Selected Bibliography on the History of the Theories of Nonexistent Objects

BIBLIOGRAPHY


3. Amerini, Fabrizio, and Rode, Christian. 2009. "Franciscus de Prato's *Tractatus de ente rationis*. A critical Edition with a historico-philosophical Introduction." *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* no. 76:261-312. "This paper provides a critical edition of Francis of Prato’s *Treatise on Being of Reason* (*Tractatus de ente rationis*). It is prefaced by a historico-philosophical introduction. Francis’s *Treatise* is one of the first Italian reactions to the diffusion of William of Ockham’s philosophy of language and logic. Francis argues here against Ockham’s reduction of being of reason to acts of cognition, accounted for as items existing ‘subjectively’ (subjective) in the mind. By contrast, following Thomas Aquinas and Hervaeus Natalis, he proposes a relational and ‘objective’ account of being of reason."


Abstract: "In this paper I shall show the relevant role which the beings of reason play in Suarez's philosophy, namely, the role of being the guarantee of the scientific validity. For this thesis it is basic to discover the difference between the chimera and other beings of reason: the negation, the relation of reason and the privation. In this way, Suarez sets the basis of the properly baroque way of understanding the world as an extra-mental reality which is only cognoscible through the artful device of the being of reason. Suarez conceives the science from the Aristotelean perspective, that is why he does not appreciate the mathematical beings of reason. Nevertheless, we do believe that the notion of being of reason is helpful in the comprehension of the singularity of the baroque metaphysics in comparison to the posterior ontologism. We enter, therefore, in discussion with the marked tendency to interpret the metaphysics of Suarez in an ontological way."


"Beings of reason or non-existent objects have always been a source of mind-boggling paradoxes that have vexed philosophers and thinkers in the past and present. Consider Bertrand Russell's paradox: 'if A and B are not different, then the difference between A and B does not subsist. But how can a non-entity be the subject of a proposition?' Or Meinong's paradox: 'There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects.' At the root of these troubling conundrums are two basic questions: What are beings of reason? What kind of existence do they have? Francisco Suárez was well aware that a solution to the metaphysical questions concerning the essential character of beings of reason and their ontological status would serve as the key to solving the puzzles and paradoxes just described. A solution to these metaphysical questions would also bring about an understanding of how we talk about beings of reason and other problems that they give rise to in the philosophy of language. In this paper, I present Suárez's view on the nature and ontological status of beings of reason and clarify some of the following questions: What kind of beings (entia) are beings of reason? What kind of being (esse) do beings of reason have? This latter concern is related to the following metaphysical issues: What are real beings? What is the nature and ontological status of possible beings? What is the distinction between real beings, actual beings, and possible beings?"


Abstract: "Much contemporary philosophy of language has shown considerable interest in the relation between our linguistic practice and our metaphysical commitments, and this interest has begun to influence work in the history of philosophy as well.(1) In his Categories and De interpretatione, Aristotle presents an analysis of language that can be read as intended to illustrate an isomorphism between the ontology of the real world and how we talk about that world. Our understanding of language is at least in part dependent upon our understanding of the relationships that exist among the enduring πράγματα that we come across in our daily experience. Part of the foundations underlying Aristotle’s doctrine of categories seems to have been a concern, going back to the Academy, about the problem of false propositions: language is supposed to be a tool for communicating the way things are, and writers in antiquity were often puzzled by the problem of how we are to understand propositions that claim that reality is other than it is.(2) Aristotle’s analysis of propositions raises a particular problem in this regard: if the subject of a proposition does not refer to anything, how can the proposition be useful for talking about a state of the world?

The problem falls into two separate but related parts: propositions whose subjects are singular terms and hence make claims about some particular thing, and propositions whose subjects are general terms and hence make claims about classes. In this paper I will explain Aristotle’s treatment of each kind, focusing in particular
on what has widely been perceived as a problem in his treatment of singular terms. My discussion of his treatment of general terms will be more brief, but will show that his treatment of them is consistent with his treatment of singular terms.

(1) An interesting treatment of this topic that illustrates how such concerns intersect with issues in the history of philosophy can be found in Diamond (1996), Introduction II (pp. 13–38). Whittaker (1996) also touches on these themes.


References


Contents: Preface IX, Introduction XI-XII; Study I. Predication and immanence: Anaxagoras, Plato, Eudoxus, and Aristotle 3; Study II. Ancient non-beings: Speusippus and others 63; Notes 121; Bibliography 179; Index locorum 205; General index 215.


"Sylvester Mauro, S.J. (1619-1687) noted that human intellects can grasp what is, what is not, what can be, and what cannot be. The first principle, 'it is not possible that the same thing simultaneously be and not be,' involves them all. The present volume begins with Greeks distinguishing 'being' from 'something' and proceeds to the late Scholastic doctrine of 'supertranscendental being,' which embraces both. On the way is Aristotle's distinction between 'being as being' and 'being as true' and his extension of the latter to include impossible objects. The Stoics will see 'something' as the widest object of human cognition and will affirm that, as signifiable, impossible objects are something, more than mere nonsense. In the sixteenth century, Francisco Suárez will identify mind-dependent beings most of all with impossible objects and will also regard them as signifiable. By this point, two conceptions will stand in opposition. One, adumbrated by Averroes, will explicitly accept the reality and knowability of impossible objects. The other, going back to Alexander of Aphrodisias, will see impossibles as accidental and false conjunctions of possible objects. Seventeenth-century Scholastics will divide on this line, but in one way or another will anticipate the Kantian notion of 'der Gegenstand überhaupt.' Going farther, Scholastics will see the two-sided upper border of being and knowing at God and the negative theology, and will fix the equally double lower border at 'supertranscendental being' and 'supertranscendental nonbeing,' which nonbeing, remaining intelligible, will negate the actual, the possible, and even the impossible."


"My feelings towards philosophers are mixed. For centuries they have used me as an experimental animal, keeping me on a minimum of being. In a way I may owe them my "life", but their experiments have weakened me so much that the end may be drawing near. If my weakness proves fatal, please inform the Centaur, Goat-Stag and Pegasus, who are my next of kin. If the philosophers kill me, I expect them to keep at least one of my relatives alive in order to continue the experiments. If we are all doomed, I would like to secure us a place in man's memory. This is why I have put together these extracts from my diary, recording the sufferings to which I and my tribe have been subjected." (*)

(*) "This paper reproduces the manuscript left by the chimera, but I have added..."
references to books and manuscripts, plus a few notes which appear in square brackets. The reader will notice that the chimera has wisely disregarded accidental changes of philosophers’ choices of example when they need a composite animal. The chimera takes remarks about, e.g., the goat-stag as remarks aimed at itself. As a matter of fact, Aristotle and the Greek Aristotelian commentators prefer the goat-stag (τραγελαφος) and the centaur (ιππογεμνατωρος). In the Hellenistic period, the centaur, the scylla and the chimera are the standard examples. In Latin medieval texts the chimera (inherited from Manlius Boethius) is vastly more popular than any of the other composite animals."


Abstract: "The article proposes a new solution to the long-standing problem of the universality of essences in Spinoza's ontology. It argues that, according to Spinoza, particular things in nature possess unique essences, but that these essences coexist with more general, mind-dependent species-essences, constructed by finite minds on the basis of similarities (‘agreements’) that obtain among the properties of formally-real particulars. This account provides the best fit both with the textual evidence and with Spinoza's other metaphysical and epistemological commitments. The article offers new readings of how Spinoza understands not just the nature of essence, but also the nature of being, reason, striving, definitions, and different kinds of knowledge."


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"Alexius Meinong and his circle of students and collaborators at the Philosophisches Institut der Universität Graz formulated the basic principles for a general theory of objects. (1) They developed branches and applications of the theory, outlined programs for further research, and answered objections from within and outside their group, revising concepts and sharpening distinctions as they proceeded. The object theory that emerged as the result of their efforts combines important advances over traditional systems of logic, psychology, and semantics. The fate of object theory in the analytic philosophical community has been unfortunate in many ways. With few exceptions, the theory has not been sympathetically interpreted. It has often met with unfounded resistance and misunderstanding under the banner of what Meinong called "The prejudice in favor of the actual". (2) The idea of nonexistent objects has wrongly been thought to be incoherent or confused, and there are still those who mistakenly believe that the theory inflates ontology with metaphysically objectionable quasi-existent entities. These criticisms are dealt with elsewhere by object theory adherents, and are not considered here. In what follows, the intelligibility of an object theory such as Meinong envisioned is assumed, and ultimately vindicated by the construction of a logically consistent version. The inadequacies of extensionalist theories of ontological commitment and definite description, hallmarks of the Russell-Quine axis in recent analytic philosophy, justify an alternative intentional Meinongian object theory logic. Analytic philosophy survives the rejection of extensionalist treatments of definite description and ontological commitment, since analytic methods are not inherently limited to any particular set of extensional or intentional assumptions.
A comprehensive historical treatment of Meinong's philosophy is not attempted in these chapters, though some historical issues are addressed. Some of Meinong's most important philosophical writings have now been translated or are expected to appear in the near future, and there are several recent commentaries on Meinong's work, including Richard Routley's *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond*, Terence Parsons' *Nonexistent Objects*, and Karel Lambert's *Meinong and the Principle of Independence*. These studies have contributed to renewed interest in and unprejudiced reappraisal of object theory. Analyses of the subtle turnings in Meinong's thought over several decades may be found in J. N. Findlay's *Meinong's*
Theory of Objects and Values, Reinhardt Grossmann's Meinong, Robin Rollinger's Meinong and Husserl on Abstraction and Universals, and Janet Farrell Smith's essay "The Russell-Meinong Debate". These works trace the complex development of Meinong's early nominalism or moderate Aristotelian realism in the Hume-Studien to his mature realistic interpretation of relations and factual objectives or states of affairs as subsistent entities, the theory of objects of higher order, and the doctrine of the Aussersein of the pure object. I have relied on these among other sources, I cannot hope to improve on them in some respects, and my topic in any case is somewhat different. I am concerned exclusively with the logic, semantics, and metaphysics or ontology and extraontology of Meinong's theory. Accordingly, I shall not discuss Meinong's epistemology, theory of perception, or value theory, which I nevertheless regard as essential to an understanding of his philosophy as a whole. The logic, semantics, and metaphysics of object theory are in a sense the most fundamental aspects of Meinong's thought, and therefore require the most careful preliminary investigation.

The formal system I develop is a variation of Meinong's vintage Gegenstandstheorie, refined and made precise by the techniques of mathematical logic. The proposal offers an integrated three-valued formalization of Meinongian object theory with existence-conditional abstraction, and modal and non-Russellian definite description subtheories. The logic is motivated by considerations about the need for an object theory semantics in the correct analysis of ontological commitment and definite description. Applications of the logic are provided in phenomenological psychology, Meinongian mathematics and metamathematics, criticism of ontological proofs for the existence of God in rationalist theodicy, the interpretation of fiction and scientific law, and formal resolutions of Wittgenstein's private language argument and the paradox of analysis. In some areas it has been necessary to depart from Meinong's official formulation of the theory. But I have tried to make these differences explicit, justifying them by argument and evaluating alternative interpretations. This I believe is in keeping with the spirit of the first exponents of object theory, who did not advance their views as a fixed body of doctrine, but maintained an openminded scientific attitude, and continually sought to achieve a more accurate approximation of the truth.

(1) I refer to Meinong's Gegenstandstheorie as a theory of objects, but alternative English equivalents have been proposed which should also be considered. Reinhardt Grossmann argues that the theory must be called a theory of entities because it includes not merely objects (Objekte), but objectives or states of affairs (Objektive). Grossmann, Meinong [1974], pp. 111-12: "If we keep in mind that Meinong will eventually divide all entities (other than so-called dignitatives and desideratives) into objects on the one hand and objectives on the other, we cannot speak of a theory of objects as the all-embracing enterprise, but must speak -- as I have done and shall continue to do -- of a theory of entities." This argument is inconclusive, since objectives are also objects of a kind, which Meinong describes as objects of higher order (hOherer Ordnung), superiora founded on inferiora or lower order objects. An objective in any case can be as much an object of thought as any other nonobjective object, as when someone thinks about the fact that Graz is in Austria, and thereby makes that state of affairs an object of thought. In this sense, the theory of objects, of lower and higher order, is already all-embracing in the way Grossmann thinks Meinong's Gegenstandstheorie is meant to be. Nicholas Griffin identifies a further difficulty in Grossmann's terminological recommendation. In "The Independence of Sosein from Sein" [1979], p. 23, n. 2, Griffin writes: 'Grossmann standardly uses the term 'entity' for Meinong's 'Gegenstand', which is usually translated as 'object'.
Since the Oxford English Dictionary defines 'entity' as 'thing that has real existence', this switch is unsatisfactory. Accordingly I have switched back either to 'object' or to the even more neutral term 'item.' Griffin's choice of translation agrees with Richard Routley's in Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond [1981], where Routley refers to a theory of items distinct in some respects from but directly inspired by Meinong's theory of objects. Routley's 'theory of item' is perhaps better used to designate his own special version of object theory, which he also denotes 'noneism'. Neither Grossmann's nor Routley's terminology carries the intentional force of 'Gegenstand', which as Meinong explains is etymologically related to 'gegenstehen', to stand against or confront, as objects of thought are supposed to confront and present themselves to the mind.


(3) In his early work, Meinong expressed the belief that nonexistent objects have what he then called Quasisein. "The Theory of Objects", pp. 84-5. Meinong here refers to the first edition of his Uber Annahmen [1902], p. 95. See J. N. Findlay, Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values [1963], pp. 47- 8. Routley, Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond [1981], pp. 442, 854. Routley reports that Meinong renounced the theory of Quasisein in favor of the Aussersein thesis by 1899 (presumably with the publication in that year of his essay "Uber Gegenstände höherer Ordnung und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung"). As a statement of the frequent misinterpretations of Meinong's object theory that persist today, see P.M. S. Hacker, Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein, revised edition [1986], p. 8: "The Theory of Descriptions ... enabled Russell to thin out the luxuriant Meinongian jungle of entities (such as the square circle) which, it had appeared, must in some sense subsist in order to be talked about ..."
changes influenced the concept of entia rationis. In the concluding section of the paper I present a simple formal reconstruction of what I take to be Ockham's basic innovations in semantics, and discuss briefly the new ontological programme it initiated."

(1) One of course has to be very cautious when applying such an expression so much involved in scholarly debate. In the rest of this paper I want to use it in a very restricted, technical sense, referring to a particular way of constructing semantic theory, sharply distinguishable from Ockham's and his followers' way (both to be described later). What I think may justify such a usage is the clear connection of these ways of doing semantics with the manners in which broader philosophical, theological, and methodological issues were treated in the two great trends getting separated later in mediaeval thought. Indeed, this paper may perhaps serve as a modest contribution to the characterisation of the two viae from the point of view of the connections between semantics and ontology. As to the debates concerning the proper characterisation of via antiqua vs. via moderna, see, e.g., Moore (1989).

(2) To be sure, by presenting Aquinas's views as representative of what I call 'via antiqua semantics' I do not want to deny the immense variety of semantic views in mediaeval philosophy even before Ockham. I take Aquinas's views as typical, however, as contrasted with Ockham's, precisely in those of their features that rendered the via antiqua framework unacceptable for Ockham.


Translation and Commentary by Dale Jacquette.


"In 1597 Francisco Suárez published a comprehensive treatise on beings of reason (entia rationis) as part of his Disputationes metaphysicae. Subsequent scholastic philosophers vigorously debated various aspects of Suárez's theory. The aim of this paper is to identify some of the most controversial points of these debates, as they developed in the first half of the seventeenth century. In particular, I focus on the intension and the extension of 'ens rationis', its division (into negations, privations and relations of reason) and its causes. Additionally, I will discuss how Suárez's views sparked a number of debates within the classical view, debates which ultimately led to the emergence of various alternative theories, especially among the Jesuits. These non-classical views radically revise the previous classical conception of beings of reason."


"Beings of reason are impossible intentional objects, such as blindness and square-circle. The first part of this book is structured around a close reading of Suarez's main text on the subject, namely Disputation 54. The second part centers on texts on this topic by other outstanding philosophers of the time, such as the Spanish Jesuit Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza (1578-1641), the Italian Franciscan Bartolomeo Mastri (1602-73), and the Spanish-Bohemian-Luxembourgian polymath Juan Caramuel de Lobkowitz (1606-82)."


79. O'Meara, Dominic. 1990. "La question de l'être et du non-être des objets


"Si Aristote a eu le mérite de distinguer avec beaucoup de netteté l'art de la logique de la philosophie elle-même, considérant cet art comme un organon, un instrument de la pensée, saint Thomas, commentateur d'Aristote, continue son effort; et dans une perspective critique il précise que si la philosophie regarde l'ens naturae, l'ens extra animam, la logique, elle, considère l'ens rationis, ce qui ne peut naître que dans notre connaissance intellectuelle (1).

Examinons ici les principaux textes où saint Thomas expose sa pensée sur ce point, pour essayer d'en saisir toute la signification et, à partir de là, mieux comprendre le réalisme de sa métaphysique. Car si l'ens naturae ne se définit pas par l'ens rationis - c'est plutôt l'inverse qui a lieu, puisque l'ens per se est l'ens extra animam, il peut cependant être mieux manifesté, pour nous, grâce à l'ens rationis. Il y a là quelque chose d'analoge à ce qui a lieu entre l'ens naturae et l'ens artificiale (qui peut, lui aussi, être appelé ens rationis en un sens élargi): l'ens artificiale se définit en fonction de l'ens naturae, et non l'inverse; mais la comparaison des deux nous aide à mieux saisir ce qu'est l'ens naturae au sens fondamental et premier." (p. 91)


"Although in his early works Spinoza is critical of “beings of reason” (entia rationis), nonetheless he thinks that they are useful in certain contexts. This paper discusses the metaphysical and epistemological status of “beings of reason”—such as universals, measurements, and value terms—and tries to explain how, even if they are problematic, they can be useful. I shall argue that Spinoza borrows from Suarez and other neo-scholastics the idea that beings of reason are analogical. The regulatory function of beings of reason depends upon the possibility—a possibility that is most often not realized—of the similarity of the imaginative entity to an actual being. I discuss the role of beings of reason in Spinoza’s conception of the part-whole relation and the construction of an imaginative sign. I shall claim that the case of beings of reason sheds light on the nature of the imagination itself in the Ethics."


Translation and introduction by Reinhardt Grossmann of *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen*.


On the website "Theory and History of Ontology" (www.ontology.co)

Entia Rationis: History of the Theories of Nonexistent Objects

The Development of Ontology from Suárez to Kant

The Birth of Ontology: a Selection of Authors from the Period 1570-1770

Francisco Suárez on Metaphysics as the Science of Real Beings

Christian Wolff's Ontology: Existence as Complement of Possibility