Modal Meinongianism and Actuality

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ABSTRACT

Modal Meinongianism is the most recent neo-Meinongian theory. Its main innovation consists in a Comprehension Principle which, unlike other neo-Meinongian approaches, seemingly avoids limitations on the properties that can characterize objects. However, in a recent paper A. Sauchelli has raised an objection against modal Meinongianism, to the effect that properties and relations involving reference to worlds at which they are instantiated, and specifically to the actual world or parts thereof, force a limitation of its Comprehension Principle. The theory, thus, is no better off than other neo-Meinongian views in this respect. This article shows that the notion *part of actuality* in Sauchelli's paper is ambiguous from the modal Meinongian viewpoint. Accordingly, his objection splits into two, depending on its disambiguation. It is then explained how neither interpretation forces modal Meinongianism to limit its Comprehension Principle. A third problem connected to Sauchelli's objection(s) is addressed: how to account for our felicitously referring to nonexistent objects via descriptions that embed reference to properties not *actually* instantiated by the objects. Overall, the replies to these difficulties provide good insights into the workings of the new Meinongian theory.

1. Modal Meinongianism and Comprehension.

Meinongianism is the view that some objects do not exist, but we can generally refer to them, quantify on them, and state true things about them.[1] Any Meinongian theory needs some principle of comprehension for its objects: a

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[1] This is the characterization provided in Sainsbury (2010), p. 45.

principle explaining which (nonexistent) objects there are and which properties they can bear. So-called naïve Meinongianism endorses what Parsons (1979), (1980) has called, by analogy with naïve set theory, an "Unrestricted Comprehension Principle" for objects:

(UCP) For any condition A[x] with free variable x, some object satisfies A[x].

Take Joseph Conrad's (allegedly) nonexistent fictional character Charles Marlow. The naïve view has it that the object is specified via a package of properties, like *x is a sailor of the British Empire, x is from London, x transports ivory on a boat through the river Congo,* etc. If A[x] stands for the conjunction of the corresponding predicates or open formulas in the appropriate language, then, according to the UCP, an object is characterized by A[x] and, calling it "Charles Marlow", m, Marlow really has the relevant properties, A[m]. The intuition is that nonexistent objects should in *some* sense have the properties they are characterized as having – otherwise, how could we know what we are thinking and talking about when we refer to them? We can in principle causally interact with ordinary, concrete, existent objects, thus being perceptually acquainted with many of their features. But when the thing does not exist, we need something like a Comprehension Principle.

The UCP does not last long. As Russell (1905a-b) famously showed, when A[x] = $Px \wedge \neg Px$ for some predicate P, the Principle delivers inconsistent objects violating the Law of Non-Contradiction. Additionally, one can prove the existence of anything one wills. For A[x] = "x is made of gold $\wedge$ x is a mountain $\wedge$ x exists", the UCP allows *a priori* an object actually having the features of being a golden mountain and existing; so there actually exists a golden mountain – which will not do (as Kant remarked: if the existence predicate could legitimately enter into definitions or characterizations, we could define things into existence). Worse, as pointed out by Graham Priest (2005, p. 83), one can prove anything. If A[x] is $x = x \wedge$ B, with B standing for any sentence, by the UCP for some object, say b, it is actually true that $b = b \wedge$ B; from which B follows by Conjunction Elimination.

Neo-Meinongians have traditionally tried to fix the Comprehension Principle by limiting the range of properties that can figure in characterizing conditions. So-called nuclear Meinongianism (Parsons (1980), Routley (1980), (1982), Jacquette (1996)) distinguishes between two families of

properties, the *nuclear* and *extranuclear* ones. Only conditions including just predicates standing for nuclear properties can characterize objects (and a crucial move consists in denying that existence is nuclear). The strategy faces various problems, one of which consists in providing a principled criterion to distinguish nuclear from extranuclear properties.

In his book *Towards Non-Being* (2005), Priest has claimed that the Meinongian can do better. Drawing on insights by Daniel Nolan (1998) and Nick Griffin (1998), he has proposed a Qualified Comprehension Principle for objects:

(QCP) For any condition A[*x*] with free *x*, some object satisfies A[*x*] *at some world.*

Because of its QCP's explicitly referring to worlds, this new kind of Meinongianism has been called "the other worlds strategy" (Reicher (2010)), or "modal Meinongianism" (Berto (2011), (2012)), and I will stick to the latter label. Objects characterized by a condition should have their characterizing features, not automatically at the actual world, but at others: those that make the characterization true. The justification for the QCP bears on the fact that nonexistent objects typically are the targets of intentional, representational states:

Cognitive agents represent the world to themselves in certain ways. These may not, in fact, be accurate representations of this world, but they may, none the less, be accurate representations of a *different* world. For example, if I imagine Sherlock Holmes, I represent the situation much as Victorian London (so, in particular, for example, there are no airplanes); but where there is a detective that lives in Baker St, and so on. The way I represent the world to be is not an accurate representation of our world. But our world could have been like that; there *is* a world that is like that. (Priest 2005, p. 84)

By parameterising to worlds the having of properties, modal Meinongianism promises to avoid restrictions on the range of properties that can characterize objects. Given any property whatsoever, the represented object does exemplify it – at the worlds where things are as they are represented.

Besides the QCP, modal Meinongianism rests on two other pillars: (1) a modal framework including so-called *non-normal* or *impossible* worlds, broadly taken as worlds that are not possible with respect to an unrestricted (logical, perhaps metaphysical and/or mathematical) notion of possibility;[2] and (2) a natural distinction between properties the having of which entails existence, and properties the having of which does not.

As for (1), non-normal worlds help with inconsistent characterizations: $A[x] = Px \wedge \neg Px$ characterizes something which is and is not P – but only at the worlds where the characterization holds; and these are no possible worlds for sure. The theory avoids commitment to actually, or even possibly inconsistent objects.

As for (2), for instance, the actually nonexistent Marlow cannot actually have such properties as being a sailor, or transporting ivory on a boat, or thinking about Kurtz. To have such features one must be endowed with a physical location and causal powers, which Marlow as a fictional object actually lacks – in short: one must exist. But Marlow has those properties, at the worlds described by Conrad's story (the ascription of such properties to Marlow is "intra-fictional", as those working on the philosophy of fiction often say). At those worlds, Marlow is very much existent. His lacking existence at the actual world does not preclude Marlow from actually instantiating several other properties that do not entail existence, for instance: being a fictional character due to Conrad; being Marlow; being a nonexistent object; or being thought about by the Conrad readers (these count as "extra-fictional" ascriptions of features: Marlow does not have such properties within the Conrad fiction).

It is easily seen how this may seem to help with the existent golden mountain: $A[x] =$ "x is made of gold $\wedge$ x is a mountain $\wedge$ x exists" characterizes an object represented as an existent golden mountain, and which is a golden mountain at the worlds where the representational characterization is realized, which need not include the actual one. So the QCP does not allow one to prove the existence of whatever one wills.

An antecedent of this modal Meinongian setting may be due to Kit Fine, who proposed it in his critical discussion of nuclear Meinongianism back in the Eighties. Fine's early version of the QCP says: "For any class of properties, there is an object and a context such that the object [...] has in that context exactly the properties of the class" (Fine (1984), p. 138). Now Fine's *contexts*

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[2] See Yagisawa (1988), Restall (1997), Mares (1997).

play a role similar to the one of the modal Meinongian's non-normal or impossible worlds: they are fictional or represented situations which can be locally inconsistent or incomplete. Also according to Fine, by parameterizing to contexts the having of properties by objects, one needs no restriction on the properties that can appear in the characterizing conditions, and "the whole apparatus of nuclear properties can drop out as so much idle machinery" (p. 139; see also Fine (1982), pp. 108-9).

In an interesting and thoroughly argued recent paper, Andrea Sauchelli (2012) disagrees. According to Sauchelli, certain characterizations of nonexistent objects spell trouble for the modal Meinongian, in such a way that she is forced to introduce restrictions to the QCP. Once the restrictions are in play, modal Meinongianism is no better off than nuclear Meinongianism or other neo-Meinongian theories. The supposedly unmanageable characterizations involve properties encompassing reference to the actual world or parts thereof, or entailing that the characterized object has relations to things that are part of actuality. Sauchelli's point is introduced in Section 2. As we will see, the notion *part of actuality* in play in the objection can be read in two different ways from the modal Meinongian viewpoint, thus giving rise to two distinct problems; and the theory has different replies to them.

In view of such replies, Section 3 makes things precise by providing a compressed formal presentation of modal Meinongianism, in the shape of a modal semantics including non-normal worlds. Section 4 shows how the theory can effectively address Sauchelli's (twofold) concern. In the closing Section 5 a third problem is addressed, not directly raised by Sauchelli but connected to his remarks, and having to do with the way definite descriptions referring to nonexistents work according to modal Meinongianism. Taken together the three issues, and their being dealt with by the theory, provide a deeper understanding of the workings of this new kind of Meinongianism.

2. The Objection from Actuality.

Sauchelli's objection to the QCP in unrestricted form is based on the idea that nonexistent and, in particular, fictional objects are often represented by cognitive agents

> as existing *at our world* and as having relations to objects that are part of our world. This means that the content of their representations contains attributions that are meant to relate them to parts of our world. [...] These

> representational properties are indexed at our world, in the sense that they are supposed to hold *at* our world. For example, Joseph Conrad, a member of our world, characterised Marlow, and thus attributed to him certain representational properties, that, among other things, contain reference to our world and that were meant to relate them to objects of our world. In particular, Marlow is represented as being in London, the London that is part of our world. (p. 3)

For another example: Travis Bickle, the main character of *Taxi Driver*, is represented in the movie as such that he drives a taxi in New York, "the New York that is part of @" ("@" standing for the actual world), and as "talking to the mirror (which is in the New York that is part of our world)" (p. 4). Realistic fictional works like *Heart of Darkness* or *Taxi Driver*, according to Sauchelli, prescribe us to imagine certain things as happening at the actual world. For example, the movie prescribes us to imagine "that our world contains a taxi driver who turned into a vigilante" (ibid.). The features Marlow or Travis are characterized as having are properties they are "represented as possessing as a part of our world; [they are] not represented as having those properties in other worlds" (p. 6).

It is thus in the content of the respective representations that Marlow, or Travis, be part of the actual world @, and thus exist at @: one who is represented as driving a taxi at @, since driving a taxi is an existence-entailing property, must exist at @. One who is represented as being from London – the London which is part of @ – must exist at @. But this flatly contradicts the modal Meinongian view that that Marlow or Travis are nonexistent objects. We should therefore conclude that the theory "is either inconsistent (if it embraces an unrestricted principle of characterization) or incomplete (for it cannot accommodate certain properties attributed to fictional characters)" (p. 6).

So formulated, the objection adopts a notion, *being part of actuality*, or *being part of @*, or *being part of our world*, crucially ambiguous from the modal Meinongian viewpoint. Which does not mean that the objection is flawed because of this. Rather, as we will see, it amounts to two different points, depending on how one disambiguates it. The ambiguity becomes apparent once modal Meinongianism has been phrased in formally precise terms; and to this we now turn.

3. Modal Meinongian Semantics

In this Section we use standard tools of world semantics to describe a simple model for the modal Meinongian theory. Take a standard first-order language, L, having individual variables: x, y, z ($x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n$); individual constants: m, n, o ($o_1, o_2, \dots, o_n$); n-place predicates: F, G, H ($F_1, F_2, \dots, F_n$); a designated one-place predicate, E; the usual logical connectives: negation $\neg$, conjunction $\wedge$, disjunction $\vee$, the conditional $\rightarrow$; the two Meinongian quantifiers Λ and Σ (written thus, for reasons to be explained soon); a sentential operator, $\circledR$; and round brackets as auxiliary symbols. Individual constants and variables are singular terms. If $t_1, \dots, t_n$ are singular terms and P is any n-place predicate, then $Pt_1 \dots t_n$ is an atomic formula. If A and B are formulas, then $\neg$A, (A $\wedge$ B), (A $\vee$ B), (A $\rightarrow$ B), and $\circledR$A are formulas; outermost brackets are omitted in formulas; if A is a formula and x is a variable, ΛxA and ΣxA are formulas, closed and open formulas being defined as usual. The only notational novelty is $\circledR$, called the *representation operator*. The intuitive reading of "$\circledR$A" will be "It is represented that A", representation being understood as a generic for the intentional activities relevant for the characterization of our nonexistent objects – from imagining, to picturing, to envisaging, to describing in a fiction, etc.

An *interpretation* of L is an ordered sextuple $<P, I, @, R, D, v>$. P is the set of possible worlds; I is the set of non-normal or impossible worlds; P, I are disjoint, W = P $\cup$ I is the totality of worlds; $@ \in$ P is the actual world, a possible one. $R \subseteq$ W x W is a binary relation on the whole set of worlds. If $<w_1, w_2> \in R$ ($w_1, w_2 \in$ W), we write this as $w_1 R w_2$ and say that w_2 is *representationally accessible* or, quickly, R-accessible, from w_1. D is the set of objects of the theory; v assigns denotations to the descriptive constant symbols of L:

If c is an individual constant, $v(c) \in$ D;

If P is a n-place predicate and $w \in$ W, $v(P, w)$ is a pair,

$<v+(P, w), v\text{-}(P, w)>$, with $v+(P, w) \subseteq D^n$, $v\text{-}(P, w) \subseteq D^n$.

$D^n = \{<d_1, \dots, d_n> \mid d_1, \dots, d_n \in D\}$, the set of n-tuples of members of D ($<d>$ is stipulated to be just d, so D^1 is D). To each pair of n-place atomic predicate P and world w, v assigns an extension $v+(P, w)$, and an anti-extension, $v\text{-}(P, w)$.

The (anti-)extension of P at w is the set of (n-tuples of) things of which P is true (false) there. The following twofold clause, called the Classicality Condition, ensures that at possible worlds the extension and anti-extension of each predicate be mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive:

(CC) If $w \in P$, for any n-ary predicate P: $v+(P, w) \cap v\text{-}(P, w) = \emptyset$

$$v+(P, w) \cup v\text{-}(P, w) = D^n$$

If a is an assignment for the variables of L (a map from the variables to D), then v_a is the denotation function indexed in the usual way:

If c is an individual constant, then $v_a(c) = v(c)$;
If x is a variable, then $v_a(x) = a(x)$.

Then, "$w \Vdash^+_a A$" means that A is true at world w, with respect to assignment a, "$w \Vdash^-_a A$", that A is false at w, etc. (we will omit the assignment subscript when we deal with closed formulas). Atomic formulas have truth and falsity conditions phrased as follows:

$w \Vdash^+_a Pt_1 \dots t_n$ iff $\langle v_a(t_1), \dots, v_a(t_n) \rangle \in v+(P, w)$

$w \Vdash^-_a Pt_1 \dots t_n$ iff $\langle v_a(t_1), \dots, v_a(t_n) \rangle \in v\text{-}(P, w)$.

The extensional logical words have familiar clauses at all $w \in P$:

$w \Vdash^+_a \neg A$ iff $w \Vdash^-_a A$

$w \Vdash^-_a \neg A$ iff $w \Vdash^+_a A$

$w \Vdash^+_a A \wedge B$ iff $w \Vdash^+_a A$ and $w \Vdash^+_a B$

$w \Vdash^-_a A \wedge B$ iff $w \Vdash^-_a A$ or $w \Vdash^-_a B$

$w \Vdash^+_a A \vee B$ iff $w \Vdash^+_a A$ or $w \Vdash^+_a B$

$w \Vdash^-_a A \vee B$ iff $w \Vdash^-_a A$ and $w \Vdash^-_a B$

$w \Vdash^+_a \Lambda x A$ iff for all $d \in D$, $w \Vdash^+_{a(x/d)} A$

$w \Vdash^-_a \Lambda x A$ iff for some $d \in D$, $w \Vdash^-_{a(x/d)} A$

$w \Vdash^+_a \Sigma x A$ iff for some d $\in$ D, $w \Vdash^+_{a(x/d)} A$

$w \Vdash^-_a \Sigma x A$ iff for all d $\in$ D, $w \Vdash^-_{a(x/d)} A$

In the last four clauses, "$a(x/d)$" stands for the assignment which is just like a, except for assigning d $\in$ D to x. We can have the material conditional, the usual way: $A \supset B =_{df} \neg A \vee B$. We can take $\rightarrow$ as a more vertebrate strict conditional. At all $w \in$ P:

$w \Vdash^+_a A \rightarrow B$ iff for all $w_1 \in$ P such that $w_1 \Vdash^+_a A$, $w_1 \Vdash^+_a B$.

$w \Vdash^-_a A \rightarrow B$ iff for some $w_1 \in$ P, $w_1 \Vdash^+_a A$ and $w_1 \Vdash^-_a B$.

Everything works familiarly enough as far as worlds in P are concerned, the one change with respect to standard modal semantics being that truth and falsity conditions are spelt separately. This does not change much at possible worlds anyway. The CC dictates that, at each $w \in$ P, any predicate P is either true or false of the relevant object (or n-tuple thereof), but not both. That no formula is both true and false or neither true nor false can be checked recursively: there are no so-called truth-value gluts or gaps at possible worlds.[3]

Things change at non-normal worlds. At points in I, v treats complex formulas basically as *atomic*: their truth-values are not determined recursively, but directly assigned by $\vee$ in an arbitrary way: $A \vee B$ may turn out to be true even though both a and b are false, etc.[4] The idea that complex formulas can

[3] A technical proviso: one needs, in fact, a couple of extra constraints on ® to rule out via the CC truth value gaps and gluts at world in P for formulas involving it, given that its clauses, which we are about to meet, allow access to non-normal worlds. We can skip this further complication, as it is unimportant for our purposes.

[4] Another technical note, which can be skipped without loss of continuity. We want the syntax of various complex formulas to be semantically neglected at non-normal worlds: this is what "treating them as atomic" consists in. But if, for instance, conditionals $A \rightarrow B$ are just assigned arbitrary truth values, one may have that $Fm \rightarrow Gm$ gets a different value from $Fn \rightarrow Gn$ although m and n denote the same thing. We fix this following a technique due to Priest (2005, pp. 17-8). Each formula A is paired to one of the form $M[x_1, \ldots, x_n]$, the formula's *matrix*. One gets the matrix of A by substituting each occurrence in A of a free term (an individual constant, or a free variable), from left to right, with a different variable $x_1, \ldots, x_n$, in this order, these being indexed as the least variables greater than all the variables bound in a in some ordering. The initial formula can always be regained from its matrix via the reverse substitutions. At points in I, in fact, the following takes place: v assigns there to each

behave as atomic at some points in a model goes back to seminal work in epistemic logic by Rantala: non-normal worlds were used to provide semantics for epistemic operators, capable of dealing with the various problems related to logical omniscience.[5] Something of the sort happens with our ®. At $w \in$ P:

$w \Vdash^{+}_{a} ®A$ iff for all $w_1 \in$ W such that wRw_1, $w_1 \Vdash^{+}_{a} A$

$w \Vdash^{-}_{a} ®A$ iff for some $w_1 \in$ W such that wRw_1, $w_1 \Vdash^{-}_{a} A$

The clauses remind us of the usual binary accessibility semantics for standard modal logics – except that representation allows us to access impossibilities. "wRw_1" ("w_1 is R-accessible from w") roughly says that at w_1 things are as they are represented to be at w, for instance, if ®A is your dreaming that you win the lottery, then an R-accessible w_1 is a fine world at which your dream comes true.

Logical consequence goes as in ordinary modal logics with a designated world: it is truth preservation at the base world, that is, the actual world @, in all interpretations (and assignments).[6] Given a set of formulas S,

S ⊨ A iff for each interpretation <P, I, @, R, D, v>, and assignment a, if

$@ \Vdash^{+}_{a} B$ for all B $\in$ S, then $@ \Vdash^{+}_{a} A$.

The Meinongian quantifiers have been symbolized as Λ and Σ to remind one of their existential neutrality: one can quantify on nonexistents, so one wants to

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matrix M pairs of subsets of D^n, i.e., extensions and antiextensions: if w is non-normal and M the relevant matrix, $v(M, w) = <v+(M, w), v-(M, w)>$, with $v+(M, w), v-(M, w) \subseteq$ D^n. Next, if $M[x_1, \ldots, x_n]$ is a matrix and $t_1, \ldots, t_n$ the replaceable terms, we give these truth conditions for the substitution instances:

$w \Vdash^{+}_{a} M[t_1, \ldots, t_n]$ iff $< v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v+(M, w)$

$w \Vdash^{-}_{a} M[t_1, \ldots, t_n]$ iff $< v_a(t_1), \ldots, v_a(t_n)> \in v-(M, w)$.

When we talk of "treating complex formulas as atomic" at impossible worlds, this matrix procedure is in fact understood as being in place.

[5] See Rantala (1982). A similar strategy showed up earlier for the evaluation of modal formulas in some weak modal logics, like the system S0.5: see Cresswell (1966).

[6] One could define logical consequence as truth preservation at all possible worlds in all interpretations. In this respect, the semantics has nothing to differentiate @ from the other w's (provided $w \in$ P: we are dealing with what logically holds, that is, what holds at worlds where logic is *not* different). @ has been flagged because it has other tasks to carry out, as we will see.

avoid "∃", for the temptation to read it as expressing existence is strong. Existence is a normal first-order property designated by the predicate E.[7] A task nicely performed by the formalism via this predicate is the representation of existence-entailments. If an n-place predicate P of L is existence-entailing in i-th position, it is so at all possible worlds:

If $w \in$ P, then if $\langle d_1, ..., d_i, ..., d_n \rangle \in v+(P, w)$, then $d_i \in v+(E, w)$.

Thus, if Sherlock Holmes thinks about Pegasus at w, Holmes must exist at w, even though Pegasus need not exist there. But if Holmes kisses Watson at w, then at w both Holmes and Watson exist. And this always applies when $w \in$ P (things may be different at impossible worlds: we may have nonexistent thinkers and kissers there – bizarre, but this is how impossible worlds are).

We can now spell out what the having of representational properties exactly amounts to in the theory. Nuclear Meinongianism maintained that any nuclear condition characterized some object *simpliciter*. Given one such condition A[x], calling o an object characterized by it, we have (in our notation) that @ $\Vdash^+$ A[o]: objects actually have the relevant nuclear properties. But in modal Meinongianism characterization is representational. An object o is actually represented via A[x]: @ $\Vdash^+$ ®A[o]. Then for all w that realize the representation, i.e., for all w such that @Rw, $w \Vdash^+$ A[o]. As ® is not factive, we do not have, in general, @ $\Vdash^+$ A[o]. Marlow is represented (at @), by Conrad and his readers, as a sailor of the British Empire coming from London, transporting ivory on a boat through the river Congo, etc. But Marlow does not have these existence-entailing, features at @.

That characterization is representational does not mean that the theory cannot afford full reference to the involved objects. Marlow only fictionally has the property of being a sailor, but we can really, not fictionally, refer to Marlow. Although ® has been introduced as a sentential operator, a *de dicto-de re* switch should, in general, be allowed insofar as we have to do with full-fledged, albeit nonexistent, objects. "Marlow", m, being a rigid designator in our semantics, it is natural to move from "It is represented (in Conrad's story) that

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[7] Quantification on existents is thus for the Meinongian just restricted quantification, ranging on the subset of the existent items in D. Using the old symbols for the existentially loaded quantifiers, "All existing things are such that..." is: $\forall x$A[x] $=_{df}$ $\Lambda x(Ex \rightarrow$ A[x]). "There exists something such that..." is: $\exists x$A[x] $=_{df}$ $\Sigma x(Ex \wedge$ A[x]).

Marlow is a sailor", to "Marlow is such that he is represented (in Conrad's story) as a sailor". This can be settled formally via the addition of λ-abstraction clauses, allowing the move from ®*Sm* to [λ*x*.®*Sx*]*m*. We are effectively stating, of the nonexistent (at @) Marlow, that he has the property of being represented-as-a-sailor (in Conrad's story). "Charles Marlow", then, always denotes a unique object, namely Charles Marlow, both in intra-fictional contexts in which representational properties are ascribed to him, and in extra-fictional contexts – such as when we say: "Charles Marlow is a purely fictional character invented by Conrad".

4. The Objections from Actuality

Back to Sauchelli. Given the framework above, what can such expressions as "part of actuality", or "part of @", or "part of our world" mean in the sentences used to phrase his objection?

To begin with, notice that the model above is constant domain world semantics, D being the unique domain of quantification. One of the reasons for taking the domain of the quantifiers as variable across worlds in first-order modal semantics, having different worlds mapped to different sets of objects, is to represent contingent existence. I do not exist at other possible worlds where my parents never meet. *Vice versa* (and perhaps more controversially), a never-born sister of mine does not exist but could; mountains made of gold do not exist but appear to be possibly existent; and Marlow does not exist but, in the world of *Hart of Darkness*, he does. If existence is captured by the quantifiers, and we let the domain be constant across all worlds, then what is included in the domain of quantification at one world, and thus exists there, exists at all worlds. To exist at all (possible) worlds is to exist necessarily; thus, anything that exists at some world exists necessarily, against the intuition of contingency. Instead, in a variable domain setting the latter can be captured by representing contingency as domain variation across worlds, while having the quantifiers of the formal language range, at each world, only on what exists at that world.

For a Meinongian, however, existence is not quantification. Existential commitment is made explicit by means of the predicate E of L flagged above. The objects existent at a world w are just those in $v+(E, w)$. That object o exists at world w_1, not at world w_2, is simply represented by having o satisfy the existence predicate at w_1, not at w_2.

Given this setting, to read Sauchelli's objection taking "being a part of @",
or "being a part of actuality", as if they meant "being included in the domain of
quantification at @", would make its import vanish. Trivially, *everything* for
modal Meinongianism is part of actuality in this sense: everything is included in
the unique domain of quantification, D, invariant across worlds. *Obiectus
tantum obiectus*, objects are just objects, they are not at this or that world.
What can be "at" this or that world (and, also, "at @"), that is, meaningfully
world-indexed, is the having of properties by objects. Marlow is nonexistent at
@, but existent in the Conrad worlds, merely fictional at @, but not fictional at
all in the Conrad Worlds: at those worlds, Marlow is very real.

In what sense, then, can Sauchelli's claims to the effect that we often
represent nonexistents "as existing *at our world* and as having relations to
objects that are part of our world" count as an objection to the unrestricted
QCP? They can so count, I take it, in two ways, none of which has to do with an
object's being included in the domain of quantification at this or that world.

4.1 Reference to Existents, Relations With Existents

On a first reading, those remarks may point at the fact that fictional works also
talk of things that are not purely fictional, but really exist, or have existed, at
@; and purely fictional objects are characterized as having relations with these
real things. In this sense, these things are "part of @", or "parts of actuality".
"Part of @" here should mean something like: being (or having been) a
spatiotemporal part of actuality; or being (or having been) physically located at
the actual world; or having (had) causal powers in reality; in short: *really*
existing (or having really existed). For instance: Napoleon is a really existed
man, but also, a character mentioned in *War and Peace*. Besides, purely
fictional characters of *War and Peace* are variously related to him in the story.
London is a really existing city, but also, is referred to in *Heart of Darkness*,
where Marlow is characterized as being from London.

Now another merit of modal Meinongianism is precisely its supplying an
intuitive treatment of fictional discourse involving reference to things that are
not purely fictional, but real, and to which purely fictional things may be
related *in the relevant fictions*. It is represented (in Conrad's story) that
Marlow comes from London: ®$F(m, l)$ ("*m*" standing for Marlow, "*l*" standing
for London, "*F*" for the relation of *coming from*). According to the theory that
"*l*", "London", there refers back to the unique really existing ("part of

actuality", in this sense) London, so dear to us (and to Pierre), not to fictional or other-worldly London-counterparts. This does not create any problem as far as the nonexistence of Marlow is concerned. For it is only *within the representation*, not in reality, that (the unique real) London is Marlow's home city. Formulas beginning with the representation operator support the aforementioned *de dicto-de re* switch also for actually existing things. We can seamlessly move to "London is represented (in Conrad's story) as such that Conrad comes from *it*" (abstracting: [λx.®F(m, x)]*l*). Conrad represented that quite existent city as such that Marlow came from it. By the same token, he was representing Marlow as such that he came from that quite existent city (abstracting: [λx.®F(x, *l*)]m). But being represented as coming from an existent city does not make a nonexistent object existent: Marlow does not have the property of coming from London at @, nor does London have the property that Marlow comes from it at @. There is no problem for the QCP of modal Meinongianism, in this first reading of Sauchelli's remarks.

This simple treatment of real objects mentioned in fiction avoids to modal Meinongianism the need to treat such names as "Napoleon" as ambiguous, in the way of some realist accounts of fictional objects *à la* van Inwagen (1977). On these accounts, the name normally stands for the real and (former) existent historical man. But when it occurs in extra-fictional discourse on the character of *War and Peace*, the name stands for a purely fictional object, which is an abstract existent – thus, something quite different from the historical man. Additionally, the name may also denote nothing at all, when it occurs in the intra-fictional discourse of *War and Peace,* for Tolstoj only pretended to refer when he wrote the story. Such distinctions seem to be introduced *ad hoc*, not being supported by the intuitive data: competent speakers have no sense of the postulated ambiguity (the Wikipedia entry on *War and Peace* claims: "There are approximately 160 real persons named or referred to in *War and Peace*").[8]

In the modal Meinongian treatment, "Napoleon" simply stands for one thing in all the aforementioned contexts: it stands for Napoleon, the really existed man. That Napoleon lost at Waterloo is actually true, true at @, of that man. If a literary critic claims that the Napoleon of *War and Peace* is representative of Tolstoj's historical realism, she is referring again to the one and only Napoleon. What she claims can again be actually true, nor does this conflict with Napoleon's being a really existed man (you can make of *me* a

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[8] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_and_Peace.

representative of your historical realism, by lengthily talking about me in a historically realistic novel you write). Finally, when "Napoleon" appears in the phrases composing *War and Peace*, those phrases are still about the real Napoleon. The features Napoleon is *represented* as having by the story are had by him at the worlds that realize Tolstoj's story. Some of these features, such as being the self-proclaimed emperor of France, he may also have, or have had, in the real world; some others, he may not.

4.2 Pointers to Actuality

The second reading of "part of @" in Sauchelli's discourse may rely on the following idea: fictional works often ascribe to purely fictional objects properties *that are world-indexed*, that is, which include reference to this or that world, or "world-pointers", either implicitly or explicitly. Some of these properties, in particular those indexed to @ – including explicit or implicit reference to @, or "pointers to actuality" – are the ones that cannot be had by nonexistent objects (at this or that world), against the unrestricted QCP. When some nonexistent object, *o*, is represented as being such-and-such-at-@, where "being-such-and-such" stands for some existence-entailing property, *o* cannot be, at this or that world, as it is represented: for *o* would need to be such-and-such, and thus to exist, at the actual world.

The first thing to remark is that fictional representations involving world-pointers, and especially pointers to actuality, may be much less pervasive than the Sauchelli objection suggests on this reading. It is very uncommon for a writer of fiction to introduce talk of *worlds* (possible, or impossible) explicitly in her stories. Most writers have, of course, no special acquaintance with modal logic or metaphysics. Are representations in general *implicitly* world-indexed, then? I suspect not. We normally do not conceive, or imagine, or represent things having reference to worlds embedded in our representation. Evidence for it is that we most often grasp the content of a representation without having any clue on the worlds at which it may hold, and specifically on whether it is true, i.e., it holds at @. We may even be misguided on this and take fiction for reality, or *vice versa*. As Mark Sainsbury has noticed,

> a documentary might be mistaken for an ordinary drama-movie, or vice versa. An interesting feature of these mistakes is that they are consistent with the consumers grasping the content of the work. The movie shows a scene of rioters in Chechnya; that is made plain (they are certainly rioting, and the

streets signs and buildings are distinctive of Chechnya). This does not tell us whether we are in the realm of fact or fiction, documentary or drama. (Sainsbury 2010, p. 5)

We don't know whether what is represented obtains at the actual world or not, but we understand the represented content quite well. It seems, therefore, that the representation brings no reference to worlds embedded in it, and in particular to the actual one. Otherwise, we could not understand it without understanding *that* it is given as actually holding. According to Sainsbury, this shows that "there is no distinctive species of meaning, 'fictional meaning', distinct from everyday meaning" (Ibid.)

Per se, this is no reply to (the second reading of) Sauchelli's objection yet. As he acknowledges (p. 6), the modal Meinongian may retort that, for instance, *Taxi Driver* "is not representing Travis Bickle as being part of our world" ("part of our world" meaning now: existing, or having existence-entailing properties, at @), for no world-indexing is explicit or implicit in the characterization. But as Sauchelli correctly points out, even if the examples he has provided are bad, nothing prevents one from producing a fictional characterization which does include explicit reference to actuality: "at least in certain fictions, reference to @ is explicit and central to their understanding." (Ibid.) One may imagine one's dreams or representations as realized. One may imagine or represent, for instance, not only a winged horse, but that something is a winged horse at the actual world.

Here is how the point can be made precise. The expression "actually", taken as a world-pointer meaning the same as "at the actual world", can notoriously work as a rigidifier for descriptions and property-ascriptions generally. I am, contingently, brown-haired, i.e., I am brown-haired at @ but not at other possible worlds. But then I am necessarily brown-haired-at-the-actual-world. Now suppose we add the following world-pointing device to our object language L above: a sentential operator, "*Act*", whose intuitive reading is something like "actually", or "it is actually the case that". The natural truth conditions for *Act* would seem to be the following:

$$w \Vdash^+_a Act\,A \text{ iff } @ \Vdash^+_a A$$
$$w \Vdash^-_a Act\,A \text{ iff } @ \Vdash^-_a A$$

"It is actually the case that A" is true (false) at a world if and only if A is true (false) at the actual world.[9] Now let us embed our new item in a characterizing condition. If B[x] = "x is a winged horse", then let A[x] = Act B[x] = "It is actually the case that x is a winged horse". Let something, b, be represented as being a winged horse at the actual world: $@ \Vdash^+ ®A[b]$, that is, $@ \Vdash^+ ®Act$ B[b]. By the QCP at some world, w, b has the property of actually being a winged horse. Since $w \Vdash^+ Act$ B[b], we have that $@ \Vdash^+ B[b]$. *This* is what will not do: the QCP cannot deliver real winged horses by *fiat*.

However, the solution to this has already been pointed out by Priest.[10] What comes to the rescue, in fact, is the apparatus of non-normal worlds included in the semantics of modal Meinongianism. The clauses for *Act* above are only acceptable if w is a *possible* world. *Act* is an intensional operator whose semantics involves a world shift. Now, as Priest stresses, we cannot postulate the truth conditions of such operators to be uniform unrestrictedly across *all* worlds, normal and non-normal: we cannot housetrain the totality of worlds *simpliciter* in this way. If a is false at @, then *Act* A is not a necessary truth. But if w is an impossible world, *Act* A can hold at it even if A does not hold at @.

Act A must have different truth conditions at impossible worlds (one may take it as atomic there, via the matrix treatment explained above). Given a condition, B[x], we can certainly imagine, as Sauchelli has remarked, that it obtains *simpliciter*, that is, its holding at the actual world, and form a new represetational condition A[x] = *Act* B[x]. But this does not automatically guarantee its realization, as it would happen if the truth conditions for *Act* were uniform across all worlds. A[x] = "It is actually the case that x is a winged horse", therefore, is no problem for the QCP. Something has, at some world, the property of being a winged horse at @. But this doesn't give us a real winged horse. The intuition is simple: one may imagine one's dreams or fantasies to be realized, but unfortunately, that doesn't make them real.

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[9] So phrased, *Act* does not correspond to the world-pointing use of "actually" taken as a modal indexical. *Act* has been so formulated for the sake of the argument. Sentences containing indexicals can express different contents in different contexts of use. In the standard Kaplanian treatment, to give their semantics we need a double indexing, taking into account not only worlds of evaluation, but also contexts of use. For the indexical "actually", the relevant contexts are worlds themselves: when embedded in an expression used at a world, "actually" picks out that very world. Used in the context of world w_1, "It is actually the case that A" is true at w, iff A, as used at w_1, is true at w_1, and false otherwise. $w_1 = @$ is a special case.

[10] See Priest (2011), Section 3.3. This is in reply to a remark by Beall (2006), which to some extent anticipates (this disambiguation of) Sauchelli's objection.

5. Marlow the Ivory Trader

The discourse so far leaves room for a linguistic subtlety. Modal Meinongianism focuses on the idea that the existence-entailing properties nonexistent objects are represented as having are not actually possessed by the relevant objects; and we have seen reasons for denying that (existence-entailing) representational property-ascriptions to nonexistents are, in general, world-indexed. The nonexistent Marlow, therefore, on this account is actually not an ivory trader from London, nor is Sherlock Holmes a detective, nor Travis a taxi driver, etc. However, we use such features to build descriptions apparently successfully referring to them. We felicitously refer to Holmes as "Doyle's detective living in 221b Baker St.", or to Marlow as "the ivory trader in search of Kurtz", etc. How come? For a nuclear Meinongian, Marlow actually *is* an ivory trader, albeit a nonexistent one, for being an ivory trader is a nuclear property. This is not so for the modal Meinongian, for whom these objects are only represented as having such features.

Donnellan (1966)'s famous referential/attributive distinction shows that we can use descriptions successfully to refer to objects that don't actually satisfy them. "The man over there with the champagne in his glass is happy" successfully refers to a man in the corner who is, in fact, happily drinking sparkling water. Kripke (1977)'s rejoinder to Donnellan is equally well-known. One should distinguish between what is meant by a speaker via a particular utterance (speaker's reference) and what is literally said (semantic reference). Only the latter has to do with semantics properly, whereas investigation of the former falls in the realm of pragmatics. My intention to refer to a person who, unbeknownst to me, has water in his glass, does not affect the proposition literally expressed by my utterance of "The man over there with the champagne in his glass is happy": this does not depend on the speaker's reference but on the description's semantic denotation, which cannot be any non-champagne drinker.

Whether the successful use of "the ivory trader in search of Kurtz" to refer to Marlow is a matter of pragmatics or semantics, the linguistic phenomenon brings no problem to the modal Meinongian ontology. It seems that we simply have unstable linguistic habits, mirroring shaky intuitions on when it is appropriate to use existence-entailing predicates, also in forming descriptions. The analogy between worlds and times is often useful. We say on the one hand that Joseph Conrad *was* an English novelist: assuming Conrad has ceased to

exist given that he died in 1924, he can hardly be a novelist *in actu*. On the other hand, we also take "Joseph Conrad is an English novelist" as retaining much of its truth today (contrast "Joseph Conrad is a Scottish philosopher"). We may felicitously refer to Conrad, today, as "the English novelist who wrote *Heart of Darkness*". We allow ourselves to describe objects via predicates that express contextually distinctive, important, or salient features, even when the objects don't currently make those predicates true. Existence-entailing features, of course, can be quite salient. Compare the habit of calling "president" a former president of some nation, say the United States, even when, having finished the mandate, calling that person a president is, strictly speaking, false: *semel abbas, semper abbas.*

For an example projecting onto the future, take Brontë's Jane Eyre, being called (indeed, calling herself) "Mrs Rochester" the evening before her marriage. This is quite successful reference, even if Jane is to start satisfying the condition of being married to Rochester only the day after (the example has been taken from Yablo (1987)). In fact, in the story the marriage does not even take place in the end: being Rochester's wife is to remain an unrealized possibility for Jane. Which confirms that what happens across times also happens across worlds. We successfully refer to Holmes as Doyle's detective. Now being a detective is a property Holmes cannot have at the actual world: you have to exist to be one. The modal Meinongian view prescribes, as we have seen, that Holmes be a detective at the worlds at which Doyle's stories are realized, and @ is not among them. This doesn't make our referring to Holmes via the description "Doyle's detective" less felicitous: being a detective is one of the most salient features for Holmes, despite his not actually being such.

How to account for these felicitous uses of descriptions including predicates that are actually-currently false of the relevant objects certainly is a delicate issue in the philosophy of language. Perhaps "the president (of the US)" semantically refers only to whoever currently actually is the president. Perhaps contextually successful reference to the former president Jimmy Carter in "The president is busy, he is writing his Camp David memories", uttered at the phone by a member of Carter's entourage, must be located in the pragmatics of referential uses of descriptions, at the level of speakers' meaning (in the Kripkean sense). If this is so, certainly lots of speakers talk this way.[11]

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[11] For criticisms of Kripke (1977), see Reimer (1998), Devitt (2004). For a defense, see Neale (1990), Ch. 3.

As the phenomenon is widespread, and independent from the existential status of the involved objects, it cannot be a problem for modal Meinongianism specifically.

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