument*, 119 (2:73); cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pt.2, div.2, bk.2, ch.3, sect.4, 567 (A596/B624). For a discussion of this distinction, see Martin, *Theories of Judgment*, 42–55; Jaakko Hintikka, "Kant on Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument," *Dialectica* 35, no. 1–2 (1981): 127–46, esp. 137–38.

[29] Kant, *Only Possible Argument*, 120 (2:74).

[30] Allan Wood seems to reduce Kant's existential judgments to ones with only absolute positing. Allan Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 106–7. This is not accurate; see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pt.2, div.2, bk.2, ch.3, sect.4, 567 (A599/B627) (where he sees propositions of the form, "God is, or there is a God" as "posit[ing] the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit[ing] the object in relation to my concept"; he identifies "objects" with what is "actual"—a notion he apparently conflates with "being outside my concept"; he identifies concepts, however, with what is "merely possible," and notes that "with actuality the object is not merely included in my concept analytically, but adds synthetically to my concept.").

[31] See Martin, *Theories of Judgment*, 55–62. For a lengthier discussion of Fichte's debt to Kant, see Wayne Martin, "From Kant to Fichte," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, ed. David James and Günter Zöller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 7–37. For Fichte as anticipating twentieth-century existentialism, see Henry Allison, "Kant on Freedom of the Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 381–415, esp. 401. For a deflationary account of his idealism, see Paul Franks, "Fichte's Position: Anti-Subjectivism, Self-Awareness and Self-Location in the Space of Reasons," in *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, 374–404. Below, I operate on the assumption of a more metaphysical interpretation of Fichte's idealism not because I necessarily dispute Franks's historical argument, but because such an interpretation is more relevant to the later development of Thomistic existentialism. For an

As we saw above, for Kant, absolute positing (which from now on, we'll call the "thetic" operation of judgment), is the mental correlate of God's efficient causal activity over the world. This is significant for understanding Fichte's understanding of the thetic operation. To see why, we need to take a step back to consider the Cartesian notion of God as *causa sui*. Descartes understands God his own quasi-efficient cause and seems to imply that anyone who denies this thereby undermines any proof for his existence.[32] The rationale for this surprising claim is disputed among recent scholars,[33] but it is possible it comes from the scholastic definition of "existence" as being from another (*ex alio sistere*).[34] Caterus asked him if he meant that God causes himself only in the negative sense admitted by everyone (i.e., that God lacks an efficient cause), or in some positive sense.[35] Descartes confirmed that he meant God causes himself in a positive, if analogous, sense of "cause."[36] Arnauld also challenged Descartes on this point,

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overview of Herbart's thought, see the recent Frederick Beiser, *Johann Friedrich Herbart: Grandfather of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[32] Descartes, *Fourth Reply*, 170 (243–44). Cf. Descartes, *Meditations* III, 34 (49–50).

[33] As Yitzhak Melamed notes, "The possibility that God, qua first cause, simply has no cause is *not* considered a viable option in this passage." He speculates that this is, "apparently, because it would constitute a violation of the *ex nihilo nihil fit* principle which Descartes clearly endorses." Yitzhak Melamed, "Spinoza on *Causa sui*," in *A Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Melamed (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), 116–25, at 118. This explanation is unsatisfactory, however, since such a principle would only be violated if it were assumed God *came to be* without an efficient cause, not if he simply were without one. Tad Schmaltz gives a different explanation: "Descartes accepted as axiomatic that there is a 'cause or reason' for the existence of everything," and he "twisted himself into knots in order to explain how this causal axiom can apply to the only being that requires no efficient cause, namely, God." Tad Schmaltz, "God as *Causa sui* and Created Truth in Descartes," in *The Ultimate Why Question: Why Is There Anything at All Rather Than Nothing Whatsoever?* ed. John Wippel, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy 54 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 109–24, at 109–10.

[34] Cf. Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate: Texte critique avec introduction, notes et tables* [*De Trinitate*: critical text with introduction, notes, and tables], ed. Jean Ribaillier (Paris: Vrin, 1958), IV, c.12, pp.174–75, lns.22–30; Albert, *Super Dionysium* De divinis nominibus, in *Opera Omnia Editio Coloniensis* [Complete works, the Cologne edition] [=Col. ed.], vol. 37/1 (Monasterii Westfalorum: Aschendorff, 1951–), c.4, p.183, lns.40–45: "prima est, *uno* simplici *comprehendit tota*, idest omnia, secundum influentiam et continentiam, sed *in existentibus*, idest in his quae ex alio vel aliis habent esse—dicitur enim 'existens' quasi 'ex alio sistens' secundum RICHARDUM DE S. VICTORE—, in his, dico, scilicet in causatis, dividentes…" (Albert recognizes "*existere*" can be applied to God because it need not always be taken in this way; see c.5 [Col. ed. 37/1:310:20–24]); Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae* [Metaphysical disputations], ed. Charles Berton, Opera Omnia 26 (Paris: Vivès, 1861), disp.31, sect.4, 6, p.236: "Tertio declarator hoc ipsum ex propria ratione existentiae; nam esse existentiae nihil aliud est quam illud esse, quo formaliter et immediate entitas aliqua constituitur extra causas suas, et desinit esse nihil, ac incipit esse aliquid."

[35] Caterus, *First Objection*, 68 (95).

[36] Descartes, *First Reply*, 78 (108–9).

saying that God would have to already exist in order to efficiently cause himself to exist.[37]

Descartes replied by saying that a formal cause does not need to precede its effect, but God's

formal causality of himself is what is analogous to an efficient cause in him.[38] This

understanding of God as self-cause was embraced with modification by Spinoza, and then,

through Spinoza, radically transformed in the hands of Fichte.[39] Fichte, in effect, collapses the

distinction between the Kantian thetic operation (for Kant, the mental correlate of God's efficient

causation) performed by the human mind and God's own efficient causation, and combines the

resulting action within the ego with Spinoza's notion of God as *causa sui*. For Fichte, "The I is

what it itself posits, and it is nothing but this."[40] Against the Arnauld-style objection that nothing

can posit itself unless it already exists,[41] Fichte insists that, in the ego, the posited object and

positing subject are the absolutely identical; "its very essence is to posit itself as positing."[42]

    In Kant, there was no indication that existence was an immanent activity. Though he

doesn't say so in so many words, he treats "exists" as an extrinsic denomination of creatures

either from God's act of creation or from the true mental act of absolute positing. With Fichte's

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[37] Arnauld, *Fourth Objection*, 148 (210).

[38] Descartes, *Fourth Reply*, 170 (243–44).

[39] On Fichte's debt to Spinoza, see Peter Heath and John Lachs, preface to *The Science of Knowledge*, by Fichte, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), xiv: "The fundamental premise of Fichte's philosophy is just such a self positing or asserting itself, and positing itself as engaging in this enterprise of self-assertion. This thought invites comparison with the concept of Aristotle's Prime Mover … and would perhaps be identical with it, were it not for the practical, volitional element involved in self-assertion. A more compelling similarity is with Spinoza's idea of the eternal potency-in-act—the inner core of his one Substance. … Fichte frequently pays tribute to him [Spinoza] as the greatest and most consistent of dogmatists." For a comparison of Spinoza and Descartes on God as *causa sui*, see Yitzhak Melamed, "Spinoza on *Causa sui*," who notes two main differences between these authors—namely, first, that Spinoza is "more resolute and unapologetic in employing this crucial notion" (121) and, second, that, unlike Descartes, Spinoza allows God to be the efficient cause of essences as well as existence (122).

[40] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy: (Wissenschaftslehre) Nova methodo (1769/99)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 112.

[41] Fichte, *Foundations*, 112: "One may think, 'Before I can do anything at all [for example, before I can think of the I], I first have to exist.' … Or one may also say, 'Before I could act, there had to be some object upon which I could act.' But what could such an objection really mean? Who makes this objection? It is I myself. I thereby posit myself as preceding myself. Thus this entire objection could be rephrased as follows: 'I cannot proceed to posit the I without assuming that the I has already posited its own being.'"

[42] Fichte, *Foundations*, 112–14.

remodeling of the subject (the "I") on the Cartesian self-causing God and reduction of divine causation to the mental act of existential positing (*setzen*), however, the groundwork is laid for viewing existence as both an immanent activity and the effect of this activity. We'll see this bear fruit in Pfänder, Maritain, and Gilson.

3. Assertion, Predication, and Existence

3.1. Brentano

Apart from the existentially neutral view of the copula and the distinction between two kinds of positing, introduced by Kant, the third major semantic development that lies at the root of Gilson's Thomistic existentialism is the distinction between assertion and predication—the claim that it is one thing to predicate something of another and something else to assert that the resultant combination is true. Martin Heidegger and others argue that the assertion-predication distinction arose because of Descartes's refounding of philosophy on universal doubt about prior beliefs.[43] Giorgio Pini has argued that the assertion-predication distinction is also found in Scotus, though not Aquinas;[44] so perhaps the causal connection between Cartesian doubt and this distinction should be reversed. In any case, the assertion-predication distinction is absent from

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[43] Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Martin Heim, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 35; Cobb-Stevens, *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy*, esp. 103, 121n8 (who contrasts this view of propositions to that of Aristotle and Aquinas, but sees as foundational for Frege, Brentano, and Husserl). Gabriel Nuchelmans represents the standard view of Aristotle scholars that, in harmony with Cobb-Stevens and Heidegger, holds that Aristotle lacked an assertion-predication distinction. See Gabriel Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition: Ancient and Mediaeval Conceptions of the Bearers of Truth and Falsity*, North-Holland Linguistic Series 8 (London: North-Holland, 1973), 29.

[44] Giorgio Pini, "Scotus on Assertion and the Copula: A Comparison with Aquinas," in *Medieval Theories on Assertive and Non Assertive Language: Acts of the 14th European Symposium on Medieval Logic and Semantics Rome, June 11-15, 2002*, ed. Alfonso Maierú and Luisa Valente, Lessico Intellettuale Europeo 92 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2004), 307–31. Can Laurens Löwe is unusual among recent interpreters since he argues this distinction is in Aquinas; see *Thomas Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Human Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 203–7. I think he is misreading his prooftexts, but cannot take up this exegetical matter here.

the otherwise Cartesian PRL, which identifies "judgment" with the "proposition."[45] It is also absent from the much later logical treatises of the two Mills. Whatever the provenance of the assertion-predication distinction, Brentano espouses it, and, moreover, conflates it, in effect, with Kant's distinction between the two kinds of "positing." For Kant, as we saw, relative positing is the same thing as predicating; yet, for him, absolute positing took for its object not a proposition or propositional content, but, at least in his early essay on the ontological argument, the subject of a categorical proposition. For the Herbartian school, the object posited in existential judgments was a predicate. Brentano replaces this absolute positing of the subject or predicate alone of a categorical proposition with an act of existential assertion or affirmation, the object of which is a complete propositional content, whether that consist of one idea or multiple.

Franz Brentano's theory of judgment changed between his early work *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle* (1862), on the one hand, and *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint* (1874) and *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* (1889), on the other.[46] Here, I'll focus on his later view. In his later *Psychology* and *Origin*, he claims to be recovering Descartes's long-lost tripartite division of mental phenomena into: (1) "presentation," (2) "judgment," and (3) "emotion," "interest," or "love."[47] Here, Brentano is drawing on Descartes's tripartite classification of "thoughts" in his *Meditations* (1st ed., 1641)—distinguishing (1) ideas,

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[45] Cf. Jill Vance Buroker, introduction to *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, by Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xxiii, xxiv; PRL II, c.3, 113.

[46] For Brentano's intellectual development, see Hynek Janoušek, "Judgmental Force and Assertion in Brentano and Early Husserl," *Studia Phaenomenologica* 15 (2015): 105–28. For the place of his later theory in the thetic tradition going back to Kant, see Martin, *Theories of Judgment*, 63–73. For a more general overview of his theory of judgment, see Roderick Chisholm, "Brentano's Nonpropositional Theory of Judgment," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (1976): 91–95; Uriah Kriegel, "Brentano on Judgment," in *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School*, ed. Uriah Kriegel, Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2017), 103–9; Uriah Kriegel, "Being," in *Brentano's Philosophical System: Mind, Being, Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 103–83; Cobb-Stevens, *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy*, 109–12; Arkadiusz Chrudzimski and Barry Smith, "Brentano's Ontology: From Conceptualism to Reism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brentano*, ed. Dale Jacquette (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 197–219.

[47] Brenano, *Psychology*, 152; Brentano, *Origin*, 9.

which are images of things, (2) volitions or emotions, and (3) judgments[48]—not his later dichotomous classification of them in *Principles of Philosophy* (1st ed., 1644), where he only distinguishes perceptions and volitions and classifies judgment under volitions as a "mode of willing."[49] What is "distinctive about judgement," Brentano says, is that "in addition to there being an idea or presentation of a certain object, there is a second intentional relation which is directed upon the object. The relation is one of either affirmation or denial—either acceptance or rejection."[50] "By 'judgement,'" he says, "we mean … acceptance (as true) or rejection (as false)."[51]

With Hume and the Herbartian school, Brentano endorses the possibility of one-term judgments, which, like his predecessors, he exemplifies with an existential judgment. The combination of presentations is neither necessary for judgment, as in his interpretation of the judgment, "There is a God," nor is it sufficient for judgment, as in the combination of the presentations of gold and mountain into "golden mountain."[52] Brentano addresses why it is that people thought "that the essential difference between judgement and presentation consists in the fact that judgements have as their content a conjunction of attributes."[53] The reason, he thinks, is that, to distinguish the mere presentation of a simple idea from the judgment that it exists or does not exist, people introduced the linguistic sign "is" or "is not."[54] Since "the linguistic expression" of judgment was composite, "the view arose that judgement itself must also be composite."[55] To support his claim that the composition of presentations is a different activity than judgment and

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[48] Descartes, Meditations III, 25–26 (37).
[49] René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, I, 32, p. 204 (17).
[50] Brentano, *Origin*, 10.
[51] Brentano, *Psychology*, 153 (parentheses original).
[52] Brentano, *Origin*, 9; cf. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, I, pt.3, sect.7, 67n20.
[53] Brentano, *Psychology*, 171–72.
[54] Brentano, *Psychology*, 177.
[55] Brentano, *Psychology*, 177–78.

unessential to judgment, Brentano famously shows that all categorial (i.e., predicative) judgments can be translated into existential ones, interpreted as predicateless judgments. (I) "Some man is sick" becomes "A sick man exists" or "There is a sick man"; (E) "No stone is living," becomes "A living stone does not exist"; (A) "All men are mortal" becomes the negative judgment with privative subject, "An immortal man does not exist"; and (O) "Some man is not learned" becomes "An unlearned man exists."[56]

3.2. Frege

While Brentano's claim that judgment is not the relation or composition of ideas, but a distinct mental act of asserting the objects of those ideas, seems to have been widely embraced by subsequent nineteenth-century logicians, other aspects of his thought were more controversial to his near contemporaries. Here, I'll highlight two of these criticisms pertinent to the question of the meaning of "existence": those of Frege and of Alexander Pfänder. I discuss Frege not primarily for his influence on Gilson and Maritain—which, if there was any, was negligible—but to relate the whole history surveyed in this paper to the notion of "existence" with which most readers today are most intimately familiar and, thereby, to define by way of contrast the less familiar views of Brentano and Pfänder.

Let's first survey the key similarities and differences between Frege's and Brentano's thetic logics.[57] In *Begriffsschrift*—published in 1879, five years after Brentano's *Psychology*—Frege expresses the assertion-proposition distinction by introducing a distinction between the "content stroke" (—), which expresses *a mere complex of ideas* without expressing

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[56] Brentano, *Psychology*, 165–66.
[57] Cf. Martin, *Theories of Judgment*, 74–102 (for Frege as culmination of the thetic tradition); Cobb-Stevens, *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy*, 102–12 (for comparison of Frege and Brentano as heirs of Descartes's assertion-proposition distinction).

"recognition or non-recognition of the truth of this," and the "judgment stroke," which is a vertical line added to the left of the content stroke (|—) to express the "assertion" of that content.[58] As for Brentano, the object of assertion is not the predicate or subject, but the whole propositional content.[59] In "Sense and Reference" (1892), he analogously distinguishes the "thought" of a sentence from its reference, which is always its "truth value."[60] In *Begriffsschrift*, he says you could, if you like, take the whole content of a judgment as its subject and say that, in every judgment, "is a fact" is its predicate, but "there is no question here of subject and predicate in the ordinary sense."[61] In "Sense and Reference," he denies that the truth value should be conceived as a predicate since if someone says a proposition is true in a play, they have not actually asserted it.[62]

Whereas Brentano reduced the meaning of "is" to the univocal sense of the contentless affirmation of existence or truth, Frege and Russell famously distinguished several senses of "is." Their ambiguity of "is" thesis is clearly inspired by the two Mills. According to James, "the *Copula* is merely a mark necessary to shew that the Predicate is to be taken and used as a substitute for the Subject."[63] John, in contrast, says, "Every proposition consists of three parts: the Subject, the Predicate, and the Copula. … [T]he word *is*, which serves as the connecting mark between the subject and predicate, to show that one of them is affirmed of the other, is

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[58] Frege, *Begriffsschrift* [Concept-writing], trans. Peter Geach, in *Translations from Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. Peter Geach and Max Black, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), 1–41, at 1–2.

[59] For a defense of this against Strawson, see Geach, "Assertion," 265–66.

[60] Frege, "On Sense and Reference," in *Translations from Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, 56–78, esp. 62–66.

[61] Frege, *Begriffsschrift* [Concept-writing], 3.

[62] Frege, "Sense and Reference," 64.

[63] James Mill, *APHM*, I, ch.4, sect.4, 123.

called the Copula."[64] John's description of the copula better matches the description of it found

in Kant[65] and the PRL,[66] where the object of the action signified by the copula is the predicate.

Since both Mills distinguish between the copulative and the existential meanings of "is,"

but they describe the copulative use differently, it was only natural that Frege and Russell would

distinguish not two, but three equivocal sense of "is": that of "identity" ($x = y$); "the relation of

subject and predicate" (Fx); and existence.[67] Both Russell and Frege treat "existence" itself as

ambiguous. Frege distinguishes existence in the "there is" (*es-gibt*) sense understood as a

quantifier (i.e., the second order attribute of a concept being more than zero or having an

instance) and existence understood as actuality (*Wirklichkeit*), which belongs to individuals.[68]

Frege isn't clear what he means by the latter, but his language is reminiscent of Kant's

description of existence in the first *Critique*. In his "Dialogue with Pünjer on Existence" (before

1884), however, he treats even the "exists" proper to individuals as capable of being defined

quantitatively: when we apparently predicate "exists" of Leo Sachse, what we are really saying is

that there is at least one thing identical to that individual; or, in standard notation: $(\exists x)(x = \text{Leo}$

Sachse).[69] Russell and Whitehead, in the *Principia mathematica*, similarly hold, besides the

existentially quantified variable ($\exists x$), two quantitative definitions of existence, one belonging to

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[64] John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, I, ch.1, 22.

[65] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pt.2, div.2, bk.2, ch.3, sect.4, 567 (A596/B624): "In the logical use it [Being] is merely the copula of a judgment. The proposition God is omnipotent contains two concepts that have their objects: God and omnipotence; the little word 'is' is not a predicate in it, but only that which posits the predicate in relation to the subject."

[66] PRL II, c.3, 113.

[67] Cf. Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920), 171–72 (from whom I've taken the portions in quotation marks); Gottlob Frege, "On Concept and Object," trans. Peter Geach, in *Translations from Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, 42–55, at 43–44.

[68] Gottlob Frege, *Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, ed. and trans. Philip Ebert and Marcus Rossberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), xxv: "…the proper conception of those judgments which we express in English by 'there is' also eludes them. This existence is mixed up by Mr. Erdmann (*Logik* I, p. 311) with actuality…" For discussion of this, see fn. 6.

[69] Gottlob Frege, "Dialogue with Pünjer on Existence," in *Posthumous Writings*, ed. Hans Hermes, Friedrich Kambartel, and Friedrich Kaulbach, trans. Peter Long and Roger White (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 53–67. For discussion of this, see Miller, *Fullness of Being*, 2–9.

individuals E! (which attributes existence to an individual by asserting that one and only one individual matches a definite description),[70] and one to classes ∃! (which denies their emptiness).[71] What is important at present is that Frege rejects Brentano's conflation of "exists" with the assertion sign. The judgment stroke, which signifies assertion, he says, cannot be applied to simple ideas, like "house," and has an entirely different meaning than that of "exists."[72] "Exists" is a second-level predicate, not a non-predicative assertion sign.

3.3. Pfänder

Alexander Pfänder also parts ways with Brentano both over his claim that there are one-term judgments and over his conflation of "exists" with the assertion sign.[73] Like the PRL, the two Mills, Frege, and Russell, he distinguishes different senses of "is," but his enumeration of these senses is his own, and he sees all as capable of being used simultaneously. Like Brentano, he conflates propositional assertion with an absolute positing signified by "is," but he breaks with his predecessors and the original purpose of the thetic function of judgment in Kant, by disconnecting it from knowledge of existence. For Pfänder, unlike Brentano, the Herbartians, Kant, or Hume, "exists" is, once again, a predicate. Unlike for Frege, it is a first-order predicate.

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[70] Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, *Principia mathematica* [Mathematical principles] [=PM], vol. I (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 182 (14.02).

[71] PM, I, 229 (24.03–24.04). For discussion of this, see Allan Bäck, *Aristotle's Theory of Predication* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 8n17. For Russell on the existence of individuals more generally, see Miller, *Fullness of Being*, 9–10, 40–43.

[72] Cf. Frege, *Begriffsschrift* [Concept-writing], 2. Geach argues that this view is superior to that of Hume, Brentano, and Gilson since we can discuss the content of existence or an existential proposition without asserting existence. Geach, "Assertion," 263–65.

[73] For discussion of other one-term theories of judgment after Brentano, see J. N. Mohanty, "Heidegger on Logic," in *Logic, Truth and Modalities: From a Phenomenological Perspective*, ed. J. N. Mohanty, Synthese Library 278 (Dordrecht: Springer, 1999), 79–109, at 88; Martin, *Theories of Judgment*, 125–45. For a prominent critic of one-term judgments, who, nevertheless, conceded judgment was something over and above relating predicate to subject, see Christoph Sigward, *Logic: The Judgment, Concept, and Inference*, trans. Helen Dendy, 2nd ed. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895), 72n2.

Pfänder was encouraged to write his logic textbook (1st ed., 1921) by his teacher, Edmund Husserl, himself a student of Brentano.[74] In it, he attributes to "the copula" two functions: (1) that of referring the predicate determination "P" to the subject, and (2) the assertion function, whereby the judgment "projects" a "state of affairs" outside itself or, put differently, "posits it [the state of affairs] over against itself in such a way that the projected state of affairs is always kept exterior to the judgment that projects it."[75] Against the likes of Brentano and James Mill, he insists "The 'is' *of the copula* means nothing at all of existence or reality."[76] Rather, "Existence is a *predicate-determination sui generis* that we ought neither to deny, nor identify with any other object determination";[77] "Existence *is* precisely no 'whatness,' no qualitative determination [*Wie*], and no relational determination of any kind."[78] The problem of saying what this mysterious predicate means, Pfänder thinks, is "not really one that logic can solve, but is the job of ontology."[79] All Pfänder ventures to say about existence is to describe it in self-referential, quasi-efficient causal terms, strongly reminiscent of Fichte's self-positing ego: "All we can say here is that what is meant in the existential judgment by existence is a unique comportment of the object towards itself, one in which it *establishes itself*, or by virtue of which it *has from itself its duration and stability*."[80] While Pfänder rejects Brentano's one-term analysis of existential judgments, he is sympathetic with it. Since every judgment, according to him, contains an "assertion-function" that "*posits* the independent subsistence of a state of affairs," and "the existential thought *means* the independent subsistence of the object," "one can identify

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[74] Donald Ferrari, introduction to *Logic: Translated from the Third, Unaltered Edition*, by Alexander Pfänder, trans. Donald Ferrari, Realist Phenomenology 3 (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2009), vii; Pfänder's work originally published *Logik* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1921; 3rd ed., Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1963).
[75] Pfänder, *Logic*, 35.
[76] Pfänder, *Logic*, 61.
[77] Pfänder, *Logic*, 62.
[78] Pfänder, *Logic*, 60.
[79] Pfänder, *Logic*, 60.
[80] Pfänder, *Logic*, 60.

in *every* judgment a positing that is *analogous* to that of the meaning of the existential judgment."[81] Nevertheless, the existential judgment includes two terms since besides the fact it "posits" or "asserts" the independent subsistence of a state of affairs (namely, the subsistent union of subject and existence), it also, in the predicate concept, "means" existence.[82] Thus, for Pfänder, existence is analogous to the positing function in judgment, but not the same as it. What it corresponds to directly in judgment is the predicate of an existential judgment.

While Pfänder's notion of existential judgments as two-term propositions with "exists" as their predicate is more conservative, his interpretation of "existence" is a genuine novelty, anticipated somewhat by Fichte's self-positing ego. For Kant, the Herbartian school, and Brentano, the existence of things was known through positing—or in the case of God's positing, caused by it—but existence itself was not some *sui generis* action analogous to positing in the existent thing itself. As Uriah Kriegel describes Brentano's view, "There is not some aspect of the world, or of things in it, that we are trying to capture with our concept EXISTENT."[83] Similarly, Janoušek explains, "For Brentano the *concept* of existence is a *denominatio extrinseca* which is predicated of objects, *not* of concepts. It is therefore a 'comment' on objects in their relation to *evident affirmative* judgments (To be is to be an object of evident judgment)."[84] Something similar could doubtless be said for Kant as well. For Pfänder, however, every existent seems to be something like Fichte's self-positing ego inasmuch as "existence" is, in it, a *sui generis* predicate determination analogous to the judgment's assertion function. Existence is that in a thing in virtue of which it "establishes" itself and has both duration and stability.

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[81] Pfänder, *Logic*, 63.
[82] Pfänder, *Logic*, 63.
[83] Kriegel, "Being," 134.
[84] Janoušek, "Judgmental Force," 113n21.

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