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IS 'OUGHT' AN OBJECT? MEINONG'S AND WEBER'S ANSWERS

I

The distinction between being (*Sein*) and ought (*Sollen*)¹ is among the most classic of the history of philosophy, and the criticisms it has undergone are just as classic. Consider, for example, Hegel's rejection of the is/ought separation, which the young Marx takes over and applies to his conception of communism; moreover, scholars like Schopenhauer have criticized the concept of ought, confining it within the scope of a theological ethics, and others, like Nietzsche, have rejected it, replacing it with the will to power.

The conceptions of ought developed by Alexius Meinong (1853–1920) and by his pupil France Veber (1890–1975) are much less known than those of the authors just mentioned. However, examining them is interesting not only because they have so far received little attention – which is especially true of Veber – but mainly for theoretical and historical reasons. These conceptions are antithetical to those which refuse to use the notion of ought, and propose instead a special understanding of the relationship between being and ought, insofar as they claim that the latter is an object, and therefore a part of being. From a historical point of view, such an analysis

¹ Following the common use, I translate *Sollen* with 'ought'; although there are linguistic reasons for using quotes when the term is taken as a noun, I shall omit them for ease of reading. Occasionally, I also use the word 'obligation'. Meinong's works are quoted from the *Alexius Meinong Gesamtausgabe* (1968–1978), abbreviated as *GA*. Translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise; references to English translations appear in brackets.

sheds new light on how work was conducted within the Graz school, showing how fruitful was the dialogue between the teacher and the pupil for the elaboration of their respective theories; this may be deduced especially from the two texts on which I will mainly focus my attention, Meinong's *Über emotionale Präsentation* and Veber's *Die Natur des Sollens*.

In *Die Natur des Sollens*, Veber assumes several Meinongian concepts, which Meinong illustrated in some of his mature works and, finally, in *Über emotionale Präsentation*. This work was published in 1917, but it was already finished in the previous year: on the cover of the printed text, we may read that it was presented at the meeting of the Academy of Sciences of Vienna on 18th October 1916.

Until a few years ago, *Die Natur des Sollens* posed some problems to scholars concerning both the dating and the identification of the text. From 1912 till 1917, Veber studied philosophy and classical philology at the University of Graz, and he earned his doctoral degree under the supervision of Meinong on 10th February 1917. Since the dissertation is missing, a problem arises as to its identification. According to Mechtild and Wolfgang Stock, *Der Gegenstand Sollen ist zu untersuchen und den Grundproblemen der Ethik nutzbar zu machen* is the title of the dissertation, of which we have only chapter IV; probably – they write – the dissertation is the same as the text presented by Veber for the Wartinger Prize. (Stock & Stock, 1990, pp. 758-9; Stock W. G., 1992, p. 12) According to Ana Juvančič-Mehle, who quotes a biographical sketch of Veber written by Anton Terstenjak, the dissertation had as a title *Die Natur des Gegenstandes Sollen und dessen Beziehungen zum Wert*, and was awarded the Wartinger Prize. (Juvančič Mehle, 1988, p. 35) Although disagreeing on the title, she too accepts that dissertation and *Wartinger-Arbeit* are one and the same. In *Christliche Philosophie der Slowenen*, Joseph Hlebŝ expresses a completely different opinion: the manuscript which is present in Veber's *Nachlass* with the title *Einiges über die Objektivität der sogenannten "relativen" Werte* corresponds to the dissertation and is "an expansion of the so-called *Wartinger Preisarbeit*." (Hlebŝ, 1997, p. 119) This view is supported by the fact that, in Veber's *Nachlass*, the certificate of the *Haupttrigorousum* is attached to this manuscript. On the contrary, Wolfgang L. Gombocz excludes that *Einiges über die Objektivität* can be either the *Wartinger-Arbeit* or the dissertation, and hypothesizes that the *Wartinger-Arbeit*, which is entitled *Die Natur des Gegenstandes Sollen und dessen Beziehung zum Wert ist zu untersuchen und das Ergebnis womöglich den Grundproblemen der Ethik nutzbar zu machen*, was expanded into the dissertation and that *Einiges über die Objektivität* was its basis. (Gombocz, 1987, pp. 69, 70; 2001, pp. 282-3) In this text, the *Wartinger-Arbeit* of 1915/16 is quoted several times, but nowhere is it explicitly identified with the dissertation.

Not even Veber himself was very helpful in solving the riddle, namely, whether the *Wartinger-Arbeit* and the dissertation are two different texts, or one and the same work. In *Sistem Filozofije* (1921) he writes:

Once I presented my thoughts to my teacher, he persuaded me that it would take much more subtle work. Dialoguing almost every day with my teacher and thanks to his constant, constructive criticism of all my unfinished thoughts, I went so far that I could bring together all these thoughts in 1916 in my 'work for the Wartinger Prize', which I have not yet been able to publish, since I finished it as a soldier, in the most difficult conditions, and hence to date I have been unable to

put it into publishable form. (pp. 72-3)

If in 1921 Veber refers to *Die Natur des Sollens* calling it not 'doctoral dissertation', but 'work for the Wartinger Prize', this could mean that the two texts are not identical. On the other hand, given the very short time – one text was completed by February 1916, the other is prior to 10th February 1917, when Veber received his PhD – and the fact that Veber was engaged in the first world war as a soldier, it is very unlikely that he was able to change his ideas about the ought significantly.

The publication in 2004 of the text of *Die Natur des Sollens und sein Verhältnis zum Werte unter kritischer Würdigung namentlich der neusten einschlägigen Theorien zu untersuchen und das Ergebnis womöglich den Grundproblemen der Ethik nutzbar zu machen*, with an appendix containing documents relating to it, at last shed light on the whole issue. On the title page of the extant text, we read that the work was registered at the Dean's Office in the Faculty of Philosophy on 28th February 1916. In the afterword, Michael Reichmayr says:

His [Veber's] dissertation consists of the three chapters of the cited work, begun in 1915 and awarded the Wartinger Prize in June 1916, plus a fourth chapter added later by Veber. (Reichmayr, 2004, pp. 157-8 / 165)

And in fact the *Rigorousum* protocol of 17th February 1917 reads:

Following his [Veber's] application of 9th January 1917, Z. 347, the college of professors of the Faculty of Philosophy, at its meeting of 26th January 1917 on the request of professors Hofrat Alexius Ritter von Meinong and Dr. Hugo Spitzer, took the unanimous decision: [...] to accept as dissertation the work presented by him [Veber] in 1915 and awarded the Wartinger Prize "The nature of the object 'ought' and its relationship to value should be investigated and the result made useful for the fundamental problems of ethics" [...]. (Quoted in the appendix of Weber F., 2004, p. 177)

Summarizing, the dissertation consists of the three chapters of the *Wartinger-Arbeit* plus a fourth one added subsequently, and it was written between 1915 and the end of 1916, since the application to obtain his doctorate was submitted by Veber on 9th January 1917.

Having clarified the mystery of the dissertation, we can rightly assume that Meinong and Veber worked almost simultaneously on their respective texts. *Die Natur des Sollens* presupposes part of the content of *Über emotionale Präsentation*, even though the latter contains theories (like the quadripartite classification of objects) as yet unknown to the young Veber; but it is possible that the teacher had worked them out partly thanks to the exchange of ideas he had with his pupil. It should also be considered that, in the years Veber studied in Graz, Meinong held in the summer semester 1913 one seminar on his essay "Für die Psychologie und gegen den Psychologismus in der allgemeinen Werttheorie", and two courses on the general theory of values, respectively in the winter semester 1913/14 and in the winter semester 1916/17. (Dölling, 1999, pp. 244-5) It is doubtful that Veber was able to attend the latter, but it is very likely that he had attended the previous ones. (Veber, 1972, p. 157) Moreover, it seems that Meinong selected the nature of the ought as a

theme for the Wartinger Prize precisely after the discussions with Veber and the suggestions that came from his young pupil.²

In *Die Natur des Sollens*, Veber refers explicitly to Meinong, but he does not mention any specific writings by Meinong himself or other authors, and the few footnotes of his manuscript have been lost; however, it is clear that his theory of ought presupposes Meinong's value theory. This was first illustrated in the *Psychologisch-ethische Untersuchungen zur Wert-Theorie* (1894), then in "Über Werthaltung und Wert" (1895), in a chapter of *Über Annahmen* – both in the edition of 1902 (chap. VIII) and in that of 1910 (chap. IX) –, in "Über Urteilsgefühle: was sie sind und was sie nicht sind" (1905) and "Für die Psychologie und gegen den Psychologismus in der allgemeinen Werttheorie" (1912); finally, with more details, in *Über emotionale Präsentation*. Posthumously, *Zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Werttheorie* (1923) and "Ethische Bausteine" (1968) were published. The whole of Meinong's reflection on value is not isolated, but – as he himself wrote in his "Selbstdarstellung" (*GA VII*, 1921, p. 5 [1974, p. 231]) – it was inspired by Carl Menger's lectures on national economy.³ The relations between Meinong's value theory and that of his pupil Christian von Ehrenfels (1859–1932) – as we read again in the "Selbstdarstellung" (*GA VII*, 1921, p. 10 [1974, p. 234]) – are also important; (Ehrenfels, 1893–1894; 1897–1898)⁴ and, of course, we should not forget Brentano's contribution to the same discipline in *Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis* (1889). (Brentano, 1889)⁵ As noted by Karl Wolf (Wolf, 1952, p. 157 ff.; 1968, p. 48 ff.), Meinong's theory of values should also be seen in connection with the reflections that were being elaborated in his time by the neo-Kantians of the Baden school (Wilhelm Windelband, Hans Rickert, Bruno Bauch) and by some members of the phenomenological school, first of all Max Scheler, but also Nicolai Hartmann and Dietrich von Hildebrand.⁶

Within the Graz school, Ernst Mally (1879–1944) (Mally, 1926) and Ernst Schwarz (1878–1938) (Schwarz, 1934),⁷ both of Slovenian origin, also dealt with the theory of values and the ought. Unlike his mature works on ethics, Veber's early writings on value theory and, more specifically, the ought, have been largely neglected by scholars, especially because – as mentioned above – they have only recently become available again.⁸ Therefore, the relationships of the young Veber with the

² For a reconstruction of these events see Trofenik (1972, pp. 143–4) and Veber (1972, pp. 158–9).

³ Which were based on Menger (1871).

⁴ On Ehrenfels' value theory see Tacon (2008).

⁵ On Brentano's value theory see Eaton (1930, pp. 51 ff., 61 ff). See also Reimherr (2004/2005), who shows that Menger's and Brentano's theories of values present many similarities. Also Meinong (*GA III*, 1912, p. 278) recognizes an affinity between his own views and those of Brentano; but see Meinong (*GA III*, 1917, pp. 434 fn. 1 [1972, pp. 131 fn. 8]) for a claim of independence from Brentano.

⁶ For a survey of these researches see Donise (2008, pp. 14–9, 32–114).

⁷ See especially pp. 73–126, which are dedicated to the *Soll*.

⁸ To my knowledge, the only text which deals with *Die Natur des Sollens* is Marini (2011, pp. 85–144). The *Forschungsstelle und Dokumentationszentrum für österreichische Philosophie* of Graz holds Veber's *Nachlass*, which contains, among others, seminar works and writings of the years 1912–1918 on the theory of values and of ought. On Veber's *Nachlass* see Gombocz (1987, pp. 69–73) and Marini (2011, pp. 597–611).

Graz school, namely with Meinong, Ehrenfels, Mally and Schwarz, still need to be investigated.⁹ The pages that follow are intended to contribute to this line of research.

II

In order to understand both Meinong's and Veber's concepts of ought, we have to start from the notions of object and of intentionality. According to Meinong, for something to be an object does not mean being concrete like perceptual things, but being independent from the subject. The object is the logical *prius*. Intentionality means the relationship whereby each mental experience is directed to an object. For Meinong, all mental experiences are either intellectual or emotional; the first group consists of representations and thoughts (i.e., judgments and assumptions), the second one of feelings and desires. Since each mental experience has an object, Meinong introduces also the objects of feelings and desires, which he calls respectively 'dignitatives' and 'desideratives'. This conception may at first seem strange, but – as John N. Findlay remarked (1963, pp. 303-4) – it reveals a very important fact, which has often been neglected by philosophical inquiry: the cognitive function of feelings and desires. In Meinong's view, there are specific forms and characteristics of the objects, which we apprehend through our emotions and desires, but this fact does not render them subjective. Therefore, emotions possess a cognitive function. Such forms and features of the objects are not apparent, but effective. One cannot assign value to something if one does not feel emotions. Feelings and desires are logically prior to value assignment, but objects, or the aspects of objects, that such emotional experiences allow us to discover, are independent of the fact that they are the matter of our emotions.

Unlike Veber, Meinong has not written a specific work on the ought. His theories about it are found in wider contexts regarding the theory of values. Undoubtedly, his most important text on this matter, even in the opinion of Meinong himself, is *Über emotionale Präsentation*. This work presupposes Meinong's mature reflection, that is the object theory exposed not only in *Über Gegenstandstheorie* (1904) and *Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie im System der Wissenschaften* (1906-07), but especially in *Über Annahmen* (1910) and *Über Möglichkeit und Wahrscheinlichkeit* (1915). In order to understand Meinong's mature ideas about the ought, one should know at least the general outlines of object theory, above all because he does not use shared words and concepts, but his own terminology and his own concepts. One can talk about object theory without considering value theory, but not vice versa. Here, I assume that the main object-theoretic concepts are known.¹⁰

In *Psychologisch-ethische Untersuchungen zur Wert-Theorie* (1894), Meinong defines value by means of psychological analysis. (GA III, 1894, pp. 16, 19) Value is the capacity of an object to arouse in a subject the foundation for a feel-

⁹ Veber's (1972) own autobiographical memories are an interesting source on the relationship between himself and Meinong. Some information on the relationship between Veber and Schwarz is provided by Gombocz (2001, pp. 264-6). Schwarz (1934, pp. 8 ff., 74 ff. and *passim*) directly deals with Veber's *System filozofije* (1921) and *Etika* (1923).

¹⁰ I gave an introduction to object theory in Raspa (2008).

ing of value (i.e. a feeling of pleasure or pain in relation to the existence or non-existence of something). There are no absolute values, but only values for a subject for whom they are values. (GA III, 1894, p. 42) The ought designates a complex fact, namely the presence of a will or a desire directed towards an act or a volition. The moral ought presents degrees of intensity which go from correct to meritorious, to allowable, down to reprehensible. The ought *par excellence* is correctness, the non-ought (*Nicht-Sollen*) belongs to the field of the reprehensible. It is a social need that people should act correctly and not reprehensibly. Heroes are not needed: the meritorious is a weak ought, just as the allowable is a weak non-ought. (GA III, 1894, pp. 196-7)

The ought is a phenomenon of value and lies in the value of moral volition, which is qualified not in relation to the acting subject, but rather to a community. The dispositional value can push the acting subject to the greatest sacrifice; however, the actuality value (*Actualitätswert*) imposed by the community is content with minor sacrifices. He who fulfils his everyday duties actualizes for the community a very important value, which is greater than the effort it costs him. The true social need for morality is limited to requiring the correct and to omitting the reprehensible. Whence, then, does the ought draw its authoritative nature? Well, every ought refers to the future, it cannot concern the past. The authoritative nature of the ought lies in a decision proposed to the acting subject by a collective evaluation. The field of the ought, which extends to the correct, corresponds to duty (*Pflicht*); the correlative of duty is the law (*Recht*) (GA III, 1894, p. 205).

With “Für die Psychologie und gegen den Psychologismus in der allgemeinen Werttheorie” Meinong abandons psychologism and impresses an objectivistic turn to his value theory, introducing, besides the concept of personal value, i.e. a value which is related to the subject, that of impersonal or absolute value. This is a clear change with respect to 1894, to which he came by means of the notion of emotional presentation. The function of presenting an object to the thought – he says – has so far rightly been ascribed to representations, but it was a mistake to ascribe it to representations alone. Judgments and assumptions too, and even emotional experiences, namely feelings and desires, can play this role (since each mental phenomenon has an object). (GA III, 1912, p. 278).

Thus, [...] an object has a value not because the interest of a subject is turned to it, but firstly because it deserves this interest. Or else, put more simply: an object has a value, insofar as whatever has to be presented by value experiences actually pertains to it; and therein lies an even simpler definition: value is what is presented by means of value experiences. By itself, of course, an object presented through emotions is as little an experience as an object presented intellectually. Value as I understand it is thus apprehended by means of an experience like all that is apprehended, yet by its nature it no longer has any relationship to an experience: it is neither personal, nor relative; hence, it can be termed impersonal or even absolute. (GA III, 1912, p. 280)

In the same essay Meinong reasserts one thesis, which he already maintained in 1894 (GA III, 1894, pp. 27-8) and which we will also find in Veber: it is not possible to desire something which, even though it possesses value, according to own's conviction does already exist. Desire is not the value experience (*Werterlebnis*) *par*

excellence, nor is it the peculiar way in which the subject relates to the object of value, but it is not even fully extraneous to it. (GA III, 1912, p. 272)

I said that *Über emotionale Präsentation* contains Meinong's mature value theory, which is developed from the perspective of object theory. The starting point of this work is the theory of presentation, according to which mental experiences, mostly those parts of the experiences which are the contents, present objects to the thought, that is, they present objects to us. (GA III, 1917, p. 287 ff. [1972, p. 3 ff.]) We know that mental experiences are either intellectual or emotional; so we have an intellectual presentation and an emotional one. (GA III, 1917, pp. 310-1 [1972, pp. 23-4]) Representations present objecta, judgments and assumptions present objectives; but the objects of emotional presentation, that is the objects of feelings and desires, are neither objecta nor objectives. We have seen that Meinong calls 'dignitatives' the objects of feelings and 'desideratives' the objects of desires. The former have more affinity with objecta, the latter with objectives. (GA III, 1917, pp. 394-5 [1972, p. 98]) Summarizing, the four main classes of objects (objecta, objectives, dignitatives, and desideratives) correspond to four main classes of mental experiences (representations, thoughts (judgments and assumptions), feelings, and desires). More specifically, the beautiful, the true, the good and the pleasant fall within dignitatives, the ought and the purpose within desideratives. From the point of view of quality, experiences can be genuine or imaginary, but they also differ from the point of view of quantity, so that there are different intensities of feelings and desires. (GA III, 1917, pp. 397-8 [1972, pp. 100-1])¹¹ Accordingly, variations occur in the presented objects; for example, there are different intensities of ought (GA III, 1917, p. 399 [1972, p. 101]) – a thesis which will be developed in detail by Veber. (Weber F., 2004, pp. 39-43)

The ought shows a close relationship to desire, so that Ehrenfels went as far as claiming that ought is constituted by a pair of desires. (Ehrenfels, 1897–1898/1982–1990, I, p. 544 ff.) In expressions such as 'Thou shalt [*du sollst*]' it seems that obligation is attributed to subjects, who are expected to take account of their obligations through their desires. But this second desire – Meinong says – is hardly essential. This is evident if we consider expressions like 'It ought not to have been [*Es hat nicht sollen sein*]' or, even more, like 'Thou shalt honor thy father and mother [*Du sollst Vater und Mutter ehren*]', in which obligation does not relate to a 'thou'; rather, it "is primarily a determination of the objective 'to honor father and mother' [*eine Bestimmung an dem Objektiv 'Vater und Mutter ehren'*]" and only by way of this, as it were, can the 'shalt' be attributed to the subject of the objective. Just as with 'may', the obligation is also, in the first place, a specification of being [*Gleich dem Können ist also auch das Sollen eine Eigenschaft des Seins*]" (GA III, 1917, p. 325 [1972, p. 36]) (intended as an objective). The desire does not come into play in defining the essence of the ought, it is not one of its constitutive elements; however, it is true that we can apprehend this type of property of being (*Eigenschaft des Seins*) only through that presenting experience which is the desire.

If the desire related to the ought is that of someone who expresses a command – like when a father, for example, orders his son to return home – the experience in

¹¹ I have dealt with these issues in Raspa (2005, p. 118 ff.).

question is a genuine experience; on the contrary, if the desire related to the ought is not that of the speaker, but is of the kind of the Ten Commandments (“Thou shalt not kill”), then the ought is not accompanied by a genuine desire, but by an imaginary one, which can however act as a partial presentation like the imaginary experiences in the other classes of experiences. So desires, as presenting experiences, apprehend objects – the objects of desire; and also obligation possesses “an objectivity of its own, which is accessible through presentation by desire.” (GA III, 1917, p. 327 [1972, p. 38]) Meinong explicitly recognizes that he has reached this conclusion through Veber’s *Wartinger-Arbeit*. (GA III, 1917, p. 327 fn. 1 [1972, p. 38 fn. 8])

Despite the similarities, in this period Meinong and Veber disagree on some points. The former relates obligation to possibility, which he dealt with in *Über Möglichkeit und Wahrscheinlichkeit*. The ought – Meinong says – has no application to the past. It cannot be said: ‘No person and no civilized state ought to identify itself with the assassination of the Archduke in 1914’, because such an identification has already been made by individuals and by whole states. One can only say: ‘It ought not to have been’. Similar limitations apply to the present and the future. On a bright day one cannot say: ‘The weather ought to be fine today’, or in August: ‘It ought to be winter in five months’. If the ought does not concern either factuality or non-factuality, then it has to do with subfactuality, the realm of possibility, the bearers of which are incomplete objects, that is objects which are not determined in all their aspects, like abstract objects. And the ought has to do precisely with incomplete objects. “That something ought to be or ought not to be is said only of what is possible.” (GA III, 1917, p. 448 [1972, p. 143]) Likewise, desire can only apply to the possible and to incomplete objects, not to the factual and the unfactual. One cannot say (in 1917): ‘I wish there had been no war [*Ich wünsche, daß kein Krieg gewesen sei*]’, but rather: ‘I wished that there would be no war [*Ich wünschte, es wäre kein Krieg gewesen*]’, as well as I cannot wish in summer that in six months the days will be longer and clearer. (GA III, 1917, pp. 447-50 [1972, pp. 142-5])

Secondly, Meinong believes that both dignitatives and desideratives, hence obligations too, are ideal objects of higher order, that is, objects which are based on other objects, or else on objectives, that underlie them and without which they could not be there. This means that the good and the beautiful, but also the ought, are in the world, even though they are ideal objects, not concrete, actually existing ones. (GA III, 1917, pp. 392, 394 [1972, pp. 96, 97-8]; GA VII, 1921, p. 22 [1974, pp. 228-9])

A consequence of the thesis according to which the ought is an object is that, just as there are impersonal values, there are also impersonal obligations, which are not relative but absolute. (GA III, 1917, p. 446 [1972, p. 142]) On this point Veber agrees with Meinong. (Weber F., 2004, p. 125 ff.) The attempt to establish a theory recognizing absolute impersonal values, which are common to everyone, is certainly related to the tragic experience of the First World War, which both Meinong and Veber were living through, albeit in different ways. Finding an agreement on an objective common *minimum* might not be a way to prevent conflicts, since that common element which is reached may also be the result of a conflict, yet it can be a viable path to avoiding at least those conflicts which are wars.

III

I come to *Die Natur des Sollens*. Compared to Meinong, Veber reduces the horizon of his research – but this is his first philosophical work – and examines more closely the concept of ought: while Meinong presents only some scattered reflections on the ought, Veber proposes a structured theory, which is grounded on Meinongian concepts. He understands his work as internal to object theory, the theses of which are also fundamental for developing a theory of ought. Veber himself is aware of the similarities subsisting between his own text and *Über emotionale Präsentation*,¹² but – as I mentioned – there are also some differences between the two authors.

At first Veber asks himself: “what is the ought”? But very soon this question is transformed into another one that channels the research in a very specific direction: is ought an object in the proper sense of the word? This direction becomes even more specific when Veber adopts a conclusion of *Über emotionale Präsentation* and maintains that “objects are presented to us by experiences.” (Weber F., 2004, p. 1) Therefore, the first task for him is to identify the experience that presents the ought. By doing so, not only has Veber indicated the strategy he intends to pursue in order to prove his thesis, but he has already implicitly answered the previous question: if experiences present objects, and there is an experience which presents the ought, then ought is an object. From the very beginning, Veber takes a resolute stand in favour of a thesis which is not at all obvious. In Kant’s view, for example, the ought is a product of reason, which separates the realm of nature from that of man; there is no object, corresponding to the ought, which is independent of the subject.

Following Meinong, Veber regards the object as independent of its presenting experience, but the experience is the gateway through which we come to know the object. Veber thus starts from Meinong’s classification of mental experiences in representations, thoughts (judgments and assumptions), feelings and desires. The first two classes are immediately excluded: the objects of representations, unlike obligations, are neither positive nor negative; as for judgments, even though their objects (i.e. objectives) are positive or negative, they are all included within the dichotomy of being–non-being. This argument is not altogether clear. Veber’s thesis is the following: one can judge about an obligation, but, in order to do it, another experience is needed that directly presents the obligation, just as one can express a judgment on a colour, but one needs another experience presenting the colour, namely, a representation. Two classes are still available, as Meinong showed with the theory of emotional presentation, a theory with which Veber agrees. Feelings have as their objects the beautiful, the true, the good, and the pleasant; since the ought cannot be identified with any of them, feelings cannot be the class we are seeking. One could consider the good, understood as value, but the difference between value and ought is sharp: while value applies to something that is, i.e. that exists or subsists, the ought – Veber maintains – is removed if the corresponding object exists. I recall that Meinong, too,

¹² See Veber’s *Sistem filozofije* (1921, p. 73): “What persuaded me that this work for science was not vain after all, was precisely Meinong’s previously mentioned 1917 text, which – explicitly referring to my work which is currently unpublished – not only agrees with the main thoughts of this work, but in many respects completes and broadens them.”

maintained that both the ought and the desire do not apply to the factual. The last class is that of desires, of volitions (*Wollungen*), as Veber calls them. Can volitions be presenting experiences? Veber's positive answer is based on a truly poor argument, which he calls the "principle of analogy": if all other mental experiences present an object, why shouldn't the same be true of volitions, which are also experiences? (Weber F., 2004, p. 4)¹³ Again with Meinong, Veber says that, among emotional experiences, volitions are active, while feelings are passive, and that their intellectual *pendants* are judgments and representations. Thus, if (i) *volitions present objects*, these objects should be identified and defined, and if (ii) *the ought is presented by volitions*, then (iii) *the ought can be considered (is) an object*. Veber has shown, albeit weakly, the first premise, he must now prove the second.

Since every volition of an object presupposes a valuation (*Werthaltung*) of that object, one might consider that the volition exhibits the value of the object. On the contrary, Veber argues, since objects only have a value if they exist or subsist, and since one can only desire something if it does not exist or subsist, then the will cannot present the value of the object. (Weber F., 2004, pp. 5-6)¹⁴ It could be objected that, instead, I can desire something that exists (a house, a woman, a jewel), but which I do not have. Here, however, it should be observed – and it will shortly become clearer – that, as Meinong argued, what is not factual is not the object of the representation, but the corresponding objective, and the ought is a property of the objective. I want to buy a certain existing house, which I do not have, while it is obvious that I do not want to buy a house which I already have; or I desire to marry a real woman, not an imaginary one, whom I have not yet married, while it is absurd to want to marry one's own wife. In all these cases, the desire is directed towards the realization of something that is not an object of representation, but a not-yet-factual objective: that I buy a certain (existing) house, that I marry a certain (existing) woman.

Veber has achieved a negative result, which he had in fact already mentioned, but he has not yet identified the object of volition. To this end, he follows his teacher's method as well as his doctrine: he allows natural language and grammar to guide him (as Aristotle had taught long before). The object of volition, for example when we wish that a certain enterprise be successful, is not the experience itself, but something toward which the experience (the desire) is directed – the desired object. (Weber F., 2004, pp. 6-8) Suppose I want to meet an acquaintance and I mentally express the wish that he come; the content of my thought is not the desire that my acquaintance appear, but the attribution to his arrival of what we usually (in German) denote by 'may [*möge*]' and that sometimes, depending on the circumstances, we replace with 'let [*sei*]', 'ought [*soll*]', etc. The thought I formulated is very similar to

¹³ It seems that precisely the non-acceptance of the exceptional nature of desires has led Veber to investigate into their objects (s. above, fn. 2).

¹⁴ "[...] 'objects of value' receive their value only through their existence or subsistence. It is however possible to want these objects only if they do not yet exist or, alternatively, subsist. Wanting them anyway when they already (for example) exist would not only be absurd, but is also intrinsically impossible. Thus, since value cannot be ascribed to an object insofar as it is wanted, and on the other hand, if it possesses this value, it can no longer be wanted, the assertion according to which the will presents the value of an object falls."

a judgment of so-being (that is, a categorical judgment), but they diverge as to their matter: in the categorical judgment 'the ball is round [*die Kugel ist rund*]', the matter of judgment is made by the representation of the ball – there is no judgment without representation, for the latter contributes to the presentation of the object that judgment alone cannot apprehend –; on the contrary, the matter of the judgment 'the ball ought to roll [*die Kugel soll rollen*]' is given by the desire that the ball should roll, and here the desire presents emotionally the 'ought [*soll*]', while the representation presents intellectually the ball. Intellectual experiences (representations and judgments) do not suffice to apprehend such an object; to this purpose, an emotional experience, a desire, is needed. This apprehends that property of the object which is expressed by the '*soll*', and since this property does not apply to the 'ball', but to the objective 'that the ball roll [*daß die Kugel rolle*]', it follows that for Veber, as for Meinong, the ought is a property of the objective, not of the object of a representation; (Weber F., 2004, pp. 16, 27) therein lies its objectuality. Like the object of a judgment, an obligation is either positive or negative, but unlike the object of a judgment, an obligation cannot be apprehended through an experience of the intellectual life (*Geistesleben*) and is therefore an object of our emotional life (*Gemütsleben*).

Veber has thus concluded his argument in support of the second premise, namely that "ought is an object of the will [*Sollen ist Wollensgegenstand*]," (Weber F., 2004, p. 14) or that it is presented by volitions (or desires). From premises (i) and (ii) he derives conclusion (iii). Previously, against the thesis that value is the object of desire, it has been observed that, while value applies to something that is, desire is directed toward something that is not yet. Exactly the reverse happens with respect to ought:

If we desire an object, then we can predicate also the ought of it; if we can no more desire it, because it already exists or subsists, then it does not make sense to say that it ought to be. (Weber F., 2004, p. 15)

Desire possesses three characteristics (positivity, negativity, and variations of intensity), which allow us to establish a typology of different volitions. (Weber F., 2004, pp. 17-8) The same three features belong also to the ought. (Weber F., 2004, pp. 20, 24)

Veber remarks that, "as we know" – that is, as Meinong says –, each mental experience is composed of two elements, the act and the content.¹⁵ These two elements are present in different proportions in the various experiences: while in the representations the content prevails over the act, exactly the opposite happens in the judgments; such prevalence of the act over the content increases in feelings and desires. This does not mean that, in such cases, the content is totally missing, and the presenting function along with it. In volitions the presenting element is even more hidden than in feelings. In short, and herein lies the main theoretical difficulty, the act and the content of an experience possess a quantitative aspect; such quantities are in reciprocal relationship to one another. Therefore, volitions differ from other expe-

¹⁵ See Meinong (*GA II*, 1899, p. 384 [1978, pp. 142-3]; *GA III*, 1917, pp. 339 ff., 347 [1972, pp. 49 ff., 55]).

riences as they present a *minimum* of content and a *maximum* of act. (Weber F., 2004, pp. 22-3)

Veber acknowledges that the arguments he has presented, taken individually, are not cogent, but he believes that, taken together, they may speak in favour of the plausibility (*Wahrscheinlichkeit*) of the main thesis he supports, namely that ought is an object and, specifically, the object of desire. (Weber F., 2004, p. 25)

That Veber's discourse is based on Meinong's object theory is further proved by his attempt to understand the ought in relation to some object-theoretic pairs of concepts: objects may be real or ideal, there may be objecta or objectives, of higher or lower order. But which kind of object is the ought in relation to such pairs of concepts?

First of all, since the ought cannot exist, it cannot be real, and therefore it is an ideal object; besides, the very fact that the ought can only belong to objectives, which are ideal objects and hence do not possess real properties, shows that it is an ideal object, more precisely an ideal property. (Weber F., 2004, pp. 26-9) Secondly, the ought is not an objective, but an objectum, and it is so because, while in the judgment that a certain object ought to be, we apprehend the being of the object along with the ought, the apprehension of the latter does not imply, according to Veber, the apprehension of a being; moreover, the objective possesses modal properties like factuality, non-factuality, necessity, or contingency, which can in no way belong to the ought. (Weber F., 2004, pp. 29-30) Here it becomes clear that Veber is still working with the dichotomy of objecta and objectives, not with Meinong's quadripartite classification of objects. Regarding the third question, ideal objects which stand in such a relation of non-independence to other objects, that they cannot be without such objects, are all indisputably objects of higher order.¹⁶ This relation has been called 'foundation' by Meinong.¹⁷ Now, Veber recognizes that the ought belongs to certain objectives, but – he adds – its objectual content (*Objektsgeltung*) is not based on such objectives, so the relation between objectives and the ought is not one of foundation; moreover, referring to what he has stated previously, i.e. that the apprehension of the ought does not imply the apprehension of a being, he believes that the will can present the ought independently from objectives; therefore – he concludes – “the ought is not an object of higher order.” (Weber F., 2004, p. 33)

I omit the long discussion of the constitutive (positivity, negativity, intensity variations) and consecutive features of the ought, (Weber F., 2004, pp. 34-67) since it does not add further arguments in support of the thesis Veber has endorsed: that the ought is an object and, precisely, the object of desire. Let us dwell instead on the last points considered. In 1916, Veber does not yet know desideratives, which is why he states that the ought is an objectum; later on, he introduces the class of strivings <*stremljenja*>, whose specific object is precisely the ought <*najstvo*>. (Weber F., 2004, p. 133 ff.)¹⁸ Unlike Meinong, he says that the ought, even though it is an ideal object, is not a higher order object and is substantially different from the possible.

¹⁶ See Meinong (*GA II*, 1899, p. 385 ff. [1978, p. 144 ff.]; *GA III*, 1917, p. 352 ff. [1972, p. 61 ff.]).

¹⁷ See Meinong (*GA II*, 1899, p. 399 [1978, p. 153]).

¹⁸ On Veber's mature ethical conceptions see Juhant (2005), Strahovnik (2005) and Marini (2011, pp. 67 ff., 145 ff.).

Concerning the former point, Veber assimilates the ought to beauty and value, which Meinong regards instead as objects of higher order. (On this issue he came into controversy with Witasek¹⁹). According to Meinong, if an object requires a bearer in order to be there, then it is an object of higher order; and if the ought is there only when there is an object to which it applies, then it is an object of higher order too. As for the other point, if the ought has nothing to do with the realm of possibility, then it does not possess modal properties, and therefore it does not fall – contrary to Meinong's claim – in the realm of subfactuality, which is peculiar to possibility.

If the pupil and the teacher disagree on these issues, it should however be sufficiently clear that *Die Natur des Sollens* stimulated Meinong to postulate a specific object for desires, just as *Über emotionale Präsentation* was to stimulate Veber to deepen his research on both the ought and ethics in general. A very fruitful dialectical exchange was established between Meinong and the young Veber, an example of scientific collaboration among scholars, which may be taken as a model and should be further investigated.

¹⁹ I dealt with this topic in Raspa (2006, p. 72 ff.; 2010, p. 36 ff).