Foreword

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The destiny of Meinongianism in the Anglo-American analytic philosophy in the first half of the 20th Century is summarized by G. Ryle, 1972's well-known remark:

> Let us frankly concede from the start that *Gegenstandstheorie* itself is dead, buried and not going to be resurrected. Nobody is going to argue again that, for example, 'there are objects concerning which it is the case that there are no such objects'. Nobody is going to argue again that the possibility of ethical and aesthetic judgments being true requires that values be objects of a special sort.

Unfortunately, philosophers typically make bad prophecies. Nine years before, in 1963, John N. Findlay published the second edition of one of the most important studies on Meinong's philosophy: *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values* (Findlay, 1963). In 1967, Gustav Bergmann published his *Realism. A Critique of Brentano and Meinong* (commented in this issue by Guido Bonino) (Bergmann, 1967). Seven years later, in 1974, Reinhardt Grossmann published another important book on Meinong's theory of objects (Grossmann, 1974).

Yet, this was only the beginning of the Meinong-Renaissance. In the United States, the growing interest of two philosophers in Meinong's theories (Roderick M. Chisholm and Hector-Neri Castañeda) provided the Meinong-Renaissance with deep and insightful new theoretical intuitions. While Findlay's and Grossmann's studies aimed at clarifying Meinong's thoughts after several historical misunderstandings – even provided that it was difficult for English-speaking philosophers to read and understand Meinong's original texts –, Chisholm's and Castañeda's works somehow anticipated the

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development of Neo-Meinongianism, i.e. a renewed and (at least in part, as we will see) simplified version of Meinongianism. In 1967, Chisholm wrote the entry "Meinong, Alexius" in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* published by MacMillan (Chisholm, 1967). Seven years before, in 1960, he published the English translation of Meinong's 1904 *Über Gegenstandstheorie* (Chisholm (ed.), 1960) and in 1973 he summarized some typical Meinongian theses in his paper *Beyond Being and Nonbeing* (Chisholm, 1973). On the other hand, Castañeda exposed in 1974 his Guise Theory, that seemed to present important connections with Meinong's theory of objects (Castañeda, 1974), even though Castañeda cannot be properly considered a Neo-Meinongian for many reasons (e.g., guises are different from Meinongian objects). However, Castañeda introduced the idea that there is more than one way of predication and this idea was already part of Meinong's legacy (it was suggested by one of Meinong's pupils, Ernst Mally, who also suggested the distinction between characterising and non-characterising properties, thus being the legitimate founder of two Neo-Meinongian doctrines).

   In 1976, in turn, one of Castañeda's pupils, William J. Rapaport, completed his PhD dissertation on *Intentionality and the Structure of Existence* (Rapaport, 1976 and 1978). Rapaport examined some data and some problems that typically affect our ontology when we try to introduce in it intentional objects. He proposed a theory according to which there are two kinds of objects (Meinongian and actual objects) and two ways of predication (constituency and exemplification): Meinongian objects both are constituted by properties and exemplify them, while actual objects only exemplify properties. This distinction was motivated by recalling, among other, the well-known Russell's objections against Meinong (Russell, 2003, 80–84). Rapaport's theory was perhaps the first example of the Neo-Meinongian dual copula strategy (Orilia, 2005[2] and Berto, 2012) or, as we would better claim, of the instantiation-centered Neo-Meinongianism. Unfortunately, this theory was affected by the paradox originally discovered by Roman Clark with regard to the guise theory (Clark, 1978) and much discussion focused on that critical point.

   In 1974, Terence Parsons published *A Prolegomenon to Meinongian Semantics* (Parsons, 1974), that was followed by an article on fictional objects (Parsons, 1975), and, in 1980, he exposed his Neo-Meinongian theory to a larger extent in the book *Nonexistent objects* (Parsons, 1980). In opposition to the dual copula strategy and developing Mally's second suggestion, Parsons

accepted a distinction between characterising and non-characterising properties of objects: ontological properties, for example, are non-characterising and cannot be assumed to constitute an object. Parsons' theory represents the second, Neo-Meinongian strategy to deal with the problems surrounding the objects' theory: the property-centered Neo-Meinongianism.

However, the most comprehensive book on Meinongianism was written in 1979 by an Australian philosopher, Richard Routley (then Richard Sylvan): *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond. An investigation of noneism and the theory of items* (Routley, 1979), that was anticipated by many articles (for example, Routley, 1966). The publication of this monumental book perhaps represented the moment in which Meinongians became strongly aware of their distinction from (and opposition to) the mainstream Frege-Russell-Quine view of ontology: Meinong's jungle and its flourishing of items (even strange ones)overtly contrasted Quine's desert landscapes, i.e. Quine's principle of economy in ontology (Quine, 1948), even though one diffused reading of this opposition misunderstands Meinong's ideas, by claiming that, for Meinongians, there *exist* (or, simply, there *are*) objects that Quinean ontologists could not accept, so that such objects turn out to be part of ontology. However, Meinongianism, by accepting that there are objects that do not exist, was considered by Routley a minority view, that went against the "establishment philosophers". In reply, David K. Lewis declared that Routley was not a noneist, but an allist, since he simply accepted the existence of controversial items (e.g., fictional and merely possible ones) (Lewis, 1990). In order to make Meinongian positions intelligible, many Non-Meinongians still follow this interpretation, by claiming that Meinongians are committed to the existence of strange items *or* that they at least distinguish being from existence, so that every item has being, even though not all the items exist. Thus, even the definition of the disagreement between Meinongians and Non-Meinongians became problematic.

In 1983, in his book *Abstract objects*, Edward N. Zalta developed the dual copula strategy by using a vast logical apparatus (Zalta, 1983 and 1988). In the same year, after a long series of articles on Meinongian themes, Karel Lambert published his *Meinong and the Principle of Independence* (Lambert, 1983). On the other hand, Dale Jacquette accepted the property-centered Neo-Meinongianism (that was defended by Routley too) and tried to define the distinction between characterising and non-characterising properties on logical grounds (for example, Jacquette, 1996).

More recently, a third form of Neo-Meinongianism emerged: Graham Priest's modal approach (adopted by Francesco Berto too) (for example, Priest, 2005 and 2006[2], and Berto, 2010 and 2012). Following the modal approach, items do not only instantiate properties in the actual world, but they instantiate them in other possible (and impossible) worlds too. Thus, Pegasus is not a unicorn in the actual world (there are no unicorns here!), but it is a unicorn in some possible world, while the round square is not round and square in the actual world, but it is round and square in some impossible world. In the actual world, it is legitimate to refer to such items that instantiate strange properties in other worlds, and this seems to set the distinctions between modes of predications or between kinds of properties apart. Together with a growing interest in paraconsistent logic (i.e., logic that accepts that there are – in the actual world or at least in some impossible world – true contradictions and that such contradictions do not obey the *ex falso quodlibet* law), the definition and the status of impossible worlds nowadays is one of the most discussed topics in ontology and logic.

After these historical remarks, it is now time to ask: what do Neo-Meinongians believe? They typically accept many theses that reasonably derive from Meinong's philosophy: objects are what they are – i.e. they instantiate or they are characterized by their properties – independently of their ontological status (principle of the independence of the *Sosein*); every set of properties (at least under some qualification) constitutes an object (principle of the freedom of assumption); our primary quantifiers are not ontologically loaded, so that there are objects that do not exist; more generally, there are objects that do not have any kind of being at all. One important and obvious consequence of such theses is that there are many objects that do not exist and that nevertheless have some properties: Pegasus, the round square, and so on.

Neo-Meinongians learnt from the Russell-Meinong debate that it was necessary to qualify the principle of the freedom of assumption, in order to deal with difficult cases, such as the case of the existent round square. In fact, if we take the existent round square at face value, it is characterized by the properties of being round, of being a square and of existing, so that, given the unqualified reading of that principle, the existent round square exists, even though we all know that it does not exist. Furthermore, Neo-Meinongians had to defend their theses from the Russellian objection according to which they violate the law of non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle *or* they had at least to justify such violations, in order to make them reasonable and

unproblematic. Finally, further difficulties emerged from the general problem of implicit properties: for example, is Pegasus an animal, provided that it is a unicorn, even though the Greek myth does not explicitly asserts that it is an animal? Is it legitimate to claim that it is characterized by the property of being an animal too? Or is it incomplete with regard to that property, i.e. it is neither true, nor false that it has it?

In order to reply to the first objection, Neo-Meinongians limited the principle of the freedom of assumption under some qualification. For example, property-centered Neo-Meinongians (such as Parsons, Routley, Jacquette) claimed that every set of *characterising* (or *nuclear*) properties constitutes an object, while instantiation-centered Neo-Meinongians (such as Rapaport and Zalta) accepted that every set of properties constitutes an object, insofar as those properties are *encoded* (in Zalta's terms) by that object. Finally, modal Neo-Meinongians (such as Priest and Berto) roughly claimed that every set of properties constitutes an object, insofar as those properties are instantiated by that object *in some* (possible or impossible) *world*. It is not necessary to recall here the advantages and the problems of each solution. However, it is important to remark that there are some points in which Neo-Meinongianism differs from Meinong's original philosophy.

Firstly, as we have already noticed, Neo-Meinongians restricted Meinong's principle of the freedom of assumption – even though Meinong himself was inclined to think that it was necessary to introduce some restriction (with regard to the existent round square, he claimed that the property of being existent – that is instantiated by that object – is different from the property of existing – that is not instantiated by it). Secondly, Neo-Meinongians did not accept that there are different kinds of being. In particular, they did not accept subsistence as the kind of being of abstract objects and of some objectives. For Neo-Meinongians, objects either exist, or do not exist. Thirdly, they did not deepen every aspect of Meinong's philosophy: for example, they did not investigate objectives (or, at least, they did not suggest original theories about them) and they did not focus on aesthetic values and on ethics. Neo-Meinongianism only covered some areas of philosophy: ontology of fiction, at first – even though they did not developed full theories of art and aesthetic judgment –, logic, the problem of the reference of seemingly empty names – and some other issues in philosophy of language. On the other hand, with regard to the ontology of time and to the theory of knowledge, for example, there are only some remarks by Routley that still need to be studied in depth.

However, even though Neo-Meinongianism still represents a non-fully developed minority view, many recent philosophical intuitions seem to corroborate some of Meinong's ideas *or* they seem to be nearer to the Meinongian spirit than traditional theories. Here are some examples.

In 1973, in his lessons on *Reference and Existence* (Kripke, 2013), Saul Kripke argued for a heretical thesis: fictional objects – such as Sherlock Holmes and Pegasus – exist. In 1977, in full Quinean spirit, Peter van Inwagen agreed with this idea, by claiming that, provided that it is legitimate to quantify over such items and provided that our quantifiers are ontologically committing, fictional objects have existence (van Inwagen, 1977). Nathan Salmon (1987) and (1998) and Amie Thomasson (1999) came to the same conclusion and Thomasson developed a full artifactualist theory of fictional items. Artifactualism differs from Meinongianism in two important respects: while the former claims that *ficta* exist and that they are created by their authors, Meinongians typically assert that *ficta* do not exist and that they are somehow found out by their authors (provided that the objects of the author's thoughts do not depend, for their being what they are, on the author's mental activity). However, *ficta* somehow conquered (at least for artifactualism) the right of being accepted *qua* objects by the theory of fiction – a right that they already had in Meinong's theory of objects.

Furthermore, what about the idea that there are items that do not exist? Even though many ontologists still maintain that everything whatsoever exist – so that existence can be considered, at best, a non-discriminating property of objects (for a recent example, Rami, 2013) –, it is worth asking whether there are existing objects that are not real or not concrete. Timothy Williamson notoriously argued that every possible object exists, so that *possibilia* have necessary existence, even though not every object is concrete (Williamson, 2002). Applying this idea to the ontology of time (in particular, with regard to presentist theories), some philosophers argued that there are (= exist) now objects that are not now concrete (for example, Hinchliff, 1988, and Orilia, 2012): Julius Caesar, for example, still exists, even though he is not concrete anymore (he is an *ex-concretum*). Other philosophers distinguished being from existence (for example, Yourgrau, 1987), by asserting that there still are merely past objects, even though they do not exist anymore. Finally, in metaontological debates, Fine (2009) distinguished reality from existence – or, better, reality from what is expressed by the existential quantifier. In sum, from the perspective of some philosophers who still believe that everything

exists, what is captured by the predicate "exist" seems nevertheless not to be sufficient to define the ontological status of some problematic items – such as merely past or merely possible ones. With regard to the Meinongian possibility of there being kinds of being different from existence, ontological pluralists (for example, McDaniel 2009, 2010) and (Turner, 2010)) recently argued that there are many ways of being (or of existing) – still accepting that everything exists in some way or another – and that such ways of existing are more natural or fundamental than existence in general.

   Ryle's prediction came out to be incorrect but, as we have seen, Neo-Meinongianism even if inspired by Meinong's theory of objects has not lead to a deep and accurate analysis of Meinong's philosophy. This is not *per se* a problem; on the contrary it has the merit of having brought Meinong back to the scene of contemporary philosophical discussion. But is it really Meinong that has resurrected? Or sometimes his name is simply attached to some topics in order to convey the idea that it is something strange, unconventional, or out of the mainstream? Currently there are two ways of treating Meinong: a methodological historical side, that deepens Meinong's topics analyzing his works in order to undertake a historical and conceptual reconstruction of his philosophy (clarifying the different steps, the Brentanian background and so on), and Neo-Meinongianism that takes some of his most famous ideas and builds on them new different theories, without closely adhering to Meinong's works. But is it possible to find a matching point between the historical Meinong and Neo-Meinongism?

   In order to answer to this question, it is worth moving from the Meinong-Russell dispute, because the way Meinong was depicted there has been the last word on Meinong's philosophy so well described by Ryle. In fact, as it is well known, Russell's strong critique of Meinong had a great weight in disregarding Meinong within the analytical tradition. However, it is important to remind that Russell gave great importance to Meinong's works, offering a careful analysis of them in several Reviews of his papers, published between 1899 and1907. For example, Russell ends the Review of *Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie* published in 1907 – hence after On Denoting – as follows:

> In what precedes, I have dwelt chiefly on points in which Meinong seems open to criticism. But such points are few and slight compared to the points in which his views seem to me true and important. Moreover his contentions are in all

cases clear, and whether right or not, they imperatively demand consideration (Russell, 1907, p. 93).

This quotation shows that Russell's criticism of Meinong was not a simple dismiss of the theory of object, but a deep analysis of the problems he was trying to find a solution for, solution that he presented in *On Denoting* (Russell, 1905). In *On Denoting*, in fact, Russell offers a different answer to the problems he was dwelling with in the preceding years, as he exposed in *The Principles of Mathematics* (Russell, 1903). If we carefully look at Russell's reviews, it is possible to note that the controversy with Meinong does not deal primarily with impossible objects. Rather it is a wide and comprehensive confront that moves from themes of descriptive psychology (as the distinction between representation, assumption and judgment or the one between mental act, content and object), to the notion of being, the existential import of propositions, as well as the notion of object, which brings to light a different ontological framework of the two authors. Within this confront, the increasing attention reserved by Russell to impossible objects can be considered as what makes manifest the change of the theory Russell undertook from *The Principles* to *On Denoting*.

Before 1905 Russell shared with Meinong the idea that objects have to "stand" already in order to be available for reference and predication. In *The Principles of Mathematics* Russell distinguished *existence* from *being*, which belong to any object whether it exists or not. Being thus is the general category which any term – in so far as it is conceivable and then expressible in language – must belong to; while existence pertains only to a subclass of terms: concrete individuals. Russell then distinguishes between existence and being, because he finds this distinction essential for the treatment of negative existential statements, but considers being as the necessary precondition for any object to be a genuine object. Meinong offered exactly the opposite strategy: he arrives to hold that an object does not need an ontic status (neither existence or being) in order to be what it is and to have properties truly predicated of it. Objecthood is thus the precondition for investigating the ontic status of any object. With the *Theory of Objects* Meinong wants to build a science «whose legitimate function is to deal with objects as such or objects in their totality» (Meinong, 1904, p. 79) and in order to achieve this aim he believes that it is necessary to overcome "the prejudice in favor of the actual" that brings to consider what does not exist as mere nothing. Thus Meinong's aim is that to find out a way of investigating objects without any limitation, first of all that of

existence, so that the Theory of Objects is – in Meinong's words – a «*daseinsfreie Wissenschaft*», that is, a science that does not undergo to the limitations of existence nor – widening the principle – of being. To investigate objects independently of their ontic status then means to analyse their formal characters and the criteria of objecthood. The character of *Daseinsfreiheit* is expressed by two principles at the core of Meinong's philosophy: the principle of *Aussersein* (extra-being) and the principle of the independence of *Sosein* (So-being) from *Sein* (being), which are complementary. According to the principle of independence objects are constituted by their *Sosein*, i.e. their properties, which is unaffected by their non existence. This means that an object is prior to the determination of its ontic status, that is, it is beyond being and non-being. Objects are in the first instance *ausserseiende* (in this way they can be apprehended), and then they can be determined as regard as their existence or subsistence. The category of *Aussersein* introduced by Meinong hence is what guarantees a semantic presence – as the lowest grade of Giveness – that makes objects available for reference and predication, without which they could not be objects.

The irreparable point of divergence between Russell and Meinong lies then in the ontological framework they offer: for Russell being constitutes the most general and comprehensive ontological category and it is classificatory, since it is a necessary presupposition, while for Meinong the fundamental category is the level of *Aussersein*, which is not classificatory in contrast with being, which includes the existent, the non-actual and the subsistent, i.e. the real and the ideal. Meinong by introducing the principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein* detaches the notion of object from that of being, which in the Theory of Objects' framework does not define the domain of objecthood. This principle – at the core of many Neo-Meinongians elaborations – brings forth a strong alternative way to the standard view, i.e. the Frege-Russell canon, according to which being is a necessary presupposition for reference and predication, because the notion of object – no more equivalent with entity – goes far beyond the limit of being. The principle of independence determines that any set of properties suffices to determine an object and to single it out. This is a kind of combinatory level, at which any conjunction of properties individuates an object that has to be recognized as such, in order then to investigate its ontic status. It is the *Sosein* which identifies an object, while its ontic status is in any way external to it. It is indeed the nature of the object that allows for a distinction with regard to the mode of being: «the nature of objects

is such that either allows them to exist and to be perceived or prohibits it; so that, if they have being, this cannot be existence but only subsistence» (Meinong, 1921, pp. 17–18). It is then the nature of the object which determines whether the object can exist (or subsist) or not, but if it allows for existence (subsistence *resp.*) then the object is completely determined. Real and ideal objects follow the law of excluded middle, so that they are determined in all their respects and it is for this reason that they are entities. Nevertheless, subsistence and existence exhaust the domain of completeness (Meinong, 1915, pp. 185, 191, 202), so that to be – both in the sense of existence and subsistence – means to be an individual. But within Meinong's framework are there also incomplete objects, i.e. objects that have only a finite number of properties which do not exist nor subsist and along with them are there those objects that violate the law of contradiction (as the famous round square), whose non-being is thus determined by their having contradictory properties. But these objects are not individuals, since they are not determined in all their respect; nevertheless they can be understood and apprehended in virtue of their having a «remnant of positional character» (Meinong, 1921, p. 21), i.e. *Aussersein*.

This means that while the notion of object is ontic neutral, that of individual is instead determined and is a synonym of entity.

One of the greatest merits of Meinong's Theory of Object lies in having disentangled the problem of having properties from that of ontological determination, that is, in having proposed a theory without extensionalist presuppositions, offering thus an alternative way of treating the notion of object, which is basic to any ontological theory. Moreover, the desire to escape the desert landscapes of Quinean ontology that gave rise to neo-Meinongianism comes out to be very close to the original need explored by Meinong to find a place for *heimatlos* objects and that brought his so far.

In sum, forty-one years after Ryle's prophecy, it seems that Meinongianism is still vital and that many philosophers – even without considering themselves Meinongians – are coming to conclusions that seem to be quite near to (or at least compatible with) Meinongianism. After the first works in Neo-Meinongianism, this fact maybe represents the third stage of the Meinong-Renaissance – provided that the second one is represented by the rise of modal Neo-Meinongianism. We only wish to remark that, just after Ryle's clear-cut judgment on Meinong's theory of objects, Neo-Meinongianism somehow "lived" its best decade (from the publication in 1974 of Grossman's and

Castañeda works to the publication of Zalta's *Abstract Objects* in 1983, passing through Rapaport's, Parsons', Routley's works). Perhaps, Meinong's theory of objects was not that dead. Or, if it was dead, it was nevertheless going to be resurrected.

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