



# **NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND**

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE



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[newdirectionsproject.com](http://newdirectionsproject.com)

# Seminar 31

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1. Recap: Being and existence
2. Meinong and Meinongianism
3. Properties of non-existent objects

# 1. Recap: being and existence

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## Semantics (or logic)

The relationships between:

- (i) quantifiers in natural language;
- (ii) the formal representation of quantification (*some* and *all*) in formal languages;
- (iii) idioms like 'There is', 'Es gibt', etc.
- (iv) the verb (predicate) 'exists' ('x exists')

# A dominant collection of views in the 20th century

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Some As are B

There are As which are Bs

$\text{Ex}(\text{Ax} \ \& \ \text{Bx})$

— all express the same proposition

and ....

A dominant collection of views ctd.

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(2) 'Exists' is not a first level predicate

It is a predicate of first-level predicates (a second level predicate)

Frege: it's a second-level concept-word

(2) Quine's criterion of ontological commitment

(3) Russell's theory of descriptions

## **Digression: names**

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We also looked at how the Quinean reduction of names to descriptions worked, and the contemporary view that names are general terms/common nouns ('names are predicates')

These ideas are all very different

**try and pull them apart**

# Being and existence

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## Metaphysics:

Is the realm of being distinct from the realm of existence?

Are there beings that do not exist?

Do non-existent objects have a kind of being?



## 2. Meinong and Meinongianism

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Alexius Meinong (1853-1920)

Austrian philosopher, student of Brentano

‘The Theory of Objects’

# Notoriety

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Meinong is notorious for the apparently absurd view that there are objects that do not exist

Russell: 'robust sense of reality that must be preserved even in the most abstract studies'

# Three concepts

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Being

Existence (spatio-temporal being)

Subsistence (non-temporal being)

# Non-beings

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The round square etc.

These objects have no beings at all

So what does it mean to call them objects?

# Meinong's principle of independence

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Being (*Sein*) is independent of being-so (*Sosein*)

# What's wrong with the principle of independence?

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Can non-existent objects have properties?

Compare:

Vulcan is a planet

Vulcan was hypothesised by Le Verrier

### 3. The properties of non-existent objects

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The distinctive feature of Meinong's view is not:

- (i) that there are non-existent objects
- (ii) the principle of independence

BUT

- (iii) that non-existent objects have all the properties they are represented as having

# Two extreme views

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The Descartes-Malebranche view: nothing can have no properties

Meinong: nonexistent objects have all the properties predicated of them

is there a middle way?



# Properties

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Representation-dependent vs non-representation dependent properties....



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