UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DE CAMPINAS
INSTITUTO DE FILOSOFIA E CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS

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MEINONGIAN METAONTOLOGY AND THE PARADOX OF NEGATIVE EXISTENTIALS

METAONTOLOGIA MEINONGIANA E O PARADOXO DOS EXISTENCIAIS NEGATIVOS

CAMPINAS
2024

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Dissertação apresentada ao Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas da Universidade Estadual de Campinas como parte dos requisitos exigidos para a obtenção do título de Mestre em Filosofia.

Dissertation presented to the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences of the University of Campinas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in the area of Philosophy.

Orientador: Prof. Dr. Marco Antonio Caron Ruffino

ESTE TRABALHO CORRESPONDE À VERSÃO FINAL DA DISSERTAÇÃO DEFENDIDA PELO ALUNO RENATO SEMANIUC VALVASSORI, E ORIENTADA PELO PROF. DR. MARCO ANTONIO CARON RUFFINO.

CAMPINAS
2024

Ficha catalográfica
Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP)
Biblioteca do Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas
Neiva Gonçalves de Oliveira - CRB 8/6792

Valvassori, Renato Semaniuc, 1999-
V249m Meinongian metaontology and the paradox of negative existentials / Renato Semaniuc Valvassori. – Campinas, SP : [s.n.], 2024.

Orientador: Marco Antonio Caron Ruffino.
Dissertação (mestrado) – Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas.

1. Metafísica. 2. Linguagem e línguas - Filosofia. I. Ruffino, Marco, 1963-. II. Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP). Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas. III. Título.

Informações Complementares

Título em outro idioma: Metaontologia meinongiana e o paradoxo dos existenciais negativos
Palavras-chave em inglês:
Metaphysics
Language and languages - Philosophy
Área de concentração: Filosofia
Titulação: Mestre em Filosofia
Banca examinadora:
Marco Antonio Caron Ruffino [Orientador]
Francesco Berto
Italo Lins Lemos
Data de defesa: 21-08-2024
Programa de Pós-Graduação: Filosofia

Identificação e informações acadêmicas do(a) aluno(a)
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Universidade Estadual de Campinas
Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas

A Comissão Julgadora dos trabalhos de Defesa de Dissertação de Mestrado, composta pelos Professores Doutores a seguir descritos, em sessão pública realizada em 21 de Agosto de 2024, considerou o candidato Renato Semaniuc Valvassori aprovado.

Prof. Dr. Marco Antonio Caron Ruffino
Prof. Dr. Italo Lins Lemos
Prof. Dr. Francesco Berto

A Ata de Defesa com as respectivas assinaturas dos membros encontra-se no SIGA/Sistema de Fluxo de Dissertações/Teses e na Coordenadoria do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia do Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas.

À Ana Luiza S.V.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank FAPESP for the financial support for this dissertation (Process Nº 2022/0011-2), and the three supervisors who, at different stages of my Master's degree, gave me all the support I needed to carry out this research: professors Marco Ruffino, Giorgio Venturi, and Matteo Plebani.

I am thankful to my friends and GeProf members: Gabriel Maruchi, Socrates, Gabriel Eugênio, Deiver, Mariana, João Felipe, Rafael, Alex, Daniel Diniz, Sofia, and Mahan. I am always learning from them, and they all inspire me to continue my efforts in my academic life as a philosopher.

I would also like to thank four friends who have been fundamental to my survival on Italian soil: Massao, Stefano, Michela and Raoni. To the latter, a special thanks for the bed, shower and philosophical partnership in writing an article that should soon see the light of day.

Finally, I am extremely thankful to my family and my *quasi*-family: I am grateful to Bia for all her love and companionship; I am thankful to Francesco for his enduring friendship; and to my grandparents, mother, and father, I am grateful for everything in life that I have been able to achieve.

"Deus existe mesmo quando não há. Mas o demônio não precisa de existir para haver – a gente sabendo que ele não existe, aí é que ele toma conta de tudo"

Grande Sertão: Veredas

Resumo

O Paradoxo dos Existencias Negativos é um paradoxo da referência semântica com interessantes implicações metafísicas. Como é possível negar a existência de um objeto se, para negá-la, é preciso que nos refiramos ao objeto cuja existência é negada? Se o Papai Noel não existe de verdade, como é possível falar sobre ele?

Complicando ainda mais esse paradoxo, filósofos identificam ainda aquele que é chamado de “Problema dos Veritadores de Existencias Negativos": que tipo de coisa é capaz de tornar verdadeiro um existencial negativo do tipo <Papai Noel não existe>? Uma ausência, o mundo atual, certo estado de coisas? De fato, encontrar a melhor resposta para esses problemas não é tarefa simples.

Assim, o primeiro objetivo desta dissertação é discutir as tentativas de respostas ao Paradoxo dos Existenciais Negativos oferecidas por diferentes corrente Meinongianas, assim como compará-las com as soluções a esse mesmo problema defendidas por filósofos Russellianos e Quineanos, de modo que, com o embasamento apresentado, eu possa oferecer minha própria visão acerca do supracitado problema.

Já o segundo objetivo desta dissertação é oferecer uma solução Meinongiana origial ao Problema dos Veritadores para Existenciais Negativos, a qual se baseia em um princípio mereológico que denomino “composição radical irrestrita". Por fim, comparo a solução por mim proposta às soluções Quineanas disponíveis na literatura filosófica recente.

Palavras-chave: Metaontologia; Meinong; Quine; Veritadores.

Abstract

The Paradox of Negative Existentials is a paradox of semantic reference with interesting metaphysical implications. How is it possible to deny the existence of an object if, in order to deny it, we need to refer to the object whose existence is denied? If Santa Claus does not really exist, how is it possible to talk about him?

Complexifying this paradox even further, philosophers have also identified the so-called 'Truth-making Problem for Negative Existentials': what kind of thing can make a negative existential like <Santa Claus does not exist> true? An absence, the actual world, a certain state of affairs? In fact, finding the best answer to these problems is no simple task.

Thus, the first objective of this dissertation is to discuss the attempted answers to the Paradox of Negative Existentials offered by different Meinongian trends, as well as to compare them with the solutions to this same problem defended by Russellian and Quinean philosophers, so that, in the end of this thesis, I can offer my own vision of the aforementioned problem.

The second aim of this dissertation is to offer an original Meinongian solution to the Truthmaking Problem for Negative Existentials, which is based on a mereological principle that I call 'unrestricted radical composition'. Finally, I compare my proposed solution to the Quinean solutions available in recent philosophical literature.

Keywords: Metaontology; Meinong; Quine; Truthmakers.

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Introduction

Metametaphysics can be understood as the branch of philosophy whose aim is to set the foundations of metaphysics. It asks methodological and epistemological questions regarding the very possibility of doing metaphysics, investigates the nature of metaphysical problems (and their answers), and tries to find the most suitable procedures that must be employed to achieve philosophical progress in the metaphysical field of inquiry.[1]

Metaontology, in turn, is the branch of metametaphysics focused on foundational and methodological problems regarding ontology (a sub-area of metaphysics).[2] While ontology tries to figure out which entities compose reality — or, in a Quinean fashion, which objects are included in the catalog of the world's furniture —, metaontology investigates what the most basic principles of ontology are, which methods are more appropriate for doing ontology and, according to Inwagen (1998), it examinates what we are asking when we ask "What is there?".

Even if terms such as "metaontology" or "metametaphysics" have only recently come to be used to name sub-areas of philosophy, it is possible to trace the discussion of metametaphysical problems back to ancient Greek authors. To give an example, the analysis of the term "being" in Plato's *Sophist* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* can be reasonably characterized as metametaphysical given that both philosophers conduct a semantic-conceptual examination of a fundamental metaphysical notion "in preparation for engaging in a particular metaphysical inquiry".[3]

The central theme of the following chapters will be the contemporary metaontological dispute between Meinongians and Quineans. Meinongianism, whose name is due to its founding father Alexius Meinong, is usually characterized as the doctrine according to which it is possible to quantify over nonexistent objects and have intentional states toward them. Quineanism, on the other hand, the philosophical position whose leading apologist was Williard Van Orman Quine, stands on the opposite side of the metaontological debate defending that everything exists, so that "nonexistent object" would be a useless, and even meaningless, notion.

My main goal in this dissertation will be to analyze the plausibility of the Meinongian metaontology — still unpopular among analytic philosophers —, and see whether we have any justification for preferring a Quinean metaontology over a Meinongian metaontology. Besides Meinong's Meinongianism, we will also discuss in the following chapters three of the most important versions of neo-Meinongianism: Modal, Dual-Copula, and Nuclear Meinongianism.

A particular philosophical problem, namely the Paradox of Negative Existentials, will be used to guide the discussions in the next chapters. Roughly speaking, the paradox appears

[1] See Wasserman et al. (2009).

[2] The taxonomy I propose classifies ontology as a branch of metaphysics and metaontology as a branch of metametaphysics. However, there is no unanimity on how to distinguish all these fields, what the precise definition of terms such as "metaphysics" or "ontology" is, and what the relationship between these supposedly different domains of investigation is. See Berto and Plebani (2015) for a discussion on this subject.

[3] See Politis chapter on Bliss and Miller (2020)

when we try to refer to nonexistent objects: how is it possible to talk about what is not if we must denote something to talk about it? Quineans and Meinongians have different answers to this problem and we will investigate which answer is philosophically preferable.

Besides that, a secondary goal of this dissertation will be to formulate three different Meinongian answers to the problem of truthmakers for negative existentials. In other words, I will suggest which kinds of objects each version of neo-Meinongianism (Nuclear, Dual-Copula, and Modal Meinongianism) can point out as a truthmaker for negative existentials.

The Paradox and the Truthmaking Problem

As stated before, the discussions in this dissertation will be guided by a particular paradox – the so-called Paradox of Negative Existentials, also known as the paradox of nonbeing or Plato's Beard – in reference to the problems of non-being discussed in Plato's *Sophist*. This ancient riddle arises when we try to deny the existence of something by precisely referring to it (as if it had *being* in some sense). As Quine (1948) once expressed, "nonbeing must in some sense be, otherwise what is it that there is not?" (p. 21).

A precise formulation of the paradox, due to Berto (2012), can be stated as follows:

P1. To deny the existence of something, one refers to that thing;

P2. But if one refers to something, then that thing has to exist; Thus,

C1. To deny the existence of something, that thing has to exist.

As we will see, there are two ways of solving the paradox: rejecting P1 and assuming that we can deny the existence of an object without referring specifically to it (the Russellian/Quinean answer); and rejecting P2, by separating quantification and ontological commitment (the Meinongian path). Both solutions will be explored in detail in the course of the next chapters.

Independently of how one chooses to solve the paradox, a related philosophical problem is finding the appropriate truthmaker of negative existentials. In other words, even if we accept that it is true that certain objects do not exist, we still have to answer *what* makes it true that these objects do not exist.

One way out of this problem is assuming that negative existentials simply do not have truthmakers: there is nothing by virtue of which a negative existential is true. I personally think this cannot be the right answer, given my acceptance of the Truthmaking Maximalist thesis: every truth, I endorse, must have a truthmaker.

In this dissertation, however, I will not argue for Truthmaking Maximalism, but I will just assume it to be the case. For each solution to the paradox of negative existentials, then, I will present a compatible answer to the problem of truthmakers for negative existentials. More importantly, I will present three simple but original solutions to the truthmaking problem that are

compatible, each one, with a different form of neo-Meinongianism: Nuclear, Dual-Copula, and Modal Meinongianism.

But before we dive into the Meinongian doctrines and discuss the aforementioned paradox and truthmaking problem, it will be useful to briefly present the historical process that culminated in this specific philosophical debate at the beginning of the twentieth century.

From Parmenides to Frege

A convenient starting point for our brief historical panorama is Parmenides's poem *On Nature*, written in the fifth century BCE. There we can find passages affirming that:[4]

> "thou canst not know what is not — that is impossible — nor utter it; for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be" (Fragments 4 and 5)
>
> "It needs must be that what can be spoken and thought is; for it is possible for it to be, and it is not possible for what is nothing to be" (Fragment 6)

These and other passages of *On Nature* support the interpretation according to which Parmenides was the first Western philosopher to defend the impossibility of thinking or speaking about nonexistents. Besides that, a Platonic-Aristotelian interpretation of Parmenides's ideas goes even further and puts him at the beginning of a philosophical tradition endorsing the existence of everything[5] – one of the central Quinean theses, that would only flourish thousands of years after Parmenides's writings.

These Parmenidean theses are the seed for the upcoming paradox of negative existentials. If an object must exist in order for someone to speak of it, how can we deny the existence of anything? Should we simply accept that an intuitively true proposition such as <Batman does not exist> is actually false or, in other words, accept Batman's existence?

The candidate solutions to these problems will only be discussed in the next chapter. For now, it is important to see how the problem of nonexistents also affected philosophers from later generations. Plato was probably the first to clearly state the paradox in his dialogue *The Sophist*. There, it is possible the see two characters discussing if "that which is not in a way is", given that it is impossible to apply the name "*that which is not*" to something, since we "always apply this *something* to a being".[6] In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle discussed similar subjects, and affirmed that "one can signify even things that are not" (See Barnes (1984), An. Pr. 28b6–7)

Around the 10th century, al-Farabi was one the first philosophers to discuss if existence is a property or not. In his "Treatise on answers to questions asked of him", al-Farabi claims that, even though the logician can treat "existence" as a predicate, "the existence of a thing is nothing other than the thing itself",[7] adding nothing to its characterization. This interesting idea can be seen as a medieval anticipation of Kant's position, as we will see.

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[4] The used translation can be found in Burnet (1892).
[5] See Berto (2012), p.4
[6] See Plato and White (1961), 237c-240d)
[7] See Rescher (1960), p. 429.

Still in the Middle Ages, it is possible to verify the exact contrary position to that of al-Farabi in one of the most important philosophers of the eleventh century – Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), better known as Saint Anselm. His importance to the debate around the paradox of negative existentials is due to the conception of *existence* he presents in the notable ontological argument for the existence of God, figuring in his *Proslogion II*. The argument is as follows:[8]

> "Even the Fool, then, is forced to agree that something- than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a-greater- cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality"

According to a standard interpretation of this argument, Saint Anselm tries to derive the existence of God from the very concept of God — a being that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.[9] The crucial step for us to note is the one in which Saint Anselm seems to assert that something that exists in reality is greater than something that does not. That is, he is treating *existence* as a property, just like Meinongians will do from the beginning of the twentieth century. As we will see, treating existence as a property is one of the fundamental steps to offer a Meinongian solution to the paradox of negative existential.

In the seventeenth century, Descartes revitalized the ontological argument, arguing in his Fifth Meditation that he can conclude the existence of God from the mere fact that he has a clear and distinct idea of God's nature as a being that "always exists". Nolan (2021) affirms that Descartes relies on a medieval distinction between essence and existence, according to which "one can determine what something is (i.e. its essence), independently of knowing whether it exists".[10] A very similar distinction between essence and existence will be employed by Meinong and his followers to support their metaontology – the distinction between an object's *Sein* (its being) and its *Sosein* (its essence or set of defining properties) is a fundamental part of the Meinongian doctrine.

Just like Saint Anselm, Descartes seems to have been committed to the thesis of *existence* being a property — a philosophical position famously criticized by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).[11] Following Hume, according to whom the idea of existence "when conjoin'd with the idea of any object, makes no addition to it"[12], Kant's most famous remark on this subject is the following one:

---

[8] The used translation can be found in Anselme and Charlesworth (1965).

[9] For a detailed discussion on the interpretations of the ontological argument, see Oppy (2021).

[10] See, for example, chapter four of Aquinas's *On Being and Essence* (Bobik (1965)).

[11] Even though Gassendi had already based a rejection of Descartes's ontological argument by claiming that existence is not a property (See Forgie (2007).

[12] See Hume (2007), Book I, Part II, Section VI.

> 'Being' is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing [...] By whatever and however many predicates we may think a thing [...] we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that the thing is (Kant (1781/1929), A598/B626–A600/B628).

A plausible way of interpreting the foregoing notion of "real predicate", in line with Heathwood (2011), explains it as a predicate (a linguistic object) denoting a real property. To understand what "real property" means, we should first establish what equivalence among properties is. Say that a property P is equivalent to another property Q if, and only if, it is impossible for something to exemplify P or Q, but not the other property – *triangularity* and *trilaterality* are examples of equivalent properties. Properties R and S are inequivalent if it is possible for something to exemplify R or S, but not the other property – *round* and *red* are inequivalent properties, given that some round objects are not red and vice versa. Another important point is that each property (understood as a concept) can itself be defined by a list of properties – so that the property of *being a chair*, for example, can be defined by a list of properties that may include, among others, *being a seat* and *having back support*. Thereby, a real property T is a property whose addition to a list of properties able to define a certain property (or concept) U results in a new list which is, in turn, able to define a property V inequivalent to U.

Let us look at some examples. *Being red* is a real property, given the above definition, because adding *being red* to a list of properties such as [*being a seat*; *having a back*], which is the definition of the concept of chair,[13] would create a list that would define a new concept – that of *being a red chair* – that is inequivalent to the former concept (something can be *a chair* even if it is not *a red chair*). *Being a guitar or not being a guitar*, on the other hand, is not a real property, because adding this property to any list would not create a new definition inequivalent to the former one – because for every concept it is the case that its definition implies that the defined object is a guitar or is not a guitar (given the law of excluded middle).

Therefore, when affirming that existence is not a real predicate, Kant was expressing that the addition of a supposed property of existence to any concept-defining list would not create a list inequivalent to the former one. The intuition behind this thesis is that for something to have any property, it must already exist. After all, how could something be red, round, be a seat, or exemplify any other properties if it does not exist?

As we will see, that is one of the main intuitions of the so-called Quinean tradition in metaontology. Assuming that existence is not a real property is a fundamental step towards giving a non-Meionongian solution to the paradox of negative existentials.

The last philosopher worth mentioning in this very brief historical overview before we dive properly into the metaontological debate between Meinongians and Quineans is Gottlob Frege (1848 - 1925). Following Kant's conception of real predicate, Frege used to hold that "existence is a property of concepts",[14] not of individuals. According to Frege, for something

[13] At least a preliminary definition for the sake of argument.

[14] See Austin (1950), paragraph §53.

to exist, say a horse, is for anything to instantiate the property (or exemplify the concept) of *being a horse*. Thereby, when we say that unicorns *do not* exist, we are not saying that unicorns have the property of *non-being*, but we are affirming that the property of *being a unicorn* is not instantiated. In other words, Frege defended that *existence* is a second-order property – a property of properties –, and not a property of individuals – a first-order property.

The next relevant philosopher to endorse the position according to which *existence* is not a property of individuals is Bertrand Russell, the most important intellectual adversary of Meinong even before the rising of Quineanism. Given his huge importance to the future metaontological debate between neo-Meinongians and neo-Quineans, the next chapter will be devoted to the Meinong/Russell dispute around non-existent objects. But first, we are going to describe the main aspects of Alexius Meinong's theory of objects.

Part I: Meinong and Russell

1 Meinong's Theory of Objects

After this brief historical introduction, it is time to focus on the founding father of Meinongianism – Alexius Meinong himself.[1] By the end of the 19th century, Meinong was one of the most prominent students of Franz Brentano, alongside other important figures of 20th-century philosophy – notably Edmund Husserl.

Influenced by Hume's British Empiricism, and very interested in descriptive psychology (having established an important experimental psychology laboratory in Austria), Meinong followed Brentano in his studies on the intentionality of thought, even if later he would develop some of Brentano's ideas in ways Brentano himself would not concur.

One of the most important Brentanian ideas that remained in the Meinongian philosophy was that "psychological states cannot adequately be explained except in terms of their intended objects".[2] In other words, mental phenomena such as desires, representations, fears, or judgments, are usually *intentional*, having an object towards which they are directed; and an adequate explanation of the nature of these experiences requires a description in terms of such objects.

Let us look at some examples. If I desire, clearly I desire *something*. There is no such thing as a desire without a desired object. The same goes for fears or representations, for example. Someone can fear the bogeyman and an imaginative child can mentally represent a dragon, but no one seems to be able to have representations without something being represented or fear having no feared object.

According to Meinong, intended objects of thought belong to a mind-independent domain:[3] If I fear Vladimir Putin, for example, then I fear a real man – a real object outside my mind –, and not some part of my psychological act of fear. I can also fear the bogeyman, but even if the bogeyman does not exist, Meinong would still say that he is not a mind-dependent object – given that I do not fear my representation of the bogeyman, but *the bogeyman itself*.

Thereby, Meinong's theory of objects (*Gegenstansdstheorie*) is ultimately an attempt to establish the principles of a theory of thought-transcendent intended objects and clarify the nature and epistemology of nonexistents. According to Marek (2022), Meinong's theory of objects was formulated to be the most general and fundamental science, whose range would be even wider than the range of metaphysics. While metaphysics would be only interested in the general aspects of reality and the existing objects that permeate it, the theory of objects was designed to deal with objects as such, independently of their ontological status.[4] According to Jacquette (2015),

[1] All the historical information concerning Alexius Meinong can be found in Jacquette (2015) and Marek (2022).

[2] See Jacquette (2015), p.8

[3] Brentano, on the other hand, initially defended what came to be known as the *immanece thesis* – objects of psychological states are immanent, in the sense that they are contained *within* the mental acts. See Jacquette (2015) and Huemer (2019).

[4] According to Meinong, "without doubt, metaphysics has to do with everything that exists. However, the totality of what exists, including what has existed and will exist, is infinitely small in comparison with the totality of the

with regard to the object theory, “by distinguishing the kinds of mind-independent intended objects available to thought, Meinong provides a new subject matter for philosophical psychology, epistemology, and value theory, in a combined ontology and extraontology consisting of existent and nonexistent objects" (p. 12).

1.1 The Principles

Meinong’s theory of objects, at least in its initial form, can be summarized in six principles.[5] Principle number one is called **Principle of Unrestricted Freedom of Assumption** (*unbeschränkten Annahmefreit*), and it establishes that any objective (*objektiv*) can be assumed or entertained.[6]

An objective, according to the Meinongian terminology, is an object that some contemporary metaphysicians would recognize as a state of affairs (or, at least, something similar to it). Findlay (1963) explains that objectives are “the whole class of entities of which some are, and others are not, the case" (p. 60). Thus, both *the sun is a star* and *the sun is a planet* are considered objectives – only the first being the case.

Assumptions are, for Meinong, a subclass of thoughts. Assuming a certain objective is considering it without conviction or even belief. When questioning or reasoning over a certain objective, for example, we do not necessarily believe it to be true, but we assume it to reach a later conclusion. All objectives can be assumed – and that is what the first principle says.

The second principle is the **Transcendent Intentionality Thesis**, establishing that every objective assumed is directed toward a mind-independent object (*Gegenstand*[7]). Findlay, trying to explain a primitive notion such as “object", says that “an object is anything to which a mental process may be directed" (p. 67, 1963).[8] Thus, someone’s assumed objectives *the sun is a star* and *the round square is round*, for example, have the sun and the round square as its objects, respectively. As Swanson (2011) points out, “Meinong takes every expression of the form “the-so-and-so” (such as “the golden mountain” or “the purple dragon”) to designate an object" (p. 8).

This second principle already commits Meinong to the idea that not all knowable objects exist: some objects are contingently nonexistent and others are even metaphysically impossible (such as the round square). Notwithstanding, Meinong accepts this later consequence of his principle without any strain. As Findlay states, “It is clear that we are able to think of objects which do not exist" (p. 43, 1963). I can mentally represent Batman, I can wish to have a

Objects of knowledge" (p. 79, 1960).

5 I am following Jacquette on the selection of the principles. See the introduction of Findlay (1963).

6 This principle, in its full generality, came to be questioned in 1915 by Meinong himself. See Marek (2022).

7 Meinong uses the term “*Gegenstand*" for objects in general, and reserves the term “*Objekt*" for objects that are not objectives, given that objectives are also considered *Gegenstand* – that is, objectives can also be the object of other objectives and thus be the target of mental processes such as representations or desires. See Findlay (p. 67, 1963)

8 Swanson (2011) expresses that "An object [...] can be pretty much anything with any set of properties, so long as someone *could* conceive it" (p. 8)

square ball (just like Quico, the famous character of El Chavo del Ocho) or I can fear Freddy Krueger, even if all these objects are known to be nonexistent. Denying the possibility of thinking about nonexistents is what Meinong considered a "prejudice in favor of the actual".[9]

The Independence of *Sein* from *Sosein* Thesis is the third principle of the Theory of Objects. [10] Initially formulated by Ernest Mally in 1903,[11] this principle determines that every object has its constitutive properties (what Meinong named *Sosein*) independently of its ontic status (*Sein*). According to Routley (1983), the Meinongian Independence Principle hides in it another important principle, namely the so-called Characterization Postulate, establishing that every nonexistent object has the properties characterizing it. Thereby, it is possible to ascribe the property of *being-a-superhero* to Batman and the property of *being-the-god-of-thunder* to Zeus, even if both Zeus and Batman are nonexistent objects.

It is also the Independence Principle that, according to Routley (1983), motivates the rejection of the Ontological Assumption, which says that no statement about nonexistents is true. Routley ascribes the (implicit or explicit) acceptance of this assumption to important philosophers such as Parmenides[12] and early Wittgenstein, Plato, Strawson, and Russell. For Meinong, on the other hand, it is clear that there are positive facts concerning nonexistents – it is even intuitively true that Batman dresses like a bat, that Batman lives in Gothan City, and that Batman does not exist.

The fourth fundamental Meinongian principle is the **Indifference Thesis**, also known as the *Außersein* of the homeless pure object. What this principle settles, according to Findlay, is that "whether an object is or not, makes no difference to *what* the object is" (p.49, 1963). In other words, the ontic status of an object does not affect the characterization of that object as an object (the object as such is *pure* of ontic status and *homeless* in the sense of not belonging to any traditional ontic category).[13] Thus, Batman is a superhero and Gilberto Gil is a composer, independently of the fact that Gilberto Gil exists and Batman does not exist. In virtue of the Indifference Thesis, existence is seen by Meinong as something extrinsic to the objects' natures.

The fifth principle of the theory of objects, called ***Existenz/Bestand* Thesis** by Jacquette, establishes two modes of being (*Sein*) for intended objects: existence and subsistence. According to Findlay (1963), it is impossible to define or explain the difference between these two modes of being, but the distinction becomes clear even for laymen after seeing some examples of its applications. While objects such as the Eiffel Tower, the sun, my computer, and Robert De Niro's mental states are said to exist (they enjoy existence as their mode of being), configurations, facts, similarities, and classes are considered by Meinong subsistent objects.

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[9] See Meinong (p.78, 1960).

[10] The German term "*Sein*" can presumably be translated by "being", and "*Sosein*" could be translated to something like "so-being". However, even anglophone contemporary philosophers still use these German terms to discuss this principle. For this reason, I will keep using the original Meinongian terminology.

[11] See Marek (2022) section 5.1.

[12] As we saw in the Introduction, according to some interpretations, Parmenides thought that it was even impossible to talk about nonexistents.

[13] See Jacquette (p.13, 2015).

The idea is that objects such as [the class of all stars] and [the sun] (an individual star) are said to *be there* in different senses. The mentioned class, for example, does not *exist*, such as the sun, but merely *subsists*, according to the Meinongian terminology. We can also grasp the distinction between modes of being from the perspective of the relationship between them and time. For Meinong, existence is a mode of being in time – an existent comes to be in time and then (presumably) ceases to be somewhere in time. Subsistents, on the other hand, are considered timeless.[14] From the epistemological point of view, existents are usually known empirically, but we come to know subsistents *a priori* (mathematical knowledge being a paradigmatic example).[15]

Based on the distinction between modes of being, Meinong settles the difference between real objects and ideal objects. Real objects, for Meinong, are those possibly or actually existent objects. Thereby, the sun is a real object as much as my saxophone (given that I do not own a saxophone, but this object presumably could have existed). On the other hand, ideal objects are objects that could not possibly exist, given their timeless subsistent nature. Objectives, similarities, characteristics, and absences are examples of ideal objects, according to Meinong.[16]

The last principle of this brief characterization of the Theory of Objects, which I will name ***Nichtsein* Principle**,[17] establishes that some objects have no mode of being (Sein) – they neither exist nor subsist. Among those objects that have no mode of being, we can find both contradictory objects, such as the round square and the greatest prime number, and non-contradictory objects, such as the golden mountain in Campinas and my saxophone (given that Campinas has no golden mountain and that I have no saxophone).

These 6 principles were elaborated as the grounding for the Theory of Objects, whose goal was to offer a better understanding of the mental intentionality phenomena. Surpassing Meinong's purposes, the Theory of Objects became the starting point for an important metaontological framework, lately baptized as Meinongianism or neo-Meinongianism. In subsequent chapters, we will see the development of the neo-Meinongian metaontology and its applications. For now, let us see how a defender of the original Theory of Objects could answer the paradox of negative existentials.

1.2 Solving the Paradox: The Meinongian Way

As we mentioned in the introduction, the paradox of negative existentials arises when we try to deny the existence of an object. When we say "*x* does not exist", we seem to make reference to *x* and attribute nonexistence to it. But if the reference to *x* requires *x*'s existence (at least according to a widespread intuition), then *x* must exist in order for us to deny *x*'s existence: here is the paradox! Let us check again Berto's formulation of the paradox:

P1. To deny the existence of something, one refers to that thing;

[14] See Marek (2022).
[15] See Swanson (2011), p. 8
[16] See section 5.3.2 on Marek (2022).
[17] As Meinong famously stated, "there are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects" (p. 83, 1960).

P2. But if one refers to something, then that thing has to exist; Thus,

C1. To deny the existence of something, that thing has to exist.

How could Alexius Meinong solve the Paradox of Negative Existentials? The obvious Meinongian route would be to reject P2: given the Transcendent Intentionality Thesis, if I assume the proposition “Batman does not exist", for example, my assumption has Batman as its object, even if Batman is a nonexistent object. As we said before, the Transcendent Intentionality Thesis already commits Meinong to the idea that not all knowable objects exist, so there is no reason to support P2 accepting the Meinongian theoretical framework – and the paradox is instantly dissolved.

According to Marek (2022), Meinong adopts an identity theory of truth according to which a judgment is true if, and only if, there is a subsistent objective corresponding to it. Thereby, a false judgment corresponds to a non-subsistent objective (a judgment that has no mode of being). Take “Batman does not exist". Regarding this judgment, Meinong probably would say that there is a subsistent objective corresponding to it – *Batman not existing* –, and *that* is the reason why it is a true judgment (in contemporary terms, the subsistent objective *Batman not existing* works as a truthmaker for the judgment that Batman does not exist). The corresponding objective, in turn, is directed towards a mind-independent object – that is, Batman –, and this object does not have the property of existing – in other words, Batman is a nonexistent object.

With such an interesting and functional Theory of Objects combined with his straightforward identity theory of truth, we could think that Meinong solved once and for all the Paradox of Negative Existentials. But that is not the case. As we will see, his theories were heavily criticized by two of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century: Bertrand Russell and Williard Von Orman Quine. In virtue of these critiques, we can even say that until the rise of neo-Meinongianism, the Meinongian doctrines were considered definitively refuted by most philosophers. [18] The next chapter will focus on the Russellian critiques to Meinong and the way we can answer them.

[18] Even Ryle (1973) once said that the “*Gegenstandstheorie* itself is dead, buried and not going to be resurrected”(p. 255).

2 Russell's Attack

According to Parsons (1980), analytic philosophy went through a period of Kunhian normal science at least during the first half of the twentieth century. In other words, philosophers had an almost dogmatic set of paradigmatic beliefs and techniques with which they developed their theories and ideas. One of these beliefs was that everything exists (a Parmenidean and anti-Meinongian thesis) and one of these techniques was the Theory of Definite Descriptions. The rise of this state of normal science in philosophy happened, to a large extent, by virtue of the publication of a groundbreaking article: Russell's *On Denoting* (1905) – one the most trenchant attacks against Meinong's Theory of Objects.

In this chapter, we will focus on analyzing the main aspects of Russell's Theory of Descriptions and how it objects to some of the grounding principles of Meinong's theory. But before doing that, we will briefly summarize the process that made Russell abandon his commitment to nonexistent objects and his sympathy for Meinongian ideas and then develop new semantics for the descriptive fragment of ordinary languages.

2.1 Before the Theory of Descriptions

Some years before *On Denoting* (1904) was published,[1] between 1890 and 1899, Russell was an idealist influenced by philosophers such as Kant and Hegel. His later rejection of idealism was to a large extent a result of the epistemological difficulty that idealist doctrines had when it came to justifying the possibility of objective knowledge of the external world – a possibility that Russell assumed to be undeniable.

Rejecting the central idealist thesis that all understanding of the world is mediated by conceptual structures, Russell, by the time of his *Principles of Mathematics* (1903), committed himself to *direct realism* – a thesis according to which we can have direct cognitive relations (acquaintance) to both concrete and abstract objects.

The linguistic counterpart of direct realism, also defended by Russell, was that propositions are abstract objects whose knowledge is acquired by acquaintance. Besides that, during this period, Russell defended that propositions contain not merely the representations of the objects they are about, but the objects themselves. Thus for Russell, a proposition about Napoleon (the one expressed by the sentence "Napoleon was Corsican", for example) would have Napoleon himself as one of its constituents, and not a representation of him.

For our interests, the main consequence of young Russell's irrestrict acceptance of direct realism is his commitment to nonexistent objects. If "Batman is a superhero" expresses a proposition (as it seems to express), then, given the direct realist thesis, Batman is one of the constituents contained in it – or, in other words, there is a nonexistent object called "Batman"

[1] This section is highly inspired by Hylton (2003)

that is contained in the mentioned proposition. In his *Principles of Mathematics*, Russell (1903) says the following:

> If A be any term that can be counted as one, it is plain that A is something, and therefore that A is. "A is not" must always be either false or meaningless. For if A were nothing, it could not be said not to be [...] Numbers, the Homeric gods, relations, chimeras and four-dimensional spaces all have being, for if they were not entities of a kind, we could make no propositions about them. Thus being is a general attribute of everything (1903, p. 455)

Hence, Russell's view of nonexistent objects during this period could be seen as even more radical than Meinong's. If the latter used to hold that some objects have no form of being (fictional and impossible objects, for example),[2] young Russell defended that every object has being/subsists, independently of its existential status.[3]

According to Russell's point of view at this point of his career, "to exist is to have a specific relation to existence" (1903, p. 455). Therefore, his answer to the paradox of negative existentials would be that "A does not exist" can be true if, and only if, A is not appropriately related to (the property of) existence, even if A has being (if A had not had *being*, it would be impossible for us to deny its existence).

Nevertheless, his unrestricted acceptance of direct realism did not last long. Russell realized that the notion of acquaintance could be quite obscure when applied to understand the way we know abstract and no longer existing objects. In other words, even if one can comprehend propositions about Aristotle or the number two, it seems implausible to assume that it is possible to stand in a direct epistemological relation with them (Aristotle is already dead and the number two is not a concrete physical object).

Besides that, Russell wanted to restrict his theory of meaning to avoid the so-called *problem of generality*. Assuming direct realism, how could we grasp the meaning of propositions about all natural numbers – that is, propositions with infinite complexity – such as "every natural number is either odd or even"? According to direct realism, we would have to be able to be acquainted with an infinity of abstract objects (the natural numbers), but that sounded way too implausible for Russell.

Accordingly, Russell developed the Theory of Denoting Concepts aiming to deal with the difficulties faced by direct realism.[4] The theory is based on a distinction between denotation (the denoted object) and denoting concept (the meaning), and it is used to interpret certain kinds of propositions – those that would be exceptions to the direct realist interpretation.[5]

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[2] Given the *Nichtsein* Principle. See page 12.

[3] According to Swanson (2011) "Meinong sometimes speaks of subsistents broadly, referring to everything with being, including the entire subset of existents. However, he often speaks of subsistents narrowly, referring only to *ideal* objects with being, such as numbers, classes, facts, and relations"(p.7). In the last chapter, we focused on the narrower use of the term in Meinong's philosophy. See page 12.

[4] Russell developed this theory in his *Principles of Mathematics* but, at this time, he was not already able to see how to use it to avoid commitment to nonexistent. See Hylton (2003).

[5] According to Hylton (2003) it is possible to make an analogy between the Fregean notions of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* with the notions in Russell's Theory of Denoting Concepts. *Sinn* is the Fregean analog of the denoting concept (the meaning), and *Bedeutung* is the analog of the denotation (the object denoted by the expression).

The denoting concept can be understood as the representational element we find in definite and indefinite descriptions (something that was absent in the direct realist theory). Thereby, when we say “the actual president of Brazil is old" we use a denoting concept to represent and denote a certain person (in 2024 it is Lula). Different from paradigmatic subject-predicate sentences which contain the subject itself as a component (having no representational surrogate), definite and indefinite descriptions have denoting concepts as elements, and not the denoted object.

This distinction was the move that allowed Russell to find a way to avoid commitment to nonexistent objects. He could use it to violate direct realism and say that, in certain circumstances, denoting concepts have no denotation. In his article *The Existential Import of Propositions*, Russell and MacColl (1905) say the following:

> ‘The present King of England’ is a complex concept denoting an individual; ‘the present King of France’ is a similar complex concept denoting nothing. The phrase intends to point out an individual, but fails to do so: it does not point out an unreal individual, but no individual at all. The same explanation applies to mythical personages, Apollo, Priam, etc. These words have a meaning, which can be found by looking them up in a classical dictionary; but they have not a denotation: there is no entity, real or imaginary, which they point out. (1905, p. 399)

Notwithstanding, Russell was unsatisfied with his own Theory of Denoting Concepts. He wanted to develop a theory (I) better integrated with classical logic and with no truth-value gaps, (ii) able to deal with the problem of generality, and (iii) that was not conflicting with direct realism (postulating exceptions as the Theory of Denoting Concepts did). Besides that, even if his Theory of Denoting Concepts was already able to deal with supposed nonexistent objects, Russell (1959) made the following confession in *My philosophical Development*:

> [Meinong] pointed out that one can make statements in which the logical subject is ‘the golden mountain’ although no golden mountain exists. He argued, if you say that the golden mountain does not exist, it is obvious that there is something that you are saying does not exist namely, the golden mountain; therefore the golden mountain must subsist in some shadowy Platonic world of being, for otherwise your statement that the golden mountain does not exist would have no meaning. I confess that, until I hit upon the theory of descriptions, this argument seemed to me convincing. (1959, p. 84)

That is how Russell ended up creating one of the most famous philosophical theories of the twentieth century: The Theory of Descriptions.

2.2 The Theory of Descriptions

As an evolution of the Theory of Denoting Concepts, Russell’s Theory of Descriptions was published in 1905 and had as its main objective to serve as a method to analyze singular terms (names and definite descriptions) and solve some important paradoxes of reference, such as the paradox of negative existentials.

This new theory again avoided the representational elements of the referential theory (contrary to the Theory of Denoting Concepts) – moving away from the idealist philosophy and reestablishing direct realism – and was consistent with the classical reasoning – rejecting any commitment to free logic to explain the reference to nonexistents.

One of the fundamental aspects of Russell's new theory is the perception that language can be misleading: the grammatical form of a sentence is not a good guide to grasping its logical form[6] – in other words, there are cases in which the grammatical form of a sentence (the relation between the subject, predicate, and its connectives) does not correspond exactly to the form this same sentence would have if one translated it to the formal language of first-order classical logic.

According to Russell (1905), the Meinongian theory of reference "regards any grammatically correct denoting phrase as standing for an object" (p. 482). That is, on Russel's interpretation, the Meinongian doctrine would be committed to the idea that any definite or even indefinite description would have to denote an object due solely to its grammatical form. That intuition is what Russell aims to refuse in his *On Denoting* (1905).

Russell's Theory of Descriptions explains that the inference from the grammatical form to the logical form of a phrase is misleading because definite descriptions actually hide complex quantificational structures behind them. When I say "The president of the US is an important person", I am not simply attaching a singular term (*The president of the US*) to someone in order to make a predication – the subject is not part of the proposition (as the young Russell thought), nor there is a denoting concept representing something in the real world. For us to really understand the logical role of definite descriptions, Russell proposes a revealing method for paraphrasing sentences[7]: That is what the Theory of Description is really about.

Take, for example, the following definite description

I) The composer of *The Guarany* was born in Campinas.

Those who like Brazilian opera know that this definite description aims to designate Antônio Carlos Gomes but, according to Russell, there is a conjunction of three quantified statements hidden behind the particle "the" that introduces the description, and none of these statements make direct reference to Carlos Gomes.

The Russellian proposed paraphrase of "The composer of *The Guarany* was born in Campinas" is, then[8]:

1) At least one person composed *The Guarany*.

2) At most one person composed *The Guarany*.

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[6] Swanson (2011) says that "According to Russell, logical form is the way a sentence's constituents are put together. By 'constituents', he means particulars, properties, relations, and other logic features (features relevant to valid inferences)" (p.35).

[7] That is the paradigmatic technique Parsons considered part of the philosophical state of normal science in the first half of the twentieth century. See page 15.

[8] If C stands for *being-a-composer-of-The-Guarany* and B for *being-born-in-Campinas*
$\exists x(Cx \wedge \forall y(Cy \equiv x = y) \wedge Bx)$.

3) Whoever composed *The Guarany* was born in Campinas.

Besides respecting our intuitions – after all, we do believe that, if *the* composer of *The Guarany* was born in Campinas, then there is only one person who composed this piece (something we naturally infer from the meaning of "the") –, Russell's method can also explain the validity of arguments containing definite descriptions in its premises – something that is harder to do if we maintain the subject-predicate grammatical form when we are doing the logical analysis.

Take the following intuitively valid inference:

P1. The composer of *The Guarany* was born in Campinas

P2. Carlos Gomes is the Composer of *the Guarany*

C1. Carlos Gomes was born in Campinas.

If we had translated these sentences into the language of first-order classical logic maintaining the subject-predicate grammatical form, the aforementioned argument would become invalid.[9] Using Russell's suggested paraphrase, however, the argument's validity is safeguarded as we would expect.[10]

According to Russell, we could systematically use this paraphrase technique to reveal the logical form of definite descriptions. Furthermore, Russell suggests that we can also apply this analysis to proper names: according to him, proper names are, semantically speaking, definite descriptions in disguise [11]. Take the sentence "Apollo is a good archer". According to Russell, we can understand the name "Apollo" as an abbreviation for something like "the sun-god"[12] (or any other definite description we use to talk about this character). Thus, a Russellian paraphrase of "Apollo is a good archer" would be something like this:

1) At least one x is a sun-god.

2) At most one x is a sun-god.

3) Whoever is a sun-god is a good archer.

Given that (supposedly) there are no sun-gods, (1) expresses something false and, therefore, the conjunction of the three statements is also false. Consequently, "Apollo is a good archer" expresses something false and there is no nonexistent object referred to by the name "Apollo".

Let us see now how we can use the Theory of Definite Descriptions to solve the paradox of negative existentials.

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[9] If p stands for the person who composed *The Guarany*, B for *being-born-in-Campinas*, C for the property of being-the-composer-of-The-Guarany and g for Carlos Gomes itself, then:

$Bp; Cg \nvdash Bg$.

[10] If g stands for Carlos Gomes, C stands for *being-a-composer-of-The-Guarany* and B for *being-born-in-Campinas*, then:

$\exists x(Cx \wedge \forall y(Cy \equiv x = y) \wedge Bx), \exists x(Cx \wedge \forall y(Cy \equiv x = y) \wedge x = g) \vdash Bg$

[11] See Lycan (1999), p. 31.

[12] See Russell (1905), p. 491.

2.3 Solving the Paradox: The Russellian Way

Russell thought he solved the paradox of negative existentials through his Theory of Definite Descriptions.[13] Take the following sentence:

I) The present King of France does not exist.

The Russellian paraphrase of this sentence would be something like:[14]

(In conjunction, it is NOT the case that)

1) At least one person is presently King of France.

2) At most one person is presently King of France.

3) Whoever is presently King of France exists.

Given that it is not the case that at least one person is presently King of France, Russell would conclude that “The present King of France does not exist" expresses a true proposition, confirming our intuitions without referring to any specific nonexistent King.

Two aspects of this Russellian approach are important to note. First, the fact that the right paraphrase of negative existential phrases must assume the wide scope reading of the negation – that is, the particle “not" must deny the whole sentence, and not only existence as a predicate –, otherwise the first and third premises would contradict each other.[15]

In the second place, it is interesting to remark on the way Russell faces the predicate “exists" in (3). In *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, Russell (1940) expresses that “existence is essentially a property of a propositional function" (p. 66). In other words, existence is a specific property of properties: for Zebras to exist is for the property of *being-a-Zebra* to be instantiated at least once.[16] Thereby, the present King of France does not exist because the property of being King of France has no instances in the actual world.

But what is the truthmaker of negative existentials according to old-school Russellians? In the same spirit as some of Russell’s ideas from the period of *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (1918), Jago (2013) proposes that negative existentials are made true by negative facts. Thereby, “the present King of France" does not exist since *there is no King of France*. This fact, in turn, can be understood as the negative non-mereological composition of the property of *being-King-of-France* and the higher-order property of *being-instantiated*.

It is important to note that for Jago’s approach to work, the composition containing these two properties must be non-mereological. That is a consequence of the fact that the mere existence of the universals in question does not guarantee the corresponding fact. For instance, even if the first-order universal *redness* and the second-order universal *color* exist, there is no

[13] See Berto (2012), p. 24.
[14] See Lycan (1999), p. 16.
[15] In symbols, $\neg\exists x(Kx \wedge \forall y(Ky \equiv x = y) \wedge Ex)$.
[16] See Berto (2012), p. 23.

negative fact expressed by “redness is not a color". Non-mereological composition must also be accepted by some Quinean answers to the truthmaking problem, as we will see in section 2.13.

2.4 Undermining the Theory of Objects

One of the main reasons to endorse the Theory of Descriptions, according to Russell, is precisely to avoid the Meinongian approach to reference and meaning. His first argument against Meinong’s Theory of Objects is pointing out the fact that it violates two fundamental classical logic principles: the Law of Non-Contradiction and the Law of Excluded Middle.

The Law of Non-Contradiction settles that two contradictory propositions cannot be both true at the same time. Russell (1905) says that:

> It is contended [on Meinong’s Theory], for example, that the existent present King of France exists, and also does not exist; that the round square is round, and also not round ; etc. But this is intolerable; and if any theory can be found to avoid this result, it is surely to be preferred. (1905, p. 483)

In other words, when the Theory of Objects establishes that every objective assumed is directed towards a mind-independent object (through the Transcendent Intentionality Thesis), it accepts the consequence of having contradictory objects in the widest domain over which we can quantify – and that is intolerable for Russell. The Round Square is round and square, given the Characterization Postulate, but it is also not round, because if something is square, then it is not round. The existent King of France, in turn, is an existent object, given the Characterization Postulate again, but it is nonexistent, since we know that France is not a monarchy anymore.

According to Inwagen (2008), Meinong’s theory also falls in contradiction when it asserts, by means of the *Nichtsein* Principle, that some objects have no mode of being. Inwagen’s argument, known as the Argument from Italics, points out that it is self-contradictory to say that there *are* being-less objects, after all “if there *are* such things, they obviously have being. For a thing to have *being* is for there to *be* such a thing as it" (p. 39). In other words, Inwagen stresses, by means of the italicized verb “to be"[17], that we already commit ourselves with the being of something when we say that it *is* there, after all, “there is" and “there are" are simply different verb forms to express the being of objects.

Besides that, as I said before, Russell indirectly accuses Meinong’s Theory of Objects of recognizing objects that violate the Excluded Middle in this same widest domain of quantification.[18] The present King of France, for example, is neither bald nor not-bald – it just seems to be indeterminate in terms of baldness. But again, if any theory can be found that avoids violating classical logic, just like the Theory of Definite Descriptions, then it is surely to be preferred.

As we will see, there are compelling answers to these objections, and even Meinong has already thought about some of them. But there is another Russellian objection against the

[17] That is why the argument has this name.
[18] See Russell (1905), p. 485.

Theory of Objects that is way more threatening to the Meinongian philosophy: The Objection of Triviality[19].

According to Russell, in virtue of the Characterization Postulate, the Theory of Objects allows one to prove the existence of an infinity of unwanted objects – objects we are sure do not exist. Not only the present existent King of France but any imaginable object characterized as existent must exist, given the aforementioned postulate: the existent dragon, the existent ghost, the existent Curupira, or even the existent nonexistent object.

Worse than that, if for any condition Ax with free variable x, some object satisfies Ax (a plausible interpretation of what would be the Theory of Objects' Comprehension Principle – derived from the Characterization Postulate),[20] then given conditions such as '$x = x$ and B' with arbitrary B, any B can be proved true by Conjunction Elimination, – that is, the Meinongian system is completely trivialized.[21]

2.5 Meinongian Answers

As we saw, the first Russellian objection against the Theory of Objects accuses it of violating classical logic principles. When it comes to the Principle of Non-Contradiction, Meinong appeals to the distinction between wide and narrow negation to avoid this objection[22].

According to Meinong, the Round Square is indeed round and non-round, but that would not imply a contradiction because *non-round* must be seen as a negative property the Round Square has and not a negation of the fact that the Round Square is round. In other words, Meinongs posits a distinction between two kinds of negations: a wide negation, whose scope is whole propositions, and narrow negations, whose scope is only properties. The Round Square has the properties of *being-round* and *being-non-round*, but Meinong would still insist that the proposition <It is not the case that the Round Square is Round> is false – and, therefore, no contradictions arise.[23]

Similarly, Meinong addresses the objection of violating the Excluded Middle accepting as logical law only the wide version of the Excluded Middle ($\forall F \forall x \neg(Fx \vee \neg Fx)$) and not the narrow one ($\forall F \forall x \neg(Fx \vee -Fx)$). Therefore, Meinong would accept the Russellian suggestion that the present King of France is neither bald nor non-bald, but that does not violate the relevant wide version of the Excluded Middle. Classical Logic principles, then, seem to be safeguarded.

Meinong names objects that violate the narrow version of the Excluded Middle indeterminate or incomplete objects, and defines indetermination of an object a concerning

[19] See Berto and Plebani (2015), p. 109.
[20] See Berto and Plebani (2015), p.108.
[21] See Priest (2005), p. 83.
[22] See Swanson (2011), p. 13.
[23] Take "¬" to stand for wide negation and "-" to stand for the narrow negation. According to Swanson (2011) "Meinong thinks the wide version of the Law of Non-Contradiction [$\forall F \forall x \neg(Fx \wedge \neg Fx)$] holds absolutely and universally, but the narrow version [$\forall F \forall x \neg(Fx \wedge -Fx)$] does not always hold, because it is not a genuine law of logic" (p.15, 2011).

property B as *a* having neither B nor non-B. Thereby, the present King of France is indeterminate with respect to baldness (it is neither bald nor non-bald) and, therefore, it is considered an incomplete object. It is important to note that, for Meinong, incomplete objects are always beingless – "existents and subsistents are all completely determined"[24] (Swanson (2011), p18).

In general, the opponents of the Theory of Objects question the meaningfulness of the narrow negation and the nature of negative properties. Besides that, Meinong still seems to owe an explanation of what makes an object impossible or inconsistent, given that he rejects the violation of the Principle of Non-Contradiction by beingless objects such as the Round Square. Thus, it is not evident that Meinong was able to properly answer the first Russelian objection.[25]

Furthermore, Swanson (2011) says that even if Meinong was able to answer Russell, his solution cannot deal with objects such as *the coaster that has and lacks the property of being square*, and *the coaster that neither has nor lacks the property of being square*. Appealing to the distinction between wide and narrow versions of the classical logic principles is not enough: these are clearly contradictory and wide-incomplete objects, respectively – but they are still part of the general domain of quantification, given the Characterization Postulate.

Now the Objection of Triviality. To answer it, Meinong distinguishes between "being existent" (*Existierend-Sein*) and "existence" (*Existieren*). According to him, objects such as the existent King of France have existence only in watered-down form, lacking real full-fledged existence – they are existent objects but do not *exist*. To say that something is an existent object is to say that its *Sosein* is determined by the property referred by the predicate "existent", but for something to exist it must be real and have a space-time location. For Meinong, the difference between being existent and to exist is explained by the notion of *modal moment*.[26]

For Meinong, the existent King of France is a beingless object that has *being existent* as one of its properties, given the Characterization Principle, but it does not exist – because the property of *being existent* it has lacks modal moment. Having modal moment is what Findlay (1963) describes as having full-strength factuality. The Doctrine of Modal Moment is understood by Meinong as a later restriction to its Principle of Unrestricted Freedom of Assumption. One cannot simply assume certain objectives as if they were factual in full strength, because this would lead to contradictions such as the one pointed out by the Russellian Triviality Objection.

Russell himself felt really disappointed by the reply Meinong gave to his objections and abandoned this philosophical debate. The notion of modal moment is normally seen as overly obscure, and the supposed difference between *to exist* and *being existent* looks confusing and plausibly *ad hoc*. The different neo-Meinongian traditions that appeared some decades after the debate between Russell and Meinong devoted considerable time searching for the best solutions for the Triviality Objection, as we will see in the second part of this dissertation.

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[24] Existents and subsistents are all completely determined at least with respect to the properties that apply to their category of objects – gender does not apply to numbers, so the number 2 (a subsistent object) is neither a woman nor a non-woman.

[25] For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see Swanson (2011), chapter 2.

[26] See Marek (2022).

Neo-Meinongian traditions also have different answers for the Argument from Italics, whose objective was to show that quantification, by means of the verb “to be", already indicates the being of the quantified objects. Zalta (1988) proposes the thesis according to which every object has being, but only concrete physical objects exist. Thus, differing between *being* and *existence* is one way to solve the problem Inwagen identified. Other Meinongians such as Priest (2005) and Sylvan (1980) prefer to keep the identity between *being* and *existence* and answer the problem otherwise. Berto (2012), for example, defends that the verb “to be" is accidental to quantification. One evidence of that is the fact that other languages quantify using other verbs – in French, for example, a common quantificational expression is “il y a" (using the verb that corresponds to “have"). No one, however, attribute “having" to objects quantified this way. Thereby, the use of the same verb for quantification and the attribution of existence would not lead Meinong’s Theory of Objects into contradictions by accepting that "there *are* some things that do not exist".

2.6 Objections to Russell

Even if some of the objections against the Theory of Objects may sound quite convincing, the Russellian Theory of Descriptions is not obviously a better candidate as a theory of denotation.

The most famous objections against the Theory of Descriptions were initially offered by Strawson (1950).[27] The main objective of the Strawsonian objections is to point out how the Theory of Definite Descriptions fails as a semantic theory since it ignores the pragmatic use of definite descriptions – that is, the actual use of definite descriptions in real-life contexts.

According to Russell’s theory, for example, “the presently existent King of France is bald" expresses a false proposition, but that just does not seem to be the case since there is no King of France ou there, and saying that it is false that the King of France is bald makes us automatically infer that he is hairy (when that is also not the case). Strawson’s point of view is that sentences such as this one are defective and simply do not have a referent. As a consequence of that, they are neither true nor false.

Kripke (1980), in his turn, presents some important modal objections to the Russellian supposed equivalence between ordinary proper names and definite descriptions.[28] The most important[29] one focuses on the different rigidity of descriptions and proper names. “The philosopher who wrote *Phaedo*" is a definite description that denotes the same individual as the

[27] Another important objection against the Theory of Objects is the one offered by Donnellan (1966) according to which the Russellian theory ignores what Donnellan calls “the referential use of definite descriptions". Nevertheless, I will not discuss this objection in this dissertation.

[28] By ordinary proper names I mean names such as “Socrates" or “Obama", stressing the difference between them and the so-called logically proper names. According to Russell (1940) during the period of the Logical Atomism, “The names that we commonly use, like ’Socrates’, are really abbreviations for descriptions; not only that, but what they describe are not particulars but complicated systems of classes or series [...] The only words which one does use as names in the logical sense are words like ’this’ or ’that’" (p.29).

[29] You can check some other objections offered by Kripke and Searle in Lycan (1999).

name “Plato", namely, Plato. It is intuitively possible that Plato could have never written this dialogue and another person could have done it – we can imagine a possible world in which Aristotle wrote *Phaedo*, and not Plato. Given that the mentioned description denotes different objects in different possible worlds, it is said to be a flaccid designator. The term “Plato", on the other hand, does not seem to change its denotation when we imagine counterfactual situations – according to Kripke, “Plato" is a rigid designator, denoting the same object in all possible worlds in which it exists.

To make this distinction evident, we just have to consider these two statements: (1) “The philosopher who wrote *Phaedo* could have not written it", and (2) “Plato could have not been Plato". Although (1) seems to express an intuitively true proposition – because Plato could have chosen not to write this dialogue –, (2) is at least an odd sentence, and after some reflection, we realize it expresses something evidently false – after all, how could Plato be different from himself?

Thereby, Kripke concludes, proper names cannot be equivalent to definite descriptions. If they were semantically equivalent, “Plato is the philosopher who wrote *Phaedo*" would be a necessary truth[30] (just like “Plato is Plato"), but that is obviously not the case – Plato could have decided to spend all his time doing exercises and never have written a single dialogue.

If Kripke’s objection succeeds in showing that proper names are not equivalents to definite descriptions, then old-fashioned Russellians have no means to explain negative existentials such as “Batman does not exist" – something that Meinonongians easily do.

[30] See Berto (2012), p.50.

Part II: Quineanism

3 Quine's Quineanism

3.1 The birth of Metaontological Quineanism

Now that we summarized the debate between Meinong and Russell, it is time to focus on one of the most important figures for the general metaontological debate: Willard Van Orman Quine. In his famous article *On What There Is* (1948), he not only establishes the most common contemporary conception of the ultimate task of ontology as a philosophical field but also presents one of the most popular metaontological theories still endorsed nowadays.

In the first part of this chapter, we will focus on Quine's metaontology and how it contraposes itself against the Meinongian Theory of Objects, continuing somehow the Russellian project. Then, we will briefly discuss two of the most important Neo-Quinean metaontological views – the ones defended by Peter van Inwagen and Theodore Sider –, and analyze the most relevant objections against them.

3.2 On What There Is

In his article called *On What There Is* (1948), Quine popularized the view according to which the task of ontology is to furnish the list of the world's furniture – that is, to answer what exists or what reality is composed of. This became, after this article, an almost standard way of understanding ontology[1] in the analytic philosophy tradition, contraposed to the view of continental philosophers such as Heidegger, and deviants of the Quinean tradition – Aristotelians, for example –, like Jonathan Schaffer.[2]

On the one hand, from Quine's perspective, there is an easy answer to the question "What is there?", namely, *everything*.[3] That answer is an implicit denial of the Meinongian principles concluding that not all knowable objects exist – that nonexistent objects are part of the most general domain of quantification we engage with –, and an acceptance of what Berto (2012) called *Parmenidean Thesis* – "what can be spoken or thought *is*",[4] as we saw in the introduction.[5] On the other hand, even if everything exists, Quines concedes that there can be "disagreement

[1] In this dissertation I will be using the term "ontology" both to designate the task Quine attribute to ontology, and the list of what exists itself.

[2] Philosophers who follow a certain Aristotelian tradition consider that the task of ontology is to identify what the most basic entities of reality, which grounds the existence of the others, and what the relationships obtaining between them are. On the other hand, philosophers who follow a certain Heideggerian tradition understand that it is also the task of ontology to study the different ways of being and their conditions of possibility. See the chapters *On What Grounds What* and *Ways of Being* in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology* (2009) and Wheeler (2020).

[3] See Quine (1948)

[4] This appearance of the verb "to be" in the context of Berto's interpretation of Parmenides must be read as ontologically committing – for something to be is for it to exist.

[5] See p.2.

over cases" – even if there are no nonexistent objects, not every name or definite description designates an object, and it is not always evident which terms really have referents in the world.

Quine's method for deciding which objects (or categories of objects) must enter into the list describing the world's furniture is based on identifying which objects our best sciences are ontologically committed to and accepting these and solely these as the entities that compose reality (or, at least, the only ones we can legitimately accept in our ontology). This method is part of the Quinean naturalist approach to philosophy. Quine (1981) describes naturalism as "the recognition that it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described" (p. 21). In other words, Quines refuses that we can do *a priori* metaphysics to discover the basic structures of reality – as a great part of contemporary metaphysicians seem to think –, but defends that ontology (and philosophy in general) must be seen in a continuum with empirical sciences.[6]

There are basically two categories of objects in Quine's ontology: physical objects and mathematical sets. Many abstract objects some philosophers would be inclined to accept in their ontologies can be seen, in the Quinean framework, as objects ultimately reducible to sets – numbers and functions, for example. Other abstract objects, such as propositions, merely possible objects, and properties are simply left out of Quine's furniture of the world for (supposedly) having no clear identity-criteria.

But what should be the method to decide, besides what categories of objects there are, which objects exist? Are there eletrons, lions, the Batman, or natural numbers in the world's furniture? Quine's answer rests on quantification theory. As we said before, Quine thought that we should decide which objects must be considered part of reality considering what the ontological commitments of our best scientific theories are. For us to know these commitments, we should focus on knowing which objects must exist for these theories to be true. On Quine's perspective, the best way for us to discover which objects are those is to translate our best scientific theories to the language of first-order classical logic and see which objects these theories are quantifying over (something that may not be clear when we look at the body of a theory written in natural language). In the context of Quine's proposal, Hylton (2006) explains that:

> For every existentially quantified sentence that the theory [we are investigating] contains or implies, there must be an object of which the corresponding sentence is true; such an object must exist if the theory is to be true (p. 123).

The same is expressed by Quine (1953) in the following way:

> a theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory must be capable of referring in order that the affirmations made in the theory be true (p. 13).

Thereby, if the body of our best physics theory translated to first-order logic implies, for example, that *there is an x, and only one x, such that x is orbited by the Earth and is mainly*

[6] This way of understanding the role of ontology as something tied to empirical sciences with no primacy of *a priori* reasoning is also called *metaphysics naturalized*.

composed of hydrogen and helium,[7], then we are justified in holding the existence of the object able to verify this sentence – namely, the Sun.

A famous Quinean slogan summarizes the point of this quantification theory: "To be is to be the value of a bound variable". In other words, the only way in which a theory expresses ontological commitment to a certain object is when this theory quantifies over it – and verifying what is in the domain of quantification of our best scientific theories is the Quinean method to decide what figures in the ontology we should accept.

3.3 Refusing Nonexistents

In his article *On What There Is*, Quine (1948) presents a character named Wyman, clearly inspired by Meinong, and offers some arguments aiming to refuse the Meinongian way to deal with nonexistent objects. According to Wyman, not every object exists – some objects are unactualized possibles and, therefore, nonexistents. Pegasus, for example, has no space-time position (given that it does not exist), but it is a subsistent mythical horse we can think and talk about.[8]

First of all, Quine refuses to accept a distinction between *being* and *existence*. For an object to be is for it to exist, independently of the particular properties or ontological categories of each individual object. Numbers and physical objects, for example, exist in the same way but have different properties that differentiate their ontological categories.

Accepting a distinction between being and existence, or subsistence and existence, has the fairly unwelcome consequence of unnecessarily inflating our general domain of quantification – something that, according to Quine (1948), "offends the aesthetic sense of us who have a taste for desert landscapes" (p. 4).

Besides that, Quine argues that this large domain of quantification full of unactualized possibles is "a breeding ground for disorderly elements" (p. 4). He asks us to consider *the possible fat man in that doorway* and *the possible bald man in that doorway*. Quine, then, wants us to consider if these two merely possible men (I) are the same, (II) with which criteria we should decide if they are the same, and (III) how many possible men are there in that doorway. Having found no good answers to those questions, Quine suggests that we must dismiss Wyman's treatment of nonexistents and search for another philosophical theory – if Wyman's unactualized possibles have not even clear identity conditions, how could we take his theory seriously? As Quine once famously said, we should accept "no entity without identity".

Quine encourages us to push further the objection and consider how Wymanian philosophers would deal with objects such as the round square – that is, contradictory objects. Should they admit that these also have some way of being? Should we accept the meaningfulness

[7] If O stands for *being-orbited-by-the-Earth,* and C for *being-mainly-composed-of-hydrogen-and-helium* then: $\exists x(Ox \wedge \forall y(Oy \equiv x = y) \wedge Cx)$.

[8] As we saw in section 1.1, Meinong himself would not agree with Wyman's conception of subsistence. For Meinong, objects such as mythical creatures are merely nonexistent, having no way of being. Actually, Wyman's sense of subsistence is more similar to young Russell's position on nonexistent we discussed in section 2.1.

of talking about unactualized impossibles? If we are not even able to give identity conditions to merely possible objects, how could we deal with the impossible ones?

The objection of the fat man in the doorway is one of the most famous objections against Meinongianism. It demands Meinongians to give clear identity conditions for the objects pertaining to the realm of nonexistents in case we should really consider them an option to explain the paradox of negative existential – otherwise it may seem that talking about nonexistents amounts to talking unintelligibly, and there is no sense in committing ourselves theoretically with objects we cannot even identify.

3.4 Solving the Paradox: The Quinean Way

The Quinean answer to the paradox of negative existentials is absolutely Russellian in spirit. He uses Russell's Theory of Descriptions as a method to eliminate quantification over nonexistent objects and develops further Russell's idea of expanding his method to proper names.

When it comes to statements such as "Pegasus does not exist", Quine suggests two different paraphrases of the term "Pegasus" for us to be able to apply the Russellian method. The first was already suggested by Russell: we can understand "Pegasus" as an abbreviation of a definite description like "the winged Horse that was captured by Bellerophon". With this description in hand, it is then easy to apply the Theory of Descriptions and show that the statement expresses a true proposition (exactly like the case of The present King of France on page 20).

The second Quinean suggestion is that we appeal to an unanalyzable and irreducible property that could work as a surrogate for the name. In the case of Pegasus, for example, we can appeal to the (plausibly) artificial property of *being-Pegasus*. Thus, "Pegasus does not exist" becomes "The thing that *is Pegasus* does not exist" or "The thing that *pegasizes*[9] does not exist". Once again, the paraphrases enable us to apply the Russellian method and verify the truth of the analyzed statement.

"The thing that is Pegasus does not exist" is analyzed in the following way:

(In conjunction, it is NOT the case that)

1) At least one thing is Pegasus.

2) At most one thing is Pegasus.

3) Whoever is Pegasus exists.

Given that it is false that at least one thing is Pegasus, Quine would conclude that the analyzed statement is true.

It is important to note that, according to Quine, the mere use of predication does not commit us ontologically with properties or universals in a Platonic sense. As Berto and Plebani (2015) explains, from Quine's perspective "You are ontologically committed to the Fs if and

[9] Quine also suggests this odd and artificial verb as an alternative for us to represent the property of being Pegasus.

only if what you claim entails that ∃xFx"(p. 29). Saying that *x* is not Pegasus or that *x* is red does not logically imply the existence of *redness* or *pegasusness*. Thereby, Quine's answer to the paradox of negative existentials presumably does not inflate his ontology with an additional realm of abstract properties[10].

[10] Given that Quine did not discuss truthmaking in his writings, I will separately discuss neo-Quinean truthmaking approaches in subsection 2.13.

4 Neo-Quineans

4.1 Peter Van Inwagen

Since the moment Quine published *On What There Is* (1948), many philosophers started adopting the Quinean way of understanding the role of ontology and his suggested criteria for ontological commitment. But Inwagen (1998) went a step further in establishing the precise principles of metaontological Quineanism – actually, he was the one to introduce the term "metaontology" to designate the investigation of ontology, as a field, in the contemporary analytic philosophy vocabulary.

According to Inwagen, five principles summarize the Quinean metaontology (even if Quine himself did not express explicitly all these principles). Let us look at each one of them and give some motivations to accept this philosophical framework:

(1) **Being is not an activity**

Contrary to existentialists and phenomenologists such as Sartre (or at least his reading of Sartre's philosophy), Inwagen denies that being is the most general activity something can engage in – an activity that things engage "in virtue of engaging in any activity at all" (p. 234). Besides that, Inwagen also rejects that there are different ways of being – or different ways of engaging in the most general activity –, just like Sartre or Heidegger would accept.

The two Inwagenian grounds for denying that *being* is an activity are (1) that the verb "to be" does not work like regular verbs such as "walking" or "breathing" (*being* is not something that an object *does*), and (2) that even if there is a most general activity objects engage in, this would be an activity such as *enduring* – that is, all objects endure as far as they exist (but existence is something presupposed for an object to engage in any activity whatsoever).

Besides that, according to Inwagen, we do not need to appeal to a distinction between modes or ways of being to explain how different things seem to *be* differently. A chair, a human being, and the number 2 are quite distinct objects, but we can explain their differences in terms of their natures or properties, without mentioning ways of being. An argument for this thesis can rest on a version of Ockham's Razor: When choosing between two theories that aim to explain the same phenomenon, we should prefer the theory that is the simplest in terms of ideological parsimony (that is, the one that accepts the less theoretical primitives as possible). Appealing to ways of being to explain the difference between different entities, would argue the Quinean, is just a more complex way of explaining something we already have a simpler explanation for.[1]

(2) **Being is the same as Existence**

[1] Obviously this argument depends on the previous acceptance of some ontology of properties and assumes that all the relevant metaphysical differences between distinct kinds of objects can be explained in terms of properties – both dubious Quinean premisses. See McDaniel (2017) for a contraposition to this Quinean thesis.

According to Inwagen, to say that something *is* – that it has *being* – is the same as saying that it exists. If “there are dogs" is true, then dogs exist; given that Batman does not exist, then *there is no* such thing as Batman. For Inwagen, it does not make sense to say that there are nonexistent objects (with such and such properties), because nonexistent objects do not exist (obviously), and *being* is the same as *existence*.

Inwagen himself, in this article, gave no clear arguments for this thesis. According to him “This thesis seems to me to be so obvious that I have difficulty in seeing how to argue for it" (p. 235).

(3) **Being is univocal**

According to Inwagen, the concept of “being" does not change its meaning according to the kind of object it is applied to. When it is said that a number, a planet, a person, or a chair *exists*/*is*, the terms “being" and “existence" remain with the same meaning. That is: “being" is univocal.

Inwagen’s argument for this thesis tries to conclude the univocity of "being" from the meaning univocity of arithmetic terms. The argument can be summarized as follows:

P1. Number-words mean the same thing even when counting different sorts of objects (when it is said that Mars has two moons and that the *Kill Bill* franchise has two movies, for example, the word “two" has the same meaning in both assertions)

C1. Number-words, then, are meaning-univocal.

P2. There is an “intimate connection between number and existence" (p. 236) – to say that objects of type *X* do not exist is to say that the number of *Xs* is zero. To say that objects of type *X* exist is to say that the number of *Xs* is 1 or more.

C2. “There is at least very good reason to think that existence is univocal" (p. 236)

(4) **The single sense of being or existence is adequately captured by the existential quantifier of formal logic**

The fourth thesis of Inwagen’s reconstruction of the Quinean metaontology concerns the meaning of the classical logic quantifier. According to him, the existential quantifier (usually represented by the symbol “∃x"), precisely “expresses the sense of ‘there is’ in ordinary English" (p. 241).

It is possible to reach this conclusion just by verifying that sentences such as “∃x x is a dog" are abbreviations of more complex sentences – in this specific case, “It is true of at least one thing that it is a dog" –, and these complex sentences are equivalent to sentences of the form “There is at least one dog". Given that “being" and “existence" have the same meaning, and there are no different ways or modes of being, than quantifying over a certain domain of objects automatically commits us with their existence. From Inwagen’s point of view, it does not make

sense to consider the quantifier as an ontologically neutral tool, such that it would be possible to quantify over nonexistent objects.

(5) **The ontological commitment thesis**

This fifth and last thesis can be understood as a strategy to somehow reveal the ontological commitments of a certain interlocutor.

According to Inwagen (1998), if one can identify in its interlocutor's discourse or theory that "the existential generalization on a certain open sentence *F* can be formally deduced from the sentences he accepts, one has shown that the sentences that he accepts [...] formally commit him to there being things that satisfy *F*" (p. 247).

This strategy does not ultimately show what there is, but it helps us to identify which object must exist in order for our beliefs or theories to be true. This thesis, for sure, presupposes that the attempt to quantify over nonexistents is incoherent – if you admit that "some dogs are brown" or that "some superheroes can fly", and even accept to infer from these sentences that "there are dogs" and "there are superheroes", then it is possible to ascribe you an ontological commitment to dogs and superheroes (both must be part of the world's furniture for your belief that "some dogs are brown" and "some superheroes can fly" to be true).

4.2 Theodore Sider

More recently, Theodore Sider has been one of the most important Quineans in contemporary metaphysics. The Quinean metaontology is part of the background that makes his metaphysical system possible.

In his celebrated *Writing the Book of The World* (2011), Sider presents an interesting perspective on the nature of reality according to which the world has a fundamental structure that makes it objectively better describable in terms of certain concepts and not others – in other words, Sider in this book not only endorses realism about structures but also realism about fundamental languages (languages in which all their expressions carve the nature at the joints).

The first Quinean aspect of Sider's philosophy is his naturalistic tendency. That is, for Sider, metaphysics must be seen as something continuous with science, using most of the same criteria for theory choice within metaphysics that scientists employ in their own fields of study.

Sider also endorses the Quinean metaontological principle according to which we must believe the ontology of our best theories, but adds a second principle that gives support to his structural realism:

> regard the ideology of your best theory as carving at the joints. We have defeasible reason to believe that the conceptual decisions of successful theories correspond to something real: reality's structure (p. 12).

Even the concept of ideology is Quinean itself. According to Quine (1951), the ideology of a theory is the range of all ideas that can be expressed by it. Comparing ideology and ontology, Quine (1951) says: “The ideology of a theory is a question of what the symbols mean; the ontology of a theory is a question of what the assertions say or imply that there is."(p.14). Thus, for Sider, the metaphysician not only must care about committing himself to the ontology of our best theories, but also about embracing the correspondent ideology that best carves nature at the joints.

Sider goes further and, besides supporting a Quinean metaontology, directly attacks neo-Meinongian approaches to ontology. According to Sider (2011), “there are no joints in reality corresponding to the neo-Meinongian ideology" (p.207). Sider says that, for a neo-Meinongian to be an ontological realist, she would have to defend that not only quantifiers carve at the joints but that the predicate “exist" must be also joint-carving. – that is, a neo-Meinongian would have to sustain that “reality includes both quantificational and existential structure" (p. 207).

Nevertheless, Sider gives no arguments against the Meinongian framework, but only assumes the superiority of the Quinean ideology, affirming that one could attack the neo-Meinongian metaontologies for not explaining satisfactorily the theoretical role his ideology must play and for giving bad arguments to support their theories (even if he admits that rejecting Meinongianism simply because it has a different ideology of the one sustained by the standard Quinean metaontology is not a reasonable move).

4.3 Neo-Quinean Truthmakers

By “neo-Quinean", in this subsection’s title, I am not only talking about those philosophers who accept Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment, but more broadly including all of those who deny the possibility of quantifying over nonexistents (that is, endorsers of the Parmenidean thesis that everything exists). Having that in mind, which objects could a neo-Quinean choose to solve the problem of truthmakers for negative existentials?[2] We can say that there are at least three strong candidates: absences, totality facts, and the world itself.[3]

The first option has been recently endorsed by Kukso (2006). According to his approach, “Pegasus does not exist" expresses something false in virtue of the absence of unicorns in the world (more precisely, in virtue of the absence of the state of affairs *Pegasus existing*). Absences, says Kukso, are mind-independent, causally relevant, and spatiotemporally located objects, fitting perfectly into a naturalistic metaphysical framework.

Totality facts, in turn, are the entities preferred by Armstrong (2004) to solve the truthmaking problem. For Armstrong, positive truths, such as <the sky is blue>, are made true by states of affairs, like *the sky being blue*, which are non-mereological compositions of

[2] Neo-Russellians would also enter here, but I already talked about them in the subsection 2.3.

[3] Other alternatives can be found in Jago (2013) and Dodd (2007).

particulars and a universal.[4] In the case of negative existentials, Armstrong proposes that totality facts are their truthmakers. These so-called “totality facts" are the mereological composition of all first-order states of affairs and the property of *being-a-first-order-state-of-affairs*, under a relation – call it “Total" – establishing that these states of affairs are all the entities instantiating the property of being a state of affairs.

Finally, Cameron (2008) proposes that the world itself can be considered the truthmaker of all negative existentials. On his account, each possible world is essentiality the way it is and their existence necessitates all the propositions that are true according to them, including true negative existentials. Thus, it is true that Pegasus does not exist, according to Cameron’s approach, in virtue of the way the world itself is – our actual world is its truthmaker.

Nevertheless, these three solutions to the problem of truthmakers for negative existentials are not immune to criticism. Few philosophers are willing to accept absences in their ontologies; totality facts are incompatible with Humean metaphysical principles and the world itself “is a severely non-discriminating truthmaker" (p. 466, Jago (2013)), being able to work as a truthmaker to every single truth – just to cite a few objections.

Besides that, many philosophers are not comfortable with the primitive relation of non-mereological composition that Armstrong has to accept – after all, what is a non-mereological composition, if composition is precisely what mereology is all about? As we will see, the Meionongian solutions I propose to solve the truthmaking problem have the advantage of dispensing non-mereological composition even if following some Armstrongian intuitions.

[4] Just like in Jago’s Russellian approach, Armstrongians must admit non-mereological composition because the mere existence of a certain particular and a universal does not guarantee the existence of a corresponding state of affairs – there exists the Eiffel Tower and the property of *being-made-of-chocolate*, but there is no corresponding state of affairs *the Eiffel Tower being made of chocolate*.

5 The objections

5.1 Objections to Quine

A first objection against Quine's answer to the paradox of negative existentials focuses on its apparent failure to offer a good paraphrase of negative existentials such as "Pegasus does not exist". As we saw, Quine's second proposal was to paraphrase "Pegasus does not exist" as "The thing that is Pegasus does not exist" or "The thing that pegasizes does not exist". By using a property as a surrogate for the name "Pegasus", Quine's suggestion avoids the Kripkean objection to Russellian paraphrases that consider proper names equivalent to a definite description.

However, these proposed Quinean paraphrases still disrespect our intuitions when it comes to the truth values of predications in fictional discourse. Take for example "Holmes lives in Baker Street" – a sentence expressing an intuitively true proposition, given what is written in Conan Doyle's stories. According to Quine, we should paraphrase this sentence to something like "There exists exactly one *x* that holmesizes, and some holmesizer lives in Baker Street". The problem is: given that there exists no holmesizer, the paraphrase must deliver false as the truth value of <Holmes lives in Baker Street>. Worse than that, the paraphrase of sentences such as "Holmes was created by Doyle" would also render false as truth value of the propositions expressed – something that would sound absurd to any lover of British literature.

When it comes to the acceptance of the Parmenidean thesis, i.e. that everythig exists, a series of objections can be raised. First, and most obvious, it is a quite counterintuitive thesis – we do seem to be able to point out many things that do not exist, namely Santa Claus, the Round Square, the nonexistent object that has four legs, and the list goes on. From this counterintuitveness, it is possible to offer a sort of transcendental argument against the Parmenidean thesis:[1]

P1. The Quinean says that there are no nonexistent objects.

P2. But we know we can think of nonexistents ("how weird would be a picture of a Round Square!" is the thought I am entertaining right now)

P3. But if we can think of nonexistents, then *there are* nonexistents.

C1. *Contra* Quine, there are nonexistent objects.

According to this reasoning, the idea according to which we cannot think of nonexistents would be actually self-refuting: if I think that I cannot think of nonexistents, I am automatically thinking of nonexistents – and so we can infer that there are nonexistents I am thinking about.

[1] See Berto (2012), p. 40

The Quinean could try to explain away intentional states directed to nonexistents (thoughts, for instance), but that is a pretty hard task, and there is no decisive clue on how do it. How could the Quinean explain, from the ontological point of view, the fear of evil ghosts my sister has? If the Quinean thinks ghosts do not exist, he cannot say she fears a nonexistent object. But then what is the object of her fear? It cannot be only a mental representation, given that she is afraid of evil ghosts and not of mental representations of them. For the same reason, we cannot say she fears a proposition or a definite description. Thereby, if not a nonexistent object, it is not at all clear what is the object my sister fears.

Quine's method for deciding which objects should figure in our world's furniture is also really problematic. First, we do not have a unique way of translating theories to first-order logic, and different translations may force us to have different ontological commitments. In the second place, it is not clear what the sciences we should choose to begin with are. Are social sciences among our best sciences? What about literary studies or the science of religion? To choose only physics as our best science (as some old-fashioned Quineans may think), we would first be able to offer clear bridge laws to explain how all the other sciences can be reduced to it, but we simply do not know them.

Besides all that, Quine's fat and bald men challenges for Meinongians are pretty easy to solve, as Routley (1982) has shown us. (I) Are the two possible fat men the same? To answer this question we must previously know if they have the same properties, and that also answers Quine's question (II): with which criteria should we decide if they are the same or not? The answer is: two objects – existent or nonexistent – are the same when they have the same properties. If the only properties the bald and the fat men have, respectively, are *being-bald* and *being-fat*, then they are obviously different objects. If they also have other properties, then Quine should have told us what they are. The fact that we cannot tell if two objects are the same does not show that they have no identity conditions (are Bituca and Milton Nascimento the same? If you do not know previously that "Bituca" is Milton's nickname – a famous Brazilian musician –, then you may not be able to assert the identity "Milton is Bituca", even though he obviously has identity conditions).

Quine's question (III) is: how many possible men are there in that doorway? And again, the answer requires an explanation: which doorway? If he is talking about an existent doorway, then clearly the answer is none. If it is a nonexistent doorway, then his fictional story is lacking some parts: we just cannot answer his question due to lack of information. Read the following excerpt of a story:

Once upon a time there was a wizard named Korgos playing chess in the doorway of his house in Atlantis...

In that story there is a wizard (a nonexistent object) and it is true of him that he was in a doorway. You only know that because of the description I gave. If I had only told you that there is a story about a wizard called Korgos, you would not know that it is true of him that,

according to his story, he was in a doorway.

5.2 Objection to Neo-Quineans

Every principle presented by Inwagen as a cornerstone of neo-Quineanism can be questioned and objected to. His first principle says that being is not an activity. One apparent consequence of this principle is the acceptance of ontological monism – the thesis according to which there is only one way for something to *be*. Even if Meinong himself used to advocate against ontological monism by endorsing a distinction between existence and subsistence (*Existenz*/*Bestand* Thesis),[2] the most important recent upholder of ontological pluralism has been Kris McDaniel.[3]

According to McDaniel (2009) (who is not a Meinongian), “being" is an analogical expression – a term that has a generic sense “which, roughly, applies to objects of different sorts in virtue of those objects exemplifying very different features" (p. 295). Thereby, there are multiple modes of being (the way abstract objects *are*, the way human beings *are*, the way tools *are*, and so forth) but there is a general concept of being covering all entities – and this generic sense of being is the one captured by the existential quantifier of classical logic.

Specific senses of being, then, can be understood as restricted quantifiers whose domains are proper subsets of the classical existential quantifier's domain. What is metaphysically important, however, is that, in McDaniel's view, the most fundamental quantifiers are exactly the restricted ones and not the other way around. According to McDaniel “this generic sense [of being] represents something *akin to a mere disjunction* of the metaphysically basic ways of being". In other words, some basic restricted quantifiers are really the ones that carve nature at its joints, and not the most general quantifier (as Sider would defend).

Some supposed benefits of McDaniel's ontological pluralism are: (I) it supports a really common pre-philosophical metaphysical view (many people agree that numbers and chairs do not exist *in the same way*, and this intuition is somehow forced to change by contemporary analytic professors who nowadays are usually ontological monists); and (II) it can help us explain modal facts or possible worlds ontology (maybe possible worlds do not exist *in the same way* actual concrete objects do, even if they do exist in some way, given that there are modal facts). Therefore, if Kris McDaniel is right, the neo-Quinean univocity of being must be rejected.

The second Inwagenian principle is a direct attack on one of the most important Meinongian thesis: for Inwagen, saying that there is an x such that Px is the same as saying that x exists and has property P. As we already saw, Meinongians defend that it is possible to quantify over nonexistents, and accepting that enables Meinononongians to better explain fictional discourse and mental intentionality. This whole dissertation is focused on that, so let us turn our attention to the next neo-Quinean principle.

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[2] See p.12.

[3] In what follows I describe the metaontology he develops based on Heidegger's *Being and Time*. He does not clearly express which of these ideas he really defends and which are only part of his Heideggerian exegesis.

Inwagen's third principle says that "being" is univocal, such that there is a symmetry between the way we ascribe existence and numerical counting. The most famous opponent of this view is Ryle (1949), according to whom:

> It is perfectly proper to say, in one logical tone of voice, that there exist minds and to say, in another logical tone of voice, that there exist bodies. But these expressions do not indicate two different species of existence, for ' existence' is not a generic word like 'coloured' or 'sexed'. They indicate two different senses of 'exist', somewhat as 'rising' has different senses in 'the tide is rising', 'hopes are rising', and 'the average age of death is rising'. A man would be thought to be making a poor joke who said that three things are now rising. namely the tide, hopes and the average age of death. It would be just as good or bad a joke to say that there exist prime numbers and Wednesdays and public opinions and navies; or that there exist both minds and bodies (p. 23)

If Ryle is right, then we do use "being" with different meanings, and treating all of our uses of this word with the same ontological import will give us a bad world's furniture – one that could have, in principle, numbers and Wednesdays counted in the same list. Thus, the neo-Quinean metaontology would be misguided.

The fourth Inwagenian principle says that the sense of "being" is adequately captured by the existential quantifier of formal logic. The obvious response to this affirmation is simply to question: why classical logic? Philosophers with Meinongian intuitions, for instance, would say that free logics are way better suited to formalize the way we speak of fiction than logics that commit us to the existence of all objects we talk about.

Finally, there is the neo-Quinean ontological commitment thesis, according to which we can reveal the ontological commitments of a certain interlocutor by deducing existential generalizations from the sentences he accepts. This principle may be almost the target of a *reductio ad absurdum* when we consider interlocutors that (quite reasonably) accept the truth of <Many children wait for Santa Claus> and <Santa Claus does not really exist>. The acceptance of the first proposition would commit the interlocutor to the existence of Santa Claus and the second one would be false unless there is no Santa Claus. Thereby, it would be incoherent to believe both propositions, but that is simply not the case – as we all do know when we are not in our philosophical office, that both these propositions are true.

Part III: Neo-Meinongianism

6 Nuclear Meinongianism

6.1 Mally and Meinong

As we saw, after Russell proposed an objection that would trivialize the Theory of Objects, Meinong answered him appealing to an odd concept of lacking modal moment – the existent King of France would in fact exist, but have no full strength factuality.

Later Meinongians such as Jacquette (2015) point to the fact that Meinong could have given a way better answer to Russell had he appealed to the distinction between formal and extra-formal properties (*außerformale*) presented by Ernst Mally and discussed in *Über Möglichkeit und Wahrscheinlichkeit* (1915), where Meinong even suggests a better terminology than Mally's to designate these concepts, adopting a distinction between constitutive (*konstitutorische*) and nonconstitutive (*außerkonstitutorische*) properties.[1]

Constitutive properties would be those properties that are contained in an object's *Sosein*. These are ordinary properties such as *being-bald* or *being-red*. Nonconstitutive properties, on the other hand, determine the ontic status of an object – *being-existent* is the paradigmatic example of a nonconstitutive property. As Jacquette (2015) observes, it is precisely this distinction between two types of properties that enables the *Sosein* of every object to be indifferent to their *Sein*, or ontic status (respecting the Indifference Thesis, discussed in the beginning of this dissertation.[2])

Differentiating between constitutive and nonconstitutive properties, it is easier to present a seemingly plausible Meinongian solution to Russell's objection, as we will see in the next subsection. For now, it is important to note that this distinction was later adopted by a certain neo-Meinongian tradition named "Nuclear Meinongianism". Nuclear Meinongians such as Routley, Jacquette and Parsons changed the traditional Meinongian terminology and started using the terms "Characterizing" and "Noncharacterizing" properties or "Nuclear" and "Extra-nuclear" properties to designate constitutive and nonconstitutive properties, respectively.

Not to be redundant, the next subsection will only focus on Parsons's version of Nuclear Meinongianism – given that other forms of Nuclear Meinongianism share more or less the same core assumptions that would be relevant to offer a solution to the paradox of negative existentials. Without further ado, let us see what Nuclear Meinongianism is all about.

6.2 Terence Parsons

The Nuclear Meinongian position we are going to discuss is Terence Parsons's theory. Most of his contributions to neo-Meinongianism can be found in his book *Nonexistent Objects*

[1] See Meinong (2018), p.176-177.
[2] See p. 11.

(1980), in which he develops an axiomatic theory of objects leaning on the distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties.

Parsons's intent, when developing his theory, was not to present a better philosophical system or metaontology, when compared to the Russellian/Quinean standard position, but only to offer a plausible alternative that respects some of our intuitions concerning nonexistents and the neutrality of logic when it comes to ontological issues.[3]

Nevertheless, Parsons thinks that the Meinongian metaontology is well motivated by the fact that we take for granted the truth of plenty of propositions that apparently commit us to nonexistent objects. For instance, "Sherlock Holmes is more famous than any existent detective" or "Several Greek gods were also worshipped by the Romans" are both seemingly true propositions, even if neither Holmes nor the Greek gods, such as Zeus/Jupiter, (presumably) exist.

Although one could paraphrase such apparently true sentences using sentences that do not commit us to there being nonexistent objects (in a Russellian fashion), Parsons questions the need to do such a procedure:[4] if we can consistently handle the data as it appears to us (that is, nonexistents-committing) why should we paraphrase them? A theory of objects is precisely a theory that shows how to deal with our data related to nonexistents in an intuitive, clear, and precise way.

To avoid complications and escape the Meinongian debate on modes of being, Parsons restricts his theory to existent and nonexistent concrete objects and, thereby, does not discuss the nature of supposedly subsistents nor even take a stand on the young-Russellian idea that nonexistents have themselves a specific mode of being.

According to Parsons, nuclear properties must be understood as ordinary properties such as *being-blue*, *being-tall*, and *being-a-mountain*. Extra-nuclear properties, in turn, can be subdivided into four groups of properties: ontological, modal, intentional, and technical properties. The following are precisely the examples he gives for each group of extra-nuclear properties,[5]:

Ontological properties: *being-existent*, *being-mythical*, *being-fictional*.

Modal properties: *being-possible*, *being-impossible*.

Intentional: *being-thought-about-by-Meinong*, *being-worshipped-by-someone*

Technical: *being-complete*.

Parsons (p. 24) admits that he does not have a precise method or decision procedure to distinguish both groups of properties, but he suggests that extra-nuclear properties are those

[3] See p. 8, Parsons (1980).

[4] See Parsons (1980), p.36.

[5] See Parsons (1980) p.23. Actually, on this page, Parsons is discussing predicates and not properties. But given that he assumes that for each nuclear and extra-nuclear predicate, there stands a property (nuclear and extra-nuclear, respectively), we can interpret his examples as examples of properties.

that are historically controversial. *Existence*, for instance, was already considered by Frege as a property of concepts, not of individuals, and even Kant was aware of the fact that “existence" is not a real predicate. Nuclear properties, in turn, like *being-round* and *being-red*, are ordinary and unproblematic, intuitively speaking.

Assuming this distinction, Parsons presents a series of metaphysical principles formulated as axioms of a second-order logic system and then expands it to a modal logic system. According to Parsons, that is precisely the aim of a theory of objects: to propose an axiomatic theory with whose theorems we can study the nature of objects *qua* objects. Given the purpose of this dissertation, we will not attain ourselves to the formal aspects of Parson’s system, but we will only focus on the main philosophical aspects of it.

First, Parsons establishes that for every set of nuclear properties, there is an object corresponding to it. The properties whose set corresponds to a certain object are all the properties the object has (call this principle the **Object Principle**). That is in accordance with the intuition we have that we can arbitrarily stipulate a set of properties to designate an object and then have this object as a target of our intentional states – precisely what authors of fictional stories do all the time (they stipulate a name followed by a series of arbitrary predicates and start to designate the object satisfying these predicates as a determinate character of his story).

The Object Principle works as a comprehension principle, substituting the naive comprehension principle (implicitly) present in the original theory of objects proposed by Meinong. Given that the Object Principle only applies to nuclear properties, there is no such object as the existent King of France (understood as the object King of France with the extra-nuclear property of *being-existent*), so the main Russellian objection is avoided. In other words, for Parsons, phrases such as “the golden mountain which has the extra-nuclear property of *being-existent*" are devoid of denotation – so no existent nonexistent can be derived by the Object Principle.

On the other hand, Parsons maintains the Meinongian concept of *watering-down* to have objects such as the existent King of France for which we can have intentional states directed to – even if such objects do not have the extra-nuclear property of existence. According to Parsons, “existence" is an ambiguous term that can denote either a nuclear or an extra-nuclear property. The nuclear version of existence is what he calls “watered-down existence", and it is a property that does not modify ontologically the objects that have it.

When it comes to the relation between extra-nuclear properties and their watered-down counterparts, Parsons (1980) says the following:

> We know at least this much about the relation between a property and its watered-down version: if p is a watered-down version of P, then (1) P is extranuclear, (2) p is nuclear, and (3) it’s hard to tell the difference between p and P. We can be more explicit about (3), by suggesting: (4) necessarily, any real object has p if and only if it has P (p. 44).

Besides that, Parsons also affirms that every extra-nuclear property has a watered-down counterpart. Suppose, for example, that I do not know much about geometry, someone tells

me that it is possible to draw a four-sided triangle and I start to believe in that. In other words, I acquired the belief that there is a possible four-sided triangle. Thus, the possible four-sided triangle is the object of my intentional state of belief. Is the possible four-sided triangle possible? The answer is: it depends on which versions of the property of *possibility* we are talking about. The possible four-sided triangle, according to Parsons's theory, would have the watered-down nuclear property of *being-possible* (for it was characterized this way), but it would lack the extra-nuclear property of *being-possible* – given that it is an extra-nuclearly impossible object.

Through the Object Principle, Parsons guarantees that not all objects are logically closed (there can be objects with properties of *being A* and *being B* but lacking the conjunctive property of *being A and B*, for example) nor complete. According to Parsons (1980) an object is said to be complete if "for any nuclear property, the object either has that property or it has its negation" (p.19).

Furthermore, Parson's assumed general domain of objects must also contain merely possible objects and even impossible objects. According to Parsons, all objects having the extra-nuclear property of existence are complete and logically closed, and an object is possible if, and only if, it is possible for an existent object to have all the properties it actually has.

Intuitive cases of incomplete objects are fictional objects: Sherlock Holmes, for example, has neither the property of *having an even number of hairs* nor the property of *not having an even number of hairs* (assuming that Conan Doyle never specified that in his stories). To know which properties fictional objects do have,[6] Parsons suggests the following principle, assuming "*F*" to be a name or description denoting a fictional object and *s* the relevant body of literature:

The *F* of *s* = the object *x* which is such that for any nuclear property *p*, *x* has *p* if, and only if, the *F* of *s* is such that in *s* it has *p*.[7]

Impossible objects, in turn, are objects such as the Round Square – given that no existent object could have both the properties of *being round* and *being square*. Additionally, if the Round Square is such that all of its nuclear properties either are *being round* or *being square*, then it is also an incomplete and logically disclosed object (it is not the case that, for any nuclear property, it has either that property or its negation; and it does not have the nuclear property of *being round and square* – the conjunctive property derived from *being round* and *being square*).

Another important aspect of Parson's theory is his conception of relational properties. First, Parsons establishes that existent objects can only bear extra-nuclear relations to nonexistent objects (intentional relations, for example, such as imagining or thinking about), but not nuclear relations (such as kicking or shaking hands). Additionally, for Parsons, even if for every existent

[6] I am restricting my talk of fictional objects to the so-called native fictional objects. I am ignoring the complications of immigrant fictional objects – that is, objects from the real world that appear in fictional stories (just like the object *London* in Conan Doyle Stories). For more on this subject, see the chapter *Sketch of a theory of fictional objects* in Parsons (1980) .

[7] See Parsons (1980), p.55.

object *x* and *y*, if *x* bears a certain nuclear relation to *y*, then *y* is such that *x* is related to it in this way (if *x* sees *y*, than *y* is seen by *x*, for example), the same does not hold for relations with nonexistent objects as one of the *relata*.[8] Parsons mentions, for example, that in a certain Conan Doyle'story Holmes talks to the British politician Gladstone. Even if it is true that Holmes talked to Gladstone, Parsons assumes that it is false that Gladstone talked to Holmes (according to the fact that existent objects cannot bear relations to nonexistent objects). On the other hand, for extra-nuclear properties that kind of symmetry always holds: if *x* bears an extra-nuclear relation to *y*, then *y* is such that *x* has that extra-nuclear relation to it (if Samuel L. Jackson thinks about Batman, then Batman is thought about by Samuel L. Jackson).

With a Leibnizian intuition, Parsons also stipulates that no two objects correspond to the same set of nuclear properties. Thus, if *x* and *y* have the same properties, then "x" and "y" are two names for the same object (call this principle the **Identity of Nuclear Indiscernibles**). With this principle in hand, it is easy for Parsons to handle the Quinean objection of the fat man in the doorway – just like Sylvan did, as we saw.

6.3 Solving the Paradox: the Nuclear Way

The Nuclear Meinongian solution to the paradox of negative existentials is a refined version of the traditional Meinongian solution. Let us recall the formulation of the paradox:

P1. To deny the existence of something, one refers to that thing;

P2. But if one refers to something, then that thing has to exist; Thus,

C1. To deny the existence of something, that thing has to exist.

As we can see, P1 is not a problem for the Nuclear Meinongian. In fact, denying the existence of an object *O* is only attributing the extra-nuclear property of *nonexistence* to it. P2, however, must be clearly rejected by the Nuclear Meinongian: quantification is not tied to ontology, as Quineans usually think, and we do refer to objects that have no way of being (fictional objects, impossible objects, and so on). By accepting P1 and rejecting P2, the paradox is dissolved.

But what kind of truthmakers could a Nuclear Meinongian furnish to explain the truth of negative existentials? My proposal is that the Nuclear Meinongians can rely on Armstrongian intuitions concerning positive truths, but modify Armstrong's approach to accommodate quantification over nonexistent objects.

[8] What makes it formally possible is the fact that Parsons treats binary relations as unary properties. Take the following example to make it clear: I can write a fictional story about a boy named John that kicked the round square. Accordingly, John would have the unary nuclear property of *having-kicked-the-round-square* that represents the binary nuclear relation between these two objects, even if the round square itself does not have the nuclear property *being-kicked-by-John*, given that it is an incomplete object that only has the nuclear properties of *being-round* and *being-square*. See Parsons (1980) chapter 3 and the axioms for plugging up nuclear and extranuclear relations in chapter 4.

If <the sky is blue> is made true by the state of affairs *the sky being blue* – the non-mereological composition of the particular *the sky* and the universal *being-blue* –, the intuitive and straightforward answer to the problem of truthmakers for negative existentials is simply that a proposition such as <Batman does not exist> is made true by the state of affairs *Batman being nonexistent*. This answer is not available for the traditional (and, therefore, Quinean) Armstrongian, because it assumes the possibility of quantifying over nonexistent objects. But that is not a problem for the Nuclear Meinongian.

The proposal is, thus, that, in a Nuclear Meinongian framework, a negative existential can be made true by the existent mereological composition of a nonexistent object plus the extra-nuclear *nonexistence* (an existent state of affairs[9] composed of a nonexistent object and a property).

An interesting advantage of the three[10] Meinongian approaches I will present (including this one) is that they do not need to rely on non-mereological composition to explain the truthmaking relation (even if they are all based on Armstrong's theory). All forms of neo-Meinongianism consider *existence* a property[11] and, therefore, not every state of affairs exists. There is an infinity of nonexistent states of affairs, each one corresponding to a mereological composition between properties and particulars. Thereby, the mere sum of a property and a certain particular *do* guarantee that there is a corresponding state of affairs, even if nonexistent (a consequence the traditional Armstrongian, under a Quinean metaontology, could not accept).

This proposal can also lead us to a Meinongian-inspired theory of truth (even if not relying on a distinction between modes of being): All true propositions[12] would correspond to existent states of affairs, and all false propositions would correspond to nonexistent states of affairs.

Let us look at an example. <The sky is red> is a false proposition because its correspondent state of affairs – *the sky being red* – is nonexistent. On the other hand, <the sky is blue> is true by virtue of the existent state of affairs *the sky being blue*. Thus, the existence of the state of affairs *the sky being blue* does not preclude there being the state of affairs *the sky being red* in the most general domain of quantification (as a nonexistent object), and that is precisely what makes it possible to explain why <The sky is red> is false, according to this approach. Thereby, <Batman does not exist> is a true proposition, given that the state of affairs *Batman being nonexistent* exists (the mereological sum of Batman – a nonexistent object – with the extra-nuclear property of *nonexistence*).

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[9] Some philosophers like Plantinga (1976) prefer talking about states of affairs that obtain (in contraposition to those states of affairs that do not obtain). This terminology, however, can be interpreted as an indication that states of affairs have a different way or mode of being from usual entities like chairs or cars. I do not think that a commitment to ontological pluralism is necessary for my proposal to work. Thus, I am assuming one sole way of being – existence – such that all objects that have being *exist* (including states of affairs).

[10] Or at least two, as we will see.

[11] In the case of Nuclear Meinongianism, it is an extra-nuclear property, as we saw.

[12] Here I understand a proposition as the information behind predictive sentences.

6.4 Objections to Nuclear Meinongiansim

The most pressing objection against Nuclear Meinongians is that the distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties is arbitrary or even *ad hoc* – whose sole purpose would be to avoid Russell's objection to Meinong's theory of objects. One way for the Nuclear Meinongian to evade this accusation is to turn the table: at least since Kant we are pretty aware of the fact that there is something wrong with the predicate "exists", and the unsoundness of the Ontological Argument for the existence of god is evidence of that. Given that we do use "existence" as a designator of properties in a variety of circumstances, the Nuclear Meinongian just take that at face value and make an intuitive cataloging of properties between those with ordinary behaviors and those that, just like the property of existence, seem to have a different metaphysical nature. Assuming our own intuitions for dividing properties between these two groups is something prior to Meinongianism, the Nuclear Meinongian distinction would not be an *ad hoc* move.

Priest (2005) also objects that Nuclear Meinongians cannot deal with situations in which extra-nuclear properties should have been part of an object's *Sosein*.[13] One could fear an object described, or represented, as "the existent evil demon", for instance, not fearing a merely fictional evil demon (or a demon represented as such). The Nuclear Meinongian answer I see for this objection is saying that someone who fears an object represented as the existent evil demon, actually fears an evil demon with a watered-down property of existence, even if she thought that the existence-property it had was extra-nuclear.

As I see, you can always be sure that objects have the properties with which they are characterized, but you can still be mistaken about the factuality (to use the Meinongian terminology) of those properties – that is, if they have full-strength factuality, or if they are watered-down. An interesting consequence of this view would be that our imagination has a certain limit: it would be impossible to think of objects with arbitrary extra-nuclear properties, because if you try to think of an actually nonexistent object as existent (ex: think of the existent Batman) or an impossible object as possible (ex: think of the possible round square), the target of your intentional act would be an object with the watered-down versions of the extra-nuclear properties you really aimed at.

Nevertheless, the concept of watered-down properties itself is open to criticism. What is the nature of these properties? What is it to be a watered-down existent? What is the difference between a round-square and a watered-down existent round square (merely saying that the latter has an additional property of watered-down existence is not illuminating at all). To avoid these problems, Nuclear Meinongians such as Jacquette (1996) simply reject the notion of watering-down. According to his perspective, inspired by Twardowsky, thoughts A and B about the existent round square and the nonexistent round square, respectively, have the same intentional object (the round square), even if they differ in content (due to a phenomenological

[13] See p. 84.

difference).

Jacquette appeals to a distinction between constitutive and nonconstitutive nuclear properties to explain when thoughts are about the same object. If John believes that Rio de Janeiro is in Brazil, and Mike believes that Rio the Janeiro is in Mexico, then both men think about the same object (Rio) due to the fact that they agree on the constitutive properties it has, and disagree over a specific nonconstitutive property (after all, if the location of Rio was constitutive, from their point of view, they would not be contradicting each other, but simply thinking about different objects – the Brazilian Rio and the Mexican Rio). In the same way, for Jacquette, thoughts about the existent round square and the nonexistent round square concern the very same object – for only *being-round* and *being-square* constitute the nature of this intentional object.

7 Dual-Copula Meinongianism

7.1 Mally Again

Dual-Copula Meinongianism is another neo-Meinononongian metaonontology inspired by Ernst Mally's ideas. Just like Meinong cites Mally when discussing formal and extra-formal properties, philosophers such as Edward Zalta are inspired by another Mallyian distinction: that of an object being determined (*determiniert sein*) by a property and of an object satisfying (*erfüllen*) a property – a distinction that can be understood as two different modes of predication (in opposition to the former Mallyian distinction between two kinds of properties).[1]

One of the first neo-Meinongians proposing two forms of predication was Castañeda (1974). Some years later, Rapaport (1978) suggested the distinction between *constituency* and *exemplification* to account for the difference between the way Meinongian and actual objects have properties. In what follows I will describe the main aspects of Zalta's theory of objects – probably the most influential version of what has been called Dual-Copula Meinongianism.

7.2 Edward Zalta

In his book *Intensional Logic and The Metaphysics of Intentionality*, Zalta (1988) develops a Meinongian theory and a formal system to deal with phenomena related to mental intentionality. The logic he presents is designed to deliver intuitive results when it comes to the failure of four logic principles in intentional contexts: *Existential* Generalization, Existential Generalization, Substitutivity, and Strong Extensionality.

In intentional contexts, according to Zalta, we cannot infer from "Sherlock Holmes inspires real detectives" that "something existent inspires real detectives" (*Existential* Generalization) – for we all know that Sherlock Holmes does not exist. Similarly, we cannot infer from "Ralph believes that the tallest spy is a spy" that "Something is such that Ralph believes it to be a spy" (Existential Generalization) – for Ralph may have no beliefs concerning who is or is not a spy.

Moreover, it is pretty plausible to assume that we cannot infer from "It is necessary that the teacher of Aristotle is a teacher" and "The teacher of Aristotle is Plato", that "It is necessary that Plato is a teacher" (Substitutivity) – for Plato certainly could have decided not to teach, and have started another job. Finally, Zalta also defends that we cannot infer from sentences such as "Necessarily, all square circles are four-sided triangles", that "being a square circle is the same thing as being a four-sided triangle." (Strong Extentionality) – for even if the properties of being a square circle and being a four-sided triangle have a null extension, they are not the same property and, therefore, the conclusion of the inference is false.

[1] See Hieke and Zecha (2018).

The use of an intensional logic to model intentional phenomena seems pretty adequate from the mathematical point of view, and a Meinongian-inspired theory of objects is needed if we want our intentional states to be taken at face value – if we want to preserve the intuition we have according to which we can have intentional states directed towards nonexistents. Zalta, in this book, aims precisely to furnish both things.

Directly inspired by Mally, at the core of Zalta's theory there is the distinction between exemplifying and encoding a property. This distinction, in the first instance, can be motivated by the fact that it captures the intuitive idea according to which even if it sounds right to say that Bruce Wayne is a rich man, Bruce Wayne is not rich *in the same way* that Jeff Bezos is rich (after all, Bruce Wayne is a fictional object and Bezos is a real human being). Zalta would say that Bruce Wayne *encodes* the property of being rich, but only Bezos *exemplifies* this property.

When it comes, for example, to the property of being a detective, Zalta (1988) says the following:

> Things that exemplify the property of being a detective exist, have a location in space and time, are made of flesh and bones, think, solve crimes, and so on, whereas things that just encode the property of being a detective are abstract and do not exemplify any of these characteristics. They might exemplify these properties according to their respective stories, but this is not the same as exemplifying them simpliciter. (p. 17)

Thereby, even if Sherlock Holmes is a detective, he is not a detective in the same way a real detective is – real detectives exemplify the property of being a detective, but Holmes only encodes it.

This distinction between exemplifying and encoding also makes it possible for Zalta to avoid Russellian objections against Meinongianism. First of all, no object violates logical laws in Zalta's theory of objects because, according to him, even impossible objects only encode contradictory properties, but no object – possible or impossible – exemplifies contradictions.

One important aspect of Zalta's theory that is already implicit in the aforementioned citation is the identification of nonexistent objects as abstract objects. Zalta assumes that to exist is to have a location in space-time, and objects are said to be ordinary if they could exist at some time. Abstract objects, on the other hand, are understood as objects that not only do not exist, but that also could not exist.

Zalta grounds his theory of objects on 7 basic principles:[2]

(1) *Ordinary individuals necessarily and always fail to encode properties.* [3]

In other words, real existent worldly objects such as me and you, the sun, or the Eiffel Tower cannot encode properties. Encoding is always a relation between properties and abstract

[2] I am presenting Zalta's principles in the same way he formulates them on p. 19.

[3] It is important to note that, in the formal version of these principles, the modal operators are S5 -operators, the tense operators are the operators of the system Kt, and the quantifiers (both over properties and individuals) have fixed domain.

objects and it is precisely to distinguish the way abstract and ordinary objects have properties that Zalta postulates these two modes of instantiation.

(2) *For every condition on properties, it is necessarily and always the case that there is an abstract individual that encodes just the properties satisfying the condition.*

The second principle is Zalta's comprehension principle for abstract objects. It is important to note, however, that not all formulas specifying conditions on properties are permissible – otherwise, contradictions would arise. The restriction that avoids contradictions is basically telling that all and only the formulas with no free variables for individuals determine abstract objects.

(3) *Two individuals are identical if and only if one of the following conditions holds: (a) they are both ordinary individuals and they necessarily and always exemplify the same properties, or (b) they are both abstract individuals and they necessarily and always encode the same properties.*

Principle 3 is a Leibnizian-inspired law of identity. Two objects are actually the same if, and only if, they *have* the same properties. Given that there are two ways in which an object can have a property (encoding and exemplification), the principle has a disjunctive form in Zalta's account.

(4) *If it is possibly or sometimes the case that an individual encodes a property, then that individual encodes that property necessarily and always.*

According to principle 4, all properties encoded by an abstract object are essential to it (it is precisely the having of these properties that makes the abstract object the object it is). Nevertheless, abstract objects can change the properties they exemplify from time to time and in different worlds. Yesterday, for example, I was thinking about the round square, but I was not thinking about it ten years ago. Consequently, yesterday the round square exemplified the property of being thought by me, something it did not use to exemplify in 2013. On the other hand, the round square always encoded and will forever encode *being round* and *being square*.

(5) *For every exemplification condition on individuals that does not involve quantification over relations, there is a property which is such that, necessarily and always, all and only the individuals satisfying the condition exemplify it.*

Principle 5 is a comprehension schema for properties, restricted to avoid contradictions. An object can only exemplify a certain property when it satisfies its exemplification condition.

(6) *Two properties are identical just in case it is necessarily and always the case that they are encoded by the same individuals.*

Principle 6 tells us when two properties are the same, and it rests on an extensional intuition. Two properties are the same when they have the same encoding extension (which is the set of objects that encode the properties). The reason why the identity of properties is given in terms of the encoding relation and not exemplification is that the exemplification extension of a property varies from one world to another, but the encoding relation is the same across all worlds.

(7) *If two individuals are identical (or two properties are identical), then anything true about the one is also true about the other.*

Due to principle 7, two terms referring to the same property or individual can be substituted *salva veritate* in the contexts of Zalta's proposed language.

It is important to note how these principles that ground Zalta's formal theory are the core of Zalta's metaphysics. His theory of objects is not something "beyond metaphysics", like it was for Meinong, because nonexistent objects, for Zalta, are abstract objects – they are somehow part of reality and not something outside of it.

7.3 Solving the Paradox: the Dual-Copula Way

Like the Nuclear Meinongian, the Dual-Copula Meinongian will not have problems solving the paradox of negative existentials. Given that, on the Dual Copula perspective, reference is independent of the ontic status of the object referred, we can certainly attribute nonexistence to an object. If the negative existential is true, says the Dual-Copula theorist, then the referred object exemplifies the property of nonexistence: again, the paradox is dissolved.

And what kind of truthmaker could ground the truth of a true negative existential in a Dual-Copula framework? Similar to the case of the Nuclear Meinongians, I propose that the true negative existential is made true by a state of affairs exemplifying *existence* composed of a nonexistent object and the property of nonexistence. The difference is that, in the Dual-Copula case, we must also specify the form of instantiation that relates the state of affair's object and its property: a true negative existential is made true by the existent mereological composition of an object *exemplifying* the property of nonexistence.

In the case of Nuclear Meinongianism, the notion of instantiation is metaphysically reduced to mereological composition between objects and properties (just like in the case of Parmenidean Armstrongianism). Things get a bit more complicated in the case of Dual-Copula Meinongianism because there are two kinds of instantiation in this theory's ideology. In other words, we will have to accept two forms of mereological composition between objects and properties (each one corresponding to exemplification and encoding, respectively).

The Dual-Copula theory of truth, then, would establish that for every true proposition, there corresponds a state of affairs exemplifying existence (the mereological composition of exemplification between a state of affairs and the property of *existence*). True propositions concerning existent objects are always made true by existent states of affairs exemplificationally composed of these objects and their properties. True propositions concerning nonexistent objects are made true by states of affairs exemplifying existence either exemplificationally composed of these objects and their properties or encodingly composed of these objects and their properties (depending on whether we are talking about characterizing or intentional/ontic properties).

Let us look at some other examples. <The sky is blue> is true (if the instantiation of *being-blue* by the sky is a case of exemplification) because the state of affairs *the sky being blue* exemplifies *existence*. If I stipulate, in the context of a fictional story created by myself, that the Round Square is red, then <The Round Square is red> exemplifies existence if I am using the

verb “to be" to express the encoding relation between the Round Square (an abstract object) and the property of *being-red*. Thus, if someone says (assuming he is talking about the plot of my story) that the Round Square is purple then, assuming “to be" expresses the encoding relation, this person will be saying something false – because *the Round Square being purple* does not exemplify *existence*.

When it comes to negative existentials, the reasoning is similar. <Batman does not exist> is true, if this proposition expresses that Batman exemplifies nonexistence, precisely because *Batman being nonexistent* is a state of affairs exemplifying existence and whose components are the Batman and the property of *being-nonexistent*, such that this mereological composition is of an exemplifying kind.

7.4 Objections to Dual-Copula Meinongianism

The main issue with Dual-Copula Meinongianism, as Berto (2012) says, “is the double copula itself" (p.134). Just like Nuclear Meinongians struggle to convince other philosophers that their distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties is not *ad hoc*, Dual-Copula Meinongians must do the same with regard to the encoding/exemplifying distinction. Their defense, again, must be an appeal to the commonsense: when we say that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, we may add that he is not a detective *in the same way* Dave Toschi was a detective (after all, Dave Toschi was a real person and Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character). The Dual-Copula distinction, then, only translates this intuition into two forms of predication. Moreover, Bueno and Zalta (2017) reply to those that accuse Dual-Copula Meinongianism of *ad hocness*: “If a distinction offers a unified approach to a vast range of phenomena, how can it be ad hoc?"

However, if we take seriously this last analogy with Sherlock Holmes, we could also say that Holmes is not literally a detective (given that he does not exist), and the nature of the encoding relation becomes suddenly obscure: if encoding is not literally having a property, then what is it?

Besides that, a pressing problem against Dual-Copula Meinongianism is due to the identification between nonexistents and *abstracta*. Should we really say that the number 2 is ontologically in the same category as a golden mountain, Vulcan, or the Round Square? Should we say that Ponce the Leon, who searches for the fountain of youth, unconsciously searches for an abstract object?[4] Simply stating this identity may sound unconvincing for most philosophers.[5]

There is also the fact that, presumably, the language of Dual-Copula Meinongianism can be translated to the language of Nuclear Meinongianism[6]: nuclear properties are properties abstract objects can only encode; extra-nuclear properties are those properties *abstracta* can also exemplify. Thus, objections against one form of Meinongianism can also affect the other form. In particular, there is the problem of descriptions lacking denotation – something that could

[4] See Berto (2012).
[5] See Bueno and Zalta (2017) for a reply.
[6] See Fine (1984).

weaken one of the motivations to accept a Meinongian metaontology: "the object x such that x exemplifies goldenness, mountainhood, and existence"[7], assuming there is no existent golden mountain, would lack denotation.

One way I propose to avoid this last objection is treating the properties ascribed to the object in this example as *explifying-goldeness*, *exemplifying-mountainhood*, and *exemplifying-existence*. Therefore, we could say that there is an abstract object encoding precisely these three properties, but that does not exemplify any of them. Once again, we would have to admit the impossibility of thinking certain thoughts: when we try to think of a nonexistent exemplifying existence, we are actually thinking of a nonexistent encoding the property of *exemplifying-existence*.

Finally, a serious objection can be raised to my proposal of Dual-Copula truthmaking for negative existentials. Given that Dual-Copula Meinongians accept two forms of instantiation, the truthmaking proposal had to accept two forms of mereological composition. The problem is that, with two forms of mereological composition in hand, it is not clear that Dual-Copula Meinongians have an advantage over Armstrongians who assume non-mereological composition. Actually, with two forms of instantiation, it is not even clear if we really have two forms of mereological composition or two forms of non-mereological composition, something even worse than what Armstrongians were willing to accept!

[7] See Berto (2012).

8 Modal Meinongianism

Modal Meinongianism is a more recent approach to the Meinongian metaontology, initially developed by Graham Priest and subsequently endorsed by Franz Berto.

8.1 Graham Priest

Priest's approach to Meinongianism is largely inspired by Sylvan's noneist theory of items. Just like Sylvan, Priest also rejected the notion of subsistence and defended that only concrete objects exist and all other objects are nonexistent, including *abstracta* and merely possible and impossible objects.

Nevertheless, Priest considered that Sylvan never really solved what he called the "characterization problem", and one of the main goals of his book *Towards Non-Being* (2005) is precisely to solve it. The characterization problem is the problem of finding the contexts in which the characterization principle holds in full generality. In other words, differently from Nuclear and Dual-Copula Meinongians, Priest's aim is not to seek the best restriction to the comprehension principle, but to find the contexts in which it could hold without restriction.

The intuition behind Priest's solution is that the characterization principle can hold irrestrictly if we consider that its instances hold in other possible and impossible worlds (not in the actual world, as Meinong himself would defend). This intuition is what gives name to Priest's approach: *Modal* Meinongianism (even if he used to call himself a noneist, just like Sylvan).

For Priest, a nonexistent object can be identified, even if not defined, as an object that lacks causal powers. Batman, for instance, is an object – since we can think of him, ascribe properties to him, and even say true and false things about him – and still, we (real human beings) definitely cannot causally interact with him, being appropriate to consider Batman nonexistent.

Nevertheless, Batman does exist in other possible worlds, and in these worlds, he is not only able to kick his enemies but is also subject to being kicked. The acceptance of these intuitions made Priest adopt a modal framework with a constant domain of objects for all possible and impossible worlds. Thereby, in some worlds, Batman has the monadic first-order property of existence and, in others, he is just a nonexistent object with no causal powers.

Rejecting the notion of subsistence, Priest explains the intuitive difference between abstract objects and concrete objects by saying that abstract objects are such that if they did exist, they would not be able to enter into causal relations. A consequence of this thesis is that abstract objects are not only nonexistent but also necessarily nonexistent. The number 2, being a paradigmatic case of abstract object, not only does not exist (given that we cannot causally interact with it), but it also *could* not exist (and the worlds in which it exists are, therefore, impossible worlds). In other words, for Priest, the counter-possible "if the number 2 existed it

would enter causal relations" is false, because in the relevant worlds that satisfy the antecedent of the counter-possible, numbers are plausibly platonic objects that lack causal powers.

One of the most important aspects of Priest's Modal Meinongianism is the rejection of Meinongs's Independence of *Sein* from *Sosein* Thesis.[1] According to Priest, not every object has its constitutive properties independently of its ontic status, because many properties are said to be existence entailing. Take for example properties such as *being-fat* or *being-red*. If someone is said to be fat or something is said to be red, we intuitively infer that both the person and the object exist. After all, how could someone be fat if she does not exist? How could an object be red if it is nonexistent? This plausible inference, however, would be illegitimate if Meinong was right about the validity of the aforementioned thesis, and Priest wants to avoid this consequence.

Despite that, not every property is existence entailing, so even objects that do not actually exist can be correctly said to have certain properties in the actual world. Take, for example, the Golden Mountain (the object that has, amongst others, the properties of being a mountain and being golden). In the actual world, this object has properties such as *being-nonexistent* and *being-possible* –, but does not have the property of being a mountain (because if it was a Mountain, we would be legitimately able to infer that it exists, when it does not).

But if the Golden Mountain is neither Golden nor Mountainous, what makes it the Golden Mountain? Does defending such a position not weaken the core motivations of Meinongianism? Priest's answers to these questions are the key aspects of Modal Meinongianism.

For Priest (2005), "the object characterized by a representation has the characterizing properties, not necessarily in the actual world, but in the worlds (partially) described by the relevant representation" (p. 84). In other words, nonexistent objects such as the Golden Mountain do not have the properties that characterize it in the actual world, but in the worlds that realize the way we represent them. Thereby, the Golden Mountain is golden and mountainous in the worlds in which it exists and realizes how we represent it to be (golden and mountainous). In the same way, Batman, in the actual world, is not a superhero dressed like a bat, precisely because he does not exist. But in the worlds that realize the way we represent Batman to be, he is not only pretty much existent but is also a bat-dressed superhero living in Gotham.

Impossible worlds are also important for Priest's model because not all of our mental representations are logically consistent. Take the example of the Round Square. We can think of it even if it is an impossible object. But no possible world can be such that realizes our representation of the Round Square precisely because it is impossible. Thereby, the worlds in which the Round Square is round and square (those that fit our representation of it) are logically impossible worlds.

Both merely possible and impossible worlds are taken by Priest to be nonexistent objects too. Most worlds, however, are not abstract objects. The worlds that realize Batman stories, for instance, must be concrete for Batman to interact with them. Odd worlds, however,

[1] See section 1.1 from this dissertation.

such as the world in which nothing exists, may plausibly be considered abstract.

When it comes to the identity of objects in such a modal account, Priest says that any two objects A and B are the same if, and only if, they have the same properties in all closed worlds. Thus, take Sherlock Holmes, for example. In all closed worlds realizing the descriptions of Conan Doyle's stories, Holmes is a detective. Can we say that Holmes is Dracula (that they are the same object)? No, because we can find closed worlds in which Holmes is a detective and Dracula is not. But can we say that Batman, as represented in Miller's *Dark Knight* comic book, is Bruce Wayne? Yes, we can. That is because in all closed worlds realizing Miller's story, every property Batman has is also a property of Bruce Wayne.

It is important to note that Batman, even according to Miller's story, can have different properties in different closed worlds. In some closed worlds, for example, Batman is right-handed and in others, he is left-handed – because Miller did not determine which of these properties Batman has. In spite of that, in every world realizing Miller's story in which Batman is left-handed, Bruce Wayne is also left-handed, and in every world in which Batman is right-handed, so does Bruce Wayne.

Also remarkable is the fact that, according to Priest, there is no problem of trans-world identity afflicting his theory because the domain of objects does not vary across worlds. We do not have to care about figuring out what makes an object the counterpart of another object in a different world (something that followers of David Lewis must do), because the domain of objects in every world is the same, and so the nonexistent Batman of the actual world is literally the same object as the existent Batman of the worlds realizing Miller's story (they just have different properties).

8.2 Solving the Paradox: the Modal Way

Similarly to the other Meinongian approaches, the Modal Meinongian solves the paradox of negative existentials by assuming that it is possible to refer to nonexistents (quantification, again, is not tied to ontology). In the actual world, "Batman" refers to an object that has the property of *being-nonexistent*. Thereby, <Batman does not exist> is true in the actual world, even if false in the worlds that realize Batman's story (worlds in which Batman not only exists but is a superhero dressed as a bat).

I suggest that the truthmaker for a negative existential such as "Batman does not exist" within a Modal Meinongian framework could be the actually existent state of affairs mereologically composed of the object Batman and the non-existence-entailing property of *being-nonexistent*.[2] The correspondent modal theory of truth would resemble the following: a certain proposition is true in a world if, and only if, there corresponds to it an existent state

[2] Graham Priest seems to support a kind of truthmaking theory, not explicitly Meinongian, known as *polarity theory*. Assuming the correspondence theory of truth, Priest suggests that truthmakers are facts with polarities, such that these polarities determine if these are positive or negative facts. I will not discuss this theory in this dissertation. For more details, see Priest (2000).

of affairs. Given that the domain of objects is constant among all worlds, all states of affairs (existent and nonexistent ones) are already actual, and the same state of affairs can be existent or nonexistent in different worlds, making the same proposition vary its truth value across the modal space.

One example will make it clear: <Batman does not exist> is actually true because Batman has the property of *being-nonexistent* in the actual world (W1) and, therefore, *Batman being nonexistent* is an actually existent state of affairs acting as a truthmaker for the aforementioned proposition in W1. In the world W2 realizing Miller's *Dark Knight* story, Batman is an existent object (a bat-dressed superhero living in Gotham), and therefore *Batman being existent* is an existent state of affairs there, which works as a truthmaker for <Batman does exists> in W2.

It is important to note that, in the actual world there is the state of affairs *Batman being existent*, but it is a nonexistent object. The same holds for *Batman being nonexistent* in W2, where it is nonexistent. As it was explained before, the domain of objects (including states of affairs) is constant among all worlds. What varies among worlds is which objects are existent there or not.

8.3 Objections to Modal Meinongianism

My first objection against Modal Meinongians concerns their ontology of possible and impossible worlds. Priest considers worlds nonexistent objects, most of which are concrete nonexistents. The problems are: (1) *being-concrete* seems to be an existence-entailing property just as *being-a-mountain*, and (2) even if it is not existence-entailing, how could a world be concrete if for something to be concrete is for it to be concrete in the worlds that realize its description? That is, calling a world concrete seems either a category mistake or assumes the odd idea that concrete worlds exist in second-order worlds realizing their descriptions.[3]

Besides that, a famous objection against Modal Meinongianism is the so-called Selection Problem, in its linguistic and phenomenological aspects.[4] How can someone name or refer to nonexistent objects if we cannot causally interact with them? How is it possible to mentally single out an individual nonexistent (say Sherlock Holmes) when there is an infinity of other nonexistents 'out there' that could have been described with the same name and descriptions (all the objects named Sherlock Holmes with the same properties described by Doyle but that are not *Sherlock Holmes*)? It seems that one has to appeal to a somewhat mysterious intentional pointing that few philosophers would be willing to accept.

One way to deal with the Selection Problem is by modifying the initial Modal Meinongian proposal to allow the possibility of creating nonexistents.[5] In other words, we could accept that certain nonexistents are somehow brought to the general domain of quantification

[3] One could reject Priest's noneism about worlds, and accept Lewisian concretism or some form of abstractionist actualism. Nevertheless, these alternative ontologies for possible worlds have received lots of objections in the context of the metaphysics of modality. See Melia (2003).

[4] See Berto (2012), chapter 9.

[5] See Berto (2012), chapter 9.

through human cognitive efforts. This proposal would take at face value common assumptions such as “Doyle created Sherlock Holmes" because, by this true proposition, we would be expressing that Holmes entered the general domain of quantification and gained its properties through the creative efforts of Doyle (even if he does not exist in the actual world). If this form of creationism is true, then the Selection Problem does not arise: an author, for example, does not have to single out a previous nonexistent – he creates a new nonexistent, baptizes it, and gives it new properties. The obvious problem is: if we previously thought that the *singling out intentional pointing* was something mysterious, we will find even more unclear how the process of creating nonexistents works and what it amounts to. Besides that, for many the idea of creating nonexistents itself may sound like an absurd wordplay: to create something is simply to bring it to existence, and denying that is simply changing the meaning of the verb “to create".

A further problem of creationist Modal Meinongianism is that it would plausibly have to accept the variability of each world’s domain of quantification over time and, therefore, the problem of trans-world identity would rise again. In which worlds do Holmes exist after its creation? How do we know which objects in each worlds are Holmes? By trying to solve the difficult problem of Selection, a creationist Modal Meinongian falls into an even deeper hole of epistemic, cognitive, and metaphysical puzzles.

Part IV: The Arguments and The Verdict

9 Meinongianism: Pros and Cons

In this last chapter, we are going to summarize the benefits and disadvantages of assuming either a Meinongian or a Quinean metaontology, and then we will analyze if we really have good reasons to choose one solution to the Paradox of Negative Existentials to the detriment of the others.

9.1 Meinongian Metaontology

First: What is it for a metaontology to be Meinongian? The term “Meinongian" says very little about one’s view of how ontology should be done and what should be written down in the catalog of the world’s furniture. Ultimately, a Meinongian is simply a person who accepts the possibility of quantification over nonexistents – that certain objects do not have the property of existing (and thus, that existence is a property). Notwithstanding, this view does not entail any thesis determining which objects *do* exist (or instantiate the *existence* property), and therefore, if by the term “Metaontology" we mean the study of which methods are more appropriate for doing ontology, establishing the core principles of what there is, then it is not even clear if term “metaontology" should be really applied to Meinongianism. Despite that, let us take the Meinongianism as a metaontology and observe which benefits we have by accepting it.

9.1.1 Pros

1) **Some things do not exist**

Quine said that everything exists. All the laymen would instantly disagree: of course, some things do not exist – Batman and Vulcan are two great examples of that. If you do not want to take this widespread intuition at face value, you will have to be revisionist regarding the referential behavior of proper names.

If intuition is a theoretical virtue, and revisionism a theoretical vice, here is a pro of Meinongianism.

2) **Truth in Fiction**

We ascribe properties to Batman even though we agree on the fact that he does not exist. These are some of Batman’s properties: *being-a-fictional-character*, *being-nonexistent*, *dressing-like-a-Bat*, *living-in-Gotham-city*.

All forms of Meinongianism can deal with intra-fictional and extra-fictional discourse straightforwardly, keeping the possibility of ascribing properties to nonexistents and maintaining our intuitions regarding truth in fiction.

Quineans and Russellians on the other hand must either deny that Batman and Brás Cubas do not exist (the Realist Abstractionist strategy) or reject that there are no literal truths

concerning the fictional characters (the Fictionalist strategy). Either way, many intuitions on fictional discourse a Meinongian can keep, the non-Meinongian must sacrifice.[1]

3) **Mental Intentionality**

Many children *fear* the boogeyman; some geeks spend time *thinking* "who is stronger: Superman or Goku?"; a boy may *wish* to earn a square-ball (even though he does not know that square-balls do not exist).

In all these examples we have cases of mental intentionality apparently directed towards nonexistents. How else could someone explain what is going on in the examples making no reference to nonexistents? It is not reasonable, for instance, to say that the boy from the third example wishes to earn a mental representation, a proposition or anything that is not, itself, a square-ball. But clearly, there are no real square-balls!

Thereby, the Meinongian metaontology has probably the best metaphysical apparatus for understanding intentional phenomena.

4) **Semantic Evidences**

If natural language can be used as a guide to metaphysics, so that contemporary developments in linguistic semantics offer evidence of certain metaontological views over others, then plausibly Meinongianism has some interesting advantages when compared to the Quinean doctrines.

In the first place, according to Moltmann (2010), natural language semantics do take "exists" as a first-order predicate – contra Frege –, given that it does not require predicative terms to be used (as second-order predicates do), but only some expression in the subject position working as a singular term.

Besides that, quantification (*there*-sentences[2]) differ in function from existence predicates in natural language. Although one can quantify over anything, in natural language, "*exist* is restricted to enduring objects (basically material objects)"[3] – an evidence against Realist Abstractionism. Negative existentials, in turn, apparently "give support for the Meinongian view", because we can find constructions in natural language such as "Some people John mentioned do not exist" in which we have intentional objects as semantic values, even though Moltaman's studies show that we take sentences predicating existence of merely imaginary or possible intentional objects to be false.

9.2 Neo-meinongian Truthmaking

Neo-meinongians rarely discuss truthmaking. Thus, there are no standard Neo-meinongian positions regarding the problem of truthmakers for negative existentials. Nevertheless, I assume that the default position concerning this truthmaking problem is actually denying

[1] For the distinction between Realist Abstractionism and Fictionalism, see Berto and Plebani (2015).
[2] See Moltmann (2013).
[3] Moltmann (2010), p. 34.

Truthmaking Maximalism and, therefore, accepting that certain truths have no truthmakers – in particular, true negative existentials.

Supporters of this view may lay on Asay's ontology-first truthmaking perspective, according to which "negative existentials impose negative constraints on our ontology"[4], but commit us ontologically with no particular entities. The role of truthmaking theory would be simply to guide ontology so that we ontologically commit ourselves to everything required by the body of truths we believe in. Thus, the fact that Santa Claus does not exist commits us to no particular entity, and consequently "Santa Claus does not exist" has no truthmakers.

I do not think that the ontology-first position works for those endorsing a neo-Meinongian metaontology. If you are a Meinongian, then you already accept somehow an infinity of objects in the overall domain of quantification – hence, you cannot use truthmaking theory to help you answer what there is when you already accept that *everything is there*! In other words, if you are Meinongian, you are committed to all possible and impossible entities, even if you do not know, pre-theoretically, which ones of those instantiate the property of existence. Truthmaking theory, however, will not help you with that.

Thus, in this dissertation, I suggested a solution all three forms of neo-Meinongianism (with appropriate adjustments) can accept to answer the truthmaking problem of negative existentials. As I already explained, I propose that all true negative existentials are true in virtue of an existent state of affairs mereologically composed of a nonexistent object plus the property of non-existing.

Let us now look at some interesting features or consequences of this proposal. First, for it to work, we shall accept a radical form of mereological universalism. Universalists in terms of mereology are those who accept unrestricted composition: "For any things whatsoever, there is an object composed of these things".[5] Usually "any things" ranges over existent objects, and the expression "there is" is taken as ontologically committing. In our case, we have to accept a larger domain of objects and refuse the identification of quantification and existence-assignment. In other words, we have to accept **Radical Unrestricted Composition**: for any object, existent or not, there is an object (existent or not) composed of these things.

The sum of any two existent[6] particulars leads to an existent particular (the sum of Christ The Redeemer with The Colosseum, leads to another existent particular) –, and that is something usual Universalists already accept. If you sum a nonexistent particular with any other particular, you end up with a nonexistent particular (the sum of Batman plus Lady Gaga is a nonexistent particular). The sum of an existent or nonexistent particular with a property leads to a state of affairs. Some states of affairs exist, others do not (you may also say that some states of affairs obtain and others do not, but I am assuming particulars and states of affairs have the same mode of being, even if we express that with different terms).

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4 See Asay (2018), p. 16.

5 See Wallace (2023), p.2.

6 In the case of Dual-Copula Meinongianism, we are considering objects exemplifying *existence* and then objects exemplifying *nonexistence* (being abstract).

There is no principle telling us which states of affairs exist – we have to discover it empirically (and sometimes *a priori*). You may know that *The Eiffel Tower being in France* obtains because you visited Paris; you know *Sherlock Holmes non-existing* obtains because someone told you that Doyle's books on Holmes's adventures are fictional; you know *Obama having four arms* does not obtain (does not exist) because you saw him on TV many times and verified he has only two arms; and I know *a priori* that *Mr. Schnukles having two thousand eyes* obtains because he is a fictional character I have just invented.

As I mentioned before, with all these mereological fusions in the widest domain of quantification, you do not have to appeal to non-mereological sums in order to explain truthmaking, as Armstrong does. Non-mereological sums are appealed to because you cannot always find, in the Quinean metaontological framework, the corresponding state of affairs for every possible mereological sum – there is no *Eiffel Tower being made of chocolate* corresponding to the sum of the Eiffel Tower plus the property of *being-made-of-chocolate*. But such a problem does not afflict Neo-Meinongians. All nonexistent states of affairs are part of the most general domain of quantification and, therefore, for every sum of objects plus properties, there will be a state of affairs (existent or not). A true proposition is true in virtue of the corresponding existent state of affairs, and a false proposition is false due to the fact that its corresponding state of affairs is nonexistent.

There is, however, an advantage in assuming either Nuclear or Modal Meinongian truthmaking to the detriment of Dual-Copula Meinongian truthmaking (if we assume my proposals). That is because, as we saw, Dual-Copula Meinongians would have to accept a distinction between two forms of mereological composition between particulars and properties (something even worse, ideologically, when compared to Armstrong's truthmaking proposal). On the other hand, Modal and Nuclear Meinongians have a simpler ideology (and possibly a simpler ontology) given that they can stake with the regular notion of mereological composition and accept no form of non-mereological composition.

Nevertheless, even if my general proposal of Meinongian truthmaking, mainly in its Nuclear and Modal forms, is (to a certain extent) intuitive and straightforward, its worst drawback – according to the Quinean perspective – is precisely the fact that it is Meinongian. After all, for those who dogmatically reject the possibility of quantifying over nonexistent objects, no possible Meinongian theory can be acceptable, independently of its results or theoretical advantages.

9.3 Quineanism (or cons for Meinononongians)

For a metaontology to be Quinean, it has to accept a certain methodology: we shall be ontologically committed to all and only those entities we can find in the domain of quantification of our best sciences formalized in first-order classical logic. On principle there are no nonexistent objects: if we are really able to make reference to certain object B, then B has to exist. In other words, for Quineans all objects are entities (exist). Let us look at the benefits of being

metaontologically Quinean:

1) **Everything exists**

What is there? Everything! How could something be there if it does not exist? Saying that everything exists is another way of expressing something pretty intuitive concerning linguistic reference: we can only refer to things that exist. That does not mean that every name must correspond to something existent – “Batman", for example, would have no referent in the world. Our intuition that not everything exists is explained precisely this way: “things that do not exist" are actually names without reference.

2) **Truth in fiction**

If Batman is literally a superhero, then Batman exists as an abstract object (that is the Abstractionist strategy). If Batman does not exist, then we can say it is not literally true that he is a superhero – we just pretend that for the sake of art (that is a Fictionalist strategy). Either way, a Quinean can maintain an intuition the Meinongians must sacrifice: nonexistent things cannot have properties! If Hulk is not an existent abstract object, and it is literally true that Hulk is extremely strong, then he would surely be able to beat me in an arm wrestling competition. However, he cannot beat me, and not because I am that strong, but precisely because he does not exist.

A Modal Meinongian can try to deal with that problem by appealing to other possible and impossible worlds (*ficta* have their existence-entailing properties there). But just as Quineans do not want to accept nonexistents, it is pretty reasonable for them to reject other worlds (even more if other worlds are nonexistents, as Priest suggests).

3) **Objects as entities**

To be an entity is to exist. If “object" is used as an ontologically neutral term, then for Quineans all objects are entities.

The Meinongian says some objects do not exist. But then the problem is, what is for something to be an object? A Meinongian may say that for something to be an object is for this thing to be target of reference or holder of properties. But then what is for something to be *something*? And what is it for something to be a *thing*? It seems inescapable to use ontologically charged terms. One of the most powerful objections one may raise against a Meinongian is simply to say that the claim according to which one may have things that *are* not is incomprehensible and ultimately does not make sense. If nonexistents are not, how could they be *things*, *objects* or *somethings*?

10 The Verdict

Before finishing this dissertation, I would like to share my own brief thoughts on the Paradox of Negative Existentials: who do I think has the best answer to it? Should we embrace the traditional Quineanism or stand with the neo-Meinongian rebels? Do we have good reasons to favor one of those metaontologies to the detriment of the other?

The sad news for those who expected a vigorous defense of one of the discussed positions is that I actually think choosing one side on this debate is, to a large extent, an arbitrary decision – a matter of deciding which ultimate pre-philosophical principle you are willing to accept.

I think the only situation in which we can non-arbitrarily choose between rival philosophical positions is when we accept the same principles and we just have to ponder who has the best arguments. The problem is: the debate between Quineanism and Meinongianism is fully motivated by non-empirically verifiable intuitions. Let us look at some examples.

The Meinongian says: “We have the advantage of respecting the pre-philosophical intuition according to which there are fictional objects such as Batman, and they have properties (such as *being-fictional*) besides nonexisting". The Quinean abstractionist can then answer: “Well, I do not even think it is intuitively true that Batman does not exist: actually, it is precisely because he has properties that we know he exists!". Furthermore, the Quinean will claim that there is another intuition he can safeguard: the intuition according to which for something to have a property it should exist. Now which intuition is stronger? Which one should we abandon? Neither the Meinongian nor the Quinean will be willing to give up their own positions: the debate is over due to stubbornness.

The Meinongian says they have the best theory explaining mental intentionality. The Quinean then answers “it is worth nothing a good theory when it is rotten to the core": for the Meinongian has to accept the absurd thesis according to which some objects are not entities. The point is: how absurd should sound a certain principle for us to be justified in rejecting any theory based on it? Is this Meinongian principle that absurd? The Meinongian says “no", and the Quinean says “yes". Who is right? How to choose? I do not think there is an objective and non-arbitrary procedure to accomplish this task.

If the paradox had an easy way out, it would not be a paradox. This one, the Paradox of Negative Existentials, has been haunting Western philosophers at least since Plato. Just like some ancient Greek philosopher discussing with Socrates, my ultimate achievement in seeking an answer to this Paradox is my falling in *aporia*.

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