

## Russell's "horrible travesty" of Meinong

For many years it was part of popular philosophical mythology that one of the central theses of Meinong's theory of objects is the claim that all objects have being of some kind. Thus, while it was sometimes conceded that Meinong did not think that the golden mountain and the round square actually exist in the same way that Mt. Everest does, it was commonly held that he thought they exist in some weak or low-grade way. This radical misunderstanding of the theory of objects was primarily responsible for the barrage of jokes and ridicule with which the theory was assailed, and thus for the unjustified denigration and neglect of an important philosopher.

Recently Meinong's work has come to be better understood. In particular, it is now widely recognized that Meinong did not think that objects such as the golden mountain and the round square have any form of being. But while the first myth is being slowly laid to rest, another myth--one equally unjust to an important philosopher--has gained wide credence: namely, that it was Russell who was mainly responsible for the misunderstanding of Meinong. Thus Findlay, in a recent review, claims that the theory of objects "was of course horribly travestied by Russell into the unMeinongian opinion that non-existent objects 'subsist'".<sup>1</sup> In this he echoes his earlier judgment that

Unfortunately Russell was far too concerned to advance from Meinong to his own notions and conclusions to bother to get Meinong quite straight, and the account he put into circulation of Meinongian contents as consisting of sense-data and images, and of Meinong's non-existent objects as "subsistent", are simplifying travesties of Meinong's com-

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Findlay, review of Reinhardt Grossmann's *Meinong*, *Mind*, 86 (1977), p. 141.

plex notions.<sup>2</sup>

Findlay is not alone in this belief. Ronald Suter, for example, also makes the accusation and claims that "it has bearing on our judgment of Russell as a critic of his predecessors" though he does not intend "a disparagement of [Russell's] theory of descriptions, which remains one of the great philosophical achievements of our century".<sup>3</sup> Linsky writes:

[I]t is certain that Russell's view of Meinong as a man who had embraced chimeras and golden mountains, spirits and round squares, as things which exist in another shadow world is far from true.<sup>4</sup>

Richard Campbell explicitly attributes priority in the misinterpretation to Russell, claiming that it "goes back to Russell's early reports of [Meinong's] position in *Mind* for 1904."<sup>5</sup> Thus Meinong is now commonly added to the (already lengthy) list of philosophers Russell was allegedly too impatient to understand before he criticized.

It must be conceded that there are two widely separated passages in Russell's writings where he does unmistakably misinterpret Meinong in the way Findlay and others have claimed. Neither reference is as early as Campbell claims: one is from Russell's last major philosophical work (*My Philosophical Development*, 1959), the other is from a book written during the First World War (*Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, 1919). The circumstances surrounding the writing of these two books--one was written in prison, the other more than fifty years after Russell's study of Meinong's theory of objects--should have made appropriately cautious commentators wary of taking either as a considered statement of Russell's interpretation of Meinong. However, of the authors already mentioned, only Linsky uses the incriminating evidence in these books--the others either give

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<sup>2</sup>Preface to second edition of his *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. xi-xii. Significantly, Findlay does not make this claim either in the first edition (1933) of his book or in the body of the second edition.

<sup>3</sup>"Russell's 'Refutation' of Meinong in 'On Denoting'", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 27 (1966/67), p. 512.

<sup>4</sup>Leonard Linsky, *Referring* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup>"Did Meinong Plant a Jungle?", *Philosophical Papers* (Grahamstown), 1 (1972), p. 89.

no evidence or create "evidence" by out of context quotation.

The origin of the view that Russell for the most part misinterpreted Meinong is to be found, not in Russell's writings on Meinong, but in the fact that Russell's own position at the time he first studied Meinong was essentially the view that used, mistakenly, to be attributed to Meinong: namely, that every object of thought, or constituent of a proposition, has being.<sup>6</sup> Since it's been widely popular to confuse Russell's theory of terms with Meinong's theory of objects,<sup>7</sup> it is not unduly surprising that once the two theories were distinguished Russell came to be held responsible for confusing them. In fact, as I shall show, Russell was well aware of the distinction.

In his most extended discussion of Meinong ("Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", *Mind*, 1904), which Campbell cites as the source of the misinterpretation of Meinong, Russell explicitly notes that Meinong thought some objects neither exist nor subsist. Russell, for example, reports Meinong's views on judgments with the remark: "the judgment always *has* its object and its Objective, but these do not necessarily have being."<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere in the paper there are copious references<sup>9</sup> to the fact that Meinong held that there are Objectives which do not have being. Nor is the parallel position with respect to objects ignored: Russell gives it as Meinong's view that "the object is transcendent when it exists, or when it has being (these are alternatives), and that otherwise it is immanent",<sup>10</sup> which clearly entails (since immanence is non-null) that some objects neither exist nor subsist. The fact that Russell emphasizes Meinong's doctrine of non-subsisting Objectives, but only occasionally mentions the doctrine of non-subsisting

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. *The Principles of Mathematics*, 2nd edn. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937; 1st edn., 1903), pp. 43, 449.

<sup>7</sup>See, e.g., I.M. Bocheński, *A History of Formal Logic*, trans. Ivo Thomas (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), p. 371; Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), II, pp. 353-4, 360; Morris Weitz, "Analysis and the Unity of Russell's Philosophy", in P.A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1944), p. 93.

<sup>8</sup>"Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", reprinted in Russell, *Essays in Analysis*, ed. Douglas Lackey (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), p. 54. Russell refers to the first edition of Meinong's *Über Annahmen* (Leipzig: Barth, 1902), pp. 154-5 for this position.

<sup>9</sup>For example, at pp. 57, 58, 59.

<sup>10</sup>"Meinong's Theory", p. 63.

objects, does not mean that Russell was unclear or mistaken about the latter, but merely that Russell's paper was not about Meinong's theory of objects but about his theory of complex objects and Objectives. The theory of objects, in any case, had not been given its definitive formulation at the time Russell wrote.

As might be expected, "evidence" that Russell misunderstood Meinong can be obtained by quoting out of context. Thus, for example, Russell says "the assertion of being [of an object of awareness], if not analytic, is yet more nearly so than any other assertion."<sup>11</sup> But when the context is taken into account it becomes clear that Russell is here *not* attributing this view to Meinong, but putting it forward as his own. Confusion might arise because in "Meinong's Theory" Russell had "the double purpose of expounding [Meinong's] opinions and of advocating my own";<sup>12</sup> and failure to distinguish the two is likely to yield confusion on precisely these points which are essential to avoiding a horrible travesty of Meinong. However, in most cases, even a fairly minimal degree of attentiveness is sufficient to keep the reader aware of which purpose any given passage is serving. Thus, for example, when Russell refers in a footnote to false propositions' subsisting (p. 57n) it is clear that that is his own opinion, since the sentence which has the footnote is almost immediately followed by one in which the opposite view is explicitly attributed (complete with page reference) to Meinong.

It is perhaps unfortunate that Russell begins his paper with a list of theses, of which the fourth, and last, was "that the object of a thought, even when this object does not exist, has a Being which is in no way dependent upon its being an object of thought" (p. 21), thereby suggesting that the thesis is to be attributed to Meinong. The suggestion is, however, quite unwarranted: Russell adds a footnote which makes clear that the four theses express his own position and the most he claims for Meinong is that Meinong comes close to it. That Russell failed to emphasize Meinong's divergence on the fourth thesis does not mean that he was unaware of it, and is hardly surprising since in 1904 the mistake of attributing the fourth thesis to Meinong had not gained currency.

There is one passage in "Meinong's Theory" which is more ambiguous but which seems to me to indicate Russell's carelessness in choosing an example, rather than a misinterpretation of the theory of objects. Russell writes:

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

It follows ... that there is no validity in Meinong's argument (p. 218<sup>13</sup>) that presentations must be perceptible because we know of such as have non-existent objects, and the non-existent cannot be perceived. We must hold that the Being, or, as Meinong says, the subsistence, of the non-existent is often immediately known.... The process suggested by Meinong's argument is, in any case, exceedingly and curiously complicated. First we think of the golden mountain, then we perceive that we are thinking of it; thence, we infer that there is a presentation of the golden mountain, and thence finally that the golden mountain subsists or has Being. But when we originally thought of the golden mountain, we already perceived, or at least could perceive if we chose, that the golden mountain subsists....<sup>14</sup>

The argument with which Russell is here concerned has to do with Meinong's distinction between real and ideal objects. Real objects (e.g., the mayor of Toronto) can exist while ideal objects (e.g., numbers) can only subsist; however, there are non-existent real objects (e.g., the king of France) as well as non-subsistent ideal objects (e.g., the even prime greater than 2). Since Meinong held that only existent objects could be perceived, the problem arose for him of how knowledge could be obtained of which ideal objects subsist and which do not. Russell's solution, in many ways the obvious one, was that the subsistence of some ideal objects is known directly by means of non-sensory acquaintance.<sup>15</sup> Meinong's solution was more complicated and involves our introspective awareness of the presentation of the ideal object.<sup>16</sup> Russell's mistake in the passage in question was to use the golden mountain as an example of an ideal object: this choice of example fitted Russell's own 1903 theory, but not Meinong's, since Meinong held that the golden mountain was a real object which neither existed nor

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<sup>13</sup>The page reference is to Meinong's "Über Gegenstände hörerer und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung", *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, 21 (1899), 182-272. The paper is reprinted in the second volume of Meinong's *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Leipzig: Barth, 1914).

<sup>14</sup>"Meinong's Theory", p. 36.

<sup>15</sup>This doctrine makes its best-known appearance in *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974; 1st edn., 1912), Ch. 10.

<sup>16</sup>The question is discussed by Grossmann, *Meinong* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 69-72.

subsisted. It seems to me most likely that this is just a badly chosen example, but the worst it could show is that Russell misunderstood Meinong's distinction between real and ideal objects. It could hardly be used to show that Russell failed to perceive the radical difference between his own theory in *The Principles of Mathematics* and Meinong's theory of objects.

"Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions" appeared one year before Russell's theory of descriptions was published in "On Denoting" (*Mind*, 1905). The new theory superseded Russell's earlier realism and marked an important divergence between his position and Meinong's. Although Russell's interest in Meinong's work waned after the theory of descriptions, this was a slow process, and in the two years that followed the advent of the theory of descriptions Russell contributed two careful reviews of Meinong's work to *Mind* (one of considerable length).<sup>17</sup> In fact Russell remained almost unique among Meinong's critics in not misrepresenting Meinong's views in order to refute them. In particular, Russell's 1905 review gives abundant evidence that he did not make the mistake of attributing to Meinong his own earlier view that all objects of reference have being. For example:

The first great division of objects is into three classes, those which exist, those which subsist (*bestehen*), and those which neither exist nor subsist. It is obvious that abstracts such as diversity or numbers do not exist; propositions, again, are non-existent; thus certainly there are objects which do not exist, and which in some sense subsist. But even when we include subsistence, we do not, it would seem, find a place for *all* objects; some, such as false propositions, the round square, etc., are objects and yet do not subsist.<sup>18</sup>

The early literature on Meinong contains few such clear and unambiguous statements on the "ontological" status of Meinongian objects.

At this time it was Russell's practice to make detailed page-by-page notes on books he was reviewing. Some, maybe

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<sup>17</sup>Review of A. Meinong (ed.), *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie*, *Mind*, 14 (1905), 530-8; review of A. Meinong, *Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie im System der Wissenschaften*, *Mind*, 16 (1907), 436-9. Both reviews are reprinted in *Essays in Analysis*, pp. 77-88 and 89-93, respectively.

<sup>18</sup>*Essays in Analysis*, pp. 78-9. For comparable statements see also pp. 79, 80, 83.

all, of the notes Russell made on Meinong's writings around this time are available in the Russell Archives;<sup>19</sup> and a study of them fully supports the conclusion that he did not misunderstand Meinong. For example, Russell's notes on Meinong's important article "Über Gegenstandstheorie" (which appeared in *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie*) include his translation of Meinong's well-known paradoxical statement of his theory:

We may say, if we like: "There are ob[jects]s of wh[ich] it is true that there are no such ob[jects]s."<sup>20</sup>

which Russell prefaces with his own comment:

An ob[ject] wh[ich] is not is subj[ect] of prop[osition] that it is not.

To p. 8 of Meinong's paper Russell makes the comment:

[Synthetic judgments] may subsist when ob[ject] does not have being.<sup>21</sup>

To p. 11 he notes:

We don't need a 3rd kind of being, besides existence and subsistence. No use in a being to wh[ich] no non-being is opposed. (*Ibid.*)

And to p. 12 he gives the following account of Meinong's position:

Only strong argument for being of non-subsistent ob[ject]s is that Objectives in wh[ich] they are subj[ect]s subsist. This depends on regarding Objective as a complex, and subj[ect] as a constituent of it; but such a view is only to be taken figuratively. Thus being of Objective doesn't involve Being of its subject.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>This material has been described by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames, "Russell's Study of Meinong", *Russell*, no. 4 (winter 1971/2), 3-7.

<sup>20</sup>Russell's unpublished notes, headed "Meinong etc." (Russell Archives file 230.030450), folio 1 (note to p. 9 of Meinong [ed.], *Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie*). Russell quotes the passage in his review (*Essays in Analysis*, p. 79).

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.* This remark also appears in his review (*Essays in Analysis*, p. 79).

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.* A slightly revised version of this passage occurs in the review (*Essay in Analysis*, p. 80). Further evidence of the same sort is provided by Russell's notes on *Über Annahmen* (f. 6, note to p. 154 of *Über Annahmen*). (There is a further unpaginated sheet which covers the same material

Russell's letters to Meinong provide still more evidence:

I have always believed until now that every object must in some sense have *being*, and I find it difficult to admit unreal objects. In such a case as that of the golden mountain or the round square one must distinguish between *sense* and *reference* (to use Frege's terms): the sense is an object, and has being; the reference, however, is not an object.<sup>23</sup>

The letter is worth quoting because it makes clear that Russell recognized that as far as ontological status was concerned the golden mountain and the round square were, for Meinong, in the same boat--a claim which might be disputed in view of the passage quoted above from "Meinong's Theory" (p. 36) where Russell chooses the golden mountain as an example of a (subsistent) ideal object.

It is abundantly clear that Russell's early writings on Meinong do not misconstrue the theory of objects. Nonetheless, it might be claimed that when Russell was not writing directly about Meinong he might have been less careful in the account he gave of Meinong's views. Suter, for example, claims that the travesty occurs in "On Denoting" and even cites "evidence" to prove it:

Russell thus concludes, on Meinong's theory "it would appear it must be self-contradictory to deny the being of anything".<sup>24</sup>

But this apparently decisive evidence is only obtained by quoting out of context; the full passage reads:

Hence, it would appear, it must always be self-contradictory to deny the being of anything; but we have seen, in connexion with Meinong, that to admit being also sometimes leads

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*Psychologie* (f. 1, note to p. 54 of *Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie*). All the material is in the Russell Archives, file 230.030450.

in *Über Annahmen* and which includes the same comment.) Nor was Russell any more cavalier with Meinong's followers: see his comment on Ameseder's paper "Beitrage zur Grundlegung der Gegenstandstheorie" in *Gegenstandstheorie und*

<sup>23</sup>Russell to Meinong, 15 Dec. 1904, trans. by D. Lackey in "Three Letters to Meinong", *Russell*, no. 9 (spring 1973), p. 16. The letter makes it clear that Russell was attempting at this time to solve the problem of non-denoting definite descriptions by means of Frege's sense/reference distinction.

<sup>24</sup>"Russell's 'Refutation' of Meinong in 'On Denoting'", p. 514.

to contradiction.<sup>25</sup>

In this sentence what comes before the semi-colon is a criticism of Russell's realist position in *The Principles of Mathematics*, what comes afterwards is a criticism of Meinong. The two arguments put together form a dilemma. On Russell's earlier theory it is, indeed, contradictory to deny the being of anything, since for any object, *a*, a denial of *a*'s being includes *a* as the subject of a proposition, and whatever is the subject of a proposition has being.<sup>26</sup> On Meinong's theory, Russell objected that, since Meinong held that the golden mountain is golden, it follows by parity of reasoning that the existent golden mountain exists; thus to admit the being of the golden mountain leads to contradictions, since the golden mountain, on Meinong's theory, does not have being.<sup>27</sup> Linsky uses this argument of Russell's in the same way:

Russell ... thought that Meinong was committed to the view that Pegasus both exists and does not exist. But nothing could be a greater misunderstanding of Meinong's position. He is very careful to make it clear that he is not asserting the existence of round squares and chimeras.<sup>28</sup>

Russell did, in fact, believe that Meinong's theory of objects entailed that the existent golden mountain exists, but that this was an entailment of which Meinong was unaware and which would yield a *reductio* refutation of the theory. He did not think that the existence or subsistence of the golden mountain was a *postulate* of the theory. If Russell's argument is valid, then Meinong's position is like that of a logician who gives an axiom-set which yields "*p*·*~p*". Thus the logician's beliefs entail "*p*·*~p*", but it doesn't follow that the logician believes "*p*·*~p*", or that "*p*·*~p*" is a cent-

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<sup>25</sup>"On Denoting", in Russell, *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. R.C. Marsh (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 48.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. *Principles of Mathematics*, p. 43.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. "On Denoting", p. 45, where the argument appears in a compressed form. It is made rather more clearly in Russell's review of *Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie* (*Essays in Analysis*, p. 81). That the problem was a serious one for Meinong is indicated by his initial (unsatisfactory) reply (cf. *Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie im System der Wissenschaften*, pp. 14ff; and Russell's rejoinder in his review, [*Essays in Analysis*, p. 92]); eventually, however, he found a workable solution to the paradox (cf. *Über Annahmen*, 2nd edn. [1910], pp. 70-1).

<sup>28</sup>*Referring*, pp. 14-15.

ral postulate of his logic.

That Russell's arguments in "On Denoting" against Meinong's position do not rely on the assumption that Meinong believed it is always self-contradictory to deny the existence of anything, is made quite clear by the brief account that he gives there of the theory of objects:

This theory regards any grammatically correct denoting phrase as standing for an *object*. Thus "the present King of France", "the round square", etc., are supposed to be genuine objects. It is admitted that such objects do not *subsist*, but nevertheless they are supposed to be objects.<sup>29</sup>

Suter, in fact, quotes part of this passage, but uses it merely to show that Russell "is probably being careless in his use of language."<sup>30</sup>

Linsky, however, is on firmer ground than Suter, since he cites<sup>31</sup> the following passage from Russell's *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*:

For want of the apparatus of propositional functions, many logicians have been driven to the conclusion that there are unreal objects. It is argued, *e.g.* by Meinong, that we can speak about "the golden mountain", "the round square", and so on; we can make true propositions of which these are the subjects; hence they must have some kind of logical being, since otherwise the propositions in which they occur would be meaningless. In such theories, it seems to me, there is a failure of that feeling for reality which ought to be preserved even in the most abstract studies.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, such a position was argued, but by Moore<sup>33</sup> and Russell, *not* by Meinong. This passage is especially annoying, since the manuscript reveals that originally Russell did not misinterpret Meinong. The passage originally began:

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<sup>29</sup>"On Denoting", *Logic and Knowledge*, p. 45; see also p. 47: "Meinong [admits] objects which do not subsist".

<sup>30</sup>"Russell's 'Refutation' of Meinong in 'On Denoting'", p. 513. It is worth pointing out that while Russell's argument against Meinong is, indeed, unsatisfactory against an appropriately formulated theory of objects, this is not on account of the minor, pedantic criticisms Suter makes of the argument.

<sup>31</sup>*Referring*, p. xv. It is, however, the only evidence he cites to support a broad claim against all of Russell's writings on Meinong.

<sup>32</sup>*Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, n.d.; 1st edn., 1919), p. 169.

<sup>33</sup>G.E. Moore, "The Nature of Judgment", *Mind*, 8 (1899), 176-93.

For want of the apparatus of propositional functions, many logicians have been driven to the conclusion that there are unreal objects. They argued that....<sup>34</sup>

On the manuscript, in Russell's hand, "They" is deleted and replaced by "It is" and the reference to Meinong is inserted above the line with a caret mark. The *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* was written in 1918. Yet earlier the very same year, in his lectures on "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", Russell had got Meinong right:

Meinong maintains that there is such an object as the round square only it does not exist, and it does not even subsist....<sup>35</sup>

Russell repeated the mistake much later when he wrote:

[Meinong] pointed out that one can make statements in which the logical subject is "the golden mountain" although no golden mountain exists. He argued, if you say that the golden mountain does not exist, it is obvious that there is something that you are saying does not exist--namely, the golden mountain; therefore the golden mountain must subsist in some shadowy Platonic world of being, for otherwise your statement that the golden mountain does not exist would have no meaning.<sup>36</sup>

It would be tempting to write off the first of these blunders as a temporary lapse due to the inadequacies of Brixton Prison's library; and put the second down to the fifty years that had elapsed since Russell last seriously studied Meinong's work.<sup>37</sup> But this explanation is doubtful since Russell's intervening references to Meinong are regrettably ambiguous. For example, in 1924 he wrote:

Meinong ... maintained that, since we can say truly "the round square does not exist", there must be such an object

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<sup>34</sup>*Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, MS., Russell Archives, f. 189. The page in question is reproduced in *Russell*, no. 20 (winter 1975/6), p. 18.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", *Logic and Knowledge*, p. 223.

<sup>36</sup>*My Philosophical Development* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), p. 84.

<sup>37</sup>Clearly Russell was writing carelessly when he said that Meinong "pointed out" that the golden mountain was the "logical subject" of the proposition that the golden mountain does not exist, since on Russell's own theory of descriptions the golden mountain could only be the grammatical, and not the logical, subject of a proposition.

as the round square, although it must be a non-existent object.<sup>38</sup>

This passage doesn't attribute to Meinong any view which wasn't his, but it fails to point out that Meinong did not ascribe some weaker form of being than existence to the round square--though, by this time, Russell had given up the doctrine of subsistence and may have felt it unnecessary to exclude this possibility in a popular essay. In "My Mental Development" Russell sailed even closer to the wind:

Everyone agrees that "the golden mountain does not exist" is a true proposition. But it has, apparently, a subject, "the golden mountain", and if this subject did not designate some object, the proposition would seem to be meaningless. Meinong inferred that there is a golden mountain, which is golden and a mountain, but does not exist. He even thought that the existent golden mountain is existent, but does not exist. This did not satisfy me, and the desire to avoid Meinong's unduly populous realm of being led me to the theory of descriptions.<sup>39</sup>

This passage clearly suggests, though it doesn't entail, that Meinong's realm of being was over-populated because it contained, *inter alia*, the golden mountain. But though Meinong never thought that the golden mountain subsisted, he did have, as we've seen, a realm of being (though a less populous one than Russell's between 1903 and 1913) which Russell felt able to dispense with by means of the techniques associated with the theory of descriptions. It is just possible (though admittedly unlikely) that Russell had this in mind in his last sentence. But, even on this interpretation, the passage is still mistaken, since it was Russell's desire to avoid his own unduly populous realm of being--not Meinong's--that led to the theory of descriptions. Whether or not the passage contains a mistake about Meinong really hinges on the interpretation of the quantifier "there is" in the third sentence, that is on whether it is an existential, "subsistentia" or ontologically neutral quantifier.

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<sup>38</sup>"Philosophy in the Twentieth Century", *Sceptical Essays* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963; 1st edn., 1928), p. 50. See also the longer, but similarly ambiguous passage in *The Analysis of Mind* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971; 1st edn., 1921), pp. 16, 19.

<sup>39</sup>"My Mental Development", in Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, p. 13. By the time this volume was published the myth about Meinong was fairly widespread, as a check on the indexed references to Meinong shows.

Clearly Russell didn't intend an existential quantifier, but the other two interpretations are left open. Meinong's theory of objects requires it to be ontologically neutral.

Russell's later references to Meinong are frequently very misleading, and occasionally plainly mistaken. But the same cannot be said of his earlier, much more detailed, studies of Meinong's work. Any claim Russell has to priority in the misinterpretation of Meinong must rest with the solitary reference in the *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. To lay the blame for fifty years' misunderstanding of Meinong's theory of objects on Russell's early studies on Meinong exhibits the same sort of scholarly carelessness with respect to Russell that Russell himself is accused of with respect to Meinong.

Department of Philosophy  
McMaster University

Nicholas Griffin