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Conservative Meinongianism

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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).

David Lewis acclimated us to talk of “nonactual concreta that exist,” regarding talking donkeys and the like. I shall argue that this was not for the best, and try to normalize a way of describing them as “actual concreta that do not exist.”

In approaching this matter, the paper defends Meinong's (1904) classic thesis “there are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects,” in relation to fictitious and illusory objects.¹ Some have wondered whether the thesis is even consistent (Lycan 1979; 1994, van Inwagen 1977; 1983; 2003, Lewis 1990), though they grant 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” unicorns in the same sense that there are horses. Though admittedly, the sense in which there are unicorns is obscure, and making this clear shall have central importance.

¹ Relatedly, ‘Everything’ is not always the answer to ‘What is there?’, pace Quine (1948). N.b., Meinong's (1904) view on fictional/illusory objects must be separated from his view on mathematical objects and similar abstracta. (Here I intend to defend the former but not the latter.) For Meinong, these have a kind of being called ‘subsistence;’ though the notion is rejected by Noneist Meinongians like Routley (1988) and Priest (2005). My own view is closer to Meinong's; regardless, I wish to reserve the topic for another occasion.

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. For unlike other Meinongians, I do not describe nonexistent as mind-independent objects. (In defending Meinong’s thesis, I thus make no pretense to historical accuracy.) Instead, the view just admits the sense in which there are mind-*dependent* objects like illusory and fictitious objects (incl. some impossibilia). Given the mind-dependence thesis, the expansion in one’s ontology is thus a relatively conservative one by Meinongian standards..

A further distinctive feature is that the view advertises a conservative “ideology.”² 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.³

The three conservative features suggest that Meinong’s thesis has been underestimated by philosophers, and the aim is to advance the case for 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 instead is just on clarifying the ontology. And even so, the problem of “incomplete” fictional objects must be passed over (e.g., the “indeterminacy” in

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 the attitude I take assigning a term a Meinongian object. None of the arguments below require this attitude, but it is worth noting that such ‘modest’ Meinongianism is an option.

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 rather because an author can accomplish only so much in one paper.⁴ However, we will address a string of objections along way, closing with some remarks on whether Meinongian objects violate principles of parsimony.

1. Negative existentials: Back with a vengeance

I begin by presenting a novel version of the problem of negative existentials, one that proves more vexing to anti-Meinongians than usual. In subsequent sections, a new Meinongian view is developed, and it is shown how smoothly it makes sense of this and other difficult data.

Consider, then, a true negative existential such as:

(P) Pegasus does not exist.

Traditionally, the semantical problem is put as follows:⁵ 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 presumes that a subject-term can be 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

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).

⁵ This is how the problem is put in, e.g., Russell (1905).

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 $\lceil \Phi(\alpha) \rceil$ is true in the actual world, then the open formula $\lceil \Phi(x/\alpha) \rceil$ is satisfied by an actual object named by α .
- (2) (P) is a sentence of the form $\lceil \sim\Psi(\text{Pegasus}) \rceil$ and is true in the actual world.⁶
- (3) The formula $\lceil \sim\Psi(x/\text{Pegasus}) \rceil$ 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 assumed that a sentence of the form $\lceil \Phi(x/\alpha) \rceil$ (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 $\lceil \Phi(x/\alpha) \rceil$ 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, since 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 faice* appeal.⁷) Regardless, the

⁶ Traditionally, ‘exist’ has been viewed as a quantifier, so that (P) has the logical form ‘ $\sim(\exists y) y = \text{Pegasus}$.’ 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 $\lceil \sim\Psi(x) \rceil$ is the negation of a quantified or unquantified formula.

⁷ 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 hope to avoid.

above formulation is an improvement insofar as a meaningful empty name is not *directly* in conflict with any single starting-assumption.

But the new formulation is also important in that it hinders Lewis' (1986) "other worlds" approach, also employed by "Modal Meinongians" such as Priest (2005) and Berto (2008; 2011). (The label 'Modal Meinongian' is from Berto.) According to this approach, (P) is true because 'Pegasus' names a creature that exists only in some nonactual world. However: Assuming (1), this does not yet vindicate (P) as a truth in the domain of actual objects, a truth that holds *here*. We can grant Lewis et al. explain its truth in some extended sense. But we also want to say that (P) is true in our world *taken 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, a Lewisian would be conceding 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.⁸

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?⁹ A

⁸ 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.)

⁹ 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).

descriptivist, for instance, will say that the logical form of (P) does not have a proper name composing 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.”¹⁰ 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. Yet though this is now widely held for non-empty terms, some philosophers retain a descriptivist view for *empty* names/kind terms (e.g., Boghossian 1997). The 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, (4) should be equivalent to (5):

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

(5) Pegasus might not have been Pegasus.

But whereas (4) is true, (5) is not. Moreover, it is no help to rigidify the descriptor, in the way that Searle (1983) does for non-empty names. E.g., 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.

¹⁰ I’m glossing that ‘Bellerophon’ is an empty name too. A descriptivist ultimately breaks it down into a set of descriptors also.

But 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. Meinongian meditations

To this end, let us first 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 a 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 it is interpreted as “According to the fiction, Pegasus is imaginary” (see Rosen 1990, Nolan 2002, Sainsbury 2010). After all, Pegasus is not imaginary according to Greek myth—he is rather a flesh-and-blood creature. Sainsbury, however, replies with an alternate analysis: “According to the fiction, Pegasus exists” (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 2013).¹²

In light of such considerations, the new Meinongian proposes that *there is an actual object o* satisfying $\ulcorner \text{Imaginary}(x) \urcorner$. But if so, what kind of object could o be? Well, if o satisfies $\ulcorner \text{Imaginary}(x) \urcorner$, 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

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.

¹² N.B., 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.

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 an imaginary, 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). Yet such talk can be paraphrased into more familiar terms: When it is said that Pegasus is not actual, ‘actual’ denotes (something like) mind-independent objects in our world. But when Pegasus is said to be an “actual imaginary object,” ‘actual’ denotes both mind-independent and mind-dependent objects in our world. Hereafter, for clarity’s sake, ‘actual+’ shall be used to express the broader sense of ‘actual,’ whereas ‘**actual**’ will be used to express the stricter sense.

Moreover, it is key against Lycan et al. that the distinction between uses of ‘actual’ is already present in natural language. Consider:

- (6) There actually are mirages.
- (7) There actually are hallucinated objects.
- (8) There actually are imaginary objects.

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 §6 for elaboration.

I submit that each of (6)-(8) has a true and a false reading in English. On the true reading, for example, (8) 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 (6) and (7) 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 is hardly “gibberish.”

Still, in the regimented language, an anti-Meinongian will hope to paraphrase away the Meinongian ‘actual’ in the true readings of (6)-(8). Yet these examples are not meant to prove that the *regimentation* of English requires Meinongian objects. Rather, (6)-(8) 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.¹⁵

With negative existentials, we can therefore say that “Pegasus is actual+” and that “Pegasus is not **actual**” without contradiction. 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 $\lceil \Phi(\alpha) \rceil$ is true in the actual+ world, the open formula

$\lceil \Phi(x/\alpha) \rceil$ is then satisfied by some actual+ object named by α .

(2*) (P) is a sentence of the form $\lceil \sim\Psi(\text{Pegasus}) \rceil$ and is true in the actual+ world.

¹⁵ The mind-dependent/independent distinction deflects a further objection from Lycan (1996), when he addresses Nagel’s (1974) subjective/objective distinction. Lycan protests that Nagel’s distinction is superficial, since if subjective facts exist at all, they objectively exist as facts about subjectivity. (Rosen 1994 makes a similar point in a different context.) But here, we can grant the analogue of Lycan’s premise without collapsing the mind-dependent/independent distinction. It *is* a mind-independent fact that Pegasus does not exist except as an intentional object. But it does not follow that Pegasus is really mind-*independent* after all.

(3*) The formula $\lceil \sim\Psi(x/\text{Pegasus}) \rceil$ is not satisfied by some **actual** object named by ‘Pegasus’.

All this is quite consistent. Yet to be clear:

(9) $\lceil \sim\Psi(x/\text{Pegasus}) \rceil$ 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 non**actual** 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 as with non-empty names, 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 just consist in the **actual** world. But by this, I mean only that our world contains actual+ objects and not merely 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. But from another angle, Pegasus is the actual+ intentional object of some thoughts and expressions. Though again, he is merely intentional.

Although '**actual**' and 'actual+' are satisfied only 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 **nonactual**, i.e., **nonactual-at-our-world**. The world-relative uses are helpful, since *inter alia* they help make sense of negative existentials that are true at **nonactual** 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:

(10) 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, the hallucinated dagger is part of his world as well—it makes his world different from one without any such dagger. We can capture this in saying that Spooky is **actual+-but-nonactual-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. Though of course it is not something we ourselves *hallucinate*.¹⁶)

That Spooky is part of Macbeth's world is also a datum that Lewis and other-worlds Meinongians seem unable to capture. '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 Lewis and Modal Meinongians, re: the new problem of negative existentials. The reply would be to co-opt my proposed disambiguation at (1*)-(3*), yet reinterpret '**actual**' and 'actual+', respectively, as the Lewisian indexical 'actual' and as the unrestricted quantifier. However, the problem is that there remains no sense in which Spooky is part of Macbeth's world. 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 is right that there is no trans-world causation, then Spooky and Macbeth must be in the same world.

¹⁶ This observation resolves a problem case given by Thomas Hofweber: 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 'Blurgafflug.' 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. (Cf. the end of the next section.)

3. Mind-dependence

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) argues 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 nonexistentents 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, since Pegasus’ actuality+ depends on whether there is a mind to imagine him.

What does it mean to be mind-dependent? It potentially means several different things (see especially Rosen 1994).¹⁷ But here, 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 at all. The point is

¹⁷ I do not regard my remarks here as settling Rosen’s puzzlement over terms like ‘mind-independence’. He might grant 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’ (277). Even so, I would argue that we indeed encounter hallucinated and illusory objects as part of the natural world+ (though of course not as part of the natural **world**). Yet this of course is contentious. For more on conservative Meinongianism’s relationship to natural science, see the final paragraphs.

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.¹⁸ In contrast, if no one ever had thoughts of Pegasus, he would have no being at all.

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. 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 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

¹⁸ For the record, the real story about minds and mind-independence is more complicated. But I do not want to pursue the matter here.

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."¹⁹ 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 establish that he is a mind-independent abstractum.²⁰

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:

(11) 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.²¹

¹⁹ [Omitted] observes that this is reminiscent of Moore (1966, pp. 31-35), who holds that two persons think of the same imaginary object if their conceptions of the object were both *caused* by the creator's the first conceiving of the object. Yet I am not appealing to a causal criterion here (one need to specify the *right* sorts of causal relations, e.g., to rule out cases of mishearing Homer). Rather, a person thinks of Homer's object if it is built into the conception itself that the object is "the same one that Homer calls 'Pegasus'."

²⁰ Relatedly, Azzouni (2010, p. 137) objects that Meinongians are ignorant of the properties of *ficta*, for these differ from the properties the object is *depicted* as having, e.g., in a mental image. But 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.)

²¹ One may ask if Pegasus is even a *horse*, i.e., of the biological kind *equus caballus*. But let that pass.

For such reasons, Meinongians often introduce a notion of “nuclear” or “encoded” properties.²² 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 (11) is true, even though (11) 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” as in Molière’s joke, 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*. 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” an instance is confusing, one can say that he *is* a **nonactual** property-instance of *horseness* (It may then also be better to speak of *merely intentional property-instances* or “MIPs.”)²³

²² 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. By the way, abstractionists such as van Inwagen (1977; 1983) and Salmon (1998) use similar distinctions. E.g., van Inwagen talks of fictions as ‘having’ vs. ‘holding’ properties. So the paraphrases above could be co-opted by him as well. (That is so, especially since van Inwagen’s quantifier seems Meinongian to some extent. See note 29.)

²³ My thanks to [omitted] for these suggestions.

Either way, (11) consequently acquires two readings, one where it is true and one where it is false. It is true if it is interpreted as:

(12) Pegasus is a non**actual** horse with wings.

But (11) is false if it expresses:

(13) Pegasus is an **actual** horse with wings.

Though it would be appropriate to say:

(14) Pegasus is an actual+ non**actual** horse with wings.

So (11) is false in one sense. Yet the fact remains that Pegasus is a non**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**actual** horse.

Priest (2005) 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 (11) in some extended sense. It does not yet explain how it is *actually* true, i.e., a true sentence *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.)

Question: If (11) is actually+ true, are both **actual** and non**actual** 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’, (11) 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, (11) will come out *false*. Now I think there is a reading of (11) where it is false; *vide* (13). Still, one cannot insist both that (11) 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 are not **actual** horses but rather an actual+ horses that are MIOs.

It is worth remarking that, since the **actual/actual+** distinction holds for objects within a world, the same moves are available with the following:

(15) Spooky is a dagger.

This is true if it expresses either the following (where “*M*” is the pertinent Macbeth-world):

(16) Spooky is an actual+ dagger

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

Yet it is false if it expresses:

(18) Spooky is an **actual** dagger.

(19) Spooky is an **actual-in-*M*** dagger.

Though it is right to say:

(20) Spooky is actually+ a **nonactual** dagger.

(21) Spooky is actually+ an actual+-in-*M* dagger.

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

And from these, it follows:

(23) Spooky is an actual+, **nonactual**, actual+-in-*M*, **nonactual-in-*M*** dagger.

The “encoding” talk is sometimes used to resolve another problem-case for Meinong—Russell’s example ‘there is an existing golden mountain.’ A Meinongian seems committed to the truth of this, even though no golden mountain exists. The “encoding” response, however, is that there is a non-existent golden mountain, which somehow “encodes” existence. But again, it is preferable to avoid the “encoding” jargon. And we can do so by saying instead that the existing golden mountain does not **actually** exist, though it actually+ does (as a non**actual** mountain).

Yet unfortunately, there is a revenge example: There is an **actual** golden mountain. I cannot properly resolve the problem here. But for the record, I would analyze it rather like the Anselmian conclusion ‘There is a God’ where God is **actual** by definition. (See Parent 2015b for this analysis.) In both cases, even though 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 actual+ at least or, as Anselm says, “exists in the mind.” Indeed, if an entity is *de facto* non**actual**, then to define an **actual** version is to define something *impossible* (given that if $x \notin @$, then $\Box x \notin @$.) Thus, a commitment to Anselm’s **actual** God or Russell’s **actual** mountain can be avoided by treating them as non**actual** objects that are **actual** only *per impossibile*.

5. Impossibilia and abstracta

Following Meinong, the present view generally maintains that there are impossible objects—or more precisely, that impossibilia are actual+. This is not merely because ‘Some impossible objects are imaginary’ seems true. 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:

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

Such a thing seems 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 (24) as:

(25) Bertie need not have been Bertie.

And (25) 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.

Famously, Russell (1906) rejected Meinongianism about impossibilia, since the view commits to the contradiction that the round square is 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.²⁴

Nonetheless, if a 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

²⁴ A connected issue is that round squares violate Lewis' (1986, p. 7, n. 3) axiom that one cannot assert a truth by asserting a contradiction. But the reply is: This is exactly why these objects are *impossible*. They are objects of which inconsistent claims are true (which is, of course, impossible!). Nonetheless, I sympathize with Lewis (2004) that *reasoning* about impossible objects is vexed. The round square is both round and square—but is it therefore both non-round and non-square? If so, does this mean a round square is also not a round square?. It may be just a matter of stipulation, assuming we can imagine these objects using whatever descriptors we want. But I am unsure.

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.

The mention of round squares brings us more broadly to the topic of abstract vs. concrete objects.²⁵ It is important that MIOs have *not* been described as uniformly “abstract” (as the reader may have expected). Indeed, I would urge us to distinguish **actual** abstracta from **nonactual** abstracta. The round square is an abstractum, but it is merely an imaginary one; hence, it is **nonactual**.²⁶ And whereas some MIOs are **nonactual** abstracta, other MIOs are **nonactual** concreta. Pegasus is a **nonactual** flesh-and-blood horse, for instance, and is therefore a **nonactual** concretum. (Consequently, per my opening paragraph, there is a way of describing such things as “actual concreta that does not exist;” for Pegasus is an actual+ albeit **nonactual** concretum.) Yet although Pegasus is not **actually** concrete, it does not follow that he is **actually** abstract. As we saw earlier, the new Meinong says that Pegasus *isn't anything* as concerns **actuality**.²⁷ It is of course correct that ‘Pegasus’ is not **actually** in spacetime. But neither is ‘Blurgafflug,’ and for the same vacuous reason: The name does not **actually** denote.

²⁵ Lewis (1986) is known for observing that there are at least four ways of drawing the abstract/concrete distinction. But the literature on the present topic seems to uniformly adopt what Lewis calls the ‘Negative Way:’ Being concrete is the same as having a spatiotemporal location, or rather (since Lewisian worlds are concrete yet do not strictly have a location), having spatiotemporal dimensions. (Lewis notes that there are complications even with this refinement, involving ghosts and such, but we shall ignore these here.)

²⁶ Does this mean that ordinary squares are **actual** abstracta? I would prefer to say instead that they are subsistent in roughly Meinong’s sense. But explicating this further notion is more than I can accomplish at this time.

²⁷ Hofweber (2000) is also good on distinguishing abstractness from existence: ‘[W]hatever difficulty there might be to answer the question whether or not there are abstract objects, it has to be even harder to decide whether or not there are non-existent objects. Abstract entities, if there are any, at least exist’ (p. 249).

Accordingly, a sentence of the form $\lceil \Phi(\alpha/\text{Pegasus}) \rceil$ is not truth-evaluable when we are restricted to **actual** objects, regardless of whether ‘ Φ ’ is replaced with ‘concrete’ or ‘abstract’ or whatever else.

6. Compare and contrast

So Pegasus is a MIO, but he is not abstract—rather, Pegasus is **nonactually** concrete, and **actually** is nothing at all. In resisting the abstractness of Pegasus, the present view is thus importantly different from Moltmann’s (forthcoming) and Thomasson’s (1999; 2003) artifactualism, as well as the abstractionism in Wolterstoff (1980) Salmon (1998), and Kripke (2011; 2013).²⁸ Arguably, such views entail Meinong’s classic thesis. (In the artifactualism case Moltmann concurs, whereas Thomasson 1999, p. 15 conditionally agrees).²⁹ Regardless, in light of the actual+/**actual** distinction, it is better to distinguish such views from the present one.³⁰ The position is more akin to Crane (2013). Crane also holds that there are intentional objects like Pegasus—and similarly rejects his abstractness, on the grounds that he isn’t anything (see pp. 75-81). Yet unlike myself, Crane is not making an ontological claim when he says that there are

²⁸ Kripke, of course, is better known for his (1972/1980) view that Pegasus and the like *necessarily* do not exist. I discuss this view a bit further in connection with McGinn below. Nevertheless, Kripke is unequivocal in recent work that fictional objects are abstracta. Salmon (2011, p. 50) expresses doubt on whether Kripke’s views are all consistent; regardless, the artifactualism really is part of Kripke’s most recent view.

²⁹ Even van Inwagen’s (1977; 1983) abstractionism may entail Meinong’s thesis. Van Inwagen vehemently rejects Meinong’s *quantifier* (or rather, Meinong’s explication of it). But his own existential quantifier (call it ‘ $(\forall x)$ ’) ranges over fictions, thus allowing *one* reading of Meinong’s thesis where it is true: $(\forall x)(x \text{ is fictional})$.

³⁰ Interestingly, our rejecting the abstractness of all non-existent objects means the present account differs from other contemporary Meinongian views as well, most noticeably, that of Zalta (1983; 1988).

MIOs. Early on, he stresses “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 a Meinongian, but rather a kind of “reductionist” (his term, p. 6) about the truth of ‘there are non-existent objects.’³¹ In contrast, the present view is indeed Meinongian in acknowledging two kinds of “being”—namely, mind-independent and mind-dependent being. There is little hope, I would add, of reducing a mind-dependent entity to something mind-independent—that would be to have are logically contradictory entity. Nothing can be both mind-*dependent* and mind-*independent* (except *per impossibile*, like the **actual** golden mountain).³²

³¹ Even so, Crane is like the new Meinong in denying 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 roughly Lewis’ 1983; 1986 sense), and *being a horse* qualifies as such. But this seems unfortunate, for the problem of negative existentials resurfaces for the case of “**nonactual** sparse-property-instances.” The new Meinong thus prefers to say that there actually+ are **nonactual** sparse-property-instances. (This also allows one to affirm that Pegasus and real horses have something important in common.)

³² For further explanation of this “anti-reductionism” between the two kinds of being, see Parent (2015c).

The present account may bear a stronger resemblance to McGinn's (2000; 2004, ch. 10) view, where fictional entities are identified with merely intentional objects. But importantly, he hopes to preserve the mind-independence of metaphysical possibility (so that 'there are unconceived possible objects' comes out true), while simultaneously upholding the mind-dependence of Pegasus. Yet how can this be? McGinn's solution is to follow Kripke (1972/1980), in the claim that Pegasus is *not* possible: Greek myth assigns no essence to Pegasus, hence, no possible entity properly qualifies as Pegasus. But as McGinn recognizes, the Kripkean point does not carry over to every sort of nonactual object, e.g., talking donkeys. And for those entities, McGinn apparently relinquishes the mind-dependence claim:

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 (p. 39).

Thus, McGinn succumbs to the Lewisian view that talking donkeys and the like really exist, for their ontological deficiency lies *just* in the fact they are not actual.³³ According to the new Meinongian, however, talking donkeys and the like are mere imaginings as well.

The obvious objection from McGinn, however, would be that this is unfaithful to what is metaphysically possible—it is a view where all possible objects must be conceived. The main ambition here, however, was simply to draw a contrast between myself and McGinn. Even so, it

³³ Accordingly, McGinn admits (in his n. 42) 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.

is worth canvassing briefly a reply to this challenge, just to prevent the new Meinongian from being dismissed out of hand. But I shall relegate this to a brief appendix.

7. Closing remarks on parsimony

A prominent complaint is that, in countenancing non-existents, the Meinongian dispenses with Occam's Razor, the idea that one should not posit entities beyond what is needed for empirical adequacy. This principle of parsimony is a familiar idea to philosophers; it advises, e.g., that if we can accommodate all empirical data in psychology without positing the existence of an immaterial soul, we should follow this more austere route. The objection, then, is that the Meinongian blatantly rejects such prudence by subscribing to a "bloated universe" of non-existents, thereby offending those of us with "an aesthetic taste for desert landscapes."

Be that as it may, the conservative Meinongian does not increase her ontology in one sense—i.e., her **ontology**. Presumably, what she counts as **actual** need not deviate. Nor is there an increase in ideology, since "encoding" can be paraphrased away. Yet the view indeed features a greater ontology+, for it admits the sense in which there are mind-dependent entities, imaginary objects and such. The concern, then, is that parsimony would forbid this.

But in fact, this rests on a contentious assumption, namely:

(EA) We can achieve comparable empirical adequacy without Meinongian objects.

Charitably, the parsimony objection assumes (EA)—parsimony should matter only if the competing theories are empirically comparable. After all, simpler theory is hardly attractive if it

just looks simplistic vis-à-vis the data, especially if there is some alternative that is clearly empirically superior.³⁴

However, the foregoing generates serious doubt about (EA). For one, the true readings of (6)-(8) show that English naturally permits Meinongian uses of ‘actual’—uses where its extension apparently includes mind-dependent objects. And sentences like (P) and (I) support the actual+ existence of MIOs. The common theme here is: Mind dependent-objects. Apparently, going by the data, there are mind-dependent objects. The data thus signifies more than a motley of puzzles for the anti-Meinongian work through. Rather, (6)-(8), (P), (I), and suggest a *systematic reason* for why an anti-Meinongian view is inadequate.

Anti-Meinongian accounts of the data may be attempted. Yet the thrust of these specific data points seems underappreciated. This is true even for (P), given the reformulated problem of negative existentials. Regardless, the point is not to “prove” Meinongianism, but rather just to keep it in the running, by observing that (EA) is by no means obvious. This is crucial, because when Occam’s razor is mobilized, the supposition is that some anti-Meinongian alternative *is* comparable. Yet since the Meinongian rejects this claim, the opponent thus *begs a question* when she levies the parsimony objection.

³⁴ Plus, even if (EA) is true, it does not *follow* that Meinongian objects should be razored *à la* Occam. Quine (1948) himself saw that a larger ontology can still be preferable if it results in *simpler laws*. This is why Quine thinks we should posit physical objects as the causes of sensations, rather than just the sensations themselves: ‘Physical objects are postulated entities which round out, and simplify our account of the flux of experience, just as the introduction of irrational numbers simplifies laws of arithmetic’ (p. 18). In the same way, even if (EA) is true, it is possible that Meinongia are still for the best if they simplify our semantic or psychological laws. (Considering this, it is thus a bit unclear why Quine was more antagonistic toward Meinongia than to physical objects.)

I suspect that anti-Meinongian appeals to parsimony have been compelling, precisely because a comparable alternative was thought in reach. Granted, if such an alternative existed, Meinongian objects would seem extravagant, akin to Ptolemy's epicycles-upon-epicycles. But from where I sit, the analogy is unjust. I would rather compare Meinongian objects to black holes or dark matter. Such things are not posited arbitrarily, but rather for earnest empirical reasons.

Admittedly, however, there is something uniquely unsettling about positing Meinongian objects. It seems to institute a fundamental divide in reality, where objects can have two different "ways of being." This marks a contrast even with Lewis. Lewisian possibilities all exist in a uniform way; his modal multiverse contains no "grades of being" or the like. In that respect, his view indeed enjoys greater "qualitative parsimony" at least compared to the Meinongian's (cf. Lewis 1973, p. 87).

"Ways of being" are unfamiliar, and I will not be able to fully dispel the oddity.³⁵ But in closing, I might offer an analogy. Scientific activity might be likened to a coin-counting machine which filters out slugs, etc., and sorts the remainder by type: quarters, dimes, and so forth. In a parallel manner, science normally filters out what is illusory, fictitious, or hallucinated, and then categorizes what remains. Accordingly, if MIOs are not filtered out, it can look like a breakdown. It would be as if the coin-machine started sorting the slugs in with the other denominations. (Not only does this skew the count, but it makes a mess of the categorization.)

It is hard to imagine why such a coin machine would be desirable, and similarly, it may seem perverse for science to admit mind-dependent objects. But if I am right, *there are* things

³⁵ The idea is gaining some momentum however. See McDaniel (2009) and Turner (2010) for prominent defenses of 'ontological pluralism.' See also Caplan (2011) for a provocative defense of ontological *super*pluralism, the idea that there are many ways to be an ontological pluralist.

that are normally filtered out—and one might ask about the nature of those things too. Of course, there would be no categorical imperative to undertake this inquiry. Yet there is no clear reason to forbid such inquiry either, and the pursuit would assume there exist+ things that do not **exist**.

To be clear, mind-dependent objects do not exist in any sense, as far as science normally is concerned. And rightly so. (Thus, as concerns extant scientific activities, there are no revisionist implications here at all.³⁶) Yet if there are mind-dependent objects, there should be no stigma in investigating them. And as objects of a different domain, it is only natural that such objects would not “exist” in the same sense as mind-independent objects, and fail to fit into the same categories. Yet new categories can be forged (“actual+ yet non**actual** horses”) and things can be classified accordingly. (Even the coin machine can be modified to sort out “fake dimes,” “fake quarters,” etc.) Still, on most scientific occasions, it probably *is* better to ignore MIOs. Yet when it comes to a complete inventory of what there is, a robust sense of reality will acknowledge these entities as well.

Appendix: Possibility

In §6, we saw McGinn’s (2002) desire to uphold the mind-independence of (typical) modal matters, e.g., that talking donkeys are possible, even though he accepts the mind-*dependence* of Pegasus. His resolution of this, again, is to suppose with Kripke that Pegasus is not a possible object, while conceding the Lewisian realist view for talking donkeys. My proposal, however, is to regard Pegasus and talking donkeys in the same way—namely, as actual+ mind-dependent objects. But then, what of McGinn’s intuition that the possibility of talking donkeys should be a mind-independent matter?

³⁶ Though ignoring mind-dependent objects is, I think, why qualia can seem so intractable. See Parent (2015c).

The rejoinder is that a talking donkey, while merely imaginary, is also imagined *as* a mind-independent entity. Such a mind-dependent entity would have (or perhaps be) a mind-dependent property-instance of *being mind-independent*. This suggestion can be fleshed out further by recruiting the modal fictionalism from, e.g., Rosen (1990) and Nolan (2002). On this approach, one could then maintain that the realist thesis at (26) is false, while upholding the literal truth of (27):

(26) In mind-independent reality, there is possible world with talking donkeys.

(27) According to the modal fiction: In mind-independent reality, there is a possible world with talking donkeys.

Consequently, our conflating of (26) with (27) might serve as a plausible error-theory for realist intuitions in favor of (26).³⁷ In tandem with this, an especially attractive feature of Rosen-Nolan fictionalism is that the truth of (27) is sufficient for the literal truth (not just “truth in fiction”) of the *ordinary* modal claim:

(28) Talking donkeys are possible.

The literal truth of (28) would depend not on a mind-independent, Lewisian possible world—rather, it depends on an actual+ yet non**actual** world represented within a fiction. But importantly, the fact that there-is+ such a non**actual** world is a mind-*independent* fact. The fact that *homo sapiens* represent such a non**actual** world is a fact that does not, itself, depend on someone representing that fact.

³⁷ Even so, it is contentious to saddle the Meinongian fictionalist with the view that all possibilities must be *mentally pictured* or otherwise *overtly* represented, e.g., by tokening a sentence like (27). After all, grasping Lewis’ (1986) Principle of Recombination (arguably) suffices to “conceive” of every possibility in some sense, even though not every possibility is thereby explicitly attended to in detail.

There are objections to modal fictionalism, to be sure (though some are addressed in Parent, forthcoming). Nonetheless, conservative Meinongianism might assist modal fictionalism against in some respects. For instance, a common concern is how to understand the semantics of the story-prefix operator, without invoking the bona fide existence of worlds (cf. Rosen 1990, pp. 343ff.). After all, the orthodox view (from Lewis 1978) basically is that ‘According to the fiction, p ’ is true iff **there is** a possible world—i.e., a mind-independent possible world—described by the fiction where p . But the conservative Meinongian can explicate the fictionalist’s use of the prefix as follows: ‘According to the modal fiction, **there is** a possible world where p ’ is true iff there-is+ a possible world described by the modal fiction where p .³⁸ These remarks by no means are enough to establish such Meinongian fictionalism; they are rather just meant to suggest that McGinn’s type of concern might not prove fatal.³⁹

[9848 words, incl. footnotes]

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³⁸ By the way, none of this contravenes my earlier criticism of fictionalism from §2. It remains that fictionalism per se, *sans* mind-dependent objects, does not explain the truth of ‘Pegasus is imaginary’ (at least, not without incurring other theoretical costs). Nonetheless, once mind-dependent objects are admitted, fictionalism can *then* be called upon, in the manner indicated at (27), to explain (away) the intuition that modality is mind-independent.

³⁹ Thanks to Jody Azzouni, Dorit Bar-On, Thomas Hofweber, Al Martinich, Ram Neta, Keith Simmons, Meg Wallace, Ed Zalta—and especially William Lycan—for valuable comments on earlier drafts. I also thank an audience at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

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