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Alexius Meinong's Theory of Objects

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The influence of Meinong

"Nowadays, a need for formal tools is strongly felt in the treatment of two special areas of ontological inquiry. One area is concerned with intentional objects, an area which seems to contain difficulties on the level of things, but also on the level of states of affairs, facts and other "propositional" entities. An intentional relation holds between either persons (more generally experiencing subjects) or acts of consciousness on the one hand, and the intentional objects on the other. The latter are what people see, fear, expect, look for; and the problem, naturally, consists in the fact that – contrary to usual predication – the predicates in question truly apply to intentional objects which do not exist in the same sense as my cat in "My cat is on the mat". In short: "We are thinking about Sherlock Holmes" may be true (and in fact is true while we are writing the sentence) in a real-world-context, but "Sherlock Holmes lives on Baker Street" can be true only inside the fictive context of the novels. Nevertheless, intuitively everybody can think about Sherlock Holmes in just the same sense as he can think about Baker Street, which "really" exists in London. Historically, this problem of intentional objects forms one of the roots of formal ontology, as well as of the philosophy of mind.
One of the most influential thinkers of ontology at the beginning of our century was the Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong, Ritter von Handschuchsheim. His best known conception deals, among other things, with objects that do not exist. This doctrine is part of Meinong's Object Theory (*Gegenstandstheorie*) which is based on certain assumptions concerning the correspondence of various types of mental states to objects. Thus, there are objects of higher order, founded on the so-called objects of passive perception. Such founded objects are said to subsist (*bestehen*) rather than exist. According to Meinong, the entities we assume or infer are very complex objects called objectives. Objectives are built from other objects. They do not exist either; they may either be or not be a fact (*tatsächlich*). They can be expressed, for example by a that-clause, although their being an objective does obviously not depend on their being expressed by a sentence. "Objectives" are the "propositions" of Bertrand Russell and George Edward Moore who were, by the way, heavily

influenced in many ways by Meinong. On that basis, non-existing objects or objectives, which are not facts, turn out to be genuine objects or objectives nevertheless – their status does not depend on thought or expression. The non-existence of a huge golden sphere is very different from the nonexistence of a huge uranium sphere, a difference which provides them with an objective status. Yet Meinong never claims that non-existing objects subsist, or have any other form of being (*Sein*). What he assumes them to have is a certain nature (*Sosein*), unaffected by their existence or nonexistence. To say that a huge uranium sphere is heavy and round is not to say that there is such a thing. Contrary to Russell's opinion, "there is a P" does not follow from "something is a P". Meinong's incompletely determined objects, which violate the law of excluded middle, play an extremely important role in his theory of knowledge; they are the "pointers" through which the human mind refers to the completely determinate, existing objects. " (pp. 12-13)

From: Jan Faye, Uwe Scheffler and Max Urchs (eds.), *Things, Facts and Events*, Amsterdam: Rodopi 2000.

Meinong's main works

"Of his two profound and sympathetic *Hume-Studien,* done under Brentano's supervision, the first (1877), on Hume's theory of abstraction, secured his 'habilitation', the second, on Hume's theory of relations, appeared in 1882: both were published in the Proceedings of the Imperial Academy of Sciences at Vienna, of which Meinong was later to be a Fellow. That Meinong should have served his first serious philosophical apprenticeship with Hume, places him in the Anglo-Saxon rather than the Germanic philosophical tradition, and it was in this tradition that he continued mainly to work. It was in the Anglo-Saxon world, likewise, that his philosophical reputation and influence were at their greatest.
Meinong spent four years (1878-82) as a *Privatdozent* at Vienna, and then moved on to Graz, where he remained for the rest of his life, first as Professor Extraordinarius (1882-9), and then as Ordinary Professor (1889-1920).
(...)
Apart from the foundation of an Institute of Experimental Psychology in 1894, the first in Austria, there seem to have been few events during Meinong's professorship. His history was the history of his publications and of the academic activities of his small school of pupils.
Among these publications the most notable were the *Psychologisch-ethische Untersuchungen zur W ertheorie* (1894), which almost succeeds in formalizing ordinary morality; the composite school-publication *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie* (1904), to which Meinong contributed an article ' *Über Gegenstandstheorie*'; the valuable (...) epistemological essay *Über die Erfahrungsgrundlagen unseres Wissens* (1906); the programmatic *Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie im System der Wissenschaften* (1906-7); the brilliant *Über Annahmen* (1910), with its manifold contributions to psychology, value-theory, etc., and its important introduction of 'objectives', the *Sätze-an-sich* of Bolzano, as peculiar *entia rationis*; the long treatise *Über Moglichkeit und Wahrscheinlichkeit* (1915), with its important doctrine of 'incomplete objects'; the treatise *Über emotionale Presentation* (1917), a uniquely original essay in the epistemology of valuation; and the somewhat unpersuasive *Zum Erweise des allgemeinen Kausalgesetzes* (1918). Meinong wrote many important articles which were collected by his pupils in the two volumes of *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, one volume devoted to psychology, the other to epistemology and object-theory: a third, to be devoted to value-theory, was never issued. Several important articles on value-theory, as well as the unreprinted *Psychologisch-ethische Untersuchungen,* are therefore practically inaccessible [written in 1962; Meinong's works are now published in the *Gesamtausgabe:* see the Bibliography]. The *Grundlegung zur allgemeinen Werttheorie* was published posthumously in 1923, and a work entitled *Ethische Bausteine* is still in manuscript in the Library at Graz. [now published in the third volume of the *Gesamtausgabe*, pp. 657-724]." (*Preface*, pp. V-VII)

From: John N. Findlay, *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995 (Reprint of the Second edition of 1963).

An overview of Meinong's Theory of Objects

"The two basic theses of Meinong's theory of objects (*Gegenstandstheorie*) are (1) there are objects that do not exist and (2) every object that does not exist is yet constituted in some way or other and thus may be made the subject of true predication. Traditional metaphysics treats of objects that exist as well as of those that merely subsist (*bestehen*) but, having "a prejudice in favor of the real," tends to neglect those objects that have no kind of being at all; hence, according to Meinong, there is need for a more general theory of objects.

Everything is an object, whether or not it is thinkable (if an object happens to be unthinkable then it is something having at least the property of being unthinkable) and whether or not it exists or has any other kind of being. Every object has the characteristics it has whether or not it has any kind of being; in short, the *Sosein* (character) of every object is independent of its *Sein* (being). A round square, for example, has a *Sosein*, since it is both round and square; but it is an impossible object, since it has a contradictory *Sosein* that precludes its *Sein*.

Of possible objects -- objects not having a contradictory *Sosein* -- some exist and others (for example, golden mountains) do not exist. If existence is thought of as implying a spatio-temporal locus, then there are certain subsistent objects that do not exist; among these are the being of various objects and the nonbeing of various other objects. Since there are horses, there is also the being of horses, the being of the being of horses, the nonbeing of the nonbeing of horses, and the being of the nonbeing of the nonbeing of horses. And since there is no Pegasus, there is the nonbeing of Pegasus, as well as the being of the nonbeing of Pegasus and the nonbeing of the being of Pegasus.

Meinong's theory must be distinguished from both Platonic realism, as this term is ordinarily interpreted, and the reism, or concretism, of Brentano and Tadeusz Kotarbinski. (Meinong noted that since his view is broader than realism, it might properly be called objectivism.) Thus, the Platonic realist could be said to argue: "(P) Certain objects that do not exist have certain properties; but (Q) an object has properties if and only if it is real; hence (R) there are real objects that do not exist." The reist, or concretist, on the other hand, reasons from not-R and Q to not-P; that is, he derives the contradictory of Plato's first premise by taking Plato's second premise along with the contradictory of Plato's conclusion. But Meinong, like Plato and unlike the reist, accepted both P and R; unlike both Plato and the reist, he rejected Q by asserting the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*; and therefore, again unlike both Plato and the reist, he said that the totality of objects extends far beyond the confines of what is merely real .

This doctrine of *Aussersein* -- of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*-- is sometimes misinterpreted by saying that it involves recourse to a third type of being in addition to existence and subsistence. Meinong's point, however, is that such objects as the round square have no type of being at all; they are "homeless objects," to be found not even in Plato's heaven. Bertrand Russell objected that if we say round squares are objects, we violate the law of contradiction. Meinong replied that the law of contradiction holds only for what is real and can hardly be expected to hold for any object, such as a round square, that has a contradictory *Sosein.*

Russell's theory of descriptions is often thought to constitute a refutation of the doctrine of *Aussersein;* actually, however, his theory merely presupposes that Meinong's doctrine is false. According to Meinong, the two statements "The round square is round" and "The mountain I am thinking of is golden" are true statements about nonexistent objects; they are *Sosein* and not Sein statements. The distinction between the two types of statements is most clearly put by saying that a *Sein* statement (for example, "John is angry") is an affirmative statement that can be existentially generalized upon (we may infer "There exists an x such that x is angry") and a *Sosein* statement is an affirmative statement that cannot be existentially generalized upon; despite the truth of "The mountain I am thinking of is golden," we may not infer "There exists an x such that I am thinking about x and x is golden." Russell's theory of descriptions, however, presupposes that every statement is either a *Sein* statement or the negation of a *Sein* statement and hence that there are no *Sosein* statements. According to Russell, a statement of the form "The thing that is F is G" may be paraphrased as "There exists an x such that x is F and x is G, and it is false that there exists a y such that y is F and y is not identical with x." If Meinong's true *Sosein* statements, above, are rewritten in

this form, the result will be two false statements; hence Meinong could say that Russell's theory does not provide an adequate paraphrase.

An impossible object, as indicated above, is an object having a *Sosein* that violates the law of contradiction. An incomplete object, analogously, is one having a *Sosein* that violates the law of the excluded middle. Of the golden mountains, which most readers will think of on reading the paragraph above, it will be neither true nor false to say that they are higher than Mount Monadnock. And some objects are even more poorly endowed. For example, if I wish that your wish will come true, then the object of my wish is whatever it is that you happen to wish; but if, unknown to me, what you wish is that my wish will come true, then this object would seem to have very little *Sosein* beyond that of being our mutual object. Meinong said that such an object is a defective object and suggested that the concept may throw light upon some of the logical paradoxes.

The theory of complexes -- that is, the theory of wholes and other such "objects of higher order" -- upon which Meinong wrote at length, also falls within the theory of objects.

None of the objects discussed above is created by us, nor does any of them depend in any way upon our thinking. Had no one ever thought of the round square, it would still be true of the round square that it does not exist; the round square need not be thought of in order not to exist. We draw these objects, so to speak, from the infinite depths of the *Ausserseienden*, beyond being and not-being."
(pp. 115-116)

From: Roderick M. Chisholm, *Meinong, Alexius* in: Paul Edwards (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* New York: Macmillan The Free Press, 1967; Second edition: Donald M. Borchert (ed.), New York: Thomson Gale 2006, Volume VI, pp. 114-119.

"Meinong accepted Brentano's thesis of the intentionality of the mental but modified it in a realistic direction, distinguishing, like Twardowski, between the content and object of a mental act; indeed this distinction had been pointed out in 1890 by Meinong and Höfler as an ambiguity in the notion of object. Like Twardowski and unlike Husserl, Meinong regarded it as necessary that a mental act of whatever kind always have an object as well as a content, and in those cases where nothing exists which is targeted by the act, Meinong followed Twardowski in accepting a non-existent item as the object. It is from this use of the accusative term 'object [sc. of an act]' that Meinong derives the term 'theory of objects' which he preferred to such -- as he thought, existentially loaded -- terms as 'metaphysics' and 'ontology'. Both of these, and especially the former, suffered from a prejudice, rampant among materialists and nominalists, but present to some degree in most philosophers, the 'prejudice in favour of the actual', i.e., an unsupported preference for the spatiotemporally situated or real object. Ontological questions always interested Meinong, from his early preoccupation with universals, especially relations, through his interest in Gestalt or higher-order objects and complexes. But object theory as a distinct discipline and forming the nucleus of his philosophical endeavour dominate only late in his career, from about 1899 until his death in 1920.

The first major work in object theory, initially prompted by considerations of the psychology of play and make-believe, is On Assumptions of 1902. What Meinong calls an assumption is roughly any intellectual act regarding what might be the case (nowadays called a 'propositional attitude') that falls short of a firm conviction or judgement. Only while working on this area did Meinong realise that he needed an ontology of the objects of assumptions and judgements, which objects he called objectives, preferring not to use Stumpfs term Sachverhalt (state of affairs), which he thought was loaded in favour of the true. Objectives combine some of the behaviour of propositions and other characteristics of states of affairs. Like propositions, they are there for all judgements and assumptions, including false ones, but like states of affairs their existential status is different for truth than for falsity: the objective of a true judgement or assumption, while not spatiotemporally real, still subsists or obtains (besteht), while the objective of a false judgement or assumption does not even have this kind of being.

The property of objectives corresponding to the truth of judgements Meinong calls factuality, the property corresponding to falsity unfactuality. He reserves 'true' for objectives which are both factual and apprehended by someone; 'false' is similarly restricted. For an objective, to be factual is to subsist, to be unfactual is to not subsist: there is an existential distinction between them. Objectives about an object do not have that entity as part, for an objective can at best subsist, whereas many objects can also be spatiotemporally actual or real. If Graz is in Austria had Graz as part, then it would be a subsistent with a real part, and if Sherlock Holmes is not real had Sherlock

Holmes as part, it would have an object as part which does not exist at all. Both cases are absurd, thinks Meinong, so what an objective is about is not part of it.

Object theory received its programmatic statement in the 1904 essay 'The Theory of Objects'. This appeared in a volume by the Graz School commemorating ten years of the Psychology Laboratory and contained Essays on object theory by Rudolf Ameseder and Ernst Mally. Meinong's earlier work was enthusiastically reviewed by Russell in a three-part article for Mind, a journal which Meinong himself had regularly reviewed for German speakers in the 1880s. Russell had presumably hoped that Meinong's theory of impossible objects would offer some help on the solution of the logical paradoxes, but he was disappointed there. It was Meinong's painstaking method that Russell admired. Russell could not accept non-existent objects like the round square, or unfactual objectives: he avoided them initially by adopting Frege's distinction between sense and reference for definite descriptions, and saying that false propositions do exist. (Russell wrongly identified Meinong's objectives with his and Moore's propositions.) In 1905 Russell rejected Frege too: 'On denoting' is a battle on two fronts, one against non-existent objects, one against sense. Russell's initial sympathy gave way to increasing criticism of Meinong, whom he accused (wrongly) of believing in contradictions. Although the dismissal of Meinong in Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy is curt and unfair, in the unpublished 1913 manuscript Theory of Knowledge Russell still discussed Meinong's views extensively, accurately and with some sympathy." (pp. 122-124)

From: Peter Simons, *Bolzano, Brentano and Meinong: Three Austrian Realist*s, in: Anthony O'Hear (ed.), *German Philosophy Since Kant*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, pp. 109-136.

Bertand Russell appreciation of Meinong

"Before entering upon details, I wish to emphasise the admirable method of Meinong's researches, which, in a brief epitome, it is quite impossible to preserve. Although empiricism as a philosophy does not appear to be tenable, there is an empirical manner of investigating, which should be applied in every subject-matter. This is possessed in a very perfect form by the works we are considering. A frank recognition of the data, as inspection reveals them, precedes all theorising; when a theory is propounded, the greatest skill is shown in the selection of facts favourable or unfavourable, and in eliciting all relevant consequences of the facts adduced. There is thus a rare combination of acute inference with capacity for observation. The method of philosophy is not fundamentally unlike that of other sciences : the differences seem to be only in degree. The data are fewer, but are harder to apprehend; and the inferences required are probably more difficult than in any other subject except mathematics. But the important point is that, in philosophy as elsewhere, there are self-evident truths from which we must start, and that these are discoverable by the process of inspection or observation, although the material to be observed is not, for the most part, composed of existent things. 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." (pp. 205-206)

From: Bertrand Russell, "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", *Mind*, 1904, reprinted in: Bertrand Russell, *Essays in Analysis*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973, pp. 204-219.

"Presentations, judgments and assumptions, Meinong points out, always have objects; and these objects are independent of the states of mind in which they are apprehended. This independence has been obscured hitherto by the 'prejudice in favour of the existent' (*des Wirklichen*), which has led people to suppose that, when a thought has a non-existent object, there is really no object distinct from the thought. But this is an error: existents are only an infinitesimal part of the objects of knowledge. This is illustrated by mathematics, which never deals with anything to which existence is essential, and deals in the main with objects which cannot exist, such as numbers. Now we do not need first to study the knowledge of objects before we study the objects themselves; hence the study of objects is essentially independent of both psychology and theory of knowledge. It may be objected that the study of objects must be coextensive with all knowledge; but we may consider separately the more general properties and kinds of objects, and this is an essential part of philosophy. It is this that Meinong calls *Gegenstandstheorie*.

This subject is not identical with metaphysics, but is wider in its scope; for metaphysics deals only with the real, whereas the theory of objects has no such limitations. The theory of objects deals with whatever can be known a priori about objects, but knowledge of reality can only be obtained by experience. The theory of objects is not psychology, since objects are independent of our apprehension of them. It is also not theory of knowledge; for knowledge has two sides, the cognition, which belongs to psychology, and the object, which is independent. The theory of objects, Meinong contends, is also not to be identified with pure logic, since logic, in his opinion, is essentially practical in its aim, being concerned with right reasoning. (On this point, opinions will differ; but the question is in any case only one of nomenclature.) The conclusion is, that the theory of objects is an independent subject, and the most general of all philosophical subjects. Mathematics is essentially part of it, and thus at last finds a proper place; for the traditional division of sciences into natural and mental left no room for mathematics, because it took account only of the existent. Grammar may be a guide in the general theory of objects, as mathematics in more special parts of the theory." (pp. 77-78)

From: Bertrand Russell, "Review of: A. Meinong, Untersuchungen zur Gegenständstheorie und Psychologie", *Mind*, 1905, reprinted in: Bertrand Russell, *Essays in Analysis*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd 1973, pp. 77-88.

Gilbert Ryle: "Object Theory is dead"

"What differences did Alexius Meinong make to philosophy? Are there any big lessons, especially about the nature of thinking, of which we, in 1970, must say either that we did learn them or, repentantly, that we could and should have learned them from Meinong?
Let us frankly concede from the start that *Gegenstandstheorie* itself is dead, buried and not going to be resurrected. Nobody is going to argue again that, for example, 'there are objects concerning which it is the case that there are no such objects.' Nobody is going to argue again that the possibility of ethical and aesthetic judgments being true requires that values be objects of a special sort.
As Professor Findlay suggests in his fine book *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values*, we have to allow in candid retrospect that one important part of Meinong's contribution to twentieth-century thought is precisely the anti- *Gegenstandstheorie* with which he vaccinated Brentano, Russell and Wittgenstein. We in 1970 do not merely suspect that *Gegenstandstheorie* will not do; we have learned just why it will not do; and to have learned this is to have learned from Meinong, via Russell and Wittgenstein, an important and new lesson about thinking, though not the one intended by Meinong.
a) Within a year of his famous articles in Mind on *Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions* (1904) Russell had written his even more famous and more influential Mind article ' *On Denoting*', in which he assembled logicians' arguments against the pretensions of various ostensibly entity-designating nominative-phrases, including several that Meinong had championed and that Russell had himself championed in his own Principles of Mathematics of 1903. It was the Platonising Meinong who, in effect but of course not wittingly, spurred the newly Occamising Russell to leapfrog over his back on to a terra firma that he himself was never to reach or even to wish to reach.
Though not everything, much was both new and true in Russell's Theory of Descriptions, in his account of Incomplete Symbols and Logical Constructions, in his doctrine of illegitimate totalities and thence in his Theory of Types. In all of these there were working conscious recoils against Meinong's Theory of Objects, as well as against his own and Moore's recent analogue to it. In the hands of Frege, in the differently moving hands of Russell and in the again differently moving hands of Wittgenstein, Meaning-theory expanded just when and just in so far as it was released from that "Fido"-Fido box, the lid of which was never even lifted by Meinong.
b) Wittgenstein had, via Russell, some second-hand knowledge of Meinong, but apparently he also had a little first-hand knowledge of the thoughts both of Meinong and of Husserl. The opening pages of his Tractatus are unqualified *Gegenstandstheorie* and their German often echoes Meinong's German. Yet by Tractatus 4.126-4.1274 Wittgenstein has correctly located concepts like object, thing, fact and complex among formal concepts, i.e. category-concepts, as distinct from proper, i.e.

genus-concepts or species-concepts. He has thereby disqualified in principle *Gegenstandstheorie*, including that in his own opening pages, from being informative or even mis-informative about what there is in the world. Moreover he has thereby identified for us just that disquieting but previously elusive feature of Meinong's Higher-Order Objects which had made us all along hanker to protest to Meinong: 'Yes, but notwithstanding all your rigorous arguments, these *entia rationis* of yours are only the verbalised simulacra of genuine entities.'

For though of course we can think, talk and say true things 1) about Socrates; 2) about the fact that Socrates was snub-nosed; 3) about the snubness of his nose, none the less, when we have done so, we still cannot enumerate three *somethings*, three members of any one genus or species, that we have thought or talked about --unless we like to speak vacuously of all three as 'subject-matters', or 'remark-topics'; and if we do this, we see at once that the important-sounding word 'object' never did have any other positive function than to be a synonym for 'subject-matter' or 'remark-topic'. The three phrases carry the same ontological burdens --namely none. To parody Kant, ' .... is an object' is not a predicate. 'Is so and so an it? ' is not a proper question. About what can we significantly ask 'Is it an object or not? ' If asked 'How many Objects, i.e. how many its, are mentioned in this newspaper-article? ' we could no more even begin to make a count than we could even begin to make a count of the Events that took place in the course of the Battle of Waterloo; or than we could even begin to make a count of the Actions that someone had performed or the Experiences that he had between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. Category-words do not list countables -- not because they list too many to count, but because they do not provide qualifications for, or disqualifications from being on any list. 'It' does not describe; 'object' does not distinguish." (p. 7)

From: Gilbert Ryle, *Intentionality-Theory and the Nature of Thinking*, in: Rudolf Haller (ed.), *Jenseits von Sein und Nichtsein. Beiträge zur Meinong-Forschung*, Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt 1972, pp. 7-14.

Meinong's Theory of Objects in contemporary research

"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."

(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 *(höherer 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.

Notes

(2) Alexius Meinong, "The Theory of Objects" ("*Uber Gegenstandstheorie*") [1904], pp. 78-81.
(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 *Über 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 ..." (pp. 1-3)

From: Dale Jacquette, *Meinongian Logic: the Semantics of Existence and Nonexistence*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1996.