

## Meinong, “Theory of Objects”

### 1. The Problem

“[N]o one fails to recognize that psychological events so very commonly have this distinctive ‘character of being directed to something’ as to suggest very strongly (at least) that we should take it to be a characteristic aspect of the psychological” (p. 77).

What follows: When Ponce de Leon sought the fountain of youth, there was “something” that his psychological state was directed toward. But the fountain of youth *isn’t anything*.

### 2. The Prejudice in Favor of the Actual

“knowledge is, so to speak, a double fact in which what is known confronts the fact of knowing as something relatively independent” (p. 78)

A Universal Science? “the problem about the science of Objects which was raised above is initially placed in a rather unfavorable light. A science of the Objects of cognition: . . . are we not asking for a science which either is made up of the sum-total of the sciences taken together, or which would have to accomplish all over again what the recognized sciences jointly accomplish anyway?” (ibid.)

“metaphysics has been thought to be exactly such a science. No matter how many disappointments have been associated with this name, and are associated with it, the responsibility for them lies with our intellectual capacities, and not with the idea of such a science” (p. 79).

“metaphysics [may not be] universal enough for a science of Objects. . . For. . . metaphysics has to do with everything that exists. However, the totality of what exists. . . is infinitely small in comparison with the totality of the Objects of knowledge” (p. 79)

“our nature tends to favor that exaggeration. . . which finds the non-real to be something for which science has no application at all or at least no application of any worth. // How little truth there is in such a view is most easily shown by ideal Objects which do indeed subsist, but which do not by any means exist” (ibid.) Examples: Similarity and difference, numbers.

*Objective*: The object of a judgment (what we today call a proposition). All objectives are abstract objects, hence, they do not exist although they all “subsist.”

The Ontology of Mathematics: “We would surely not want to speak of mathematics as alien to reality, as though it had nothing to do with what exists. . . However, pure mathematical knowledge is never concerned with anything which must. . . be actual. . . In this respect, mathematics never transcends subsistence” (p. 80)

“Even though the mathematician may use the term ‘existence’, he cannot but concede that what we would otherwise call “possibility” is. . . all that he requires of the objects of his theoretical consideration” (p. 81).

### 3. Sosein and Nichtsein

“our account...may seem to leave room for the conjecture that wherever existence is absent, it...*must* be replaced by subsistence. But even this restriction is inadmissible, as may be seen by contrasting the characteristic functions of judging and assuming...In the former case, the act of thought grasps a *Sein*, in the latter a ‘*Sosein*.’” (ibid.)

The Independence of Sein and Sosein: “the figures with which geometry is concerned do not exist. Nevertheless, their properties, and hence their *Sosein*, can be established...the *Sosein* of an Object is not affected by its *Nichtsein*” (p. 82).

“the principle applies, not only to Objects which do not exist in fact, but also to Objects which could not exist because they are impossible. Not only is the much heralded gold mountain made of gold, but the round square is as surely round as it is square” (ibid.)

Negative Existential Judgments: “Any particular thing that isn’t real must at least be capable of serving as the Object for those judgments which grasp its *Nichtsein*...In order to know that there is no round square, I must make a judgment about the round square...*Those who like paradoxical modes of expression could very well say: ‘There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects’*” (p. 83, italics mine)

### 4. The Aussersein of the Pure Object

Nonexistents and the Mind “it is no more necessary to an Object that it be presented in order not to exist than it is in order for it to exist.” (ibid.)

Yet: “if I should be able to judge that a certain Object is not, then I appear to have had to grasp the Object in some way beforehand,...to say anything about its non-being” (p. 84).

An Argument for the Preceding: “Now an Objective, whether it is a *Seinsobjektiv* or *Nichtseinsobjektiv*, stands in relation to its Object...as the whole to its parts. But if the whole has being, so must its parts...even when the Objective is an objective of non-being. Furthermore, since the Objective strictly prevents us from assuming that A has being, (being, as we have seen, can sometimes be understood as existence, sometimes as subsistence), it appears that the requirement that the Object have being...makes sense...only insofar as a third order of being...is adjoined to existence and subsistence. This sort of being must belong, therefore, to every Object as such...‘*Quasisein*’ seemed to me for a while to be a...suitable expression for this rather oddly constituted type of being.” (ibid.)

#### Meinong’s Objections to the Argument:

- (1) Doubts about Universal Predication: “Can being which is in principle unopposed by non-being be called being at all?” (p. 85)
- (2) The Argument commits the Division Fallacy: “instead of deriving the being of an Object from the being of an Objective...it would be better to conclude...that the being of the Objective is not by any means universally dependent upon the being of its Object.” (ibid.)

(Ted asks: Is the Division Fallacy really a *fallacy* when it comes to “being”?)

The Moral: “the Object...stands ‘beyond being and non-being’...[or] is by nature indifferent to being, although at least one of its two Objectives of being, the Object’s being or non-being, subsists” (p. 86).

A Supplement to the Moral

“[The] principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein* now presents a welcome supplement...It tells us that that which...constitutes its proper essence, subsists in its *Sosein*—the *Sosein* attaching to the Object whether the object has being or not” (ibid).

**Sections 5-11: The Theory of Objects’ Place among the Sciences:** (Skippable)

As Psychology: “psychology can take interest only in those Objects which are actually presented, whose presentations thus exist, and which, accordingly, themselves exist at least “in our presentation of them, or...have pseudo-existence” (p. 89)

As The Theory of Objects of Knowledge: “All that is knowable is given...to cognition. To this extent, all objects are knowable” (p. 92).

As “Pure Logic”: “it is only with great difficulty that the notion of logic can be separated from that of a technology devoted to the advancement of our intellectual powers. Consequently, logic always remains a ‘practical discipline.’...When logic is thus called ‘pure logic’, I would prefer to say that the result is not logic at all” (p. 93).

As Epistemology: “The psychology of cognition [of Objects] must always constitute an integral part of the theory of knowledge. The only thing against which he [sic] must guard himself is taking for psychology that part of the theory of knowledge which is and must remain the theory of Objects.” (p. 97)

As a Separate Science: “Is it necessary for our interest in the theory of Objects to procede, as it were, by way of our interest in cognition?...this is not the case...the theory of Objects raises problems whose solutions are interesting for their own sakes” (p. 98).

And Other Sciences: “although the theory of Objects may not have been pursued ‘explicitly’ heretofore, it has all the more frequently been pursued ‘implicitly’” (p. 100). For example “the theory of Objects has found in mathematics the most splendid representation that could be desired...[but] not every application of mathematical procedures need thus be taken into consideration” (p. 101).

And Philosophy: “it will not be difficult...for anyone...acquainted with any of those sciences grouped together under the name ‘philosophy,’ to recognize one of them as the theory of Objects” (p. 104).