Bruno Leclercq, Sébastien Richard and Denis Seron

Preface

The idea of a distinction between objects and pseudo-objects is related to a rather old and classical philosophical problem, which raises the question of the ontological status of general objects such as "the rose in general", of abstract objects such as "the size (or the color) of this rose", or even of fictional objects such as "the rose Fidel Castro offered to Margaret Thatcher" or "Flora, the goddess of flowers". Even though they cannot be seen, picked and smelled like this or that actual rose, all these "objects" seem to behave like genuine objects as can be seen in the fact that they possess properties, which can be attributed to them in true predicative judgments – "the rose is a flower", "the size of this rose is 5 inches", "Flora is married to Favonius", ... Language, at least, seems to make it possible to speak about such objects even if they do not exist in space and time and cannot be given to sense perception.

A tough philosophical debate has classically opposed those – named "realists" – who consider that these are genuine objects and those – named "nominalists" – who consider that they are nothing but pseudo-objects and that their seeming to be proper objects is just a trick of language. In the twentieth century, such a debate took the form of a spectacular opposition between those who, like Alexius Meinong, would take any object of thought and any linguistic subject of predicative judgment as a genuine object – with the consequence of such a luxurious domain of objects that his detractors called it an "ontological jungle" – and those who, like Bertrand Russell and Willard Van Orman Quine, but also and even more radically Franz Brentano in his old age, Tadeusz Kotarbiński or Stanisław Leśniewski, would rather rephrase sentences concerning these "objects" in such a way that only ontologically innocent objects (e.g. objects which can be known by empirical acquaintance) appear as the logical subjects of the sentence – with the consequence of much less crowded "furniture of the world", perhaps even an "ontological desert".

This strategy of getting rid of pseudo-objects by rephrasing sentences so as to show that their surface linguistic subjects do not properly refer – they are "apparent names" or "onomatoids"[1] – and are not the genuine logical subjects of these sentences is known as the use of Occam's razor for shaving Plato's beard. In some

1 See A.C. Zielinska's paper.

respect, Russell and Quine could be seen as having tried to clear Meinong's jungle in a similar way with a methodological "machete" sharpened by Frege's formal logic.[2]

In the twentieth century a specific concern for what Quine called the "referential opacity" of intensional contexts gave a new face to this classical debate. In modal contexts, i.e. in contexts involving the notions of necessity and possibility (but also of duty and permission), as well as in contexts of intentional attitudes, i.e. in contexts of beliefs, hopes, fears, …, the "intension", and not only the "extension", of linguistic expressions matters: in such contexts, expressions do not only refer to some objects but to some objects *apprehended and/or described in a certain way*. While the "logically" proper names "Phosphorus" (the morning star) and "Hesperus" (the evening star) both refer to one and the same object, namely Venus, so that normally everything which is true of one is also true of the other one – if "Phosphorus undergoes retrograde rotation" is true, so is "Hesperus undergoes retrograde rotation"; when "Hesperus can be seen from the Earth" is true, so is "Phosphorus can be seen from the Earth" –, there still are contexts where the two names cannot be intersubstituted *salva veritate*: "Phosphorus (being the morning star) necessarily shines in the morning" is true while "Hesperus necessarily shines in the morning" is not; and "Ancient Greeks believed that Phosphorus was hidden during the evening" is true while "Ancient Greeks believed that Hesperus was hidden during the evening" is not.

Similarly, even though both phrases actually refer to the same individual object, "the current President of the USA" and "the husband of Michelle Robinson" cannot replace each other in the sentences "The husband of Michelle Robinson necessarily is a married man" or "The Tea Party supporters hate the current President of the USA". And even though the passengers of the Mayflower became the founders of Plymouth, I can believe that the passengers of the Mayflower never walked upon American soil while I may not believe that the founders of Plymouth never walked upon American soil. These examples seem to mean that Phosphorus and Hesperus – or similarly the current President of the USA and the husband of Michelle Robinson, the passengers of the Mayflower and the founders of Plymouth – have at least some different properties and are thus somehow distinct "objects".

Now, what has here been highlighted on a linguistic level had been studied on a psychological level in the Brentanian school at the end of nineteenth century. Our thoughts and other mental states take as their contents "intentional ob-

2 Frege, himself, though, was not a nominalist. To some extent, his theory of meaning could even be seen as leading to an ontological jungle. See C.O. Hill's paper.

jects", i.e. objects which are sensitive to the way they are apprehended and conceived through these mental states. For instance, in Sergeant Garcia's thoughts, Zorro and Don Diego de la Vega are characterized in very different ways so that, for him, they are not one and the same object; as contents of Sergeant Garcia's intentional attitudes, Zorro and Don Diego de la Vega are different objects. And even while knowing that the current President of the USA and the husband of Michelle Robinson actually are one and the same person, namely Barack Obama, a partisan of the Tea Party can attribute some properties to – and entertain some feelings towards – the former which she does not attribute to – or entertain towards – the latter. As far as intentional attitudes are concerned, Barack Obama seen as the current President of the USA is not the same object as Barack Obama seen as the husband of Michelle Robinson. And this is why, for Brentanians, there seem to be as many objects as there are contents of thoughts… including several ones related to a single actual object like Barack Obama.

While Barack Obama exists and is an actual object corresponding to some mental content, there also are contents of thoughts to which no actual object corresponds: I can believe that Santa Claus exists, admire Sherlock Holmes, fear ghosts or look for the round square (i.e. hope for squaring the circle). Now, from the psychologist's point of view, my mental states can be described and studied regardless of whether the objects they are aiming at actually exist or not. On this respect, i.e. as far as psychological description is concerned, contents of thoughts such as Santa Claus, Sherlock Holmes, ghosts or round squares are just part of the mental states aiming at them… But, from a metaphysical point of view, they surely are more than that: that they are not just part of my mental states is shown by the fact that they can also be the contents of other people's thoughts and intentional attitudes – Santa Claus (or Sherlock Holmes or the headless horseman or the round square) is not just something in my head but seems to be of an "intersubjective" nature – but also by the fact that they have properties which have nothing to do with the mental[3] – Santa Claus has a beard (Sherlock Holmes is a detective, the headless horseman carries his head under his arm, the round square has diagonals) while no part of a mental state could. Therefore they are said to be "objective" rather than subjective; they are "ideal" contents of thoughts rather than real parts of mental states.

Yet the question remains of whether they are genuine objects or not.

Mental states are said to be *intentional* insofar as they aim at (existent or inexistent) "objects" apprehended as such and such; in some cases, the corresponding linguistic expressions exhibit unusual logical properties and are said to be inten-

3 See M. Gyemant's paper.

sional (with an *s*). This raises the question of what kind of things such intentional "objects" or "objective contents" are. When I think about the morning star, my thought does not have the same content as when I think about the evening star; yet to both contents corresponds one and the same actual object. As Frege would put it the names "Phosphorus" and "Hesperus" have different senses and yet refer to the same actual object. And when I think about Santa Claus, my thought has got some (objective) content; yet no actual object corresponds to it. The name "Santa Claus" has some sense but does not refer to any actual object.

These are the puzzles that led Bernard Bolzano to separate the ideal (as opposed to the mental) content (*Inhalt*) of a thought/presentation from its objectuality (*Gegenständlichkeit*). And this, on its turn, led both Kazimierz Twardowski to separate the intentional object (*intentionales Objekt*) – as opposed to the mental content (*Inhalt*) – of a thought from its (possible) actual object (*äusseres Objekt*) and Gottlob Frege to separate the sense (*Sinn*) – as opposed to subjective presentation – of a linguistic expression from its reference (*Bedeutung*). And here lies the question of the relation between contents and objectivity, or between intentional objects and objectivity or again between senses and objectivity.

Leaning on Twardowski, Meinong considered all intentional objects as objects, even though some of them are devoid of actual existence as well as of any other kind of being (such as the subsistence of mathematical objects): Sherlock Holmes and the round square are objects in spite of the fact that the first one lacks existence and the second one is even impossible. Being an object does not necessarily require to have a *Sein* but only to have some characteristic features – a *Sosein*.

Leaning for his part on Frege, Russell considered sense to lie in characteristic features (*Merkmale*) which may happen not to be endorsed by any (actual) object: Sherlock Holmes, conceived as the detective living at 221b Baker Street who has solved such and such mysterious cases of crime, and the round square, conceived as a geometric figure which would be made of four equal sides and four right angles while all its points would be at the same distance from its centre, are well-defined meanings to which however no (actual) object corresponds. For that reason, they should not be considered as being of an *objectual* but rather of a *conceptual* nature. Indeed, Frege had opposed concepts, which are (propositional) functions, to objects, which can be their arguments (or independent variables); concepts are required to have sense, i.e. characteristic features, but they do not need to be satisfied by an object: a term like "unicorn" is meaningful yet devoid of objective reference. And so is the case, according to Russell, of "the round square" as well as of "Sherlock Holmes", which is an abbreviation for "the detective living at 221b Baker Street who has solved such and such mysterious cases of crime".

Is having characteristic features – a *Sosein* – the mark of objects or of concepts? This is one of the main questions here at stake. In order to be an object of thought, having characteristic features is sufficient and existing is not necessary. But being an object of thought in this sense seems to amount to being *conceivable* and therefore to being a *concept*[4] (which, for Frege and Russell, is anyway something "objective" and not just a part of someone's mental states).

Like sets of characteristic features, objects of thought can be generated at will. I can think (and talk) about golden mountains, flying horses, green unicorns with red spots, and the like. However, followers of Frege and Russell would say, this enriches our ideology (and terminology) rather than our *ontology*; it provides new concepts, i.e. new principles for sorting the objects of the world, without changing anything in the furniture of the world. The fact that we can think and talk about golden mountains and flying horses does not prove that "there are" (in any sense of the expression) objects such as these; they could merely be concepts devoid of any reference, i.e. satisfied by no object. Rather than as independent variables referring to inexistent objects, Frege and Russell claim, such expressions should be construed as propositional functions, with the consequence that the corresponding "objects" are, basically, of a conceptual nature.

The question, however, is whether such a rephrasing is satisfactory and also applies to sentences about other kinds of "objects of thought". According to some Brentanians, any object of thought or talk must be a genuine object. I can think and talk about the color of this unicorn, the size of this rose, Peter and John's friendship, the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle, the divisors of twelve, the raising of the Sun, your having arrived late at our first date, and so on. This is why some of Brentano's followers such as Twardowski, Meinong, and Husserl understood "object" in a wider way[5].

At the center of Husserl's approach is the psycho-linguistic notion of "nominalization". Nominalization transforms any part of what a thought intends or a sentence means into the object of a new thought and thus into the linguistic subject of higher-order statements. I think and talk about this rose being red and then about the redness of this rose being bright or beautiful; I think and talk about Peter and John being friends and then about Peter and John's friendship being old and firm; I think and talk about the Sun raising and then about the raising of the

4 For his part, Alexander Pfänder will distinguish between the content of a concept and the "formal object" corresponding to it, while Jean Héring will separate concepts from "ideas" in the sense of "essences". See G. Fréchette's paper.

5 See S. Richard's paper.

Sun occurring earlier in the summer than in the winter; and so on. In this respect, properties, relations, states of affairs, events, etc., are kinds of objects.

Yet the question remains whether such entities can be eliminated by some rephrasing strategy. Should we keep to first-order logic and refuse to construe these entities as objects in the logical sense, that is, as independent quantified variables? Or should we accept them as part of the furniture of the world? Would this provide a satisfying account of how they behave as regards truth value? Inexistent objects do seem to have properties, and to be genuine logical subjects of true statements.

Consider the case of fictional objects: Santa Claus wears a beard, Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe, and flying horses have big wings. Frege and Russell's extensional rephrasing of such sentences is notoriously unsatisfactory. For Frege, "Flying horses have big wings" should be rephrased as "For all objects, if this object is a flying horse, it has big wings", a sentence which is trivially true since no (actual) object is a flying horse. But this analysis also makes true the statement "Flying horses smoke pipes" ! For Russell, "Sherlock Holmes has big wings" should be rephrased as "There is only one (actual) object which is a detective living at 221b Baker Street and has solved such and such mysterious cases of crime and this object has big wings", a sentence which is false since no (actual) object satisfies the first description. But this analysis makes false the statement "Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe" as well ! According to Frege, universal sentences having "inexistent objects" as their linguistic subjects are all true; according to Russell, singular sentences having "inexistent objects" as their linguistic subjects are all false – which means that it is true that all flying horses have big wings but false that Pegasus has big wings…

Clearly, extensional paraphrases do not work. A more convincing way to approach statements about "inexistent objects" while claiming that these are concepts rather than objects might be to provide – as Carnap did in *Meaning and Necessity* (1956 [1947]) – an *intensional* rather than extensional analysis of these statements: "Flying horses have big wings" and "Sherlock Holmes (the detective living at 221b Baker Street who has…) smokes a pipe" are statements about the sense or intension of the conceptual terms "flying horse" and "detective living at 221b Baker Street…". But this means that if such statements are true, they are analytically true, i.e. the attributed properties are part of the meaning of the conceptual terms which function as linguistic subjects of the sentence. Having big wings must somehow be included in the definition of "a flying horse"; smoking a

pipe must be included in the definition of "Sherlock Holmes" ("definition" which amounts to the whole description of this character in Conan Doyle's work).[6]

Note that Meinong and his followers hold quite a similar view, believing that objects rather than concepts are characterized by sets of descriptive features (the golden mountain is the object made of the properties of being a mountain and being made of gold; Sherlock Holmes is the object made of all the properties he has in Conan Doyle's novels); to such objects can only be attributed their own "constitutive" properties and the analytical consequences of these.[7] Proximity between Meinong and Carnap on this point shows that, by taking "intensions" into account, the latter took a significant step towards the admission of other entities than singular actual objects. Sherlock Holmes, i.e. the detective living at 221b Baker Street… (be it actual or not), or the morning star (whatever actual object it is), which are the logical subjects of Carnap's quantified modal logic sentences, clearly are semantical entities rather than actual objects.[8] The difference between both philosophers is that Carnap also keeps an eye on extensions so that, next to semantical entities which are characterized by descriptive features, he also admits actual objects such as Barack Obama or Venus. For most Meinongians, by contrast, actual objects are characterized by (infinite sets of) descriptive features just like any object, their only specificity being the fact that they exist.

As has been shown above for the case of fictional objects, the question of which objects have to be admitted as genuine objects is not merely a matter of rephrasing sentences. The question is also how to account for what makes these sentences true or false. Indeed, objects are not merely what we think or talk about, they are also the truth-makers for what we think and say about them.

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6 Similarly, it could be said that it is in the definition of the number "241" to be a prime number. In some way, logicism can be seen as the view that the ideal "objects" of mathematics are of a conceptual nature and that all true statements about them – "241 is an prime number", "A right-angled triangle is such that the area of the square whose side is its hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares whose sides are its two legs" – are analytically true.

7 Besides their own constitutive properties, "extranuclear" properties can also be attributed to Meinongian objects: of the golden mountain, I can not only say that it is a mountain and that it is made of gold, but also that it does not exist or that owing one is my favorite dream.

8 Another approach, later adopted in Frege's school in order to give an account of fictional objects and other intentional objects is quantified modal logic based on possible world semantics. Although quantified modal logic allows to have only singular objects in each possible world, it ontologically commits one to the existence of the possible worlds themselves and to cross-world entities such as "the morning star (whatever actual object it is)", which is some kind of function from worlds to singular entities (i.e. the singular entity which satisfies this description in each world).

This is what Husserl notably tries to theorize by giving an account of the objects of both "meaning intentions" and intuitions. For Husserl as for many Brentanians, an object is, in one sense, anything which can be thought or talked about (i.e. take place as the linguistic subject of a sentence). In another sense, an object is what is somehow "given" (along with its properties) and, as such, makes true thoughts and sentences.

This distinction between two meanings of "object" was a central feature of Brentano's and his pupils' theory of intentionality. The general idea is that intentionality involves some kind of constitutive ambiguity, due to the fact that in most cases the "object" the mental state is about is not the object of direct acquaintance that makes the state veridical. Brentanian intentionalism may be viewed as an attempt to dispel this ambiguity by distinguishing the real object properly referred to from the intentional object or content which is "obliquely" presented to the subject as far as she is aware of what her representation is about. In some sense, the true judgment "the Centaur is a poetic fiction" is about the Centaur, which thus functions as its "object". Yet the Centaur is not thereby taken as existent; it is assumed to be inexistent and hence cannot be the really existing object that makes the judgment true. In Brentano's view, at least in his later works, such judgments actually refer to some mental reality, and the sentence should consequently be rephrased as "Some mental states are such that they are lived by poets and have the property of being about 'the Centaur' ". Now, he continues, this applies not only to mythological objects, but to physical reality in general. On the one hand, the physicist's judgments are really about physical beings distinct from their appearance in the mind, not about anything mental. But on the other hand, Brentano claims in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, such physical beings are "fictions to which no reality of any sort corresponds" (Brentano 1874/1973: 11).

Likewise, because they believed only sense experience can give objects, Russell and his followers tended to restrict the domain of objects to real objects, and to discard as "pseudo-objects" the objects of thought and speech which cannot be known by empirical acquaintance. Husserl, by contrast, takes note that objects of thought and speech are of many different kinds, and that each of them makes the related thoughts and sentences true or false. For him, these objects must be not only intended or meant, but also "given" or "intuited" in some specific way. It is phenomenology's task to investigate the various kinds of objects as well as the specific ways they are intended and given. This does not prevent sense experience from playing an important role in each kind of givenness. For Husserl, abstract ob-

jects such as essences and states of affairs[9] are intuited on the ground of sense experience yet through some specific "categorical" apprehension that makes them the specific kind of objects they are.[10] Even fictional objects are, in some sense, given, namely through imaginative intuition.

The result is a general theory that specifies not only the various modes of givenness, but also the corresponding modes of being and reality and the way they are related to each other and to sense experience. Indeed, there are not only several kinds of objects of thought and speech, but also specific kinds of being given and thus specific kinds of *being*[11], of which existing or being real is only one yet perhaps the most fundamental.

This includes the theoretical objects of science, namely of physics and chemistry as well as of biology, psychology, and social sciences. Husserl, Carnap, Hartmann took up this challenge, although providing quite different answers. Carnap's claim in the *Aufbau* is that the Russellian paraphrasing makes the truth of scientific statements dependent on sense experience only. Atoms, molecules, cells, desires and beliefs, interests, social groups, etc., all objects of science are (more and more) complex logical entities constituted on the basis of similarity relations between objects of immediate sense experience. Therefore, sentences about these objects are no more than convenient abbreviations for (long and complex) sentences about immediate experience. For Husserl, by contrast, the constitution of higher-level objects on the basis of immediate experience is not a mere logical construction.[12] Although grounded on the latter, the former cannot merely be reduced to it. For Hartmann, each level, even though ontologically dependent on the lower levels, has its own laws, ontological categories and ontological dignity.[13]

9 On the tough question of the ontological nature of states of affaires, see D. Seron's and G. Fréchette's papers on Husserl and Reinach.

10 This leads to some tension in Husserl's work. On one side, objects of all kinds are given or intuited rather than merely meant or intended. On the other side, intuition is always the fulfillment of meaning intentions, so that an object can only be given according to the way it has been intended. Realism in Husserl's phenomenology is thus counterbalanced by idealistic trends. See R. Brisart's paper.

11 The fact that Meinong thinks that some objects do not have any Sein but are "*Außersein*" somewhat shows that, for him, they are thought but not given.

12 And this, for Husserl, even is the case of higher order objects such as sets, numbers or "manifolds" (mathematical structures). See C.O. Hill's paper.

13 See Poli's paper.