CONSERVATIVE MEINONGIANISM: AN ACTUALIST+ ONTOLOGY
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A frank recognition of the data, as inspection reveals them, precedes all theorizing; when a theory is propounded, the greatest skill is shown in the selections of facts favourable or unfavourable, and in eliciting all relevant consequences… There is thus a rare combination of acute inference with capacity for observation… Whatever may ultimately prove to be the value of Meinong’s particular contentions, the value of his method is undoubtedly very great; and on this account if on no other, he deserves careful study.—Russell (1904), pp. 22-3.

In the main, this paper is a defense of the classic Meinongian thesis that “there are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects,” re: talking talking donkeys and other fictitious or illusory objects.¹ But the thesis is reconstrued in a distinctive way; it is interpreted as claim that in an important sense, there are non-existent objects in this world.

Some have wondered whether a thesis like Meinong’s is even consistent (Lycan 1979; 1994, van Inwagen 1977; 1983; 2003, Lewis 1990). But all are agreed that contradiction is avoided if the two quantifiers in the thesis are given different readings. And indeed, the view to be developed is not that “there are” talking donkeys in our world in the same sense that there are non-talking donkeys in our world. Though admittedly, the sense in which there are talking donkeys in our world is obscure, and making this clear is of central importance. (Unlike Meinong and some of his followers, we shall refuse to take the Meinongian quantifier as primitive.)

As a rule, any Meinongian view is “conservative” in that it preserves the appearance that we refer freely to non-existents, and speak truths about them. Yet the view developed is conservative in a second sense: Unlike standard Meinongians, I do not flatly describe non-

¹ Relatedly, ‘Everything’ is not always the answer to ‘What is there?’, pace Quine (1948).
existents as mind-independent. (Hence, in defending Meinong’s thesis, I make no pretense to historical accuracy.) Instead, the view just allows the sense in which there actually are mind-dependent objects—illusory and fictitious objects (incl. impossibilia) being prime examples. Given the mind-dependence thesis, the expansion in one’s ontology is thus a relatively conservative one by Meinongian standards.

A further important element is that the present Meinongianism features a more conservative “ideology.” For the usual Meinongian talk of “nuclear” or “encoded” properties (as occurs in Mally 1912, Parsons 1980, Zalta 1988) will be paraphrased away. In brief, such talk is unnecessary once we realize that property-instances of fictional/illusory objects are, themselves, fictional or illusory.

The three conservative features suggest that a thesis like Meinong’s has been underestimated by philosophers, and the aim is to show why it should be taken seriously. Still, the discussion is silent on several crucial matters. For instance, there is no attempt to develop the formal semantics in any detail—the focus is just on clarifying the ontology. And even so, the problem of “incomplete” fictional objects must be passed over (e.g., the “indeterminacy” in whether Santa has a mole on his left knee). Also, we must skip problems of individuation, made famous by Quine’s (1948) possible bald/fat man in the doorway. These topics are omitted not because they are unimportant, but because an author can accomplish only so much in one paper.

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2 This is usually called a ‘parsimonious’ ideology in the literature, though ‘conservative’ strikes me as more apt. The aim is not merely to have as few terms as possible—after all, your whole theory could be coded as a single digit. The aim is rather to have the most ‘user friendly’ ideology. This is served partly by jettisoning unnecessary jargon, but it is also served by the lexicon being, at most, a conservative extension of a lexicon you already know.

3 A fourth conservative feature, though it is detachable from the view, is a kind of quietism. As explained in Parent (2015a), this is a refusal to see interpretations as answering the most fundamental questions of ontology. This is my attitude when assigning a term a Meinongian object, though none of my arguments require such an attitude.

4 For an explication and defense of ‘incomplete’ Meinongian objects, see Parsons (1980). For a Meinongian response to Quine’s possible bald/fat man, see Priest (2005/2016).
However, we will address a string of objections along way. Even so, the arguments below are not controversy-free. If a philosopher is determined to resist such Meinongianism, they will succeed—and the literature on empty terms is so vast, one can hardly do justice to it all. Be that as it may, my hope is to make clear why the view offered here is a new kind of Meinognianism, and why its innovations make it an especially attractive kind.

1. **Negative existentials: Back with a vengeance**

We may start with a novel version of the problem of negative existentials, one that proves more vexing to anti-Meinongians than is usual. Consider here a true negative existential such as:

(P) Pegasus does not exist.

Traditionally, the semantical problem here is put as follows: A subject-predicate sentence is true only if the subject-term is meaningful—and it is meaningful only if it refers to something. But the subject-term (P) does not refer to anything. Thus ‘Pegasus’ is not meaningful in (P), and so, (P) is not even truth-apt, much less true. But (P) *is* true: If we search the world high and low, we won’t find Pegasus anywhere.

This formulation of the problem seems unnecessarily contentious, however, since it supposes that a subject-term is meaningful only if it refers to something. Yet ‘Pegasus’ would be precisely the sort of term which falsifies this. For this and other reasons, I wish to pose the problem anew as the following inconsistent triad. Where ‘Φ’ is a metavariable, and ‘α’ is a metavariable for proper names specifically:

1. If a sentence of the form \( \Phi(\alpha) \) is true in the actual world, then the open formula \( \Phi(x/\alpha) \) is satisfied by an actual object named by \( \alpha \).

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5 This is how the problem is put in, e.g., Russell (1905).
(2) (P) is a sentence of the form ‘¬Ψ(Pegasus)’ and is true in the actual world.⁶

(3) The formula ‘¬Ψ(x/Pegasus)’ is not satisfied by an actual object named by ‘Pegasus’.

Here, there is no dubious reference-condition on the meaningfulness of a subject-term. Instead, it is observed that a sentence of the form ‘¬Φ(x/α)’ (i.e., a sentence with a proper name) is true in the domain of actual objects only if an actual object satisfies the predicate. This derives from a standard semantic assumption that if ‘¬Φ(x/α)’ is true within a model, the predicate is satisfied by an object in that model. But if the actual world stands as the relevant model, true negative existentials appear to violate this.

Granted, there are those who will reject (1). However, this is to surrender classical logic; the truth of (1) is needed for the formal validity of existential instantiation. This is surely not a decisive point in favor of (1), but it lends it a certain prima facie appeal. In fact, I myself forgo classical logic since, in §5, it is allowed that there are round squares. But rejecting (1) means surrendering classical logic even with respect to Pegasus—and that is something I would hope to avoid.

The new formulation is also important since it proves less tractable to Lewis’ (1986) “other worlds” approach—also employed by Modal Meinongians such as Priest (2005/2016) and Berto (2008; 2011). (The term ‘Modal Meinongian’ is from Berto.) On this approach, (P) is true because ‘Pegasus’ names a creature that exists only in some nonactual world. But assuming (1), this does not yet vindicate (P) as a truth in the domain of actual objects, a truth that holds here. So one may well grant that the “other worlds” approach explains its truth in some extended

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⁶ Traditionally, ‘exist’ has been viewed as a quantifier, so that (P) has the logical form ‘¬(∃y) y = Pegasus.’ Yet the view that ‘exist’ is a predicate has been reinvigorated by McGinn (2002), Azzouni (2004), Fine (2009), and Moltmann (2013). Notably, Crane (2013) also argues that the logical form of ‘exist’ is ultimately orthogonal to the metaphysics of nonexistents. At any rate, I mean to leave open here whether ‘¬Ψ(x)’ is the negation of a quantified or unquantified formula.
sense. But we also want to say that \( (P) \) is true in our world *considered in itself*, and this does not yet follow on the other worlds approach.

In reply, one might invoke distinction between \( (P) \) being true “at” our world, versus being true “in” our world. Such a distinction is not unprecedented (see, e.g. Plantinga 1974, Stalnaker 1976). However, in recruiting the distinction, the “other worlds” approach would admit that \( (P) \) is true only “at” our world, but not “in” it. Yet that is precisely the problem: We want to say \( (P) \) is true *in* our world, and not merely true in some extended sense.\(^7\)

In contrast, the new Meinongian will propose a sense in which Pegasus *is* in our world, even though in another sense he is obviously not. But why not just reject (2) instead?\(^8\) A descriptivist, for instance, will say that the logical form of \( (P) \) does not feature a proper name concatenated with a predicate; rather, it features a definite description—so that \( (P) \) is properly read as “The winged horse captured by Bellerophon does not exist.”\(^9\) Once \( (P) \) is seen this way, the truth of the sentence does not require the subject-term to denote some part of the actual world. Instead, the sentence is true by the fact that nothing in the actual world satisfies the description ‘the winged horse captured by Bellerophon’.

As first observed by Marcus (1961), however, Russellian descriptions do not seem equivalent to names.\(^10\) But while this is now widely accepted for non-empty terms, some philosophers retain a descriptivist view for *empty* names/kind terms (e.g., Boghossian 1997). The

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\(^7\) In a related vein, Berto (2013) sometimes talks of \( x \) being ‘in the domain of our world’ without being *within* our world. Thus, ‘Conan Doyle created Sherlock Holmes’ is actually true, partly because Holmes is ‘in the domain of our world.’ However, I am unsure what this means. Objects ‘in a domain,’ after all, are in the domain of a quantifier. So if Holmes is in the domain for the actual world, then he must *in some sense* ‘exist’ in the actual world. But Berto does not seem prepared to admit that. (To his credit, he admits some obscurity here, yet argues the problem is not unique to him; see p. 177.)

\(^8\) There are many other views of negative existentials, and I am unable to address them all. Descriptivism is singled out, since besides its continuing interest, it is historically the leading anti-Meinongian view (cf. Russell 1906).

\(^9\) I’m glossing that ‘Bellerophon’ is an empty name too. A descriptivist ultimately breaks it down into a set of descriptors also.

\(^10\) The point is better known via Kripke (1972/1980), and one should recognize that there have been detractors such as Searle (1983) (mentioned further below), and more recently, Jackson (2010).
thought is that an empty term cannot directly refer (since there is nothing to directly refer to). So it appears its meaning must be fixed by a description.

In an important paper, however, Brock (2004) shows that Marcus’ point applies just as well—nay, even better—in the case of empty names. Suppose the descriptivist says that ‘Pegasus’ is equivalent to ‘the winged horse captured by Bellerophon.’ Then, (C) should be equivalent to (C*):

(C) Pegasus might have not been captured by Bellerophon.

(C*) Pegasus might not have been Pegasus.

But whereas (C) is true, (C*) is not. Also, it is no help to rigidify the descriptor, e.g., in the way that Searle (1983) proposes for non-empty names. In particular, we cannot analyze ‘Pegasus’ as “the actual winged horse captured by Bellerophon;” for otherwise, (P) expresses:

(P*) The actual winged horse captured by Bellerophon is not actual.

And while (P) is true, (P*) is contradictory. Perhaps there are ways a descriptivist could reply to this—but it at least makes it not unreasonable to consider other options.¹¹

2. MERELY INTENTIONAL OBJECTS

To this end, let us consider the following:

(I) Pegasus is imaginary.

I submit that (I) is actually true. But if so, then even a descriptivist needs an actual object to explain this. After all, the descriptivist would analyze it as something like “there is an \(x\) such that \(x\) is an imaginary winged-horse...” And for that quantificational claim to be actually true, there must be an actual object satisfying the descriptor. Similarly, (I) vexes “fictionalist” views, where

¹¹ By the way, the problem does not appear unique to descriptivism. It seems fairly clear it also affects Kripke’s (1972/1980) ‘rigidity view;’ for example, where ‘Pegasus’ is seen as necessarily empty.
it is interpreted as “According to the fiction, Pegasus is imaginary” (see Lewis 1978, Rosen 1990, Nolan 2002, Brock 2002, Sainsbury 2010). After all, Pegasus is not imaginary according to Greek myth—he is rather a flesh-and-blood creature.¹²

In light of such considerations, the new Meinongian proposes that there is an actual object \( o \) satisfying \( \neg \text{Imaginary}(x) \). But if so, what kind of object could \( o \) be? Well, if \( o \) satisfies \( \neg \text{Imaginary}(x) \), then \( o \) is imaginary. Or more broadly, \( o \) is a merely intentional object, or “MIO” for short. Such an object is “merely” intentional in the sense that the object does not also exist in the mind-independent world.¹³ But since \( o \) is actual, that means \( o \) is an actual yet merely intentional object satisfying the predicate.¹⁴

Naturally, this will be met with resistance. An immediate objection is that if an actual object \( o = \) Pegasus, then Pegasus is actual! However, this is not as fatal as it seems. For Pegasus is not identified as a mind-independent object in our world. Quite the contrary—the truth of (I) means that he is just pretend. So the view is that Pegasus is indeed an actual object albeit a mind-dependent object.

Regardless, talk of “actual imaginary objects” may seem to abuse the term ‘actual’. It may exemplify what van Inwagen (1977; 1983; 2003), Lewis (1990) and Lycan (1979; 1994) declare unintelligible, to the point of being “literally gibberish” (Lycan 1979, p. 290). But when it is said that Pegasus is not actual, ‘actual’ indeed denotes (something like) mind-independent objects in our world; let us use ‘actual’ to express this sense of the term. Admittedly, however, when Pegasus is said to be an “actual imaginary object,” ‘actual’ denotes both mind-independent

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¹² Sainsbury replies to this sort of concern by offering an alternate analysis: ‘According to the fiction, Pegasus exists’ (2010, p. 150). But this will not do in general, since some objects in fiction are not imaginary, e.g. Napoleon in War and Peace (Kripke 1973/2013). Truth be told, however, Sainsbury’s considered view ends up looking rather different, for it is joined with the negative free logic of Sainsbury (2005). But unfortunately, I cannot explore this here without going too far afield.
¹³ The term ‘merely intentional object’ is from Brentano, though I am told it originates in the Medieval scholastics.
¹⁴ McGinn (2000; 2004, ch. 10) and Crane (2013) defend similar views, though they differ in crucial respects. See section 6 for elaboration.
and merely intentional, mind-dependent objects in our world. Let us use ‘actual+’ to mark this use of the term. The question, then, is whether ‘actual+’ expresses something intelligible.

Consider, however, that the distinction between uses of ‘actual’ is, in fact, already present in natural language. Consider:

(A1) There actually are mirages.

(A2) There actually are hallucinated objects.

(A3) There actually are imaginary objects.

I submit that each of (A1)-(A3) has a true and a false reading in English. On the true reading, for example, (A3) just says that thanks to our imaginative faculty, some things are imaginary. But on the false reading, it states that these imagined objects are not merely imagined in our world. Something similar appears true of (A1) and (A2) as well. And generally, it seems that MIOs are ‘actual’ in one sense of the term, but not in another sense. Yet this indicates that English already contains a use of ‘actual’ that extends to nonactuals. Such talk hardly seems like “gibberish.”

Still, in the regimented language, an anti-Meinongian will hope to paraphrase away the Meinongian ‘actual’ in the true readings of (A1)-(A3). Yet these examples are not meant to prove that the regimentation of English requires Meinongian objects. Rather, (A1)-(A3) are meant to show just that ordinary English features Meinongian uses of ‘actual’. And though the point is modest, it is still important—for it shows that the distinction between ‘actual’ and ‘actual+’ is not a mere philosopher’s invention. It is a distinction that is already grasped by English speakers.

With negative existentials, we can therefore intelligibly say without contradiction that Pegasus is actual+, and that Pegasus is not actual. He is “actually nonactual” meaning that
Pegasus is actually a MIO. Accordingly, the inconsistent triad is resolved by refining (1)-(3) as follows:

(1*) If a sentence of the form \( \neg \Phi(\alpha) \uparrow \) is true in the actual world, the open formula \( \neg \Phi(x/\alpha) \uparrow \) is then satisfied by some actual object named by \( \alpha \).

(2*) (P) is a sentence of the form \( \neg \psi(Pegasus) \uparrow \) and is true in the actual world.

(3*) The formula \( \neg \psi(x/Pegasus) \uparrow \) is not satisfied by some actual object named by ‘Pegasus’.

All this is quite consistent. Yet to be clear:

(4) \( \neg \psi(x/Pegasus) \uparrow \) is satisfied by an actual object named by ‘Pegasus’.

Thus, (P) is true in the actual world, owing to an actual object satisfying the predicate—albeit a nonactual one. For the name ‘Pegasus’ directly (i.e., non-descriptively) refers to a MIO.

Admittedly, it is mysterious how a name comes to refer to a MIO (though, like a non-empty name, perhaps it can be introduced via a non-equivalent descriptor). Regardless, for the new Meinongian it is clear enough that ‘Pegasus’ names an imaginary object, even if it is not obvious how it does this.

Note well; nothing here vindicates ‘Pegasus does not exist’ as an actual truth. Yet this is how it should be. If we consider a model of only actual objects, the name ‘Pegasus’ fails to denote. So in that sort of model, (P) is like the sentence ‘Blurgaflurg does not exist’—both sentences would use a subject-term that does not even denote a MIO. Accordingly, it would be a mistake to ask why ‘Pegasus does not exist’ is true in that model—just as it would be a mistake to ask this of ‘Blurgaflurg does not exist’. For neither sentence is true in the model; instead, they are not truth-evaluable, thanks to their uninterpreted proper names.
Now in our world (P) is true, and that means that our world (somewhat paradoxically) does not merely consist in the actual world. But by this, I mean only that our world contains actual+ objects and not just the actual ones. One distinguishing feature of our world is that we have a mythical creature called “Pegasus.” A world in which Pegasus was never conjured up would be a world that is different from ours.

Some may protest that the foregoing smacks of Quine’s (1948) nemesis McX, who thinks the object of ‘Pegasus’ is the idea of Pegasus. But that is not the claim. Rather, it is that the MIO is the object of ‘Pegasus’ as well as the object of the idea. Yet since Pegasus is an artifact of the imagination, there is a sense in which Pegasus is only “of the mind.” But he is not an idea—it is not as if he represents an object in the manner of an idea. In the vernacular, speakers may say that Pegasus is “just an idea.” Still, this is misleading. It encourages not only the McXian idea that Pegasus represents, but also that Pegasus represents Pegasus in particular, making him a kind of self-referring idea (which would be truly bizarre).

But if Pegasus is not an idea, what is he? From one angle, the answer is plain: Pegasus isn’t anything, at least not in the actual world. Yet from another angle, Pegasus is the actual+ intentional object of some thoughts and expressions. Though again, he is merely intentional. Admittedly, I lack a fully informative set of necessary and sufficient conditions for being such an object. But the true readings of (A1)-(A3) indicate some paradigmatic examples. And as noted there, it is not as if this is esoteric philosophy-speak. Ordinary English speakers recognize quite well the sense in which there are mirages in deserts, imaginary objects in the mind, pink elephants in the drunkard’s visual field, etc. (For further explanation, see also the next section.)

Now although ‘actual’ and ‘actual+’ are satisfied just by objects in our world, we can also introduce world-relative uses, akin to quantification in Lewis (1986). E.g., we can say
Pegasus is **actual**-at-a-Pegasus-world, even though he is non**actual**, i.e., non**actual**-at-**our**-world. The world-relative uses are helpful, since *inter alia* they help make sense of negative existentials that are true at non**actual** worlds. Consider a world just like the world of *Macbeth*, except Macbeth dubs the hallucinated dagger ‘Spooky.’ In such a world, he is then able to say correctly:

(S) Spooky does not exist, though the murder weapon does.

This would rightly state that only the murder weapon is **actual**-at-Macbeth’s-world. Though in a sense, Spooky is part of his world; it makes his world different from one without any such dagger. We can capture this by saying that Spooky is actual+-but-non**actual**-in-Macbeth’s-world. And in his world (as in ours), the distinction here would turn on whether the thing is a MIO. (Notably, Macbeth’s hallucinated dagger is actual+-in-**our**-world as well, since the dagger is something we imagine. But of course it is not something we ourselves *hallucinate*.15)

That Spooky is part of Macbeth’s world is a further datum which vexes Lewis and other-worlds Meinongians. ‘Spooky’ would be a name for an imaginary object that is not found in Macbeth’s spacetime. So on such views, there would be *no* sense in which a hallucinated dagger is part of his world. Yet there is a real sense in which it is. A world without the hallucinated dagger would not be the world described by Shakespeare’s tale.

The point also counters a reply from the “other worlds” gambit, re: the reformulated problem of negative existentials. The reply would be to co-opt my proposed disambiguation at (1*)–(3*), yet reinterpret ‘**actual**’ as the Lewisian indexical ‘actual, and ‘actual+’ as the Lewisian and as the unrestricted quantifiers, respectively. This could be used to get the truth-

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15 This observation also resolves a problem case given by Thomas Hofweber (in conversation): Suppose that a certain drug causes hallucinations of a mythical creature called ‘Thomasus.’ If you are uninitiated in the drug, you can still understand what this means, even though you lack first-hand experience. But on the present view, such experience seems required if ‘Thomasus’ is to avoid the fate of ‘Blurgaflurg.’ Yet we must distinguish *imagining* Thomasus from *hallucinating* him. The two experiences may be different, since only the latter may involve a visual *image* of the creature. Still, the object imagined can be *the same* as the object hallucinated— for the creature is not the *image* experienced, but rather the *object* of these images.
value of (P) right, without appeal to “actual” non-existent objects. However, the proposal could not be extended to (S); specifically, it would not retain a sense in which Spooky is part of Macbeth’s world. After all, Spooky is not in Macbeth’s spacetime; i.e, he is not actual-in-his-world (indexical use). So Spooky would not be a part of Macbeth’s world at all—even if one adds that Spooky is ‘actual’ in some less restricted domain. But again, the intuition is that Spooky is a part of that world. If one remains unconvinced, we might add that Macbeth’s mind and/or brain is plausibly what causes the hallucinated object. So if Lewis (1986, p. 78) is right that there is no trans-world causation, then Spooky and Macbeth must be in the same world.

3. The Metaphysics of MIOs

It is worth emphasizing what has not been said about Pegasus and other MIOs. Specifically, in saying “Pegasus is actual+,” there is no suggestion of a Platonic heaven where Pegasus lives as an abstract object. The idea is that Pegasus is a mind-dependent object, a MIO, and more specifically, a product of the imagination. Once we are clear on that, it seems much easier to acknowledge a sense in which Pegasus is actual.

Meinongians usually say that non-existents are mind-independent, but for reasons that are not obviously sound. Parsons (1980) suggests that mind-dependence would mean that Pegasus comes into existence at a particular time, even though he does not exist. Still, Parsons grants that an author can bestow fictional existence on Pegasus (p. 188), and this plausibly fits with my claim that Pegasus is actually+ a MIO. Yet Findlay (1963) also argues that nonexistents cannot be mind-dependent since “these objects exist as little when we are imagining them as at any other time” (p. 56). But I concur that Pegasus is not actual, whether or not he is imagined. So in that sense, Pegasus’ ontological status does not depend minds. Yet in another way, his status
indeed so depends—in particular, Pegasus’ actuality+ depends on whether there is a mind to imagine him.

What exactly does it mean to be mind-dependent? It potentially means several different things. But in the present discussion, Pegasus is mind-dependent in the sense that in a world $W$ where neither Pegasus nor minds are actual-in-$W$, Pegasus has no being in any sense at all. The point is intuitive enough: A world without minds is a world without imaginations, hence, without imaginary objects. Yet note on the current usage, minds themselves are not “mind-dependent.” Nor are artifacts like tables, the U.S. constitution, and the like. For the more precise notion is that of a MIO—and minds, tables, etc., are not merely intentional objects. E.g., if we never thought of our own minds, they would still exist. In contrast, if we never had thoughts of Pegasus, he would not exist in any sense.

Pegasus is mind-dependent in the further sense that minds are needed to bring about his actuality+. Yet he is also mind-dependent in that minds are needed to sustain his actuality+. Though minds are not sufficient: If Pegasus became a forgotten legend (and all records of the legend were destroyed), then plausibly he would no longer exist in any sense. But if so, does Pegasus’ persistence require him to be contemplated at all times? A better view is that tacit beliefs about Pegasus are sufficient for his persistence. The nature of tacit belief is obscure, to be sure (see, e.g., Lycan 1998, ch. 3). But assuming there are such things, Pegasus’ persistence can plausibly depend on them. There is no ambition to make this utterly convincing; rather, it is just

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16 In a paper I greatly admire, Rosen (1994) identifies persistent obscurities in terms like ‘objective’, ‘mind-independent’, and the like. And I do not regard my remarks here as settling Rosen’s conundrums. He might allow that I have made proper sense of ‘mind dependent’, but at the cost of surrendering ‘naturalism,’ the view that some mentality is ‘not quite identical with anything we encounter in the natural world’ (p. 277). Even so, I would argue that we indeed encounter hallucinated and illusory objects as part of the natural world+—though not as part of the natural world. But this of course is contentious.

17 For the record, the real story about minds and mind-independence is more complicated. But I do not want to pursue the matter here.
to show that if Pegasus persists as a MIO, it does not follow that someone must be meditating on him constantly.

A different problem with mind-dependence was raised by Ed Zalta (in conversation). Two persons can think of numerically the same fictional object. Hence, this object is apparently not within any one mind, contra the natural assumption. Pegasus instead starts to look like an abstract object in a third realm, which can be “grasped” by several minds at once.

Yet we can instead accommodate this via the phenomenon of reference borrowing (cf. Putnam 1975, pp. 227-9). Let “Homer” be the first person to imagine Pegasus, and suppose for simplicity’s sake that Homer used the term ‘Pegasus’ to tell stories about him. An audience member might then create a “mental picture” of a winged horse. Though again, a mental picture is not the same thing as Pegasus. But in creating this picture, the audience member can contemplate numerically the same object, if she intends her picture to represent “the winged horse that Homer speaks of.” So even if Pegasus lives only in Homer’s mind, others could still think of him, thanks to reference borrowing. Again, the aim is not to make the point utterly convincing, but merely to show that the “publicity” of Pegasus does not prove that he is a mind-independent abstractum.18

4. ENCODING PARAPHRASED AWAY

Nevertheless, there remain apparent problems in saying that Pegasus is a mind-dependent MIO. For we also want to say that:

18 The questions of individuation, vis-à-vis Quine’s possible bald/fat man, become especially important in connection with the “reference borrowing” proposal. But again, unfortunately, this is one issue I must table in the present discussion. Yet see again Priest (2005/2016) for headway on the matter.
A related objection, from Azzouni (2010, p. 137), is that Meinongians are ignorant of the properties of ficta. For these can differ from the properties the object is depicted as having, e.g., in a mental image. Yet since the referent of the image may be borrowed, such epistemic gaps are to be expected. Though in Homer’s case, there is no appearance/reality gap since he authors Pegasus’ properties. (Yet see Parent 2015a for a general limit on knowledge of reference.)
(W) Pegasus is a horse with wings.

But, one may protest, Pegasus cannot be both a MIO and a horse. After all, MIOs are mind-dependent and horses are not.¹⁹

For such reasons, Meinongians often introduce a notion of “nuclear” or “encoded” properties.²⁰ Thus, we hear that Pegasus is an abstract object, and hence, that he is not a horse. Instead, he merely “encodes” being a horse. Such encoding is supposed to explain why (W) is true, even though (W) is no longer about a horse, strictly speaking. Unfortunately, however, little more is said to explicate the “encoding” terminology. So the Meinongian apparently incurs an extra primitive in her vocabulary.

Besides this, encoding also weakens what was otherwise a straightforward explanation of the data. The claim is now that Pegasus is not a horse, even though it is “true” to say he is. An “encoded property” here threatens to be a mere “dormative virtue,” posited as “whatever explains the explanandum.” So again, the introduction of “encoding” depreciates what was otherwise a tight explanation of the data.

Fortunately, there is a better way. Since the new Meinongian allows nonactual individuals, she can also allow nonactual property-instances.²¹ After all, a property-instance is itself an individual—it is a non-repeatable affair. On the present view, then, Pegasus is a “horse” in the sense that he has a nonactual property-instance of horseness. Or, if this talk of “having”

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¹⁹ One may ask if Pegasus is even a horse, i.e., of the biological kind equus caballus. But let that pass.
²⁰ Parson’s (1980) nuclear properties are not the same as Zalta’s (1988) encoded properties. Yet Parsons’ ‘watered down’ versions of nuclear properties (see p. 44) basically play the role of encoded properties, and any remaining differences will be irrelevant to the present discussion.
²¹ Apparently, some scholars think that Meinong himself had a trope-theoretic ontology; see Chrudzimski (2007). However, pace Williams (1953) and Campbell (1990), the present view is meant to be neutral on trope theory (thus, I favor the use of ‘property-instance’ rather than ‘trope’). After all, a realist about universals need not deny that there are particular instantiations of properties, in addition to the properties themselves. Or at least, a realist is able to re-interpret my term ‘property-instance’ as denoting the token-event of the object’s “participating” in a universal, and thus co-opt conservative Meinongianism.
an instance is confusing, one can say that he is a non\textbf{actual} property-instance of \textit{horseness}. (It may then also be better to speak of \textit{merely intentional property-instances} or “MIPs.”)

Either way, (W) consequently acquires two readings, one where it is true and one where it is false. It is true if it is interpreted as:

(W1) Pegasus is a non\textbf{actual} horse with wings.

Or what I regard as equivalent to (W1):

(W2) Pegasus is an actual+ non\textbf{actual} horse with wings.

But (W) is false if it expresses:

(W3) Pegasus is an \textbf{actual} horse with wings.

So (W) is certainly false in one sense—though the fact remains that Pegasus is a non\textbf{actual} imaginary horse. And qua imaginary horse, in that sense he is both a MIO and a horse. More precisely, he is actually+ a MIO who is a non\textbf{actual} horse. And note that this does not imply that he is \textbf{actually} a MIO; indeed, \textbf{actual} MIOs are impossible.

Priest (2005/2016) and Berto (2011) are Meinongians who claim to dispense with encoding as well. But in adopting the “other worlds” gambit, they seem to lose something. Again, Pegasus’ qua horse is found in nonactual worlds. But as was the case with (P), this seems to account only for the truth of (W) in some extended sense. It does not yet explain how it is \textit{actually} true, i.e., a true sentence \textit{here}. (One can again try to go descriptivist, but the Brock-style problem would be to explain the truth of ‘Pegasus might have never been captured’ or the like.)

Let me add that “encoding” Meinongians like Parsons and Zalta could co-opt the present property-instance strategy, if desired. They could just relinquish the primitive status of “encoding” and instead analyze as: Pegasus “encodes” \textit{horseness} iff Pegasus has/is a non\textbf{actual} property-instance of \textit{horseness}. But at least, this would represent an advance in understanding,
for the notion of imaginary or merely intentional objects is grasped by ordinary English speakers, whereas encoding as a technical notion is not. But I might add that it is ideologically more conservative just to drop technical nomenclature whenever we can.  

Question: When (W) is interpreted as actually+ true, are both actual and nonactual objects in the extension of ‘is a horse’? That may seem odd—we often assume that extensions contain only actual objects. However, the matter may depend on context: If the domain is restricted in context to actual objects only, then obviously, only actual horses can be in the extension. But then, thanks to the name ‘Pegasus’, (W) lacks a proper interpretation (or so I claim). Relaxing the restrictions can thus prove advantageous, where Pegasus is indeed in the extension of ‘is a horse.’ (If this still feels odd, it may just reflect that fiction is not our paradigm of discourse in general.)

Still, if you think Pegasus should never be in the extension of ‘is a horse,’ then you can define ‘is a horse’ accordingly, even in a Pegasus-domain. But there, (W) will come out false. Now I think there is a reading of (W) where it is false; vide (W3). Still, one cannot insist both that (W) is true and that Pegasus is not in the extension of ‘is a horse.’

So if we hold that Pegasus is a horse and a figment of the imagination, as I think we should, it follows that some imaginary objects are horses. This may sound odd in one sense, but we must remember that these horses are not actual horses but actual+ horses that are MIOs.

We have dealt so far with “fiction internal” truths like (W), in addition to truths that attribute fictionality like (I) and (P). But importantly, the actual/actual+ distinction helps with truths that “mix” fictitious and non-fictional objects, e.g.,

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22 Artifactualists such as van Inwagen (1977; 1983) and Salmon (1998) also have jargon that is similar to encoding. E.g., van Inwagen talks of fictions as ‘having’ vs. ‘holding’ properties. The actual+/actual distinction might prove desirable to them as well.
(Z) Zeus was worshipped by Ancient Greeks

(H) Sherlock Holmes is admired by some detectives at Scotland Yard.

On the present approach, we can make sense of such truths as follows:

(Z1) Zeus is an actual+ but nonactual deity worshiped by Ancient Greeks.

(H1) Sherlock Holmes is an actual+ but nonactual detective admired by some detectives at Scotland Yard.

These express that in the domain of the actual+, some MIOs are in the worshipping- or admiring-relation to some actual people. One difference between (Z1) and (H1) is that ancient Greeks falsely believed that Zeus was actual, whereas Scotland Yard knows that Holmes is imaginary. But that is an epistemic or doxastic difference, not a semantic one.

It is also worth remarking that, since the actual/actual+ distinction holds for objects within a world, the same moves are available for mind-dependent objects that are also mind-dependent within other worlds. Consider for instance:

(D) Spooky is a dagger.

In light of the actual/actual+ distinction, (D) turns out to be semantically underdetermined in several ways. First, it expresses something true if it expresses either of the following (where “M” is the pertinent Macbeth-world):

(D1) Spooky is an actual+ dagger

(D2) Spooky is an actual+-in-M dagger.

Yet it is false if it expresses either of:

(D3) Spooky is an actual dagger.

(D4) Spooky is an actual-in-M dagger.

Though it is right to say:
(D5) Spooky is actually+ a nonactual dagger.

(D6) Spooky is actually+-in-M a nonactual-in-M dagger.

Related truths can be identified here as well, which I leave as an exercise to the reader.

Before moving on, let us observe that there seems to be a reading of (W3) where it is true. Although this reading does not occur naturally, it will be advantageous later to acknowledge such a thing. This is a reading where (W3) is elliptical for:

(W4) Pegasus is an actual-in-G horse with wings.

Assume $G$ is a nonactual world of Greek myth. Then, although Pegasus is imaginary, (W4) tells us that he is imagined as a mind-independent entity in $G$. This is true: It is not as if we imagine Pegasus as something mind-dependent (e.g., as appearing only in Bellerophon’s dreams). We instead imagine him to be a flesh-and-blood creature. Pegasus is thus nonactually mind-independent, without actually being mind-independent. (This is parallel to how he is nonactually a horse, without actually being a horse.) Thus, Pegasus would be a merely intentional object which has (or perhaps is) a merely intentional instance of the property being mind-independent. Nonetheless, given that (W4) is not a natural reading of (W) or (W3), the reader should assume that the ‘actual’ operator is not elliptical for ‘actual-in-$W$’ (for some nonactual world $W$), unless explicitly indicated otherwise.

A further clarification. (W4) should be seen as equivalent to the following:

(W5) In $G$, Pegasus is a mind-independent horse with wings.

Nevertheless, (W4) and (W5) differ from the “fictionalist” rendering below:

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23 This, I suspect, could accommodate some intuitions about horseness being an “existence-entailing” property (see, e.g., Zalta op. cits.). On the present view, being a horse is indeed actuality-entailing, albeit relative to a world.

24 Notational matter: (W5) should be equivalent to ‘In $G$, Pegasus is an actual horse with wings.’ However, I have been using the atomic predicate ‘actual’ to mean “actual in our world.” And that would suggest (W3) is not equivalent to ‘In $G$, Pegasus is an actual horse with wings.’ But in the latter sentence, we should see ‘actual’ as relativized to $G$ in virtue of the initial clause. Thus, the construction ‘In $G$…actual…’ should be seen as just another way to express “actual-in-$G$’.
(W6) According to Greek myth, Pegasus is a mind-independent horse with wings. The difference is that the truth of (W6) owes to what a certain actual text says. But the truth of (W5) owes instead to some nonactual facts. And while fictionalist renderings try to avoid a commitment to nonactuals, it is characteristic of the present view that nonactuals are actual+.

5. IMPOSSIBILIA

Following Meinong, the present view maintains in addition that there are impossible objects—or more perspicuously, that impossibilia are actual+. This is not merely because ‘Impossible objects are imaginary’ looks undeniable. It also that Brock’s arguments can be applied equally to modal claims about impossibilia. This problematizes the alternative, descriptivist treatment of such sentences. Suppose, for instance, that ‘Bertie’ names Russell’s barber who shaves exactly those who do not shave themselves. The Brock-style observation would be:

(B) Bertie need not have been the barber who shaves exactly the non-self-shavers.

Such a thing appears true: Even though Bertie is a barber with an impossible task, he might have been (say) a dentist instead. Assuming as much does not introduce a further impossibility into Bertie’s world.

However, a descriptivist treatment of ‘Bertie’ cannot follow suit. For it construes (B) as equivalent to:

(B*) Bertie need not have been Bertie.

And (B*) indeed puts a further impossibility into Bertie’s world. As with the descriptivist treatment of ‘Pegasus’, moreover, it will not help to rigidify the descriptor in the manner of Searle. For here too, there is no object for the name to be rigid on.

25 Question for the fictionalist: What does ‘Pegasus’ in (W6) refer to, if not something nonactual? If ‘Pegasus’ is simply non-referring, Greek myth vacuously entails all sentences with the term ‘Pegasus’. Perhaps the fictionalist has a way around this, but most fictionalists do not seem to confront this issue.
Famously, Russell (1906) rejected Meinongianism about impossibilia, since the view entails the contradiction that the round square is both round and not round. But as Yagisawa (1988) has argued, this contradiction is entirely in order. To acknowledge an *impossible* object is precisely to acknowledge an object with inconsistent features. (Indeed, something would be wrong if a putative impossibilium was *not* sufficient for inconsistency.) So it is no objection to point out that an impossible object is impossible.\(^{26}\)

Nonetheless, if our Meinongian adds that round squares are somehow “actual,” then in what sense are they *impossible*? This seems to be an inconsistency in the Meinongian’s ontology and not just in the objects’ shape. Apparently such objects both exist and cannot exist. Yet the new Meinongian holds instead that round squares are actual\(^+\) even though they cannot be actual. The actuality\(^+\) of round squares seems entirely tenable, moreover, since it is just the claim that we have thoughts where round squares are the intentional objects, albeit merely intentional objects.

Another objection against round squares, similar to Russell’s, concerns Lewis’ (1986, p. 7, n. 3) claim that one can never assert a truth by asserting a contradiction. But the reply again is: This is exactly why these objects are impossible—they are objects of which inconsistent claims are true. Nonetheless, I sympathize with Lewis (2004) that *reasoning* about impossible objects is vexed. Clearly, some sort of paraconsistent, dialethic logic is needed (cf. Priest 1987/2007, Beall 2009), but the details may remain obscure. A round square is round—and it is square. But is it therefore both non-round and non-square? If so, then is a round square also not a round square? I hypothesize that different round squares can be imagined in different ways, meaning that it will depend on the particular stipulations at hand. But I admit uncertainty in this area.

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\(^{26}\) I can’t resist noting that, in addition, there is an **actual** place called “round square” (круглая площадь) in downtown Nur-Sultan (Astana), Kazakhstan.
Importantly, however, the actuality+ of impossible objects leads to a new way for Meinong to escape Russell’s famous example ‘there is an existing golden mountain’. At first glance, Meinongianism seems committed to the truth of this, for the view is traditionally wedded to something like the following “comprehension principle”:

\[(CP) \text{ For any formula } \forall \Phi(x) \text{ with exactly ‘} x \text{’ free, there is an object satisfying the formula.} \]

But if we consider as ‘Golden(x) & Mountain(x) & Existing(x)’, (CP) entails that there is an existing golden mountain, which is absurd.

In the first instance, however, a Meinongian can reply that the existing golden mountain does not actually exist, though it actually+ does (as a nonactual mountain). Yet there is an obvious revenge example:

\[(R) \text{ There is an actual golden mountain.} \]

But notice that (CP) already commits the Meinongian to an impossibilium which satisfies (R), namely, the impossibilium which satisfies the predicate in:

\[(R0) \text{ There is an actual golden mountain that is also nonactual.} \]

This particular object is impossible in virtue of instantiating both mind-independence in our world and its contrary. This is of course impossible, and so, the object could not be actual. Yet in a suitable dialetheist logic, (R) is derivable from (R0). For the nonactual object is effectively defined as being mind-independent. But if it is also nonactual, this means it is mind-independent only per impossibile, much like the round square has its shape only per impossibile.

Nevertheless, once (R) is seen as merely a dialethic consequence of (R0), (R) is not a problem. It just reflects an antecedent commitment to an object that is only impossibly actual.
However, what about the following “super-revenge” example?

(R1) There is a non-impossible actual golden mountain.

In fact, if the object is impossible for an independent reason, then to characterize it as “non-impossible” only compounds its impossibility even further. Once an object is defined as an impossible one, simply adding more defining characteristics will hardly make it possible. So in this case, the object is non-impossible only per impossibile.

The situation is rather similar to the Anselmian statement ‘God exists,’ where by definition, ‘God’ denotes $x$ only if $x$ is actual (cf. Parent 2015b). The key observation here is that, even if a term is defined by ‘actual’, it does not follow that there is anything actual satisfying the definition. That is so, even if the object is nonetheless actual+ (or as Anselm says, “exists in the mind”). If the definition makes the object nonactual, then to add actuality as a defining condition suffices to define something impossible. (The point stands, even though a MIO can of course be actual-in-$W$, for some nonactual world $W$). Thus, a commitment to Anselm’s God or the actual golden mountain can be accepted on the present view, by treating them as nonactual objects that are only impossibly actual.

6. ABSTRACTA

The mention of round squares introduces the topic of abstract vs. concrete objects, and it is best to say more here. First, recall from Lewis (1986) that there at least four ways of drawing the abstract/concrete distinction, although here we will only make use of two: The Negative Way and the Way of Conflation.\(^\text{27}\) First, according to the Negative Way, being concrete is the same as having a spatiotemporal location, or rather—since Lewisian worlds are concrete yet are

\(^{27}\) The other two ways are the Way of Example and the Way of Abstraction. I concur with Lewis that the Way of Example is not very helpful. In contrast, the Way of Abstraction is important, but it shall not be of concern here, as space forces me to leave aside discussion of incomplete Meinongian objects.
unlocated—being concrete is the same as having spatiotemporal dimensions. (Lewis notes that there are complications even with this refinement, involving ghosts and the like, but we shall ignore these.) Second, according to the Way of Conflation, “the distinction between concrete and abstract entities is just the distinction between individuals and sets, or between particulars and universals, or perhaps between particular individuals and everything else” (1986, p. 83).

Numbers also count as abstract per the Way of Conflation, given that numbers are a kind of set. (Or since this might be disputed, let us include numbers here regardless.)

Henceforth, let ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ be used unequivocally in line with the Way of Conflation. If we wish to describe objects in terms of the Negative Way, we may simply speak of them as “having spatiotemporal dimensions” versus lacking such dimensions.

Now for the conservative Meinongian, we must also distinguish mind-independent versus mind-dependent versions of such things. For instance, you and I would be mind-independent, concrete spatiotemporal occupants, whereas Pegasus would be a merely intentional, concrete, spatiotemporal entity. I.e., he would be actually+ a nonactual spatiotemporal concretum.

Pegasus is so in virtue of being a merely intentional horse, rather than (say) a merely intentional abstractum (like the largest prime).

However, although Pegasus is not actually concrete, it does not follow that he is actually abstract. Again, Pegasus isn’t anything as concerns actuality. It is of course not true that Pegasus is actually in spacetime. But the same point holds of “Blurgaflurg,” and for the same vacuous reason: The names do not denote anything in the domain of the actual. Accordingly, a sentence of the form ‘Φ(α/Pegasus)’ is not truth-evaluable when we are restricted to actual objects, regardless of whether ‘Φ’ is replaced with ‘concrete’ or ‘abstract’ or whatever else.
But what about round squares? Since any geometric figure is mathematical, a round square is naturally seen as abstract. But as a geometric figure, it is also natural to say that it has spatiotemporal dimensions. (Assume its temporality amounts to its existing at all times). Of course, the round square remains an impossible object. Whence, it is a merely intentional abstractum with merely intensional dimensionality, i.e., dimensionality that exists solely as an object of thought.

Perhaps unexpectedly, ordinary, Euclidean squares are less straightforward. It seems clear enough that a Euclidean square is some kind of abstractum with spatial dimensions, but the actuality of the abstractum is contentious. A Platonic view would affirm the actuality (i.e., mind-independence) of an ordinary square, and affirm that it has actual dimensions. I would not close off this option, but I am more inclined toward a non-Platonic one, according to which a Euclidean square an imaginary spatial abstractum. The standard objection from the Platonist, of course, is that this makes truths about the square mind-dependent. And before minds evolved, it was true even then that a Euclidean square’s angles sum to 360 degrees. The anti-Platonist seems unable to agree, and to her disadvantage.

I cannot refute the Platonist objection here. However, using the actual+/actual distinction, the anti-Platonist may have a new line of resistance. She might suggest that a Euclidean square, while merely imaginary, is also imagined as a mind-independent abstractum. It is then actual-in-\( W \), for some nonactual world \( W \), without being actual. This is similar to how Pegasus is imagined to be actual-in-\( G \), without being actual; see the end section 4. The difference, however, would be that within their respective worlds, Pegasus is concrete and the Euclidean square is abstract. Nonetheless, like Pegasus, a Euclidean square would be a merely
intentional object which has (or perhaps is) a merely intentional instance of the property of being mind-independent.

If so, then the following sentence has different interpretations which echo some of the earlier variations on (W) and (D):

(E) Euclidean squares are mind-independent.

The default reading of (E) would be something like the following:

(E1) Euclidean squares are actually mind-independent.

Or, what we may treat as equivalent:

(E2) Euclidean squares are actual.

But the anti-Platonist regards these things as false. For they claim that a Euclidean square boasts a (mind-independent) instance of the property being mind-independent. In contrast, the anti-Platonist affirms that:

(E3) Euclidean squares are nonactually mind-independent.

More precisely, where $E$ is a nonactual Euclidean world:

(E4) Euclidean squares are actual-in-$E$

But (E4) might be enough for the anti-Platonist to accommodate the “mind-independence” intuition of the Platonist. For in light of (E4), the anti-Platonist emphatically agrees that:

(E5) In $E$, a square mind-independently has angles that sum to 360 degrees.

The caveat, of course, is that the anti-Platonist regards $E$ as merely intentional, i.e., as a nonactual world. And so, whereas truths about squares are mind-independent in that world, the existence of Euclidean world per se is not. The Platonist may have an objection to this too, but

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28 As with (W5), the reference to a nonactual world in (E5) should clarify this is not a version of fictionalism.
for this, I would refer her to section 8 below on possibilia. At the least, the point rests that truths about squares would be mind-independent in a Euclidian world. Yet since there certainly are further questions, anti-Platonist conservative Meinongianism is proposed only tentatively—conservative Meinongianism with Platonist mathematics remains entirely open.

Summarizing: Pegasus is a MIO, but he is not abstract—rather, Pegasus is nonactually a concrete spatiotemporal occupant, and is actually nothing at all. Rounds squares are also actually not anything; even so, they are actual+ objects which are nonactually both abstract and spatial. Ordinary Euclidean squares can be allowed as actual abstracta, or they can be seen as nonactual abstracta that are actual-in-E. Regardless, abstracta and impossibilia are also topics in metaphysics in which the literature continues to flourish. And so here too, there are obviously many important discussions which I am simply not able to cover in an article-length piece. Again, my primary aim is just to draw attention to the actual/actual+ distinction, to show how the distinction can be exploited to make new inroads into the ontological perplexities.

7. Compare and Contrast

It may be advantageous at this stage to recap some of the main features of the view, and it may especially useful to do so by contrasting it with some other prominent views of nonexistents. (The differences with actualist views like fictionalism and Russellian descriptivism need not be repeated.) The views in question I shall collect under five headings, although of course these classifications are rough and surely not definitive of the options. But they will suffice to bring out the main ways in which conservative Meinongianism differs.

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29 Cf. Meinong: “Even though the mathematician may use the term ‘existence,’ he cannot but concede that what we would otherwise call ‘possibility’ is, in the final analysis, all that he requires of the objects of his theoretical consideration” (1905, p. 81).
Caveat: I put question-marks next to some authors when I classify them below. This corresponds to one principal motivation of this paper: It is not clear where several authors stand when it comes to the ontological details. I suspect some wished to leave such details open, so that their work has the broadest appeal. (Zalta basically says as much; see Bueno & Zalta 2017, pp. 764-765.) Still, it means that the ontological details are often glossed in the literature. This is why the present work focuses on clarifying the ontology rather than developing the formal machinery (which other authors have expertly accomplished already).

Five Views of Nonexistent Objects

I. *Traditional Meinongianism*: There are objects that do not exist, though they can be quantified over. Abstracta are such objects, although they have a kind of being known as “subsistence.” Other nonexisting objects are “beyond being and non-being” (Meinong 1906, Chisholm 1973), or do not exist in any sense at all (Routley 1979), or perhaps have being in some unexplicated sense (Parsons 1980, Zalta 1983; 1988, ?Jacquette 1996)

II. *Modal Meinongianism*: There are objects that are not actual, though they are occupants of concrete possible and impossible worlds. (Priest 2005/2016, Berto 2011; 2013)

III. *Abstractionism*: “Nonexistent objects” are eternally existing abstracta in our world; our quantifier can include or exclude such objects, depending on context (van Inwagen 1977; 1983, Zalta, op. cit., ?Jacquette op. cit.).

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30 Routley, however, departs from traditional Meinongianism in holding that abstracta do not exist in any sense at all. Such is his “noneism.” Priest (2005/2017) borrows this aspect of his view as well.

31 For completeness sake’, one could classify Lewis (1986) as a truncated version of Modal Meinongianism, a version where impossible worlds are excluded.

32 Under abstractionism, one might also include ersatzism from modal metaphysics (Adams 1974, Plantinga 1976, Lycan 1979). But unlike some abstractionisms, ersatzism has no truck with impossibilia; more importantly, ersatzism remains neutral on ficta as such.
IV. *Artifactualism*: “Nonexistent objects” are actual artifacts whose existence depends on actual texts (Thomasson 1999, ?Moltmann 2015) or on our imaginations (Salmon 1998; McGinn 2000; 2004, ch. 10, Crane 2013, ?van Inwagen op. cits.). Our existential quantifier can include or exclude such objects, depending on context.

V. *Kripke’s Pluralism*: With fiction-external truths like (I) or (Z), some version of artifactualism is true. With a fiction-internal sentences like (W), we do not refer to anything using ‘Pegasus’; we only pretend to refer and the sentence is not true. But we can also preface (W) with ‘According to Greek myth’ to report truly on the content of the myth. With negative existentials like (P), yet a different view is offered (Kripke 1973/2013; 2011, ?Moltmann 2015).33

In fact, Kripke’s pluralism can be quickly distinguished from the present view. The differences with artifactualism (see below) will apply *mutatis mutandis* to Kripke on fiction-external sentences. On fiction-internal sentences, Kripke’s view is that ‘Pegasus’ does not refer (we only pretend it refers); whereas, conservative Meinongianism holds that it indeed refers. (Re: negative existentials, there is no easy summary of Kripke’s position here, but it is readily apparent that it differs from the present view; see his 2011, pp. 68-72, and lectures 3 and 6 of his 1973/2013.)

As for traditional and modal Meinongianism, conservative Meinongianism is comparable in several respects. All such Meinongianisms accept Meinong’s thesis (MT), as well as the following Impossibilist thesis (IT), plus some version of the comprehension principle (CP):

(MT) There are objects that do not exist (e.g., Pegasus, the golden mountain, etc.)

(IT) There are impossible objects (e.g., the round square)

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33 Kripke, of course, is better known for his (1972/1980) view that ficta *necessarily* do not exist. I discuss this view a bit further in connection with McGinn below. Nevertheless, Kripke is unequivocal in recent work that names for fictional objects, when they refer at all, refer to abstracta. Salmon (2011, p. 50) expresses doubt on whether Kripke’s views are all consistent; regardless, Kripke’s current view indeed goes beyond his earlier rigidity view.
(CP) For any formula \( \forall x \Phi(x) \) with exactly ‘\( x \)’ free, there is an object satisfying the formula [perhaps under a few restrictions].

And though it was not mentioned before now, the so-called Independence of Sosein from Sein is plausibly seen as a consequence of these:

(ISS) The satisfaction of a formula by an object is independent of whether the object exists.

Also, assuming any thought can be expressed by some formula, one might further deduce from (CP) Meinong’s principle of the object-directness of thought:

(OD) Every thought is a thought about an object.

So there is potentially a great amount of agreement among Meinongians.

Even so, traditional Meinongianism provoked the complaint of obscuritanism from Lycan et al. (see section 1). But the present view deflects this by explicating ‘actual+’ denoting both mind-independent objects and merely intentional objects. More than that, the “encoding” jargon and related terminology has been eliminated. This, in turn, led us to a novel way to deflate Russell’s existing golden mountain and thereby uphold (CP) without restriction.

Modal Meinongianism was also found lacking in failing to explain how true negative existentials are true in our world, rather than true in a modal pluriverse more broadly (see section 2). An analogous problem arose with negative existentials that are true only in other worlds; cf. the Spooky example. In contrast, conservative Meinongianism explains how a negative existential can be actually+ true in a world \( W \), while simultaneously being actually-in-\( W \) not truth-evaluable. The reason is that nonactual objects are actually+ part of such worlds.

Also, contra abstractionism, the present view is not that Pegasus is abstract but rather both nonactually concrete and actually neither. Nonetheless, as a MIO per se, isn’t Pegasus
abstract? He is—if ‘abstract’ means “not in our spacetime.” But all views on nonexistents agree to that much. (From this angle, “abstractionism” does not seem like a distinctive view.) More to the point is whether a nonexistent object is abstract in the manner of a universal, set, or number. And conservative Meinongism gives different answers for different kinds of nonexistents. E.g., Pegasus is a nonactual concretum, whereas the largest prime is a nonactual abstractum.

In tandem with this, I might suggest that asking which category all MIOs fall under is a mistake. Abstract and concrete are sub-categories of MIOs, not categories in which MIOs in toto may be placed. An analogy: Mammals in toto are neither pets nor non-pets; instead, some are pets and some are not. This reflects that the category of mammals is more fundamental than the category of pets—and that also comports with the fact that both mammals and non-mammals can be sorted into pets versus non-pets. Similarly, the category of MIOs is more fundamental than the category of abstracta. And that is so, even though both MIOs and non-MIOs can be sorted into abstracta versus non-abstracta.

At any rate, this section primarily aims to contrast conservative Meinongianism with other views, and the foregoing should make plain the difference with abstractionism. It should also be said that van Inwagen’s abstractionism is a view of fictional objects only, not of nonexistents generally. Yet this is difference with abstractionism is also a difference with most varieties of artifactualism. Thomasson and McGinn are offering us an artifactualist view of ficta only; they do not endorse artifactualism about possibilia as such (or about impossibila for that matter). I also reject Thomasson’s view that ficta depend for their existence on linguistic representations (1999, pp. 22-23). The view mistakenly suggests that it is impossible to create a

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34 I am unsure but Salmon (1998) seems to be an artifactualist about possibilia, in addition to ficta. But if so, he would then face McGinn’s objection (discussed further below) that possibilities ought to be mind-independent. And it is unclear how Salmon might answer that objection. (But n.b., Salmon does not count ficta as possibilia; thus, he does not need to face McGinn’s Kripkean worry that no possible object could count as Pegasus.)
fictional character in one’s own mind, for example. Perhaps Thomasson would reply that such an object is not a *character in fiction*, and thus, outside the scope of her concerns. Fair enough, although the status of such an “object” ought to be a concern at some stage.

Crane’s (2013) artifactualism is a bit different. Like the present view, Crane holds that there are a wide variety of nonexistent, merely intentional objects. However, Crane stresses early on that he is *not making an ontological claim* when he says that there are MIOs. Here, he writes “I do not mean that there is a special category of *entities* or quasi-entities or *pseudo-entities*...So the claim that there are non-existent intentional objects is not an ontological claim.” (p. 4).

*Prima facie*, this is puzzling: How can the claim that *there are* non-existent intentional objects fail to be ontological? In the end, Crane’s idea is apparently to reverse the explanatory order between the truth of ‘we represent non-existent objects’ and the truth of ‘there are non-existent objects’. Philosophers usually start with the former, and Meinongians then attempt to explain it by the latter. But it seems Crane begins instead with the truth of ‘there are non-existent objects’ as the *explanandum* and aims to use the truth of ‘we represent non-existent objects’ as the *explanans*. Thus, while ‘there are non-existent objects’ is true, Crane does not see it as a *fundamental* truth. It is in that respect not an ontological thesis.

Accordingly, Crane does not see himself as an ontologist, but rather a kind of “reductionist” (p. 6) about the truth of ‘there are non-existent objects.’ In contrast, the present view is indeed ontological in acknowledging two kinds of “being”—namely, mind-independent and mind-dependent being. There is little hope, I would add, of token-reducing a mind-

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35 Even so, Crane is like the new Meinong in that Crane denies that Pegasus is a *horse*, while affirming him as a *mythical* horse. Yet for Crane, it does not follow that Pegasus *nonactually* instantiates *being a horse*. For he thinks MIOs do not have natural or “sparse” properties (in Lewis’ 1983; 1986 sense), and *being a horse* qualifies as such. But the new Meinong finds it preferable to say that there actually+ are nonactual sparse-property-instances. I cannot elaborate on this properly here, but *inter alia*, this view allows one to affirm that Pegasus and mind-independent horses have something important in common.
dependent entity to something mind-independent—that would require a logically contradictory entity. After all, nothing can be both mind-dependent and mind-independent (except per impossibile, such as the actual golden mountain of section 5).\textsuperscript{36}

The present account may bear the strongest kinship with McGinn’s (2000; 2004, ch. 10) artifactualism. Even though McGinn is concerned only with ficta, he advocates for the mind-dependence of Pegasus. But McGinn adds that Pegasus is not a possible object, for two reasons. First, he references Kripke’s (1972/1980) argument that, since no particular biological essence characterizes Pegasus, no possible object could count as \textit{Pegasus}, even though many possible objects would be superficially indiscernable from him. Second, McGinn wishes to preserve the mind-independence of metaphysical possibilities, so that, e.g., ‘there are unconceived possible objects’ comes out true.

Importantly, the second argument compels McGinn to \textit{relinquish mind-dependence} for nonactual possible objects:

merely possible entities, such as the younger sister I might have had, really do exist, and did exist before I ever formed the concept of them—though they do not actually exist. Such entities exist in the realm of the merely possible; their ontological deficiency consists just in the fact that their existence is not actual (2000, p. 39).

So here, McGinn succumbs to the Lewisian view that nonactual possibilities really exist, for their ontological deficiency lies \textit{just} in their being nonactual.\textsuperscript{37}

According to the conservative Meinongian, however, talking donkeys and other mere possibilia are mind-dependent objects as well. The reasons for avoiding Lewis’ view should by

\textsuperscript{36} For further discussion of “anti-reductionism” between the two kinds of being, see Parent (2015c).

\textsuperscript{37} Accordingly, McGinn (2000, n. 42) admits that his aim was not so much to argue that all nonactual objects are mind-dependent. It was rather to describe a rapprochement between the Lewisian view that all possibilia exist, and the view that there are non-existent objects. McGinn’s point is that there is room here for the view that the difference between existing and non-existing turns on whether an object is mind-dependent.
now be familiar, having to do with truths like ‘Talking donkeys are figments of our imagination’, and with explaining true negative existentials with reference to our world only. Yet how can we accommodate McGinn’s intuition that metaphysical possibility ought to be a mind-independent matter? The issue is important enough that I shall devote the next section to it.

In addition, what of the Kripkean point that Pegasus could not be a possible object? Officially, conservative Meinongianism need not take a stand on this. Even though I spoke earlier of “worlds” that house Pegasus, Holmes, Macbeth, Spooky, etc., these could be construed as fictional worlds only, not possible worlds. That is so, even though the present view simultaneously is more ambitious than standard artifactualism in treating both ficta and mere possibilia as mind-dependent. (We simply adopt neutrality on whether these mind-dependent objects overlap or not.) But for the record, my ultimate preference would be to regard Pegasus and other prototypical ficta as possibilia. To blunt the Kripkean point specifically, I would follow Lycan (1994, ch. 6) in positing fictional haecceities for objects like Pegasus. However, the issues here partly turn on how nonexistent objects are to be individuated, and as noted already, that is one issue I must foreswear in the present discussion.

8. POSSIBILIA

From one angle, conservative Meinongianism is the sort of view which McGinn may have appeared to promise but did not deliver. But McGinn’s concern, again, is that mind-dependence across the board suggests that mere possibilia must be not only conceivable but also conceived. Yet the requisite “conceiving,” I suggest, is something quite minimal. We saw earlier that a nonactual object can exist merely as the object of a tacit or non-occurrent thought. In addition, the object need not be represented in any detail (under some magic number of descriptions or
what have you). It just has to be represented. Thus, ‘the largest prime’ denotes an object that is “conceived” in this minimal sense; the contrast is with ‘Blurgaflurg’. The latter does not denote any represented or “conceived” object. Even so, on this approach, the sentence ‘all possible objects are conceived’ is true—indeed, our use of that sentence suffices to make it true.

But it seems what also bothers McGinn is that talking donkeys would seem possible, even if minds had never existed. (Van Inwagen 2008 reads him this way.) However: Since this is a counterfactual, notice that the claim would standardly be construed thusly. (Cf. Lewis 1973.)

(M) In some nearby world, both minds do not exist and talking donkeys are possible.

Or, in the language of possible worlds:

(M1) There is a nearby world $W$ and a world $V$ such that: $W$ accesses $V$ and minds are not in $W$ and talking donkeys are in $V$.

It turns out, moreover, that conservative Meinongianism can accept (M1), provided that the ‘actual+’ and ‘actual’ operators are interpolated appropriately:

(M2) Actually+, there is a nonactual nearby world $W$ and a nonactual world $V$ such that…

In other words, a talking-donkey-world would exist even if minds did not, in virtue of the fact that we imagine the modal pluriverse to be that way. Specifically, we imagine it to contain a nearby mindless world which accesses a talking-donkey world. It is thereby actually+ true that talking donkeys would be possible even if minds did not exist.

If we wish, we could further boost the mind-independent flavor by making explicit the world-relative notion of actuality (as in our discussion of abstracta). Then, (M2) would be unpacked as:
(M3) Actually+, there is a nonactual nearby world $W$ and a nonactual world $V$ such that:

$W$ accesses $V$ and minds are not actual+-in-$W$ and talking donkeys are actual-in-$V$.

Be that as it may, I cannot defend this sort of analysis here. But it is a novel view about mere possibilia worth noting, one that is enabled by the actual+/actual distinction.

Addendum: Unlike Platonism/realism about abstracta, conservative Meinongianism cannot tolerate realism about mere possibilia. That is because realism about mere possibilia would be a contradiction in terms. There would remain no sense in which a mere possibilium is “merely” possible if it is actual as well as actual+. But from this perspective, is Lewisian realism therefore a contradicio in adjecto? No. One should not classify Lewis as a modal realist, even though he is a modal realist in some sense. For although Lewis accepts that talking donkeys exist in a mind-independent way, he rejects that they are part of our world. Instead, he believes they exist in a mind-independent spacetime which is discontinuous with our spacetime, where such discontinuity is sufficient for a difference in worlds. Conservative Meinongianism is of course incompatible with Lewis; it instead suggests that mind-independence is sufficient for being part of our world (spatiotemporal discontinuity makes no difference). But this of course is a point of philosophical contention. Conservative Meinongianism, in no way implies that modal realism is inconsistent on its own terms (‘actual’ is not one of Lewis’ terms, after all).

9. CLOSING REMARKS

I am certain many further questions could be raised. The ambition of this paper was not to settle the issues, but merely to introduce a new way of thinking about them. In particular, the aim was to motivate the actual+/actual distinction, and to exploit it in making new inroads into the problems. The result is at least a novel kind of Meinongianism, one that can claim advantages
over its competitors. To recap, it is a Meinongian view in that it accepts (MT), (IO), (CP), (ISS), and (OD). But it also boasts the following innovations:

(a) Meinongian being is not left as primitive or left as some mysterious state “beyond” being and non-being. Instead, MIOs are identified as the denotation of ‘actual+’; these exist merely as the objects of a tacit or occurrent thought.

(b) Talk of “encoding” or “watered down nuclear properties” is eliminated in favor of talk about non-actual property-instances (or at least, the former is explicated in terms of the latter in order to avoid technical terms as primitives).

(c) True negative existentials are made true in our world (not just in an extended pluriverse);

(d) Negative existentials true in other worlds are made true in those worlds (not just in an extended pluriverse);

(e) A Russelian golden mountain is embraced as actual per impossibile, thus allowing (CP) to stand without restrictions;

(f) It is clarified how Meinongianism can embrace either a Platonic or non-Platonic view of abstracta;

(g) It is clarified how mere possibilia can be conceived as mind-independent, while allowing them to be mere objects of conception.

I suspect that Meinongians themselves will be most interested in (e), but the non-actualist views of abstracta and of possibilia are also hoped to garner attention. One of my primary motivations, however, has been to clarify the basic ontology of a Meinongian view—and so (a) and (b) occupy a prominent place. But since judicious use of the actual+/actual distinction led to each of these innovations, this stands as the most basic contribution of the paper.
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