



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



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newdirectionsproject.com

Seminar 32

1. Recap: Meinongianism
2. Properties
3. The solution of the problem

1. Recap: Meinongianism

Subsistence, existence and being

For Meinong, non-existent being is not a 'lower-class ontological status, a sort of being shy of existence' (see Nathan Salmon 'Nonexistence' 1998)

Non-existent being is just the being of non-temporal (i.e. abstract) objects

The essence of Meinongianism

NOT 'shadowy being, falling short of existence'

NOT 'there are objects that do not exist'

NOT EVEN the principle of independence

BUT: non-existent objects have the properties they are represented as having

Varieties of Meinongianism

- (1) Two kinds of properties: nuclear and extra-nuclear
- (2) Two ways of having properties: instantiating and 'encoding' (Zalta); having and holding (van Inwagen)
- (3) Accept the characterization principle (Priest and other 'noneists')

The characterization principle

‘An object has those characterizing properties used to characterize it’

Richard Routley *Exploring Meinong's Jungle* (1980)

‘If $A(x)$ is any property, or conjunction of properties, we can characterize an object, cA , and we are guaranteed that $A(cA)$ ’

Graham Priest *Towards Non-Being* (2005)

Paradox?

(1) Suppose we characterize something as being round, square, and existent

(2) Then there is an object that has all these properties.

(3) But since it has the property of existence, it exists

So the non-existent object exists after all

Priest's (2005) response

Objects do not have properties *simpliciter*, but only at worlds

And some of these worlds are impossible

Two extreme views

(1) The Descartes-Malebranche view: ‘nothingness has no properties’ (Malebranche)

See Sainsbury, *Reference without Referents* (2005), and Azzouni, *Speaking About Nothing* (2011)

(2) Meinong: nonexistent objects have all the properties predicated of them

My view

Nonexistent objects have some of the properties predicated of them but not all

But which?

2. Properties

Substantial

‘Pleonastic’ (see S Schiffer, *The Things We Mean*)

Properties ctd

Substantial

- existence-entailing
- ‘sparse’ (Lewis, ‘New Work...’ 1983)
- ‘natural’? (Lewis)
- robust, non-minimal (Horwich *Truth*, 1990)

Pleonastic

- abundant (Lewis)
- mere Cambridge properties (Geach, *God and the Soul*)

Representation-dependent properties

Properties that something only has insofar as it is represented in a certain way

being fictional

being mythical

being famous...

3. The solution to the problem of non-existence

truths about the non-existent

truths about existent things

— how are they related?

Options

1. Definition or paraphrase
2. Metaphysical relations
 - truthmaking
 - grounding
3. Explanatory relations

My claim

What we need are explanatory reductions of claims about the non-existent

An explanatory reduction of a truth about the non-existent explains its truth in terms of truths about existing things



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