A Paleo-Criticism of Modes of Being

Brentano and Marty against Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong

HAMID TAIEB
Humboldt University Berlin

Brentanians defend the view that there are distinct types of object, but that this does not entail the admission of different modes of being. The most general distinction among objects is the one between *realia*, which are causally efficacious, and *irrealia*, which are causally inert. As for being, which is equated with existence, it is understood in terms of "correct acknowledgeability." This view was defended for some time by Brentano himself and then by his student Anton Marty. Their position is opposed to Bolzanian, Husserlian, and Meinongian ontologies, in which a distinction in the (higher) types of object implies a distinction in their mode of being. These Austro-German discussions anticipate much of the contemporary debate between Quineans, who accept only differences in objects, and neo-Meinongians or other ontological pluralists, who accept different modes of being. My paper first presents the Brentanian view in detail and then evaluates its philosophical significance.

Is ontology just the science of the highest types of object, or is it also concerned with the different ways in which these objects are? This question is raised in current philosophical debates: followers of Quine (1948/1961), such as van Inwagen (2009/2014b), hold that ontological differences are restricted to differences among objects, whereas others, notably neo-Meinongians such as Parsons (1980), or more recently McDaniel (2017), are "ontological pluralists": they defend differences in being. But this debate is older, since it had already

---

Contact: Hamid Taieb <hamid.taieb@hu-berlin.de>

849

arisen in the Austro-German tradition, among Bolzano, Brentano, and their followers.[1]

Brentano, at least for a time, and his pupil Anton Marty divide objects into *realia* and *irrealia*. *Realia* are concrete particulars, whereas *irrealia* include many types of metaphysical entities, or what contemporary philosophers call "abstract objects," such as properties, possibilities, and past and future things.[2] Whereas *realia* are causally efficacious, *irrealia* are causally inert. Both *realia* and *irrealia* can be, that is, they can exist. According to Brentanians, being, which is the same as existence, is understood as "correct acknowledgeability." This concept is acquired by reflection on judgements of acknowledgement, that is, on affirmative existential judgements, or mental positings. For Brentano and Marty, there is no other way to understand being than as correct acknowledgeability.

Bolzano, Husserl, and, to borrow an expression from van Inwagen (2004/ 2014a), "paleo-Meinongians"—that is, Meinong himself and his students[3]—not only accept distinctions between concrete and abstract objects, but also hold that these distinctions imply a contrast in the mode of being of the objects. Now, Bolzano, Husserl, and the paleo-Meinongians were paleo-criticized by Brentano and Marty. For Brentanians, the distinction between *realia* and *irrealia* is a distinction in the essence or *what* of the objects, but such a distinction does not entail a difference in the mode of being or *that*. Thus, as has been noted by Sauer (2006), the central Brentanian ontological positions are akin to those of Quine. Brentano himself, after his so-called "reistic turn," accepts only *realia* in his ontology, so his attacks on the views of Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong are not accompanied by a defence of abstract objects. By contrast, Marty remains in favour of *irrealia*. Thus, he aims to show that abstract objects do not force one to accept different modes of being. On this basis, Marty develops his master's criticism of modes of being in great detail.

This paper is devoted to presenting and evaluating the Brentanian arguments against modes of being. In the first part of the paper (§1), I present the

---

1. Some neo-Meinongian authors explicitly reject pluralism and instead endorse "noneism," that is, the claim that some objects have no mode of being at all, most famously Routley (1980) and later Priest (2005). Thus, the debate between Quineans and neo-Meinongians is not reducible to a debate about the acceptance of modes of being. However, this paper will have little to say about noneism, but will focus on ontological pluralism, as this is the main topic of the Austro-German discussion it aims to present and evaluate (namely, Brentano and Marty's criticism of modes of being).

2. The opposition between "concrete" and "abstract" contrasts ordinary, spatiotemporal and/ or causally efficacious entities—e.g., Socrates—and unordinary, non-spatiotemporal and/or causally inert entities—e.g., numbers (see Rosen 2017).

3. Note that I am using the label "paleo-Meinongian" in a merely chronological sense, whereas van Inwagen might give to it a more substantial turn, since he says that neo-Meinongians defend the view that some objects *are* but do not *exist*, while paleo-Meinongians hold that "many objects, so to speak, don't be"—that is, they endorse noneism (van Inwagen 2004/2014: 172).

main themes in Brentanian ontology, namely *realia* and *irrealia* (§1.1), as well as existence (§1.2). In the second part (§2), after a description of the views of Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong (§2.1), I present Brentano's and especially Marty's criticisms of modes of being (§2.2). In the third part (§3), I evaluate the Brentanian arguments and discuss their philosophical significance on the basis of objections raised by Meinong and Husserl.

1. Brentanian Ontology

1.1. *Realia* vs. *Irrealia*

Brentano is known mainly for having introduced the notion of intentionality into contemporary philosophy of mind (Brentano 1924–25: Vol. 1). However, his work goes far beyond mere psychological matters, as he was active in many other fields as well, notably metaphysics and ontology (1968 and 2013). As regards ontology, scholars are usually interested in his later position, called "reism" (see Chrudzimski & Smith 2004 and Kriegel 2015b). According to this theory, there are only *realia*, that is, concrete particulars; abstract items are eliminated. However, Brentano did not always defend this parsimonious theory: in an earlier phase of his philosophical development, he accepted two different types of object in his ontology, namely, *realia* and *irrealia* (Brentano 2013). Brentano distinguishes them on the basis of a causal criterion. *Realia*, also called "subsistents" (*Wesenhafte*), have their own coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be; as well, they are causally active and can undergo causal effects. By contrast, *irrealia*, also called "non-subsistents," come to be and cease to be only concomitantly with the coming-to-be or ceasing-to-be of real items. Moreover, *irrealia* are neither causally active nor suffer any causal effect (2013: 466–67). *Realia* are concrete particulars, either substantial, such as Socrates, or accidental, such as a white thing; *irrealia* include a broad range of metaphysical items, such as states of affairs, past and future things, *possibilia*, *abstracta*, relations, collectives, boundaries, *negativa*, and intentional objects (for a full list, see Chrudzimski 2004: 201).

There is no general reason for the acceptance of *irrealia* in Brentano's ontology; there are rather specific reasons, connected with each item in the list of *irrealia*. For example, Brentano thought that a red thing is red in virtue of its redness, which led him to accept abstract particulars in his ontology (2013: 471–75). Furthermore, as indicated above, he considered intentionality a relation, since it joins a subject and an object; this led him to accept intentional objects in order to preserve the relational nature of mental acts that are directed toward non-existent things (Brentano 1924–25: Vol. 1 and 1982). Thus, before his reistic turn, Brentano often modified his list of *irrealia*, depending on his position on the necessity of

accepting this or that specific sort of object in the list; the abandonment of some of these objects did not necessarily imply the abandonment of others.

1.2. Existence

Brentano clearly distinguishes between *realia* and *irrealia* on the one hand, and existence on the other. His notion of existence may seem odd at first sight. In Brentano, existence is explained by recourse to a psychic activity, specifically, the notion of "acknowledgement" (*Anerkennung*). Acknowledgement is connected with the Brentanian theory of judgement. This theory itself has some details which need to be briefly explained.

Brentano rejects the idea that judgement is propositional. The standard form of judgement is not "S is p" (for example, "Socrates is white"), but "*(Sp)," where (Sp) is a presented object (for example "white-Socrates") and "*" expresses a specific psychic attitude adopted towards this object, namely, either acknowledgement or denial.[4] What Brentano calls "acknowledgement" is the psychic activity one proceeds to in an existential affirmative judgement: one acknowledges, or *posits*, a simple or complex object. Another way of putting this is to say that acknowledgement is an "ontological commitment" to a simple or complex object. The opposite psychic activity, "denial," explains negative existential judgements: in such judgements, one denies, or *removes*, a simple or complex object. Thus, affirmative and negative existential judgements are, respectively, the positing or the removal of an object.[5] Brentano's non-propositional account of judgement leads him to claim that all judgements are existential: all "categorical" (that is, predicative) judgements can be translated into existential judgements about complex objects (1924–25: Vol. 2: 56). For example, the judgement "Socrates is white" is converted into "White-Socrates is": instead of predicating "white" of "Socrates," one makes an existential judgement about "white-Socrates." In Brentano's most fully developed theory, predicative judgements are understood as "double judgements," that is, as a specific combination of two judgements, where the first judgement is about a simple object and the second is about this same object as judged in the first judgement *plus* a determination; for example, "White-[in a prior judgement acknowledged-]Socrates is."[6]

Although it may appear that Brentano's notion of acknowledgement and denial is explained by the notion of existential judgement, and thus by the notion

---

4. See Brentano (1924–25: Vol. 2: 48–70), and Mulligan (1989).

5. See notably Brentano (1924–25: Vol. 2: 38–82 and 183–96). The interpretation of Brentano's acknowledgement as a "positing" or "ontological commitment" is found in Textor (2017: 6).

6. I follow Chrudzimski's (2004: 203) formulation of Brentano's theory of the double judgement.

of existence, it is rather the opposite: existence is explained via the notion of acknowledgement—more precisely, the notion of *correct* acknowledgement. Brentano's basic idea is thus that the psychic activity of ontological commitment, to the extent that it is correct, is enough to explain what "existence" is. Although in all his works he sticks to this idea—that is, that existence is to be understood via the notion of correct acknowledgement—he has some hesitations about the logical-ontological status of existence: he wonders whether existence is a property or not, and correspondingly, whether "existent" is a predicate or not.

In his *Psychology* of 1874 and other writings from that period, Brentano seems to think that existence is a property of things, and that "existent" is a predicate.[7] In fact, he analyzes "something existent" as "that which *can be* correctly acknowledged," that is, with a modal qualification; existence and "existent" are thus a relational dispositional property and predicate respectively (Brentano 2011: 102); abstractly, the property could be expressed as "correct acknowledgeability." On this account, existence is a relational dispositional property because it is nothing other than the object's ability (that is, a disposition) to be correctly committed to (that is, a relation) by a subject (that is, the term of the relation).[8] However, one also finds Brentano describing "something existent" with a deontic qualification as "that which *ought to be* acknowledged"; here, the relational property, which is a normative one, is expressed abstractly as "to-be-acknowledged-ness" (*das Anzuerkennensein*) (2011: 102 and 1924–25: Vol. 2: 89).[9] But does one account,

---

7. The view that existence in Brentano is a property, and "existent" a predicate, is found in Textor (2017). The clearest passage cited by Textor in favour of this view is §42 of Brentano's lectures on ethics (1952b: 144; trans. Schneewind): "In calling an object good we are not giving it a material predicate, as we do when we call something red or round or warm or thinking. In this respect, the expressions good and bad are like the expressions existent and non-existent". The idea is that "existent," like "good," is not a *material* predicate, but a predicate nonetheless: if it were not a predicate, Brentano would not specify the kind of predicate it is not, but would rather say that it is not a predicate *at all*; as will be shown below, Textor holds that "existent" is a normative predicate, which would differ from material predicates in Brentano. The problem that I have here, independently of the distinction between material and non-material predicates, is that the section containing §42 was "composed" (*redigiert*) by Kastil, as indicated by Mayer-Hillebrand (see Brentano 1952b: 134 n. 13). In fact, this section does not exist as such in the original lectures (see the Table of Contents in Brentano [n.d.] ms. Eth 21a, n. 20381, as well as those at the beginnings of mss. Eth 21c and 21d); Kastil's §§40–42, which compare emotions and judgements, apparently develop some remarks found in Eth 21d, nn. 20630–35, where there is no mention of existence being a material predicate. In my opinion, a passage that better illustrates the property view of existence is Brentano (1930: 45 n. 1), where it is claimed that the concept of existence is a relative concept whose correlative is that of a correct acknowledgement: since there is a concept of existence, and since it is a relative concept, existence must be a property—more precisely, it must be a relative one—and hence also predicable.

8. Acknowledgements to a referee of this journal for the wording.

9. Quoted and discussed in Textor (2017: 10). As indicated, Textor attributes the property theory to Brentano. Note, however, that Textor takes the normative account to be Brentano's only view and rejects the modal reading.

either the dispositional or the normative one, take priority over the other? It seems that Brentano gives priority to the modal qualification, since he explains the normative one in modal terms:

> "The object is" means [. . .] that the object is to be acknowledged, that is, that it can be correctly acknowledged. (Brentano 2011: 102)[10]

In holding that existence is a property, and "existent" a predicate, Brentano does not mean that acknowledgement is a predication of existence. This would imply that existential judgements are to be understood as predicative ones, whereas according to Brentano's theory, it is rather the opposite: predicative judgements are explained in terms of existential ones. Thus, acknowledgement is not a predication, but a positing or ontological commitment, and in acknowledging an object, one does not attribute "correct acknowledgeability" to it. However, according to Brentano, when one reflects on one's activity of acknowledgement, one grasps the correlative property of "correct acknowledgeability" that belongs to the object. In other words, when one has a higher-order psychic activity turned toward one's own judgement, one grasps not only one's own psychic activity, but also the corresponding "correct acknowledgeability" of the object. According to Brentano, this is how one acquires the concept of existence, that is, by reflecting on one's own judgements. Note that one does not merely grasp the object as *acknowledged*, but as *correctly acknowledgeable*, since one cannot rationally acknowledge an object and think at the same time that it is incorrect to do so.[11]

The fact that "existent" is a predicate, whereas acknowledgement itself is not a predication, and that the concept of existence understood as correct acknowledgeability is acquired by reflection on affirmative judgements are stated all at once by Marty in 1895:

> There is in fact a unitary concept of existence. Although in the simple and originary judgement "A is" it is not given as a predicate. "A is" means nothing more than the acknowledgement of A. However, in reflection on such an acknowledgement, when it is correct, the concept of being-correctly-acknowledgeable can then be abstracted, and this is the concept of existence. Existent means everything which can be correctly acknowledged. And this concept, once built, can, like any other, be predicatively connected with a subject A, B, C, and be said of it. I can say: A is existent,

---

10. This text is quoted in Kraus (1930: xxix). For more on the normative and modal readings of Brentano, and on the further claim that correctness itself cannot be analysed in normative terms in Brentano, see Mulligan (2017b).

11. See Brentano (1924–25: Vol. 2: 89–90) and (1930: 45). For the discussion on predication and reflection, I follow Textor (2017: 9–10).

and though this predication is not identical with "A is," it is, however, equivalent, analogously to the way "That A is, is true" is a more compounded equivalent of "A is." (Marty 1895/1918: 201)

In line with Brentano, Marty states that it would be wrong to take the judgement "A is" as if it meant "A is existent" where "existent" is a predicate of A; which is another way of saying that "A is" is not a predicative judgement. However, existence *is* a property of A, and thus can be predicated of it, but only once one has grasped the concept of existence by reflection on one's own judgement.

Thus, according to Brentano's early view, which Marty follows, existence is a relational dispositional property and "existent" a relational dispositional predicate. In some later writings, however, Brentano seems to have another understanding of the logical-ontological status of existence. He considers the view that existence is not a property and "existent" not a predicate:

> If "the existent," in its strict sense, is a name, it cannot be said to name anything directly. It comes to the same thing as "something which is the object of a correct affirmative judgement" or "something which is correctly accepted or affirmed." If "existent" is a name in the logical sense, i.e. a word which names a thing, a thing that is judged affirmatively, it is a relational word. I use it to indicate that I am thinking of some thing as corresponding to my thinking (and also, naturally, that I am thinking of myself as thinking correctly). [. . .] Perhaps it would be more nearly correct to say: "existent" is not even a logical name. The most natural expression is: "there is an A" and not "an A is existent"; for in the latter case "existent" has the appearance of being a predicate. (Brentano 1930: 79; trans. Chisholm, Politzer, Fischer)[12]

In fact, Brentano does not just have doubts, but will definitely abandon his older views on existence. Indeed, while defending his reistic position—namely, that only *realia* are to be admitted in ontology—he produces a list of ontological notions that he wants to abandon, and among them he mentions "existence and non-existence" (Brentano 1924–25: Vol. 2: 162).[13] He further holds that "the reflective presentations with the content – the being of A or a A-being, etc. – appear to be non-things" (Brentano 1952a: 108). In that case, existence does not belong to the object at all, but rather is reduced to a specific intentional relatedness of the subject, namely, possible correct acknowledgement, that is,

---

12. See also (1930: 189–90), as well as (1930: 162).
13. Quoted in a footnote to Marty (1895/1918: 203), by his editors and students Eisenmeier, Kastil, and Kraus.

possible correct "representing-as-existent" or possible correct "existence-commitment."[14] There seems to be no similar reduction in Marty, who continues to defend the older view about existence.[15] Be that as it may, on both accounts of Brentano's theory of existence—that is, the predicative and the non-predicative accounts—existence is explained via the notion of acknowledgement, that is, a non-propositional mental positing. In other words, an existent thing, for Brentano, is that to which one can correctly commit oneself ontologically; existence is either the object's ability to be correctly committed to (the predicative view) or nothing other than the possible correct commitment itself (the non-predicative view).

The interaction between *realia* and *irrealia* on the one hand, and existence on the other, is straightforward: both *realia* and *irrealia* can exist. It would be a misinterpretation of Brentano to think that *realia* exist whereas *irrealia* do not (see, e.g., Brentano 1930: 24). The *un*-reality of *irrealia* is a negation of their causal efficacy and receptivity, not of their existence. Thus, for Brentano, there are indeed different types of object, but they all can *be*; one can claim both of *realia*—"There is God," "There is a man"—and *irrealia*—"There is a lack," "There is a possibility"—that they are (Brentano 1930: 41).[16]

As already mentioned, however, Brentano himself will abandon the category of *irrealia*, and turn to a very parsimonious ontology, namely "reism," in which only *realia* are admitted; all other items are eliminated.[17] Marty will not follow this reduction. For Marty, at least two categories of *irrealia* must be maintained. The first is that of states of affairs, which guarantee the correspondence of judgement to reality: that to which a judgement corresponds in reality is not just Socrates, but *the fact that Socrates exists*. The second is the category of relation, which explains many crucial things, such as the resemblance between objects, as well as our cognitive access to the world, that is, intentionality (see Marty 1916b: 148–74; and Cesalli 2008).

2. Against (Austro-German) Modes of Being

For Brentano and Marty, not only do both *realia* and *irrealia* exist, but they exist in one and the same way. The rejection of modes of being by Brentanians was a

---

14. These formulations are found in Kriegel (2015a), who holds that existence in Brentano is not a property.

15. See again Eisenmeier, Kastil, and Kraus's footnote in Marty (1895/1918: 203) and, e.g., Marty (1908: 291–92).

16. On these questions, see Sauer (2006) and (2013).

17. This abandonment is documented in Brentano (1952a). On reism, see again Chrudzimski and Smith (2004) and Sauer (2017).

reaction to other Austro-German thinkers, Meinong most notably, but also Bolzano and Husserl, all of whom defended modes of being.

2.1. Austro-German Modes of Being

Bolzano accepts two distinct modes of being, one of which is called "existence" (*Existenz*), "actuality" (*Dasein*), or "reality" (*Wirklichkeit*), the other remaining unnamed. This distinction is made in the context of his discussion of "representations in themselves"—that is, roughly speaking, mind-independent conceptual contents—and "propositions in themselves"—that is, roughly speaking, mind-independent propositional contents, including "truths in themselves" (the subclass of propositions in themselves which are true). Representations and propositions in themselves are "objective," and they are contrasted to their "subjective" counterparts, namely, representations and propositions in the minds of individual thinking subjects. The distinct subjective entities are "the same" to the extent that different subjects grasp one and the same objective entity (*Wissenschaftslehre* §§25 and 48).[18]

Bolzano affirms that subjective representations and propositions have existence, in contrast to objective representations and propositions. He seems to explain existence via the notion of temporality: subjective representations and propositions have actuality in that they begin at some moment, last for a while, and end at some later moment (*Wissenschaftslehre* §§25 and 48).[19] Although Bolzano himself does not explain why existence is to be connected to time, a similar position is defended in current debates. The thesis has its starting point in the fact that we take material objects to be necessarily temporal. Given this intuition, a good way to describe it from a metaphysical point of view is to say that the very being of these objects is related to time; existence is thus revealed to be a *relation* between objects and times (McDaniel 2017: 61–62). Once widened to psychological entities, the argument might hold for Bolzano too, or at least might furnish an explanation for the connection he posits between existence and temporality.

Unlike psychological, subjective entities, objective representations and propositions do not exist, but they are still "given" (*gegeben*) (*Wissenschaftslehre* §§30 and 50). Does "being given" for Bolzano involve any ontological commitment? As emphasized by Beyer (1996: 66), when Bolzano explains what the sentence "A is given" means, he states:

---

18. In the following I cite *Wissenschaftslehre* by section number from Bolzano (1985–2000).

19. For the hypothesis that existence in Bolzano is connected above all with temporality, see Beyer (1996: 82–84).

> The true sense of such sentences is [. . .] hence simply that there is an object that corresponds to the representation A. (*Wissenschaftslehre* §137; trans. Rusnock and George, slightly modified)

This claim does seem to indicate an ontological commitment: the "being given" of A apparently implies that there is something like an A that corresponds to the representation, in contrast to "objectless representations," for example, that of a round square, to which no object corresponds (*Wissenschaftslehre* §67).[20] But since what accounts for the "givenness" of representations and propositions in themselves cannot be existence, it must be another sort of being; it seems therefore that Bolzano is a defender of modes of being.[21]

Husserl, in the *Logical Investigations*, inspired by Bolzano's theory of representations and propositions in themselves,[22] attributes to concepts and propositions, that is, word meanings and sentence meanings, a specific mode of being, called "ideal being," in reference to Plato's "Ideas." The relation between these objective entities and their subjective counterparts is clear: concepts and propositions are species, that is, universals, and subjective conceptual and propositional contents are instances of these species (*LU* I, §§32 and 34, 107.3–4 and 108.26–29). Yet Husserl does not just include universals among items with ideal being; numbers too are included. As in Bolzano, the opposition in Husserl is based on temporality; real beings, like instances of red, are temporal, whereas ideal beings are atemporal (*LU* II, §8, 129.10–20). Strikingly, Husserl emphasizes that talk of ideal objects is not mere empty description, as if they were *ficta* or *impossibilia*. Whereas *ficta* or *impossibilia* do not exist and cannot have anything truly predicated of them, ideal objects do exist and can be subjects of true predications. Thus, for Husserl the truth of a predication (or "categorization") seems to entail the being of its subject. However, the being of ideal, atemporal objects is to be distinguished from that of real and individual, temporal objects. Ideal objects have ideal being, whereas real objects have real being:

> It is naturally not our intention to put the *being of what is ideal* on a level with the *being-thought-of which characterizes the fictitious or the nonsensical*.

---

20. On objectless representations in Bolzano, see Fréchette (2010).

21. See also McDaniel (2017: 38), who thinks that Bolzano is an ontological pluralist. For a different reading, according to which Bolzano does not admit modes of being, see Mulligan (2019). Note that Bolzano (*Wissenschaftslehre* §142) can be found saying that some people use "being" (*Sein*), in contrast to "actuality" (*Dasein*) or "reality" (*Wirklichkeit*), to refer to the essence of something, and thus means to say that essences can *be* while having no reality. But Bolzano explicitly rejects this position, which might suggest that he is a noneist: essences have no mode of being.

22. I cite the *Logical Investigations* hereafter as *LU* from Husserl (1984) by investigation and section number. On the sources of Husserl's theory, see his own references not only to Plato and Bolzano, but also to Lotze, in Husserl (1939); see Beyer (1996) for a detailed analysis.

The latter does not exist at all, and nothing can properly be predicated of it. [. . .] Ideal objects, on the other hand, exist genuinely. Evidently there is not merely a good sense in speaking of such objects (e.g. of the number 2, the quality of redness, of the principle of contradiction etc.) and in conceiving them as sustaining predicates: we also have insight into certain categorial truths that relate to such ideal objects. If these truths hold, everything presupposed as an object by their holding must have being. If I see the truth that 4 is an even number, that the predicate of my assertion actually pertains to the ideal object 4, then this object cannot be a mere fiction, a mere *façon de parler*, a mere nothing in reality. [. . .] we do not deny but in fact emphasize, that there is a fundamental categorial split in our unified conception of being (or what is the same, in our conception of an object as such); we take account of this split when we distinguish between ideal being and real being; between being as Species and being as what is individual. (*LU* II, §8, 129.30–130.30; trans. Findlay, slightly modified)

Note that although Husserl indicates in this passage that the distinction between real and ideal *beings* (*Seiende*) is a distinction of the category of "object as such," he seems to infer from this a distinction in the modes of being of objects, since he then contrasts real and ideal *being* (*Sein*).[23]

The most explicit discussions of the distinction between modes of being in the Austro-German tradition are found in Meinong and his students, for example, Mally (1904). According to the Meinongians, being has two modes: real objects have *existence*, whereas ideal objects have *subsistence* (*Bestand*).[24] Note that, in contrast to Husserl, Meinong does not treat universals as ideal objects. For Meinong, both real and ideal objects are *complete*: for any given property, a complete object either has that property or does not have it. Universals, by contrast, are incomplete; for example, the universal triangle is neither equilateral nor non-equilateral.[25] Yet Meinong has a broad list of ideal items. He counts among them not only numbers, but also states of affairs (which he calls "objectives"), as well as some relations, namely, internal relations, that is, those which necessarily accompany their *relata*.[26] Moreover, he clearly distinguishes the non-existence

---

23. However, on Husserl's complex evolution on the topic of modes of being, see Mulligan (2019).

24. From 1910 onwards, Meinong adds that everything which exists also subsists, while the opposite does not hold (see 1910/1977: 74, as well as 1921/1978a: 20). So here, subsistence might be seen as a more general mode of being than existence, and the latter a specification of the former.

25. On incomplete objects, see Meinong (1915/1972: 168–81), and the discussion in Marek (2019); I also follow Jacquette (2015: 15).

26. On internal relations in Meinong, and their connection to subsistence, I follow Marek (2019).

of impossible objects (due to a contradiction), the contingent non-existence of fictional objects, and the non-existence *but* subsistence of ideal objects:

> The non-existence of the something can have various reasons: there may be a contradiction as with the round square, there may be just a factual inexistence as with the case of the golden mountain. It can be a something which by its very nature cannot exist because it is not real: the equality between 3 and 3, the difference between red and green can subsist – as linguistic use already permits – but it cannot exist as e.g. a house or a tree does. (Meinong 1899/1971a: 382; trans. Kalsi)

As indicated in this passage, Meinong relies on language for the opposition between existence and subsistence. However, the contrast between these two modes of being is not merely linguistic. For Meinong, as for Bolzano and Husserl, this distinction is based on temporality. After saying that, unlike existent entities, some subsistent ones are necessary—more precisely some states of affairs, for example, *that 2 is smaller than 3*—Meinong affirms:

> Subsistents are distinguished from existents among other things also in that they are not bound to a specific time-determination and are in this sense eternal or, better, atemporal. (1902: 189)

Meinong's argument about the atemporality of internal relations is that they hold "at any time" (*jederzeit*); for example, red and green are not different at a specific moment only (see 1899/1971a: 398–99). Similarly, one might add, the number four has no time-determination, since distinct things in different times can be four (on numbers, see especially 1904/1971b: 487). As for objectives, although some of them may refer to a specific time-determination, for example, *that I am writing this paper now*, Meinong holds that they "subsist" at any time. Yet this does not mean that they obtain at any time, but rather that they are "true" at any time. His objectives can indeed play the role of truth-bearers, and he himself justifies the atemporality of objectives by saying that there is a "supratemporal character of truth" (1902: 189, quoting Uphues 1901).[27]

Note finally that for Meinong actual, possible, and impossible objects all have "outside-being" (*Außersein*). Meinong seems not to consider outside-being to be a mode of being. He wonders whether he should admit a "third mode of being" (*dritte Seinsart*) in addition to existence and subsistence, but finally holds that outside-being is not a type of being, but rather that it is "similar to being"

---

27. On Meinong's objectives as playing both the role of truth-bearers and truth-makers, see Morscher (1986).

(*seinsartig*), in the sense that all objects have some sort of "pre-givenness" (*Vorge-gebenheit*) when they are thought of (1910/1977: 79–80). However, as he himself concedes, during a certain period he took things deprived of existence and subsistence to have "quasi-being" (*Quasisein*), which he did indeed treat as a mode of being (1904/1971b: 491–93).[28]

2.2. Brentano's and Marty's criticism

Brentano himself is sceptical about any distinction between existence and subsistence, and more generally about modes of being. The linguistic contrast between existence and subsistence—evoked by Meinong, but Brentano does not mention Meinong by name—is as such not philosophically reliable: one simply prefers to say, in German, "A possibility subsists" (*es bestehe eine Möglichkeit*) rather than "It exists" (1968: 30–31); but "subsistence," like "existence," means nothing more than "correct acknowledgeability."

Moreover, Brentano goes beyond linguistic issues. After referring to an "opinion" (*Meinung*) which distinguishes between being and existence—perhaps Meinong again—Brentano says:

> I confess that I am unable to make any sense of this distinction between being and existence. (Brentano 1924–25: Vol. 2: 137; trans. Rancurello, Terrell, and McAlister)

First, Brentano affirms that the logical-ontological principles which hold for existent things should also hold for things that are; for example, the principle of non-contradiction (1924–25: Vol. 2: 137). This means that contradictory entities would not be saved by having a mode of being different from existence: such things just could not be, either in the sense of existence or in any other sense.

Moreover—and this is another non-linguistic argument, which is about non-existent objects, such as the golden mountain—Brentano says that once we correctly deny something, this thing could neither exist nor be in any other sense (1924–25: Vol. 2: 137–38). His point seems to be that our negative judgements would not be true if we were to hold that things that we reject, that is,

---

28. This seems to imply that the late Meinong is both an ontological pluralist, in admitting both existence and subsistence, and a noneist, with respect to objects that have only "outside-being". For a recent discussion of modes of being in Meinong, see Richard (2017). The similarity in Meinong between outside-being and being is mentioned by Mulligan (2019). For the acceptance of modes of being by other authors in the Austro-German tradition, see again Mulligan (2019). I do not discuss these authors since they developed their views later than Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong, and were not criticized by Brentano and Marty.

non-existent objects, still *are*, though not in the sense of existence. This argument works only if one thinks that one cannot reject the existence of something while acknowledging its being—otherwise, one might simply judge that it is true that it does not exist but that it is also true that it still *is*. In other words, Brentano's argument seems to require that acknowledgement and rejection of existence be also acknowledgement and rejection of being. And this is indeed the case in the Brentanian tradition, in which there is only one kind of ontological commitment, or mental positing, namely, commitment to existence or being. As we will see, the idea that there is only one kind of mental positing plays a central role in Marty's criticism of modes of being.

In sum, although Brentano's remarks on the topic are brief, it is clear that for him, "being is the same as existence" and "existence is univocal."[29]

The most interesting criticism of modes of being does not come from Brentano himself, but from Marty (1908: 316–60; see also 1916b: 169–72). Indeed, since Marty maintains *irrealia* in his ontology, including relations and states of affairs, he distinguishes in detail between specificities at the level of objects and (supposed) specificities at the level of modes of being. Marty speaks of differences in types of object as differences of essence or *what*, in contrast to (supposed) differences in modes of being, which would be differences of *that*. Marty's vocabulary here is reminiscent of scholastic distinctions. The *what* refers to the question "quid est?" and the notion of *quiddity*; that is, it serves to determine what a thing is, for example, an animal, a horse, etc. By contrast, the *that* evokes the that-clause, which in Latin takes a verb in the infinitive mood; in philosophical discussions, this verb is usually *esse* ("to be")—as in *Socratem hominem esse* ("that Socrates is a human being")—and it surely is to this verb that Marty wants to draw attention: variations in the *that* are variations of *esse*. Marty wonders whether differences in modes of being—*if* there were any—should hold between objects which have a difference in their essence; his answer is yes, for if there were no essential differences between two objects, one would be unable to say *why* these objects have distinct modes of being (1908: 321–22). Thus Marty defends the view, summarized by Mulligan (2006: 38), that "the modes of being of objects are determined

---

29. These are the second and the third of the "five theses" of van Inwagen's ontology (2009/2014b). Note that in addition to "being in the proper sense," Brentano sometimes also speaks of "being in the improper sense" (1968: 3–31). However, this is not an alternative mode of being, nor does it imply that the term "being" is used equivocally. What Brentano means is that we sometimes talk as if some things *were*, in the usual sense of "being," that is, as if they existed, whereas in fact they are not. For example, when someone is thinking about something, we can say, correlatively, that *there is* something thought about. However, sometimes the thing thought about *is not*, that is, it does not exist. If one says in this case that *there is* something thought about, one is using "being in the improper sense."

by the essences, natures, kinds, or types of objects."[30] In short, variations of *that*—if any—could hold only between objects which have distinct *what*. This is surely the case with *realia* and *irrealia*, whose essential difference is the highest one. However, as indicated above, Marty is unsympathetic to the view that there are distinct modes of being. He has three arguments, one which is linguistic and two which are related to "the nature of things", as he puts it.

First, Marty gives a linguistic argument, just as Brentano does,[31] holding that language is often capricious and uses different terms in different contexts to say the same thing. This is the case with Meinong's distinction between existence and subsistence, which Marty compares to another linguistic variation, that between "being" (*sein*) and "being found" (*gefunden werden*): nobody takes them to indicate different modes of being. As Marty holds:

> I do not want to distinguish, following language, objects that "exist" and those that "subsist" any more than I would seriously like to build classes of objects that "are" and those that "are found." (1908: 323)

More importantly, Marty goes beyond this first, linguistic argument and provides two other arguments which are related to "the nature of things", as noted above. In his second argument, what he criticizes is not the idea itself of modes of being, but a central distinction made by Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong ahead of the adoption of modes of being and which motivates it, namely, the distinction between temporal and atemporal objects.[32] Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong apparently think that atemporality requires a specific mode of being. Marty however does not accept atemporal objects. He eliminates some of the standard candidates for atemporality. Since the world is made up of particulars, universals—among which he includes numbers—do not exist; as for definitional predications—for example, "Man is an animal"—their truth, for Marty, does not imply the existence of general objects, since they can be translated into negative statements involving particulars—for example, "A non-animal man is

---

30. This is similar to van Inwagen (2009/2014b), who speaks of differences between objects in terms not of "essence," but of "nature."

31. Although the text in which Marty gives this argument is from 1908, while that in which Brentano mentions it is from 1916 (see 1968: 26), it is not impossible that Marty borrowed it from Brentano, following one of their numerous epistolary exchanges (published only partially, in 1952a among others). The exact chronology and pattern of influences between Brentano and Marty on these issues would be difficult to reconstruct. Given the texts that I know, I take Marty's criticism of modes of being to be both Brentanian in spirit and more developed than his master's.

32. Note that Marty explicitly mentions Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong when he criticizes modes of being. Another, non-Austro-German, author that Marty includes in the list is William James, quoting *The Principles of Psychology*, bk. II, ch. 21 (see Marty 1908: 322, as well as 1892/1916a: 117–18). He also refers to Lotze's *Mikrokosmus*, where he finds similar views (see Marty 1916b: 169 and 171).

impossible." Similarly for (more complex) statements about internal relations: "A red non-differing-from-green is impossible."[33] More broadly, Marty denies that any atemporal object could be. In his view, everything that is, including states of affairs, is temporal. Thus, one cannot say that the distinction between temporality and atemporality leads to different modes of being, namely, existence and subsistence. Marty does admit that there are "eternal truths," but "eternal" means precisely *not* atemporal, but *omnitemporal*. For example, the proposition "A non-animal man is impossible" has always been true, is now true, and always will be true. This also holds for contingent propositions. Criticizing Meinong, Marty holds that a proposition such as "I am now writing this paper" is eternally true in the following sense: it was true in the past that I will now be writing this paper, it is true in the present that I am now writing it, and it will be true in the future that I was now writing it. Thus, eternal truths are not atemporal, but omnitemporal, that is, they are true at every moment of time. Marty claims that philosophers tend to confound what is "temporal" (*zeitlich*) with what is "temporary" (*zeitweilich*). In fact, things can be temporal without being temporary, namely, when they are omnitemporal:

> What is without becoming or passing away is not for this reason atemporal, but at all times. [. . .] When one defends the atemporality of such truths, is the equivocation of temporal in the sense of "temporary" perhaps playing a role? To be sure, only what is contingent is temporary, not what is necessary. But temporal, in contrast to atemporal, does not mean temporary. (1908: 328–29)

Note however that Marty, in contrast to Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong, does not accept mind-independent propositions. Propositions can be reduced to occurrent acts of judgement; for example, "Socrates is white" can be reduced to the acknowledgement of white-Socrates, which does not rule out two distinct subjects performing similar judgements. Thus, when Marty says that there are omnitemporal truths, he does not mean that these truths have always existed, now exist, and will always exist as mind-independent propositions, but rather that the possibility of judging these truths has always existed, now exists, and will always exist. A similar point holds for concepts: their omnitemporality can ultimately be explained in terms of possible conceptual presentations (see Marty 1908: 337–41, 362 and 447–52; for more on these questions, see Mulligan 1990).

---

33. On Marty's rejection of universals, see (1908: 337–39); on definitions and similar statements, see especially (1908: 339–49).

Marty's third, and main argument against modes of being (1908: 323–25) refers to the Brentanian notion of being or existence understood as "correct acknowledgeability." As mentioned above, it draws on a thesis that also plays an important role in Brentano's criticism of modes of being, namely, the thesis that there is only one kind of mental positing. Marty's claim is the following: the concept of being can be acquired only by reflecting on mental acts of positing, or ontological commitment, and by grasping the correlative property belonging to their objects. Now, if one wants to defend the view that there are different modes of being, one should have different concepts of being. Marty seems to base his argument on the following epistemic constraint: one cannot defend the view that there are different types of *X* without thinking of them, which in turn is not possible without having different concepts corresponding to them. Yet, in the Brentanian framework, if there were different concepts of being, they would be acquired by reflecting on different mental acts of positing and by grasping their specific correlative properties. The question then is: are there different ways of positing objects? Marty's answer is no: the only positing is that of acknowledgement. According to Marty, an inquiry into our own psychic lives, as it appears to us in inner consciousness, shows us that we have only one way of positing things, namely, by acknowledging them. Thus, the only notion of being that we have is "correct acknowledgeability," that is, existence:

> [I]f we were to have, with subsistence or similar things, another mode of the *that*, another situation with respect to a *what* in front of us, then it should be possibly adequate to a specific mode of the judging behaviour and manifest itself to us in and with the correctness of this behaviour. [. . .] However, inner experience seems to me to show nothing like such a relation of consciousness. And as much as it is clear that "is," when used in the sense of existence, wants to express and to evoke the acknowledging judgement, in other words, it means the content of it, I ask myself in vain where the supposedly totally peculiar concept of "subsistence" is acquired – in other words: where is the psychic mode of behaviour analogous to acknowledgement and which corresponds to the "is" in the sense of subsistence as acknowledgement corresponds to the "is" in the sense of existence? (Marty 1908: 323–25)

In sum, Marty draws all the consequences of the Brentanian account of existence with respect to theories of modes of being: since being is explained in terms of mental positing, and since its concept is acquired by reflection on mental positings, one must accept that there are various kinds of mental positing in order to have various concepts of being, which in turn are needed by anyone who holds that there are modes of being; but since we have only one kind of mental

866 • *Hamid Taieb*

positing, we have only one concept of being. Theories of modes of being are therefore mere strings of words not referring to any conceptual distinction.

Yet Marty makes a concession based on this argument. He holds that being necessary and being identical are "in a certain sense" modes of being (1908: 324). Indeed, being necessary and being identical correspond to different modes of "correct acknowledgeability."

Let us first see how Marty treats being necessary. Among judgements, Marty distinguishes assertoric and apodictic ones. Assertoric judgements "take something to be or not to be" without any modality. Apodictic judgements "take something to be necessary or to be impossible." Possibility is understood as the negation of impossibility, that is, as "that which is not necessarily not." Impossibility itself is explained via the notion of necessity, that is, as "that which is necessarily not." Marty is a realist about modalities, in the sense that he holds that they are included in states of affairs, either positive or negative. According to Marty, in order for judgements about such states of affairs to be correct, they must not simply acknowledge or deny something, but must also add the apodictic mode. In fact, the assertoric acknowledgement or denial of something necessary or impossible is not "fully correct," as Marty says, since neither is adequate to the modality of the state of affairs. Now, a correct apodictic acknowledgement has as its counterpart in reality "being necessary" (see 1908: 296–98, 321, and 759–60). In sum, Marty thinks that differences at the level of correct acknowledgement imply differences at the level of being, and since he accepts a correct *apodictic* acknowledgement, he concedes that its correlative being necessary is "in a certain sense" a mode of being.

What about being identical? Judgements of "identity" are also called "synthetic judgements," "categorial judgements," or "judgements of attribution" (*Zuerkennung*). Although these judgements attribute a property to something, they are still existential judgements, following the Brentanian theory of double judgement. For example, the attribution of whiteness to Socrates has the form: "White-[in a prior judgement acknowledged-]Socrates is."[34] Marty thinks that these judgements too form a specific mode of acknowledgement or denial. He also maintains that a correct attributive acknowledgement has as its counterpart in reality "being identical," also called "being this or that" (*Dies- oder Jenessein*) (1908: 293 and 324). Again, a difference at the level of correct acknowledgement implies a difference at the level of being (1908: 324).[35]

However, despite these apparent concessions, Marty stresses that he accepts modes of being only "in a certain sense." Why this qualification? This is due

---

34. Following Chrudzimski's (2004: 203) formulation of Brentano's theory, as indicated above.

35. Note that Marty's use of "being identical" is different from the standard understanding of identity in terms of "A = A"; the alternative name "being this or that" expresses Marty's idea better.

Ergo • vol. 7, no. 32 • 2021

to the fact that he treats "being necessary" and "being this or that" as determinations of one and the same being. As he says, "the usual concept of being is included in them and is only enriched and determined" (1908: 324). The usual concept in question is that of "correct acknowledgeability," that is, existence. As a matter of fact, Marty's determinations of being follow differences at the level of judgements, more precisely of correct acknowledgement: "being necessary" corresponds to correct *apodictic* acknowledgement and is thus to be understood as "correct *apodictic* acknowledgeability," whereas "being this or that" corresponds to correct *attributive* acknowledgement and thus is equivalent to "correct *attributive* acknowledgeability."[36] Note that the differences at the level of judgement concerns the acknowledgement itself, not the correctness: this correctness, for Marty, is understood in the same way for all judgements, namely, in a correspondentist manner as a *sui generis* relation of "ideal similarity" (*ideelle Ähnlichkeit*) between the mind and an obtaining positive or negative state of affairs (1908: 295–96 and 418).[37] Thus, for Marty as for Brentano, "being is the same as existence" and "existence is univocal," even if being can be further determined as "being necessary" and "being this or that."[38]

3. Evaluation: Meinong's and Husserl's Objections

I would like now to evaluate the Brentanian arguments against modes of being, on the basis of some of the objections by their opponents, specifically those of Meinong and Husserl. Bolzano, who died in 1848, never read the Brentanians.

---

36. The idea that modes of being may be "correlated" to distinct mental acts will be widely exploited in the Austro-German tradition after Marty. On this question, which goes beyond the scope of this paper, see Mulligan (2019).

37. On Marty's theory of intentionality as a relation of ideal similarity, see Cesalli (2017) and Majolino (2017). A similar account of correctness as a conformity to states of affairs was defended by the early Brentano (1930: 3–29), but then abandoned in favour of an "epistemic account," in which correctness is understood in terms of "evidence," that is, a "species of clarity" and an "accident or quality of judging." See Mulligan (2017a: 89), and Brentano (1930: 87–150). More generally on Brentano on truth, see Brandl (2017).

38. Although Marty himself is hostile to the theory of modes of being, he nevertheless admits that a certain equivocation has been at play with the term "being" in the history of philosophy. According to him (1908: 316–17), in Aristotle, τὸ ὄν, or "being," is used to refer to both existence and reality. For Marty, "existence" in Aristotle is "being as true" (ὄν ὡς ἀληθές), whereas "reality" is what Aristotle calls "being according to the figures of the categories" (ὄν κατὰ τὰ σχήματα τῶν κατηγοριῶν), i.e., substance, quality, quantity, relation, etc. (Marty 1884/1918: 45). The same holds for the medieval term *ens*, i.e., "being", which draws on Aristotle: it refers to both existence and reality. The assimilation of being as true to existence is initially found in Brentano (see, e.g., 1930: 45 fn.). Unfortunately, the relation of Brentano and Marty to the Aristotelian-scholastic tradition is beyond the scope of this paper. On Aristotle's account of truth, see Crivelli (2004). For an evaluation of Brentano's interpretation of Aristotle, see Sauer (2013).

Meinong's objection draws on the most important Brentanian argument against modes of being, namely, the one about the acquisition of the concept of being. Recall that this argument is developed by Marty. For Marty, the concept of being is acquired by reflecting on mental acts of positing and by grasping the correlative property belonging to their objects. Now, someone who holds that there are different modes of being must have different concepts of being; these concepts must in turn be acquired by reflecting on different sorts of positing and by grasping their specific correlative properties. However, there is only one kind of positing, that of acknowledgement, and thus only one kind of being, namely, "correct acknowledgeability." Marty's argument is based on the claim that being is explained in terms of mental positing, and thus seems to depend on the plausibility of this thesis. If one rejects the claim, then one is not forced to admit that the variations in the concept of being are limited by the kinds of mental positings that are available.

Meinong, who read Marty's attacks on his position, reacted precisely to this point by criticizing Marty's attempt to explain being with reference to mental acts. Meinong quotes a passage in which Marty (1908: 327) challenges him to say in which "mode of the mental attitude" one finds "the distinction between 'subsistence of something' and 'existence of something'." Meinong answers:

> [I]t is unnecessary to comply with this invitation or challenge before Marty has legitimated the distinction between yellow and blue by pointing out the distinction in the "mode of mental attitude" that one has in representing these colours. (1910/1977: 73–74n. 5; trans. Heanue)

What exactly is Meinong objecting to here? I take him to mean that the distinction between existence and subsistence should not be looked for on the side of mental activities, but rather on the side of the objects towards which these activities are directed. It seems problematic to explain existence, and being more generally, in relation to thought, since existence is something which happens to things themselves, independently of any subject being there to think of them. In sum, Meinong's point is that Marty simply did not justify the claim that existence should be explained by reference to our judgments, and not to things themselves.

Meinong's remark echoes a problem than might arise with the Brentanian account of being, namely, that it leads to an idealistic position. At first glance, the explanation of existence in terms of a property relative to a thinking subject does indeed seem to have an idealistic flavour, and thus to be metaphysically problematic. Note however that Brentano's modal qualification of existence understood as "correct acknowledge*ability*" avoids the pitfall of idealism, since the existence of a thing does not require the presence of

any acknowledging subject, but only its possibility. Moreover, following Textor (2017) instead of adopting the modal qualification of existence, one could privilege the Brentanian normative qualification: "existent" will then mean "that which *ought to be* acknowledged".[39] In this case, existence does not even require the possibility of a correct acknowledgement, but is understood as "to-be-acknowledged-ness."

However, in the spirit of Meinong's remark, Husserl made another objection to Brentano, which holds both for the modal and the normative accounts: if the analysis of existence via the notion of correct acknowledgement were right, then someone who mastered the concepts of "existence" and "correct acknowledgement" would not doubt their equivalence, just as someone who correctly uses "bachelor" and "unmarried man" will not wonder whether a bachelor is an unmarried man. However, someone who has mastered both "existence" and "correct acknowledgement" might still be surprised by their equivalence.[40]

One way of answering this Husserlian objection would be to adopt the Brentanian non-predicative account of existence: existence is not a property, and "existent" is not a predicate, so strictly speaking there is no corresponding concept of existence, and thus no possible problems due to its analysis. However, there are worries about an account in which existence is eliminated as a property of things in favour of understanding it in terms of a specific intentional relatedness. In a paper on Brentano's notion of existence, Vallicella, much like Meinong and Husserl, asks:

> Does the eliminativist affirm that *there are* individuals that neither exist nor do not exist apart from judgers? That would be self-contradictory. For if there are (= exist) individuals apart from minds, then it cannot be the case that they neither exist nor do not exist. But on the other hand, if there are no individuals apart from judgers, what is it that judgers accept or reject? (2001: 323–24)

---

39. As indicated above, Textor takes the normative account to be Brentano's only view and rejects the modal reading. For the problems deriving from the modal qualification of existence, see Bacigalupo (2015: 38–39 and 57–58); on these problems, see also Vallicella, who discusses at length the issue of idealism with respect to the Brentanian theory of existence (2001: 315–16) and whom I follow here.

40. This objection originates in Husserl (2001: 218): "Should really the concept of judgment be included in the concept of existence as a constituent?" It is also found in Moore (1903) and is developed by Textor (2017), whom I follow here (and who quotes both Husserl and Moore). Although Husserl wrote a review of Marty (1908), in which he defends his position on universals against Marty's criticism, he does not address the specific issue of modes of being, perhaps for lack of space (see Husserl 1979).

The idea behind this criticism is that existence must be a feature of things and that the attempt to reduce it to a mental activity leads to absurdities.[41]

Meinong's and Husserl's attacks show that Brentano's concept of existence is problematic; Marty's case against modes of being may thus be weakened, since his argument relies on this concept. In my opinion, however, there is still something valuable in Marty's argument. One important point about the Brentanian discussion of existence is that it provides a good account of what philosophers call "ontological commitment."[42] What it highlights is that when we *commit ourselves ontologically*, we necessarily do it via a specific kind of mental act. We can think of objects independently of their being, or we can take them to be (or not to be). In every case, we are performing some distinct sort of mental activity. The "taking to be" case is precisely what could be called "ontological commitment" (and the "taking not to be" case could be called "ontological rejection"). Now, no matter how one understands the concept of being, and even if one thinks that it has nothing to do with any mental activity, it remains plausible that ontological commitment itself is to be explained in terms of mental positing.[43] But then, someone who accepts modes of being has to say how she can commit herself ontologically in various ways relative to these many modes. For example, a Meinongian has to explain how the ontological commitment to subsistence works, and to what extent it differs from the commitment to existence. The issue thus becomes a problem of philosophy of mind: do we find in ourselves different mental positings corresponding to different ontological commitments (e.g., existence vs. subsistence)? If not, defenders of modes of being will be forced to admit that they can commit themselves ontologically in just one way.

---

41. Another problem, which is not mentioned by Meinong and Husserl, but which is worth considering from a systematic point of view, comes from Marty's concession that there are modes of being "in a certain sense," namely, "being necessary" and "being this or that." In order to be counted as a defender of modes of being, one does not have to hold that there are variations of being *and* that "there is no most general mode of being" or no "overarching determinable or genus" of being. As McDaniel puts it (2017: 3), "one of the milder ways in which being might fragment is one in which, although there are different modes of being enjoyed by different objects, there is a maximally general mode of being that everything enjoys as well." Marty might be seen as accepting the milder view: there is one general mode of being, namely, "correct acknowledge-ability" or existence, and it can be further determined in different ways. Consequently, one could hold that in the final analysis Marty must be included among the (mild) defenders of ontological pluralism rather than being counted as a Quinean, even though he defends the view that "being is the same as existence," and, still, that "existence is univocal," in the sense that there are not two kinds of *toto genere* distinct existences, although existence—and, thus, being—becomes universal, since it can be further specified into being necessary and being identical.

42. Here I follow Textor (2017), who draws attention to this question.

43. Such a psychological understanding of ontological commitment goes back to Szabó (2010) and is opposed to Quine's thesis that ontological commitment is first and foremost a feature of sentences. For more on these issues, see Mulligan (2013).

One might perhaps want to hold that a distinction such as that of Meinong between existence and subsistence could be seen as a specification of a more general notion of being, which would correlatively be based on two "special restricted sorts of commitment" specifying a general kind of positing. On such a view, there would be a general ontological commitment—that is, an acknowledgement of being—which in turn would be divided into two more specific commitments: acknowledgement of existence on the one hand, and acknowledgement of subsistence on the other. This division would explain how it is possible for us to commit ourselves to either existence or subsistence.[44] What would Brentanians say to this? Marty's answer would probably be that in order for such a division to make sense, we would need to find in our experience a general sort of positing—to which there would then correspond a general notion of being—and two specifications of this positing—which would lead us to distinguish between existence and subsistence. But, Marty would emphasize, there is simply nothing like this in our experience. There are indeed some variations in our judgements, which do enrich our positings, but these are not the kind of thing that Meinongians are looking for: we have apodictic judgements, which add modalities to our positings, and we have judgements of identity, which add attributions, but they both do *more* than what Meinongians want.[45]

The interesting point emerging from the Brentanian view is thus the following: if the defenders of modes of being, including Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong, fail to convince us that there are different ontological commitments, that is, different types of mental positings, they will have to admit that they cannot in fact commit themselves ontologically in accordance to these various modes of being. And if they hold that different sorts of object imply different modes of being, they will have to admit that they are in fact unable to commit themselves with respect to some of the objects of their ontology. This will reveal a major conflict between their philosophical theses and their concrete psychological capacities.

---

44. I treat this view as a philosophical hypothesis; that is, I would like to leave it open, from a strictly exegetical point of view, whether Meinong himself defends the idea that being is a genus, and existence and subsistence two species of it. Marty seems to think that Meinong does *not* endorse such a view (see Marty 1908: 324). Alternatively, one could hold, following Meinong's claims from 1910 onwards, that the general mode is subsistence, while existence is a specification of it (see 1910/1977: 74; and 1921/1978a: 20, both quoted above).

45. The notion of a "special restricted sort of commitment" was suggested to me by a referee of this journal. Note that if one were to accept that there are such specific ontological commitments, which would correspond to Meinong's distinction between existence and subsistence, one might end up with a "mild" ontological pluralist position, similar to that attributed to Marty just above. However, Marty would still stress that in his mild pluralism there is no distinction between being and existence, not even if one is treated as a genus of the other as its species; the only variation, again, is that some of our acknowledgements are accompanied by modalities or attribution.

4. Conclusion

Long before the quarrel between Quineans and neo-Meinongians or other defenders of "ontological pluralism," Austro-German thinkers discussed modes of being.[46] These modes were accepted by Bolzano, Husserl, and Meinong, but were rejected by Brentano and Marty. This rejection in no way rules out accepting abstract objects in one's ontology; indeed, both Brentano (before his reistic turn) and Marty accepted *irrealia*. They were clear about the fact that a variation in the *what* of objects is possible independently of any variation of their *that*; to that extent, they defended a Quinean point of view. However, Marty still accepted variations of being "in a certain sense." For him, even if "being is the same as existence" and "existence is univocal," being can be further determined into "being necessary" and "being this or that."

The views of Brentano and Marty are not merely of historical interest, but also have philosophical value. The Brentanian position draws attention to a crucial question connected with the debate about modes of being: how is it that we can commit ourselves ontologically with respect to such modes? The answer must be: via different ontological commitments, that is, via different mental positings. But are we capable of making different ontological commitments? If we are not, how do philosophers who defend modes of being concretely commit themselves to following these modes? Those who accept abstract objects and think that these objects have a different mode of being from concrete objects may have to admit that they cannot commit themselves with respect to all the objects in their ontology. In other words, there may be a major conflict between what people defend in their philosophy and what they are in fact able to do from a psychological point of view. This is the Brentanian challenge to the defenders of modes of being.

Acknowledgements

---

46. As noted in the Introduction, the opposition between Quineans and neo-Meinongians on ontology is not reducible to one about the admission of modes of being, since some neo-Meinongians explicitly reject modes of being and instead defend "noneism," namely the thesis that some objects have no mode of being at all (see Routley 1980 and Priest 2005).

References

Bacigalupo, Giuliano (2015). *A Study on Existence* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Lille 3).

Beyer, Christian (1996). *Von Bolzano zu Husserl: Eine Untersuchung über den Ursprung der phänomenologischen Bedeutungslehre*. Kluwer.

Bolzano, Bernard (1985–2000). *Wissenschaftslehre*. In Edward Winter et al. (Eds.), *Gesamtausgabe* (Series I, Vols. 11–14). Frommann-Holzboog.

Bolzano, Bernard (2014). *Theory of Science*. Paul Rusnock and Rolf George (Trans.). Oxford University Press (Translation from Bolzano 1985–2000).

Brandl, Johannes L. (2017). Brentano on Truth. In Uriah Kriegel (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School* (163–68). Routledge.

Brentano, Franz (1924–25). *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* (Vols. 1–2). Oskar Kraus (Ed.). Meiner.

Brentano, Franz (1930). *Wahrheit und Evidenz*. Oskar Kraus (Ed.). Meiner.

Brentano, Franz (1952a). *Die Abkehr vom Nichtrealen*. Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand (Ed.). Francke.

Brentano, Franz (1952b). *Grundlegung und Aufbau der Ethik*. Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand (Ed.). Francke.

Brentano, Franz (1966). *The True and the Evident* (Roderick M. Chisholm, Ilse Politzer, and Kurt Fischer, Trans.). Routledge. (Translation from Brentano 1930)

Brentano, Franz (1968). *Kategorienlehre* (2nd ed.). Alfred Kastil (Ed.). Meiner.

Brentano, Franz (1982). *Deskriptive Psychologie*. Roderick M. Chisholm and Wilhelm Baumgartner (Eds.). Meiner.

Brentano, Franz (1995). *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (Antos C. Rancurello, Dailey B. Terrell, and Linda L. McAlister, Trans.). Routledge. (Translation from Brentano 1924–25)

Brentano, Franz (2009). *Foundation and Construction of Ethics* (Elizabeth Hughes Schneewind, Trans.). Routledge. (Translation from Brentano 1952b)

Brentano, Franz (2011). *Logik* (EL 80). Robin D. Rollinger (Ed.). Franz Brentano Archiv.

Brentano, Franz (2013). Abstraktion und Relation. Guillaume Fréchette (Ed.) and Robin D. Rollinger (Trans.). In Denis Fisette and Guillaume Fréchette (Eds.), *Themes from Brentano* (465–82 and 431–47). Rodopi.

Brentano, Franz (n.d.). Eth 21a-i, Ethikkolleg. Franz Clemens Brentano Compositions (MS Ger 230). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Cesalli, Laurent (2008). *Relative Bestimmung*: Une relation martyienne. In Christophe Erismann and Alexandrine Schniewind (Eds.), *Compléments de substance: Études sur les propriétés accidentelles offertes à Alain de Libera* (215–29). Vrin.

Cesalli, Laurent (2017). Mental Similarity: Marty and the Pre-Brentanian Tradition. In Guillaume Fréchette and Hamid Taieb (Eds.), *Mind and Language: On the Philosophy of Anton Marty* (63–82). De Gruyter.

Chrudzimski, Arkadiusz (2004). *Die Ontologie Franz Brentanos*. Kluwer.

Chrudzimski, Arkadiusz, and Barry Smith (2004). Brentano's Ontology: From Conceptualism to Reism. In Dale Jacquette (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Franz Brentano* (197–219). Cambridge University Press.

Crivelli, Paolo (2004). *Aristotle on Truth*. Cambridge University Press.

Fréchette, Guillaume (2010). *Gegenstandslose Vorstellungen*. Academia.

Husserl, Edmund (1939). Entwurf einer 'Vorrede' zu den 'Logischen Untersuchungen' (1913). E. Fink (Ed.). *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie, 1*(1–2), 106–33 and 319–39.

Husserl, Edmund (1970). *Logical Investigations* (John N. Findlay, Trans.) Routledge. (Includes a translation from Husserl 1984)

Husserl, Edmund (1979). <Besprechung von> A. Marty, *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie*. In Bernhard Rang (Ed.), *Aufsätze und Rezensionen (1890–1910). Husserliana* (Vol. 22, 261–65). Nijhoff.

Husserl, Edmund (1984). *Logische Untersuchungen: Zweiter Teil*. In Ursula Panzer (Ed.), *Logische Untersuchungen. Husserliana* (Vol. 19). Nijhoff.

Husserl, Edmund (2001). *Logik: Vorlesung 1896*. Elisabeth Schuhmann (Ed.). Springer.

Jacquette, Dale (2015). *Alexius Meinong, The Shepherd of Non-Being*. Springer.

James, William (1981). *The Principles of Psychology*. In Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Eds.), *The Works of William James* (Vols. 8–10). Harvard University Press.

Kraus, Oskar (1930). Einleitung des Herausgebers. In Franz Brentano (Auth.) and Oskar Kraus (Ed.), *Wahrheit und Evidenz* (vii–xxxi). Meiner.

Kriegel, Uriah (2015a). How to Speak of Existence: A Brentanian Approach to (Linguistic and Mental) Ontological Commitment. *Grazer philosophische Studien, 91*(1), 81–106.

Kriegel, Uriah (2015b). Thought and Thing: Brentano's Reism as Truthmaker Nominalism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 91*(1), 153–80.

Lotze, R. Hermann (1876–80). *Mikrokosmus: Ideen zur Naturgeschichte und Geschichte der Menschheit: Versuch einer Anthropologie* (3rd ed.). S. Hirzel.

Majolino, Claudio (2017). Talking about Intentionality: Marty and the Language of 'Ideal Similarity'. In Guillaume Fréchette and Hamid Taieb (Eds.), *Mind and Language: On the Philosophy of Anton Marty* (83–104). De Gruyter.

Mally, Ernst (1904). Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie des Messens. In Alexius Meinong (Ed.), *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie* (121–62). Barth.

Marek, Johann Ch. (2019). Alexius Meinong. In Edward N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/meinong/

Marty, Anton (1908). *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie*. Niemeyer.

Marty, Anton (1916a). Anzeige von William James' Werk 'Principles of Psychology'. In Josef Eisenmeier, Alfred Kastil, and Oskar Kraus (Eds.), *Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. I.1, 105–56). Niemeyer. (Reprinted from *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane, 3*, 297–333, 1892)

Marty, Anton (1916b). *Raum und Zeit*. Josef Eisenmeier, Alfred Kastil, and Oskar Kraus (Eds.). Niemeyer.

Marty, Anton (1918). Über subjectlose Sätze und das Verhältnis der Grammatik zu Logik und Psychologie, 2nd and 6th arts. In Josef Eisenmeier, Alfred Kastil, and Oskar Kraus (Eds.), *Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. II.1, 36–62 and 189–307). Niemeyer. (Reprinted from *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie, 8*, 292–340, 1884, and *19*, 19–87 and 263–334, 1895)

McDaniel, Kris (2017). *The Fragmentation of Being*. Oxford University Press.

Meinong, Alexius (1902). *Über Annahmen*. Barth.

Meinong, Alexius (1971a). Über Gegenstände höherer Ordnung und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung. In Rudolf Haller, Rudolf Kindinger, and Roderick M. Chisholm (Eds.), *Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 2, 377–480). Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt. (Reprinted from *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, *21*, 182–272, 1899)

Meinong, Alexius (1971b). Über Gegenstandstheorie. In Rudolf Haller, Rudolf Kindinger, and Roderick M. Chisholm (Eds.), *Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 2, 481–535). Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt. (Reprinted from *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie*, 1–51, by Alexius Meinong, Ed., Barth, 1904)

Meinong, Alexius (1972). *Über Möglichkeit und Wahrscheinlichkeit. Beiträge zur Gegenstandstheorie und Erkenntnistheorie*. In Rudolf Haller, Rudolf Kindinger, and Roderick M. Chisholm (Eds.), *Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 6, xiii–xxii, 1–728). Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt. (Original work published 1915)

Meinong, Alexius (1977). *Über Annahmen*, 2nd ed. In Rudolf Haller, Rudolf Kindinger, and Roderick M. Chisholm (Eds.), *Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 4, xv–xxv and 1–384). Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt. (Original work published 1910)

Meinong, Alexius (1978a). *Selbstdarstellung*. In Rudolf Haller, Rudolf Kindinger, and Roderick M. Chisholm (Eds.), *Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 7, 1–62). Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt. (Reprinted from *Die deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, Vol. 1, 91–150, by Raymund Schmidt, Ed., Meiner, 1921)

Meinong, Alexius (1978b). On Objects of Higher Order and Their Relationship to Internal Perception. (Marie-Luise Schubert Kalsi, Trans.). In Marie-Luise Schubert Kalsi, *Alexius Meinong* (137–208). Nijhoff. (Translation from Meinong 1899/1971a).

Meinong, Alexius (1983). *On Assumptions*. James Heanue (Trans.). University of California Press. (Translation from Meinong 1910/1977)

Moore, G. E. (1903). [Review of] Franz Brentano, *The Origin of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong*. *The International Journal of Ethics, 14*(1), 115–123.

Morscher, Edgar (1986). Propositions and States of Affairs in Austrian Philosophy before Wittgenstein. In János K. Nyíri (Ed.), *From Bolzano to Wittgenstein* (75–85). Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky.

Mulligan, Kevin (1989). Judgings: Their Parts and Counterparts. *Topoi, 6*(1) suppl. 2, 117–48.

Mulligan, Kevin (1990). Marty's Philosophical Grammar. In Kevin Mulligan (Ed.), *Mind, Meaning and Metaphysics: The Philosophy and Theory of Language of Anton Marty* (11–27). Kluwer.

Mulligan, Kevin (2006). Ascent, Propositions and Other Formal Objects. *Grazer philosophische Studien*, *72*(1), 29–48.

Mulligan, Kevin (2013). Acceptance, Acknowledgment, Affirmation, Agreement, Assertion, Belief, Certainty, Conviction, Denial, Judgment, Refusal and Rejection. In Mark Textor (Ed.), *Judgement and Truth in Early Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology* (97–136). Palgrave Macmillan.

Mulligan, Kevin (2017a). Brentano's Knowledge, Austrian Verificationisms, and Epistemic Accounts of Truth and Value. *The Monist, 100*(1), 88–115.

Mulligan, Kevin (2017b). Incorrect Emotions in Ancient, Austrian and Contemporary Philosophy. *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger, 142*(4), 491–512.

Mulligan, Kevin (2019). 'Modes of Being' and the Mind. In Mirosław Szatkowski (Ed.), *Quo vadis, Metaphysics? A Volume in Honour of Peter van Inwagen* (183–202). De Gruyter.

Parsons, Terence (1980). *Nonexistent Objects*. Yale University Press.

Priest, Graham (2005). *Towards Non-Being. The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality*. Oxford University Press.

Quine, W. V. O. (1961). On What There Is. In Tim Crane and Katalin Farkas (Eds.), *From a Logical Point of View* (21–38). Harvard University Press. (Reprinted from *Review of Metaphysics*, 2(5), 21–38, 1948)

Richard, Sébastien (2017). Catégories d'objet et modes d'être chez Meinong. *Les études philosophiques, 173*(3), 367–84.

Rosen, Gideon (2017). Abstract Objects. In Edward N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/abstract-objects/

Routley, Richard (1980). *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond: An Investigation of Noneism and the Theory of Items*. Australian National University.

Sauer, Werner (2006). Die Einheit der Intentionalitätskonzeption bei Brentano. *Grazer Philosophische Studien, 73*(1), 1–26.

Sauer, Werner (2013). Being as the True: From Aristotle to Brentano. In Denis Fisette and Guillaume Fréchette (Eds.), *Themes from Brentano* (193–226). Rodopi.

Sauer, Werner (2017). Brentano's Reism. In Uriah Kriegel (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School* (133–43). Routledge.

Szabó, Zoltán G. (2010). The Ontological Attitude. In Tadeusz Czarnecki, Katarzyna Kijania-Placek, Olga Poller, and Jan Woleński (Eds.), *The Analytic Way* (21–42). King's College Publications.

Textor, Mark (2017). Towards a Neo-Brentanian Theory of Existence. *Philosophers' Imprint, 17*(6), 1–20.

Uphues, Goswin (1901). *Grundzüge der Erkenntnistheorie*. Zickfeldt.

Vallicella, William F. (2001). Brentano on Existence. *History of Philosophy Quarterly, 18*(3), 311–27.

Van Inwagen, Peter (2014a). A Theory of Properties. In Peter van Inwagen, *Existence* (153–82). Cambridge University Press. (Reprinted from *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics, 1*, 107–38, 2004)

van Inwagen, Peter (2014b). Being, Existence, and Ontological Commitment. In Peter van Inwagen, *Existence* (50–86). Cambridge University Press. (Reprinted from *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, 472–506, by David J. Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman, Eds., 2009, Oxford University Press)