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To Be and Not To Be?
A Metaphysical Inquiry into Existence and Non-Existence

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For Lanfranco and Giulia, my grandparents,
who still exist

Existence is mysterious. It is rich and complex as shown by its laws;
it is what in the end the whole of what thinking and acting is about.
Yet, it seems redundant and empty
H.-N. CASTAÑEDA 1974 (1989): 247

I am afraid that, to those who are unacquainted with the doctrine of philosophers
upon this subject, I shall appear in a very ridiculous light, for insisting upon a point so evident,
as that men may barely conceive things that never existed.
They will hardly believe, that any man in his wits ever doubted of it.
Indeed, I know no truth more evident
to the common sense and to the experience of mankind
T. REID 1785 (1969): 405

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Introduction

How do Obama, Socrates, my merely possible twin and Sherlock Holmes differ from one another? One could easily answer that there are some strong qualitative differences between them: Obama is the current President of the United States, he has a wife named Michelle and he is now dealing with difficult political and economical problems. On the other hand, Socrates was an important philosopher, he was Plato's teacher, he died in 399 B.C. after an unfair trial and he is now remembered as one of the most important "philosophical heroes". My merely possible twin perhaps resembles me in several physical respects, even if he (or she?) is perhaps my evil twin – or maybe I am his (or her?) evil twin. Finally, Sherlock Holmes is a famous detective: he has a friend named Watson, he lives in London, he once died after a fight at the Reichenbach Falls with his brilliant enemy Moriarty, even though he resurrected (or he never died?) and resumed his battle against the crime.

But wait... is this everything we can say about their being different entities? Furthermore, are they entities *at all*? Do they truly have all those features that I have ascribed to them? Well, it is difficult to deny that Obama is an entity: even if I have never met him, I cannot doubt that he performs many activities during the day, that he has great powers as the President of the United States and that he can influence the course of the world. I strongly believe that Socrates existed too, even though I cannot now talk with him (I would really like to!): unfortunately, he is now dead, he does not exist anymore – or perhaps he does not exist anymore in this world. Does he now have the property of being a philosopher? Yes and no: we all claim that Socrates is a great philosopher, even though he is not doing philosophy now. My merely possible twin could have existed. Yet, s/he does not actually exist: I am an only child. It is true that s/he could have been similar to me, even though it seems that s/he is not *actually* similar to me. Finally, what about Sherlock Holmes? He never existed, he does not exist now and, according to many ontologists, he cannot exist at all: he was created by an English writer, Arthur Conan Doyle, as a fictional character, he does many things in many stories and I greatly admire him for his intelligence. Yet, if there were a murder in Macerata, I had better not suggest that the Italian police should ask for his help.

Yet, if it is acceptable to claim that Socrates does not exist anymore, that my merely possible twin does not actually exist and that Sherlock Holmes does not exist at all (and that perhaps he cannot exist), is it true that they have some features? Is it legitimate to assert that there are objects that once were philosophers, that are now greatly admired, that are fictional characters, and that nevertheless do not exist? Furthermore, what does it make it true that Obama (now) exists, that Socrates once existed and that he does not exist anymore, that my

merely possible twin does not actually exist, even though s/he could have existed and that Sherlock Holmes does not exist at all? In sum, what is it for something to exist or not to exist? Are there things that exist and things that do not exist?

In this dissertation, I shall try to answer such questions. It seems to me that we have conflicting commonsensical views on existence and non-existence. On the one hand, it seems that we attribute some sort of being to everything to which we attribute properties: if there *were* nothing such as Sherlock Holmes, how could we assert that Sherlock Holmes is such-and-such? Yet, on the other hand, it seems nevertheless legitimate to assert that there are things that exist and things that do not exist: Sherlock Holmes is something that seems to be different from Emma Bovary, even though both Sherlock Holmes and Emma Bovary do not exist. Is the conjunction of these intuitions inconsistent? Are we justified in holding them?

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In the first part, I have tried to deal with the *status quaestionis* concerning existence and non-existence. In the second part, I have developed a theory of existence and non-existence according to which, roughly, (i) there are both things that exist and things that do not exist, (ii) existence is only a first-order, informative property (i.e., only a property of objects that is instantiated by some objects and that is not instantiated by other objects) and (iii) it is legitimate to attribute (in some peculiar way) many properties to many things that do not exist.

In the first chapter of the first part (*I.1. Prologue in Heaven: the Ontological Argument*) I shall deal with many of the aforementioned problems by examining the problem of the validity of the ontological argument for the existence of God. I shall examine four versions of the argument (two versions provided by Anselm and the ones provided by Descartes and Gödel) and several classical and contemporary objections. It seems that Anselm assumes that there are objects that merely exist in the mind and that do not really exist. Yet, God cannot be one of such objects, since it would be contradictory to assert that God is the greatest conceivable being and that He does not really exist. Descartes justifies this conclusion by asserting that existence (or real existence) is a perfection, i.e., a first-order property. It seems that there are things that do not exist or that do not really exist, so that they do not have this perfection, but God cannot be one of such things, since He has every perfection. Gödel remarks that only necessary existence is a positive property of objects, i.e., a perfection, so that God necessarily exists.

Yet, Kant famously argued that existence adds nothing to the whole concept of something: it merely "posits" that thing with all its predicates. Thus, existence cannot be considered a first-order property, such as the property of being a man or of being someone's brother: perhaps it cannot be considered a property at all. Yet, if existence is not a property that

objects can possess or lack, what is it that makes some negative existential statements (e.g., "Sherlock Holmes does not exist") true? Furthermore, is there any kind of mental existence that merely mental objects have and that is different from real existence? More generally: are there kinds of existence at all? Are there things that necessarily exist? What is it for something to necessarily exist?

In the second chapter (*I.2. What are we talking of? Existence and Reference*) I shall deal with some problems that typically arise when one considers the relationship between the reference of terms and existence. In general, it seems that we can assert something true about non-existents. Yet, what do terms such as "Sherlock Holmes", "Emma Bovary", "Bilbo Baggins" refer to, provided that it seems also true that Sherlock Holmes, Emma Bovary and Bilbo Baggins do not exist? Furthermore, given that there are true positive and negative existential statements (such as "Obama exists" and "Sherlock Holmes does not exist"), what does make them true? If we accept that propositions are primary truthbearers, do we need to assert that these statements do not express propositions such as [Obama exists] and [Sherlock Holmes does not exist][1], provided that [Obama] and [Sherlock Holmes] must refer to Obama and Sherlock Holmes – who does not exist – in order for such propositions to be true? In fact, given the Fregean Principle of Compositionality, the reference of a complex such as a statement or a proposition, i.e., the True or the False, is determined by the reference of their constituents *and* by the rules used to combine them). On the other hand, are we justified in simply asserting that there are true positive and negative existential propositions, that are made true by something not involving Obama *qua* object and Sherlock Holmes *qua* object? Or: are we justified in asserting that, at least in the case of true negative existential propositions, such propositions are made true by something that does not involve non-existents *qua* objects?

After having presented some data and some problems (e.g., the problem of the distinction between existence-entailing and non-existence-entailing predicates and properties, the ambiguity of statements such as "Sherlock Holmes is a detective", and so on), I shall examine the classical theories defended by Brentano, Frege, Russell, Moore and Meinong. I shall also briefly recall some classical objections that have been advanced against them.

Later on, I shall discuss two theses:

(actualism) there are no objects (more generally, no items) that do not exist;

(actualism-a) existence is *not* a first-order and informative property.

These theses are strictly connected, so that many philosophers accept both (actualism)

[1] I shall adopt the convention according to which: (i) propositions are put into square brackets in order to distinguish them from the statements that express them; (ii) constituents of propositions are also put into square brackets.

and (actualism-a). On the other hand, other philosophers (e.g., Meinongians) reject (actualism), but some of them accept (actualism-a). Finally, there are philosophers who partly accept (actualism) and partly reject (actualism-a), at least given two different interpretations of the predicate "exist".

In considering the first group of philosophers, I shall first deal with Ryle's and Quine's theories. More recently, other proposals have been presented by Chakrabarti (who has revived some typical Carnapian theses), some Neo-Russellians (Cocchiarella, Landini, Orilia), Kripke and van Inwagen, Sommers, Vallicella and Azzouni. I shall not deal with the more general metaontological debate about the genuineness of existential questions in metaphysics, since it seems to me that such a debate is too vast and deep to be examined here. By claiming that there must be something in the world that makes some positive and negative existential propositions true, I shall assume that existential questions in metaphysics are genuine and that they cannot be only dealt with from a linguistic and/or a metalinguistic perspective, i.e., by only examining the use of the predicate "exist" within and across different linguistic frameworks. I cannot give here a proof of the genuineness of such questions. Yet, it seems to me that those who introduce contexts and frameworks in order to leave non-existents out of their ontologies should deal (at least) with the problems of the identity conditions and of the ontological status of such contexts and frameworks.

I shall try to criticize (actualism) and (actualism-a) by remarking that: if they are mere assumptions, it seems legitimate to assert that they are false or at least questionable, since there are some data that seem to conflict with their truth and we do not have any valid reason (except for the acceptance of (actualism) and (actualism-a) themselves) for denying such data; if they are not mere assumptions, they are not adequately justified; there are some internal and (at least according to my perspective) insurmountable problems within each actualist strategy.

Moreover, I shall present the positions of those who do not accept (actualism). Following Berto (2013a), I shall distinguish three different kinds of Meinongianism: property-centered, instantiation-centered and world-centered Meinongianism. Each kind of Meinongianism has its own internal problems and, in general, it seems to me that Meinongians require too much from non-existents. Contrary to what is asserted by many Meinongians, one could perhaps deny that non-existent objects are mind-independent and nevertheless admit that they are objects that do not exist. In this part of the chapter, I shall present McGinn's theory too.

Finally, I shall examine a "third way" between actualism and non-actualism, that has been proposed by Geach and, more recently, by Miller. According to Geach, there is at least one use of the predicate "exist" that makes it legitimate to assert that not everything exists – even if there is

another use of that predicate according to which everything exists. From Miller's perspective, existence is a first-order and really important property, even if he does not actually believe that there are objects that do not exist.

In the third chapter (*I.3. The Importance of Being (Non-)Existent*), I shall explore in depth the problem of true fictional statements, i.e., of true statements that seem to be about fictional non-existent objects. Our data will comprehend several kinds of such statements and I shall examine four different kinds of theories that try to deal with them: Meinongian theories, make-believe theories, Thomasson's artifactualism and Voltolini's syncretism. The theory of fictional objects that I shall present in the second part of this dissertation summarizes several important aspects of these theories and tries to solve some problems that are connected to them.

Finally, in the fourth chapter (*I.4. The Times and Worlds they are (a-)changin'*), I shall first present some data concerning seemingly true intuitions about contingent existence and non-existence and existing objects' substantial change. It seems true that many existents only contingently exist and that many non-existents only contingently do not exist. How can we interpret such intuitions in order to ground the truth of true modal existential statements? It seems that we should use possible worlds. Yet, what are possible worlds? And how can we accept (from an actualist perspective) the fact that possible worlds – that are existing items – seem to be identified by referring to non-existent items? Furthermore, if we accept that there are non-actual possible worlds in which non-actually existing objects exist, how can we justify the intuition according to which such objects do not only need to exist in other possible worlds, but they need to be possibly existent in the actual world too? Is the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* possibility with regard to such objects ontologically justified from a non-actualist perspective? Does it help to solve the aforementioned problems?

With regard to the ontology of time, I shall consider the problem of accounting for substantial change, i.e., the fact that objects start and stop existing. In general, presentists can deal with this problem in a better way than non-presentists, even if those presentists who accept (actualism) have to solve other difficult problems, e.g., the problem of providing present truthmakers for truths about merely past objects.

In the second part of the dissertation, I shall present and defend some theses about existence and non-existence. The first chapter (*II.1. One and Many: Objects and Properties*) constitutes an ontological introduction to the rest of this speculative part of the dissertation. I shall accept a two-category ontology, comprehending both objects (in a wide sense) and properties, roughly characterizing the items belonging to the former category as what cannot be predicated of (and instantiated by) anything else and the ones belonging to the latter category as

what can be predicated of (and instantiated by) something else. Furthermore, I shall defend an abundant conception of properties, according to which it is *not* legitimate to claim that there are some predicates that do not denote any property at all and necessary coextension among properties and/or the fact that some properties are more natural than other properties are not sufficient reasons to set some items that *seem* to be properties out of our ontologies. Finally, I shall justify the acceptance of negative facts and negative properties into my ontology.

The second and the third chapters present the core of my theory. In the second chapter (*II.2. Existence: about a Genuine Property*) I shall defend the following theses:

(a) the predicate "exists" in true positive existential statements, such as "Obama exists", only denotes a first-order and informative property, i.e., a property that is only instantiated by objects (so that no property properly exists) and such that there are some objects that do not instantiate it;

(b) our ordinary quantifiers are not ontologically loaded: it is legitimate to quantify over objects (and properties) that do not exist, provided that such objects (and properties) have definite identity conditions. In other terms, by quantifying over objects and properties, we are only committed to the fact that such items have identity conditions, that there is some criterion according to which they are identical with themselves and distinct from any other item (so that, if I assert that there is something that is identical with Sherlock Holmes, I am only committed to the fact that there is an object that has definite identity conditions, that is identical with itself and that is distinct from any other item, e.g., from the property of being identical with Sherlock Holmes, from Emma Bovary, from Socrates, Obama, and everything else);

(c) necessarily, for every object, that object exists iff it has at least one disposition to act, i.e., at least one disposition to cause something. However, after having dealt with some problems such as the paradox of fiction and the fact that many objects belonging to different kinds seem to possess the same dispositions to act, I shall refine such an analysis in order to define a more perspicuous account of existence;

(d) many non-existent objects (in particular, all fictional objects and propositions) simply are mental objects, i.e., objects that depend for their identity conditions on the activity of some minded subject(s);

(e) however, not all non-existent items are mental objects: facts, properties, merely past objects, and so on, seem not to depend on the activity of some minded subject(s) for their identity conditions.

My defense of such theses will be dialectical (at least in part). For example, concerning (a), I shall argue that, even if there were a property of existence instantiated by all items (both objects and properties), such a property would be a merely disjunctive one and it could not be identified with the property that seems to be involved within the truth-conditions of [Obama exists]. We do not have any valid reason (except for the acceptance of (actualism), that I shall criticize in the first part of the dissertation) for admitting that to exist simply is to be identical with something or to be self-identical, so that everything exists. On the other hand, it does not seem to me that fictional objects – and many other non-existent objects – are objects independently of the activity of minded subjects. In fact, many Meinongians argue that such objects are not mental objects, since they have some definite ontological status (e.g., the status of being non-existent) independently of minded subjects' thinking of them. I do not agree with such a view. It seems to me that it is not legitimate to claim that it is true that Sherlock Holmes does not exist, if there is no object such as Sherlock Holmes. In a possible world in which no minded subject exists or in which there is no minded subject that defines Sherlock Holmes' identity conditions, there are no true propositions such as [Sherlock Holmes does not exist] or [Sherlock Holmes is a fictional object] and there is no Sherlock Holmes at all. Thus, I accept that there are objects that do not exist, as every Meinongian does, but my theory had better be considered a Half-Meinongian or a heretical Meinongian theory of objects, rather than an orthodox one.

In the third chapter (*II.3. Non-Existence: an Ascriptivistic Theory*) I shall present a theory of *ficta* that is grounded on some peculiar relations: ascription relations. Such relations hold (at least) between an object (or a property), a property and a minded subject. They could involve fictional contexts too, i.e., fictional objects that can be roughly considered worlds of fiction and that are identity-defined by stories. If the proposition [Sherlock Holmes is a detective] is true, it is made true by some ascription relation's holding between Sherlock Holmes, the property of being a detective, some minded subject and some fictional context (e.g., the fictional context defined by the story *A Study in Scarlet*). I shall provide further qualifications for the interpretation of such truth-conditions and I shall analyze all the other seemingly true fictional statements introduced in chapter I.3 from the perspective of this theory, that I shall name ascriptivism. Ascriptivism is a general theory of intentionality. It aims at interpreting many general phenomena connected to our thoughts and beliefs, even though I cannot investigate in this work all the implications of the theory.

Furthermore, within the ascriptivistic perspective, it is not necessary to introduce fictional surrogates of existing objects that seem to be involved within works of fiction and it is neither

necessary to admit that there are true contradictions, nor that there are properly inconsistent objects. I shall try to show other advantages of the theory in that chapter.

In the fourth chapter of the second part (*II.4. I might have not existed, I shall not exist (maybe)*), I shall deal with the data concerning the relationship between existence, contingency and temporality by briefly sketching two theories. The first theory is grounded on a mentalistic and ascriptivistic approach to modality, that takes modal truths as dependent on the activity of some omniscient minded subject. In particular, I shall admit that there are contingently non-existent objects and I shall assert that such objects are identity-defined by the activity of that subject and that possible worlds can be thought of as "completed" fictional contexts (i.e., as a peculiar kind of fictional contexts). I shall also question the widely accepted thesis according to which every fictional object is necessarily fictional: it seems to me that there are good reasons for taking some fictional objects as only contingently non-existent.

Concerning the ontology of time, I shall present a Meinongian version of presentism that is based on the admission of tensed properties with regard to times (e.g., the property of pastly being a philosopher with regard to some time) and on the rejection of (actualism). I shall demonstrate that such a version of presentism can efficiently deal with many problems that typically affect presentism.

Finally, in the last chapter (*II.5. Epilogue in Heaven: the Existence of God*), I shall defend two arguments for the existence of a being that is thought of as greater than any other being (so that I shall give a new interpretation of Anselm's ontological argument) and for the existence of an omniscient minded subject.

Part I. To Be and Not To Be? A Survey

I.1. Prologue in Heaven: the Ontological Argument

In this chapter, I shall analyze the connections between the logical and metaphysical discussions on the validity of the ontological argument for the existence of God and my inquiry on existence and non-existence. I shall not deal with all the several versions of the ontological argument: I shall only consider Anselm's, Descartes' and Gödel's versions and some relevant objections of Hume's and Kant's, because it seems to me that these moments of the discussion are the most important and interesting ones with regard to my inquiry. In particular, it seems that there is some difference between Anselm's and Descartes' arguments, on the one hand, and Gödel's argument, on the other hand. This difference lies in the fact that Anselm and Descartes seem to consider existence a first-order property, while Gödel (like Plantinga and other philosophers) does not consider it a first-order property. I shall focus on four questions:

(I) what is the concept of existence involved in these versions of the ontological argument?

(II) What is the relationship between mental and real existence?

(III) Is existence a first- or a second-order property? Is it a property at all?

(IV) What is the relationship between subjective conceivability, general conceivability, possibility and the ontological status of mental objects?

I.1.1. Anselm vs. Gaunilo and some "fools".

In Anselm's *Proslogion* (1078) there are at least two versions of the ontological argument. It seems that by the first version (in the second chapter of his work) Anselm aims at directly proving the existence of God, while by the second one (in the third chapter) he aims at proving that it is not conceivable that God does not exist. Here is the first version:

> And so, Lord, do thou, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art that which we believe. And, indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? (Psalm xiv. 1). But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of wich I speak – a being than which nothing greater can be conceived – understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.
>
> For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.
>
> Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever his understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, then which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exist in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.
>
> Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in the reality[2].

I shall assume that: "C_1" stands for the dyadic property of being conceivable that ... has ...; "C_2"

[2] Anselm, *Proslogion*, II, in Plantinga (1968): 3-4.

stands for the triadic property of being conceivable that ... is more ... than ...; "C_3" stands for the triadic property of ... conceives ... as ...; "U" stands for being understood; "G_R" stands for the dyadic property of ... is greater than ...; "G" stands for being the greatest being; "E_M" stands for having mental existence; "E_R" stands for having real existence; "$\overline{E}_R$" stands for not having real existence; "*f*" stands for the fool; "*g*" stands for God; "$\overline{P}$" stands for the negative property which corresponds to the negation of a positive property. I accept a second-order logic, according to which it is possible to quantify over properties. It seems to me that the proof goes as follows[3]:

(a'1)	C_1gG	A
(a'2)	$\sim\exists x(C_1xG \,\&\, \sim(x = g))$	A
(a'3)	$\sim\exists x(C_1xG \,\&\, \sim(x = g)) \leftrightarrow \sim\exists x(C_2xG_Rg \,\&\, \sim(x = g))$	A
(a'4)	$\forall x\forall P(C_1x\overline{P} \rightarrow Ux)$	A
(a'5)	$\forall x(Ux \rightarrow E_Mx)$	A
(a'6)	$(E_Mg \,\&\, \sim E_Rg) \rightarrow \exists y(C_2yG_Rg \,\&\, \sim(y = g)))$	A
(a'7)	$\forall x\forall y\forall P(C_3xy\overline{P} \rightarrow C_1y\overline{P})$	A
(a'8)	$C_3fg\overline{E}_R$	A
(a'9)	$\sim E_Rg$	H (~I)
(a'10)	$\forall y\forall P(C_3fy\overline{P} \rightarrow C_1y\overline{P})$	(a'7)∀E
(a'11)	$\forall P(C_3fg\overline{P} \rightarrow C_1g\overline{P})$	(a'10)∀E
(a'12)	$C_3fg\overline{E}_R \rightarrow C_1g\overline{E}_R$	(a'11)∀E
(a'13)	$C_1g\overline{E}_R$	(a'8),(a'12)→E
(a'14)	$\forall P(C_1g\overline{P} \rightarrow Ug)$	(a'4)∀E
(a'15)	$C_1g\overline{E}_R \rightarrow Ug$	(a'14)∀E
(a'16)	Ug	(a'13),(a'15)→E
(a'17)	$Ug \rightarrow E_Mg$	(a'5)∀E
(a'18)	E_Mg	(a'16),(a'17)→E
(a'19)	$E_Mg \,\&\, \sim E_Rg$	(a'9),(a'18)&I
(a'20)	$\exists y(C_2yG_Rg \,\&\, \sim(y = g))$	(a'19),(a'6)→E
(a'21)	$C_2aG_Rg \,\&\, \sim(a = g)$	H(∃E)
(a'22)	$\exists x(C_2xG_Rg \,\&\, \sim(x = g))$	(a'21)∃I
(a'23)	$\sim\exists x(C_1xG \,\&\, \sim(x = g)) \rightarrow \sim\exists x(C_2xG_Rg \,\&\, \sim(x = g))$	(a'3)↔E
(a'24)	$\sim\sim\exists x(C_1xG \,\&\, \sim(x = g))$	(a'22),(a'23)MT
(a'25)	$\exists x(C_1xG \,\&\, \sim(x = g))$	(a'24)~E
(a'26)	$\exists x(C_1xG \,\&\, \sim(x = g))$	(a'20),(a'21)-(a'25)(∃E)
(a'27)	$\exists x(C_1xG \,\&\, \sim(x = g)) \,\&\, \sim\exists x(C_1xG \,\&\, \sim(x = g))$	(a'26),(a'2) &I
(a'28)	E_Rg	(a'9)-(a'27) (~I)

[3] I shall use in this work the system of natural deduction presented in Varzi, Nolt, Rohatyn (2007). For a list of symbols, see the Appendix (pp. 281-284).

The assumptions state that: it is conceivable that God is the greatest being (a'1); there is no greatest being different from God (a'2), so that God is the only greatest being; it is not conceivable that there is a greatest being different from God iff if it is not conceivable that there is a being different from God which is greater than Him (a'3); for any property and any object, if it is conceivable that that object has the negative property corresponding to the property assumed, then that object is understood (a'4); for every object, if that object is understood, then it has mental existence (a'5); if God has mental existence but He does not have real existence, then there is an object different from God that is conceivable as greater than Him (a'6); for any two objects, for any property, if one of these objects conceives the other object as having the negative property corresponding to the property assumed, then it is conceivable that that object has that negative property (a'7); the fool conceives that God has non-real existence (a'8). In order to clarify what is for something to be conceivable as the greatest being, using the symbol ι to introduce definite descriptions, I assume that

(def.C_1G) $\forall x(C_1xG \leftrightarrow (\iota y \forall z(C_2yG_Rz \leftrightarrow \sim(y = z)) \,\&\, x = y))$

This is not equivalent to state that there is at least and at most one *really existent* being which is *the* greatest being. In this latter case, the proof would be a *petitio principii*. I only wish to assume that it is conceivable that something is *the* greatest being, i.e., that it is conceivable that there is at least and at most one greatest being.

Furthermore, my use of the conceivability relations seems to assume that Russell's multiple relation theory of judgment is valid, i.e. that, roughly, judgments directly connect objects and properties[4]. As it will become clearer after having dealt with my theses on non-existent objects, I think that attitudes such as judging and conceiving can be truly considered relations. This treatment of conceivability seems to reply to Parsons' objection against Anselm's argument[5]. According to Parsons, Anselm states that the fool imagines (*de dicto*) that there is an object nothing greater than which can be conceived, but then he establishes that there is an object which is imagined by the fool (*de re*) and this seems not to be valid. However, following our notion of conceivability, it is legitimate to state that the fool conceives that God does not really exist iff there is at least and at most one object (God) that is conceived of by the fool as not really existing. It is not legitimate to turn the *de dicto* assertion into a *de re* one only if one assumes that it is not legitimate to quantify over objects of thought. Yet, I reject this latter assumption.

Let me now consider some relevant objections against the premises and the form of the argument.

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[4] See Russell (1992): 105-118.
[5] See Parsons (1980): 214-215.

(1vs.a'quantifiers) The quantifiers range over non-existent and existent objects. Yet, if the existential quantifier implies ontological commitment, it is not legitimate to state that there is some object that does not exist. This Quinean objection will be examined in the next chapter. However, it seems to me that it is necessary to assume a neutral interpretation of the quantifiers, in order to deal with objects that truly do not have real existence, yet instantiate properties.

(2vs.a'modal) When we use the property of it is conceivable that ..., we deal with modal categories. Thus, it would be better to use modal operators instead of properties. Yet, the notions of being conceivable that ... and of being possible are not identical: we can conceive of objects regardless of their possibility. This Meinongian assumption will be defended after having considered some data concerning non-existent objects. Thus, there is no room for Sobel's objection, according to which conceivability does not imply logical possibility *and* logical possibility (that is *only* expressed by the modal operator of possibility) is required in order for the argument to work, so that the ontological argument is not well-grounded[6]. However, I think that God is not an impossible object. If we have valid reasons for rejecting the objection (1vs.a'quantifiers) and if we can demonstrate that God is a logically possible object, it is legitimate to use the property of being conceivable that… instead of modal operators.

(3vs.a'1) If God is a transcendent being, how could we conceive anything about Him? How could we conceive that He is the greatest being? We can state these words ("God is the greatest being"), even without understanding what they mean[7]. Yet, in general, what is for something to be conceived of? I think that we have to distinguish three different meanings of "conceiving": we conceive_1 that an object has some property even without knowing if that object truly has that property; we conceive_2 that an object has some property iff that object truly has that property; we conceive_3 that an object has some property when we know why that object has that property. I have only assumed that it is conceivable_1 that an object (God) has some property, because we do not know if that object truly exists and if it truly has that property.

(4vs.a'1) Gaunilo objects that, in order to conceive of a greatest being, it has to be possible to conceive of different degrees of being in nature and of some supreme degree, even though it might neither be true that there are real degrees in nature, nor any supreme degree[8]. Yet, we are not considering here real degrees of being in nature: we are just talking of an object that is conceivable as having the property of being the greatest being. Is this property a fictional one, provided that it might be true that there are no degrees of being in nature? I do not know. Yet, it is conceivable that God has it by definition.

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[6] See Sobel (2004): 65-66.
[7] See Gaunilo in Plantinga (1968): 10.
[8] See Gaunilo in Plantinga (1968): 12.

(5vs.a'2-a'3) I have assumed by definition that God is *the* greatest conceivable being. Yet, is it possible that there are other greatest beings different from Him? Let me assume that there is another greatest being different from God: if this being is greater than God, it is the true God; if it is as great as God, it is not the greatest being, because it is not greater than God. Thus, the idea that there is a greatest being implies that there is only one greatest being.

(6vs.a'4) Is it legitimate to assume that there are negative properties? I think that it is. Yet, I shall justify this answer after having made some general remarks about properties in the chapter II.1.

(7vs.a'4) If it is conceivable that something has some negative property, is that thing understood? I think that it is. In fact, it is understood that that object has that negative property. For example, if it is conceivable that I do not live in France, something about me is understood. In general, if it is truly conceivable (with regard to all the three meanings of conceivability) that something has some negative property (i.e., if the antecedent is true), then that thing is understood (i.e., the consequent is true)[9].

(8vs.a'5) It does not seem to be true that, if something is understood, then that thing has mental existence, i.e., it exists in some mind. What does this kind of existence amount to? What is the ontological status of mental objects? I shall clarify this aspect of the proof when I shall deal with the ontological status of mental objects.

(9vs.a'5) Furthermore, it seems that, when I understand something real, that thing does not exist in my mind: I only understand *that real* thing. Yet, there are many objects that do not exist and that are objects of our thoughts: Pegasus, the round square, and so on. Thus, it is possible to imagine that every object, when it is thought of by me, exists in my mind too. Real objects, when they are thought of by me, exist in my mind *and* in reality, whereas non-existent objects, when they are thought of by me, exist in my mind but they do not exist in reality. However, it is not clear *what* is for something to exist in one's mind and *how* mental existence is exactly correlated with real existence (e.g., are they two different kinds of existence?).

(10vs.a'5) If I think of God and if God exists, do I think of a mental object different from the real existing God? In other words: is mental existence only exemplified by some mental object that is somehow different from the real corresponding object? I think that it is not. Mental existence and real existence are exemplified by the same really existing object (God) and this seems to make the proof valid.

(11vs.a'5) However, if I think of God and you do not think of Him, God has and does not have

[9] This line of defense is assumed by Anselm too: "whoever, then, denies the existence of a being than which a greater cannot be conceived, at least understands and conceives of the denial which he makes. But this denial he cannot understand or conceive of without its component terms; and a term of this statement is a being than which a greater cannot be conceived. Whoever, then, makes this denial, understands and conceives of that than which nothing greater is inconceivable" (Anselm, *Proslogion*, II, in Plantinga (1968): 26).

mental existence. Thus, it seems that mental existence is mind-dependent: it seems to be a relation between one object and one mind, rather than a monadic property of some objects. I shall deal with these issues in the second part of this work.

(12vs.a'6) Is real existence a property of objects? In other words: is existence a first-order property? As we will see, Kant objects against this thesis, that grounds the validity of the argument.

(13vs.a'6) Alston[10] accepts that existence is a special first-order property, because the instantiation of that property is presupposed by every true predication. According to him, there are many ways of existing, which seem to be context-dependent: real existence, fictional existence, mental existence, and so on. On the one hand, when we deal with non-really existing objects, we have to think that there is a real existing correlate that somehow corresponds to them: if I think of God, there is some thought that is the really existing correlate of Him. On the other hand, if we think of non-existent objects, their ways of existing limit their predications: if God is a non-existing object, we cannot state that God really exists, because it is not legitimate to attribute real existence to non-existing objects. In fact, these objects are limited by the fact that their non-real kind of existence implies the real existence of their real correlates but it does not imply *their* real existence. Yet, developing an objection of Plantinga's[11], let me consider this statement:

(1) God is more famous than Obama.

What is the kind of existence that limits the instantiation of the relation of being more famous than, if God is considered a mentally existing object, while Obama is a really existing object? It seems plausible that mentally existing objects bear real relations to really existing objects, so that mental existence does not limit by itself the instantiation of real properties and relations. According to Plantinga, this implies, *contra* Alston, that mentally existing objects really exist too. Yet, as we will notice in the next chapter by examining existence-entailing properties, this conclusion is not so obvious.

(14vs.a'6) What is the relationship between real existence and the property of being greater than? Is existence a perfection (i.e., something that expresses the greatness of an object) and/or a great-making property? This point needs to be developed. In fact, it seems that, for example, an existing evil is less perfect than a non-existing one.

(15vs.a'28) Gaunilo's perfect island's example is one of the most well-known objections against the validity of Anselm's ontological argument. According to Gaunilo, following Anselm's premises, it would be possible to defend an ontological argument for the existence of some

[10] See Alston (1960), in Plantinga (1968): 86-110.
[11] See Plantinga (1967): 53.

perfect island. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be a good objection: in God's case, in fact, we are talking of the greatest being, while, in the perfect island's case, we are simply talking of the greatest being *within* one category of beings (the islands). There is something greater than the perfect island. Yet, there is nothing greater than God.

The second Anselmian version of the ontological argument aims at proving that it is not conceivable that God does not exist. It could be interpreted as a supplement to the first version and it seems to be less remarkable than the former version, because it can conclude that God exists only by introducing one further premise, according to which what cannot be conceived as non-existent does exist (perhaps by necessity), and because it does not concede that the fool can think that God does not exist. However, here is Anselm's text:

> And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God[12].

I shall assume that: "C_1" stands for the dyadic property of being conceivable that ... has ...; "G_R" stands for the dyadic property of ... is greater than ...; "E_R" stands for having real existence; "$\overline{E}_R$" stands for not having real existence; "*g*" stands for God. It seems to me that the proof goes as follows:

(a"1)	$\exists x{\sim}C_1x\overline{E}_R$	A
(a"2)	$\forall x\forall y((\sim C_1x\overline{E}_R \,\&\, C_1y\overline{E}_R) \rightarrow G_Rxy)$	A
(a"3)	$\sim\exists xG_Rxg$	A
(a"4)	$\forall x(\sim C_1x\overline{E}_R \rightarrow E_Rx)$	A
(a"5)	$C_1g\overline{E}_R$	H(~I)
(a"6)	$\sim C_1a\overline{E}_R$	H(∃E)
(a"7)	$\forall y((\sim C_1a\overline{E}_R \,\&\, C_1y\overline{E}_R) \rightarrow G_Ray)$	(a"2)∀E
(a"8)	$(\sim C_1a\overline{E}_R \,\&\, C_1g\overline{E}_R) \rightarrow G_Rag$	(a"7)∀E
(a"9)	$\forall x{\sim}G_Rxg$	(a"3)QE
(a"10)	$\sim G_Rag$	(a"9)∀E
(a"11)	$\sim(\sim C_1a\overline{E}_R \,\&\, C_1g\overline{E}_R)$	(a"8),(a"10)MT
(a"12)	$C_1a\overline{E}_R \,V\, \sim C_1g\overline{E}_R$	(a"11)DM
(a"13)	$\sim C_1g\overline{E}_R$	(a"6),(a"12)DS
(a"14)	$\sim C_1g\overline{E}_R$	(a"1),(a"6)-(a"13)(∃E)
(a"15)	$C_1g\overline{E}_R \,\&\, \sim C_1g\overline{E}_R$	(a"5),(a"14)&I
(a"16)	$\sim C_1g\overline{E}_R$	(a"5)-(a"15)(~I)

[12] Anselm, *Proslogion*, III, in Plantinga (1968): 5.

(a"17) $\sim C_1 g \overline{E}_r \rightarrow E_R g$ (a"4)∀E

(a"18) $E_R g$ (a"16),(a"17)→E

The assumptions state that: there is something for which it is not conceivable that it does not exist (a"1); for any two objects, if one of them is not conceivable as not having real existence and the other is conceivable as not having real existence, then the former is greater than the latter (a"2); there is nothing greater than God (a"3); for any object, if that object is not conceivable as not having real existence, then it has real existence (a"4).

It seems that objections (1vs.a'quantifiers), (2vs.a'modal), (15vs.a'7), (3vs.a'1), (4vs.a'1), (5vs.a'2-a'3), (12vs.a'6), (14vs.a'6) hold for this version too. However, it is possible to introduce further relevant objections.

(1vs.a"1) Every existential statement seems to be contingent. Thus, it seems that there is no object for which it is not conceivable that it does not exist. This objection is formulated by Hume and I shall analyze it in the third section of this chapter.

(2vs.a"1) The first assumption states part of what has to be proved, i.e., that there is an object that is not conceivable as not having real existence. Thus, the proof only demonstrates that this object is God and that He really exists. I think that this objection, as well as (1vs.a"1), is well-grounded and decisive.

(3vs.a"2) It is not justified why something that is not conceivable as not having real existence is greater than something that is conceivable as not having it.

(4vs.a"4) The last assumption seems very questionable, because it seems that *a nosse ad esse non valet consequentia*: if it is not conceivable that some object does not have real existence, then it does not follow that that object really exists. This assumption can be only defended by the conclusions of the first version of Anselm's ontological argument.

In sum, it seems to me that the first version fairs better than the second one because it seems to have more reasonable assumptions, because it concedes that the fool can conceive that God does not exist and because it proves something that is only assumed in the second version.

I.1.2. Descartes and the Perfection of Existing.

René Descartes formulates his version of the ontological argument in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641-1642). The French philosopher tries to give some reason for the fact that an existent being is more perfect than a non-existent one and tries to describe what is for something to be conceived of by someone. Here is Descartes' text:

If just because I can draw the idea of something from my thought, it follows that all which I know clearly and distinctly as pertaining to this object does really belong to it, may I not derive from this an argument demonstrating the existence of God? It is certain that I no less find the idea of God, that is to say, the idea of a supremely perfect Being, in me, than that of any figure or number whatever it is; and I do not know any less clearly and distinctly that an actual and eternal existence pertains to this nature than I know that all that which I am able to demonstrate of

some figure or number truly pertains to the nature of this figure or number, and therefore, although all that I concluded in the preceding Meditations were found to be false, the existence of God would pass with me as at least as certain as I have ever held the truths of mathematics to be.
This indeed is not at first manifested, since it would seem to present some appearance of being a sophism. For being accustomed in all other things to make a distinction between existence and essence, I easily persuade myself that the existence can be separated from the essence of God, and that we can thus conceive God as not actually existing. But, nevertheless, when I think of it with more attention, I clearly see that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than can its having its three angles equal to two right angles be separated from the essence of a rectilinear figure, or the idea of a mountain from the idea of a valley; and so there is not any less repugnance to our conceiving a God (that is, a Being supremely perfect) to whom existence is lacking (that is to say, to whom a certain perfection is lacking), than to conceive of a mountain which has no valley.
But although I cannot really conceive of a God without existence any more than a mountain without a valley, still from the fact that I conceive of a mountain with a valley, it does not follow that there is such a mountain in the world; similarly, although I conceive of God as possessing existence, it would seem that it does not follow that there is a God which exists; for my thought does not impose any necessity upon things, and just as I may imagine a winged horse, although no horse with wings exists, so I could perhaps attribute existence to God, although no God existed.
But a sophism is concealed in this objection; for from the fact that I cannot conceive a mountain without a valley, it does not follow that there is any mountain or any valley in existence, but only that the mountain and the valley, whether they exist or do not exist, cannot in any way be separated one from the other. While from the fact that I cannot conceive God without existence, it follows that existence is inseparable from Him, and hence that He really exists; not that my thought can bring this to pass, or impose any necessity on things, but, on the contrary, because the necessity which lies in the thing itself, i.e. the necessity of the existence of God determines me to think in this way. For it is not within my power to think of God without existence (that is of a supremely perfect Being devoid of a supreme perfection) though it is in my power to imagine a horse either with wings or without wings.
(...) Whenever it happens that I think of a first and a sovereign Being, and, so to speak, derive the idea of Him from the storehouse of my mind, it is necessary that I should attribute to Him every sort of perfection, although I do not get so far as to enumerate them all, or to apply my mind to each one in particular. And this necessity suffices to make me conclude (after having recognized that existence is a perfection) that this first and sovereign Being really exists[13].

I shall assume that: "C_1" stands for the dyadic property of being clearly and distinctly conceivable that ... has ...; "C_2" stands for the triadic property ... clearly and distinctly conceives that ... has ...; "P_E" stands for the second-order property of being a perfection; "P_S" stands for the property of being the most perfect being; "N" stands for the dyadic property of being necessary that ... has ...; "E_R" stands for having real existence; "*g*" stands for God; "*i*" stands for me (since the first-person speaker in the text could be anyone); "$\overline{P}$" stands for the negative property that corresponds to the negation of a positive property. It seems to me that the proof goes on as follows:

(d'1)	$\forall x \forall y \forall P(C_2xyP \rightarrow C_1yP)$	A
(d'2)	$\forall x \forall P(NxP \leftrightarrow (C_1xP \,\&\, \sim C_1x\overline{P}))$	A
(d'3)	$\sim C_1g\overline{P}_S$	A
(d'4)	C_2igP_S	A
(d'5)	$\forall x(P_Sx \leftrightarrow \forall P(P_EP \rightarrow Px))$	A
(d'6)	P_EE_R	A
(d'7)	$\forall x \forall P(NxP \rightarrow Px)$	A
(d'8)	$\forall y \forall P(C_2iyP \rightarrow C_1yP)$	(d'1)∀E
(d'9)	$\forall P(C_2igP \rightarrow C_1gP)$	(d'8)∀E
(d'10)	$C_2igP_S \rightarrow C_1gP_S$	(d'9)∀E

[13] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, III, in Plantinga (1968): 31-33.

(d'11) C_1gP_S	(d'4),(d'10)→E
(d'12) $\forall P(NgP \leftrightarrow (C_1gP \ \& \sim C_1g\overline{P}))$	(d'2)∀E
(d'13) $NgP_S \leftrightarrow (C_1gP_S \ \& \sim C_1g\overline{P}_S)$	(d'12)∀E
(d'14) $(C_1gP_S \ \& \sim C_1g\overline{P}_S) \rightarrow NgP_S$	(d'13)↔E
(d'15) $C_1gP_S \ \& \sim C_1g\overline{P}_S$	(d'3),(d'11)&I
(d'16) NgP_S	(d'14),(d'15)→E
(d'17) $\forall P(NgP \rightarrow Pg)$	(d'7)∀E
(d'18) $NgP_S \rightarrow P_Sg$	(d'17)∀E
(d'19) P_Sg	(d'16),(d'18)→E
(d'20) $P_Sg \leftrightarrow \forall P(P_EP \rightarrow Pg)$	(d'5)∀E
(d'21) $P_Sg \leftrightarrow (P_EE_R \rightarrow E_Rg)$	(d'20)∀E
(d'22) $P_Sg \rightarrow (P_EE_R \rightarrow E_Rg)$	(d'21)↔E
(d'23) $P_EE_R \rightarrow E_Rg$	(d'19),(d'22)→E
(d'24) E_Rg	(d'6),(d'23)→E

The assumptions state that: for any two objects and any property, if one of them clearly and distinctly conceives of the other as having that property, then it is clearly and distinctly conceivable that the latter object has that property (d'1); for any object and any property, it is necessary that that object has that property iff it is clearly and distinctly conceivable that it has that property and it is not clearly and distinctly conceivable that it has the corresponding negative property (d'2); it is not clearly and distinctly conceivable that God is not the most perfect being (d'3); I clearly and distinctly conceive that God is the most perfect being (d'4); for any object, that object is the most perfect being iff, for any property, if that property is a perfection, than that object instantiates it (d'5); real existence is a perfection (d'6); for any object and any property, if it is necessary that that object has that property, then that object has that property (d'7).

One could try to prove that God necessarily exists by adding one further assumption, according to which it is not conceivable that God does not exist. However, as I have already remarked examining Anselm's second version of the ontological argument, this thesis is quite questionable: as a matter of fact, the fool conceives that God does not exist, so that it is conceivable that God does not exist. Thus, I prefer this reading of Descartes' argument.

Objections (1vs.a'quantifiers), (2vs.a'modal), (3vs.a'1), (4vs.a'1), (5vs.a'2-a'3), (6vs.a'4), (12 vs.a'6) seem to hold for this argument too. Furthermore, it is legitimate to make further objections against the assumptions.

(1vs.d'1) What is for something to be clearly and distinctly conceivable? Descartes claims that we clearly conceive of something when we see all the attributes of that thing (or perhaps the relevant ones), so that we do not ignore any aspect of that thing, and we distinctly conceive of something when we know in what respects that thing is different from any other thing. Yet, it

does not seem that we can clearly conceive of God, because we do not know all the attributes that belong to Him. However, we can clearly conceive that God has existence, perhaps because He is the Supreme Being. Maybe this represents our partial, yet clear knowledge of God.

(2vs.d'2) A property that necessarily belongs to an object is a property that is conceived of as being instantiated by that object *and* whose corresponding negative property is not conceivable of as being instantiated by the same object. However, it seems that we use conceivability in order to define the modal category of necessity. Yet, there are many property that necessarily belongs to an object and that are not conceivable (by us) as belonging to that object and/or for which it seems also conceivable for us that that object has the corresponding negative property. For example, is π necessarily such that its $20.000.000^{th}$ digit is a zero? Maybe it necessarily is. Yet, even though we can conceive of that property as belonging to π, we cannot state if it belongs to it. Furthermore, it is also conceivable that π does not have that property. However, we could think that conceivability is a general concept, that can be applied to any minded subject. Thus, if there were an omniscient minded subject, perhaps it could rightly conceive what properties necessarily belong to objects.

(3vs.d'2) Yet, if two minded subjects conceive of two different positive properties as instantiated by the same object and these properties are hiddenly contradictory, it turns out that that objects seems to be an impossible one, even though it is not impossible. Thus, we have to understand how it is possible that conceived objects bear implicit properties (properties implied by the properties that they are thought of as instantiating) and whether it is possible to conceive of impossible objects.

(4vs.d'3) However, the fool can deny that he conceives that God is the most perfect being. Yet, if this is a definition of God (and we have to define God in some way or another, at least in order to make it sure that we are all thinking and talking of the same object), the fool does not conceive of God but maybe of some other object. It seems plausible to accept that God is by definition the most perfect being, so that it is not conceivable that something is God, even without being the most perfect being.

(5vs.d'5) Sobel argues[14] that the statement

(2) A supremely perfect being exists

is amphibolous between

(2a) for any object, if it is a perfect being, then it exists,

and

[14] See Sobel (2004): 35-40.

(2b) there is at least one object that is a perfect being and that exists.

(2a) expresses an implication, but it does not state that it is true that there is a perfect being, while (2b) expresses an existential statement, whose truth-value is contingent. Yet, it seems to me that my assumption (d'5), that is a logical equivalence, is not affected by this amphibolous reading: for any object, that object is the most perfect being iff it has all the perfections (existence included).

(6vs.d'5) Yet, it could be the case that all the perfections are not compossible. Facing this problem, Leibniz tried to prove that all the perfections are compossible in his famous *Supplementum* to Descartes' ontological argument[15]. I do not know how to defend the compossibility of all the perfections. I think that we have to face particular cases in which two perfections seem not to be compossible and that we have to assume, given that there are no decisive and insurmountable objections against the incompossibility of some perfections, that all the perfections are compossible.

(7vs.d'6) Developing (14vs.a'6), Malcolm argues that existence is not a perfection, yet necessary existence is[16]. However, why is necessary existence a perfection? Contingent beings could not exist and they can die. Yet, a necessarily existent being does not have these features. If the former beings contingently exiss, whereas the latter necessarily exists, why is the latter more perfect than the former? I think that we can give an answer to this question only if we assume that to exist is better than not to exist, so that existence is a perfection. In general, this seems to be true. However, there seems to be some counterexamples to this thesis: is an existent devil more perfect than a non-existent one?

(8vs.d'6) Gassendi objects that existence is not a perfection, yet it is what is presupposed by the instantiation of any perfection[17]. However, let me imagine two non-existing men: John and Paul. John is a sinner, while Paul is a saint. Is Paul more perfect than John? Yes, it seems that he is. Yet, they do not exist, so that existence is not presupposed when we attribute different degrees of perfection to them: they are a non-existing saint and a non-existing sinner. Thus, it seems that Gassendi had to justify his thesis in some better way.

(9vs.d'6) Parsons objects that, if something is perfect, its perfection can entail or not entail its existence. If it does not entail its existence, the proof is a *non sequitur*. If it entails its existence, one can only conclude that there is no non-existing perfect being, but maybe because there is no perfect being at all[18]. Yet, I have already established in Descartes' proof that perfection is a second-order property (it is not a property of objects), so that Parsons' objection seems not to be

[15] See Leibniz's text in Plantinga (1968): 54-56.
[16] See Malcolm (1960), in Plantinga (1968): 136-159.
[17] See Gassendi's text in Plantinga (1968): 46.
[18] See Parsons (1980): 213.

tenable. Furthermore, in order to deal with the second horn of his objection, we have to introduce Parsons' distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties: nuclear properties are properties that can be used in order to characterize objects, while extra-nuclear properties cannot be used in this way. Existence is an extra-nuclear property. However, we could characterize an object as an existent perfect being by using a "watered-down" version of existence. Yet, this does not imply that that object really exists, i.e., that it has extra-nuclear existence. In general, I think that Parsons' distinction is very problematic. I shall consider some objections against it in the next chapter. Nevertheless, it seems that when we think of God as really existent, we do not attribute to Him the "watered-down" property of really existing: it seems that we use just one property, the property of really existing, in order to characterize objects that really exist.

In general, Caterus objects that we can conceive of a being that has necessary existence. Yet, anything actual follows from this conception. It only follows that the concept of existence is inseparably connected with the concept of the most perfect being[19]. This objection, that seems to develop (4vs.a"4), is a very serious one. One could perhaps reply that necessity in our thoughts is strictly connected with necessity in reality, so that everything that necessarily is the most perfect being in our thoughts is the most perfect being in reality too. Yet, in order to defend this thesis, we have to investigate the status of necessity, possibility and conceivability and their mind-dependence or mind-independence.

Oppy argues that Descartes' argument aims at proving that there exists a supremely perfect being, but it only proves that there is a supreme perfection[20]. However, it does not seem that me that my reading of the argument implies this difficulty: a supreme perfection is only a property.

I.1.3. Hume, Kant and the "fools' revenge".

In the IXth Part of his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Hume argues that it is possible to conceive of any existent being as non-existent, so that it is not possible to demonstrate the existence of anything, because every demonstration implies some kind of necessity. Thus, it is not possible to demonstrate God's existence by means of any kind of ontological argument. Here is Hume's text, in which Cleanthes, who seems to partly express Hume's point of view, defends this thesis:

I shall begin with observing that there is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a matter of fact, or to prove it by any arguments *a priori*. Nothing is demonstrable unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing that is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no being

[19] See Caterus' text in Plantinga (1968): 35-37.
[20] See Oppy (1995): 22-23.

whose existence is demonstrable[21].

Let me assume that "D_{EM}" stands for the dyadic property of being demonstrable that ... has ...; "E_R" stands for the property of having real existence; "$\overline{E}_R$" stands for not having real existence; "C" stands for the dyadic property of being distinctly conceivable that ... has ...; "*g*" stands for God; "$\overline{P}$" stands for the negative property that corresponds to the negation of a positive property. Thus, Hume's objection goes as follows:

(h1)	$\forall x \forall P(D_{EM}xP \leftrightarrow (Cx\overline{P} \rightarrow (Q \,\&\, \sim Q)))$	A
(h2)	$\forall x((CE_Rx \,\&\, C\overline{E}_Rx) \rightarrow \sim(Q \,\&\, \sim Q))$	A
(h3)	$\forall x(CE_Rx \,\&\, C\overline{E}_Rx)$	A
(h4)	$CE_Rg \,\&\, C\overline{E}_Rg$	(h3)∀E
(h5)	$(CE_Rg \,\&\, C\overline{E}_Rg) \rightarrow \sim(Q \,\&\, \sim Q)$	(h2)∀E
(h6)	$\sim(Q \,\&\, \sim Q)$	(h4),(h5)→E
(h7)	$C\overline{E}_Rg$	(h4)&E
(h8)	$C\overline{E}_Rg \,\&\, \sim(Q \,\&\, \sim Q)$	(h6),(h7)&I
(h9)	$\forall P(D_{EM}gP \leftrightarrow (Cg\overline{P} \rightarrow (Q \,\&\, \sim Q)))$	(h1)∀E
(h10)	$D_{EM}gE_R \leftrightarrow (Cg\overline{E}_R \rightarrow (Q \,\&\, \sim Q))$	(h9)∀E
(h11)	$D_{EM}gE_R \rightarrow (Cg\overline{E}_R \rightarrow (Q \,\&\, \sim Q))$	(h10)↔E
(h12)	$\sim D_{EM}gE_R \vee (Cg\overline{E}_R \rightarrow (Q \,\&\, \sim Q))$	(h11)MI
(h13)	$\sim(Cg\overline{E}_R \rightarrow (Q \,\&\, \sim Q))$	(h8)MI
(h14)	$\sim D_{EM}gE_R$	(h12),(h13)DS

The assumptions state that: for any object and any property, it is demonstrable that that object has that property iff if it is distinctly conceivable that that object has the negative corresponding property only if some contradiction results (h1); for any object, if it is distinctly conceivable that that object has real existence and it is distinctly conceivable that that object does not have real existence, then no contradiction results (h2); for any object, it is both distinctly conceivable that that object has real existence and that it does not have real existence (h3).

Setting objection (6vs.a'4) apart, that seems to hold for Hume's argument too, I think that we should focus on assumptions (h2) and (h3).

(1vs.h2) Hume claims that, for any object, it is both distinctly conceivable that that object has real existence and that it does not have real existence (i.e., that it has non-real existence). What does this property of being distinctly conceivable correspond to? I have already claimed that it is conceivable$_1$ that some object has some property when it is conceivable that that object has that property even if that object does not truly have that property, while it is conceivable$_2$ that some object has some property iff that object truly has that property. If we assume that Hume's

[21] Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, IX.

distinct conceivability corresponds to conceivability$_1$, then Hume's argument works against Anselm's second version of the ontological argument, while it does not work against Anselm's first version. In fact, Hume demonstrates that it is conceivable$_1$ that God does not have real existence, so that it is not demonstrable that He has real existence. Yet, in this case, one could argue against (h1): I could conceive$_1$ of a triangle that does not have three angles, even though this would not result in any real contradiction (it would only be a contradiction in my thoughts). I shall develop this point in the chapters I.2 and I.3. However, even though Hume's argument fully worked against Anselm's second version, it seems that it does not work against Anselm's first version. The fool thinks of God as non-existing. Yet, following Anselm's first version, a contradiction results. Thus, (h2) needs to be revised. If we accepted that Hume's distinct conceivability corresponds to conceivability$_2$ (and this seems to be the most reasonable interpretation, given that, in Descartes' terms, if something is distinctly conceivable, no possibility of error results), then there would be some counterexamples to (h3).

(2vs.h3) For example, developing an objection of Plantinga's, let me assume this statement as true:

(3) there is (there really exists) a prime number between 18 and 20.

The proposition expressed by (3) seems to be necessarily true, because there is a number (the number 19) that is between 18 and 20 and that is prime. Thus, in this case, (h3) seems to be false: it is conceivable$_2$ that some prime number between 18 and 20 has real existence, but it is not conceivable$_2$ that it does not have real existence. How could Hume reply to this objection? He could reply that (a) numbers do not have real existence or (b) that there are things for which it is not conceivable$_2$ that they do not have real existence, but God and concrete beings are not such things. I shall set (a) aside, even though I could accept that numbers do not have real existence. As regards (b), this option is not well justified. In fact, one could state that it is not conceivable$_2$ that some numbers do not have real existence because there are laws that make their real existence necessary. Yet, according to (b), these laws do not hold for God or for other concrete beings. However, God's existence seems to be much more similar to numbers' existence, than to contingent concrete beings' existence. In fact, if God exists, God does not only contingently exist (as every contingently existing being does), since the proposition expressed by

(4) God exists

is necessarily true or necessarily false. I shall not analyze problems concerning modality in this chapter. Yet, I can conclude that Hume's argument fails if we accept conceivability$_2$, because assumption (h3) is not always true (it is not true for every object) and it does not seem to be true

for God. Furthermore, if we accept conceivability$_1$, Hume's argument fails against Anselm's first version of the ontological argument.

Kant directs his criticisms to Descartes' ontological argument and, in particular, to the assumption (d'6) and to the validity of the conclusion (d'24). I shall not quote here Kant's texts[22]. Yet, it seems to me that Kant aims at defend the following theses:

(k1) every proposition must be either analytic or synthetic. When a proposition is analytic, it expresses a mere tautology, because the predicate is already contained in the concept of the subject. When a proposition is synthetic, on the other hand, it provides some new information about the subject, because the concept expressed by the predicate enlarges the concept expressed by subject.

(k2) Thus, if the proposition expressed by (4) were analytic, it could not be properly proved, because the predicate "exists" would be already contained in the subject: this proposition would express a mere tautology.

(k3) On the other hand, if (4) expressed a synthetic proposition, then the predicate "exist" would be informative and it would refer to some property. Yet, according to Kant, this predicate is not a real one and it does not determine the concept of any subject, i.e., it does not add new information to this latter concept. To state that something exists is nothing more than to posit the subject with all its predicates: when we claim that (4), we only claim that

(4') there is a God,

i.e., that there is something (God) with all its predicates. Thus, "exist" is a logical, rather than a real predicate: it seems to be a presupposition of any true predication. Thus, at least from the perspective of real predicates, the real contains nothing more than the possible: the concept of one hundred real tallers and that of one hundred possible tallers do not differ, because they provide the same information about those tallers.

(k4) Furthermore, when we claim that there is a triangle and that this triangle does not have three angles, we claim something contradictory. Yet, when we reject that there is a triangle, we reject all its predicates too. Thus, no contradiction will result. When we reject the concept of God (i.e. when we state that there is no God) with all its predicates, we do not claim anything contradictory, because we reject God's predicates too. Furthermore, we cannot state anything necessary about the concept of God. In fact, when we consider propositions, every necessity is conditional: it is necessarily true that the predicate is borne by the subject only if the subject is posited with all its predicates. Yet, if the subject is not posited, no necessity and no contradiction will result.

[22] See Kant's text in Plantinga (1968): 57-64.

The distinction expressed in (k1) between analytic and synthetic propositions is far from being clear and many objections have been raised against it. Yet, I shall not examine here this Kantian thesis. Nor will I consider (k2), even though the distinction between analytic propositions and *a priori* synthetic ones is not sufficiently clear.

At any rate, (k3) and (k4) are the most interesting theses. Here are some plausible objections against them.

(1vs.k3) What does it mean that the real contains nothing more than the possible, at least from the perspective of real predicates? I think that there are two different meanings of possibility implied in this thesis: possibility as such and mere possibility. Something is possible as such iff it is logically possible and it is naturally possible, i.e., it can exist given the actual order of nature. Thus, one hundred tallers are possible as such iff their concept does not imply any contradiction and they can exist, given their actual order of nature. In this case, is it true that the concept of one hundred possible tallers contains nothing more than the concept of one hundred existing tallers? No, it is not. The concept of one hundred possible tallers contains all the predicates borne by one hundred possible tallers *and*, moreover, this concept is not contradictory (it is logically possible) *and*, given the actual order of nature, one hundred possible tallers can exist. On the other hand, the concept of one hundred existing tallers contains all the predicates borne by one hundred possible tallers *and*, moreover, this concept is not contradictory *and*, given the actual order of nature, one hundred existing tallers can exist *and* they exist. Furthermore, one hundred existing tallers can surely exist, given that they exist, whereas one hundred possible tallers can exist because nothing within the actual order of nature makes their existence impossible. Thus, there are at least two differences between the concept of one hundred possible tallers and the concept of one hundred existing tallers: their (natural) possibility is explained in two different ways and the concept of a hundred existing tallers contains their existence, while the former concept does not contain it. Thus, if there are such differences, why cannot we state that existence is a real predicate, that is borne by the concept of one hundred existing tallers and that is not borne by the concept of one hundred possible tallers?

If we now consider mere possibility, the concept of one hundred merely possible tallers seems to be identical with the concept of a hundred existing tallers *minus* the real predicate of existence *or* it seems to be identical with the concept of one hundred possible tallers. In the first case, existence adds something to the concept of one hundred tallers, while, in the second case, there are the same differences that subsist between the concept of one hundred existing tallers and the concept of one hundred possible tallers. Thus, in both situations, it seems that we have to abstract from existence in order to distinguish two different concepts. Yet, we can abstract

from existence only if existence is a real predicate, i.e., only if existence adds something to the concept of something. Perhaps "exist" is a *special* real predicate, because it determines the ontological status of an object. Yet, I do not see any reason to deny that "exist" is a real predicate. The Kantian thesis (k3) is acceptable only if one assumes – without any valid reason – that "exist" is not a real predicate.

(2vs.k4) Thus, when we state that one hundred existing tallers do not exist, we state something contradictory, while, when we state that one hundred possible tallers do not exist, we do not state anything contradictory (we state something that is made true or false by the fact that these tallers exist or that they do not exist) and, when we state that one hundred merely possible tallers do not exist, we state something true, if these merely possible tallers do not exist (if they are merely possible) and assuming, *contra* Quine[23], that such merely possible tallers have clear identity conditions provided by all their real predicates.

(3vs.k2-k3) What about the concept of God? Following the first version of Anselm's ontological argument, it seems possible to think of God as not existing. If Kant's objections aim at proving that we can think of God as not existing, we have already conceded this possibility. Yet, if they aim at proving that we can think of God as not existing without running into any contradiction and if Anselm's first version's assumptions are true, such objections do not reach any valid result. We can hold the concept of a merely possible God, of a possible God and of an existing God. In the first case, non-existence is truly predicated of a merely possible God, yet this true predication is not made true by any fact about God: it is made true by an act of abstraction made by subject. In the second case, existence *can* be truly predicated of God. In the third case, existence *must* be truly predicated of God. Anselm's first version considers the second case and it shows that, given the definition of God, existence must be predicated of Him.

In sum, it seems to be true that we can conceive of God as not existing. Yet, in God's case, this conception is false: it is not made true by any fact, given the definition of God, while the definition of God and what follows from this definition make the proposition expressed by (4) true.

I.1.4. The Mathematician and the Theologian: Gödel in defense of Anselm (and of God).

In this section, I shall summarize Gödel's ontological argument for the existence of God, I shall make some remarks about Gödel's ontological assumptions on properties and existence, I shall report some objections against Gödel's assumptions and conclusions. Furthermore, I shall summarize Anderson's revised version of Gödel's argument and some objections against this

[23] See Quine (1948) and his famous example of the possible fat man in the doorway, that I shall consider in the next chapter.

latter version. I shall neither report the proofs of the theorems, nor shall I discuss all the objections to in detail. I shall only focus on those assumptions that are relevant for this work on the notions of existence and non-existence.

First, I shall try to summarize the argument by following Sobel's reading of Gödel's axioms and theorems[24]. Let me assume S5 in order to deal with modal formulas. The operator "◊" means "it is possible that", i.e., "in some possible world it is true that"; the operator "□" means "it is necessary that", i.e., "in every possible world it is true that". Furthermore, I assume that: "x" and "y" are variables ranging over objects; "φ" and "ψ" are variables ranging over first-order properties; "P_{OS}" stands for the second-order property of being positive; "G_{OD}" stands for the first order property of being God-like; "E_{NEC}" stands for the first-order property of necessarily existing; "E_{SSENCE}" stands for the relation of being an essence of ... . Furthermore, I shall assume that "$\overline{\varphi}$" is a variable that stands for complementary properties of positive properties, i.e., for corresponding negative properties.

(gs1) $\Box\forall\varphi(P_{OS}\overline{\varphi} \leftrightarrow \sim P_{OS}\varphi)$ (axiom 1)

(gs2) $\Box\forall\varphi\forall\psi(((P_{OS}\varphi \,\&\, \Box\forall x(\varphi x \rightarrow \psi x)) \rightarrow P\psi)$ (axiom 2)

(gs3) $\Box\forall\varphi(P_{OS}\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond\exists x\varphi x)$ (theorem 1)

(gs4) $\Box\forall x(G_{OD}x \leftrightarrow \forall\varphi(P\varphi \rightarrow \varphi x))$ (definition of being God-like)

(gs5) $P_{OS}G$ (axiom 3)

(gs6) $\Box\forall\varphi(P_{OS}\varphi \rightarrow \Box P\varphi)$ (axiom 4)

(gs7) $\Box\forall\varphi\forall x(E_{SSENCE}\varphi x \leftrightarrow (\varphi x \,\&\, \forall\psi(\psi x \rightarrow \Box\forall y(\varphi y \rightarrow \psi y))))$ (definition of being an essence of ...)

(gs8) $\Box\forall x(G_{OD}x \rightarrow E_{SSENCE}G_{OD}x)$ (theorem 2)

(gs9) $\Box\forall x(E_{NEC}x \leftrightarrow \forall\varphi(E_{SSENCE}\varphi x \rightarrow \Box\exists x\varphi x))$ (definition of necessarily existing)

(gs10) $P_{OS}E_{NEC}$ (axiom 5)

(gs11) $\Box\exists xG_{OD}x$ (theorem 3)

(gs12) $\Box\exists x(\forall y(G_{OD}y \leftrightarrow y = x) \,\&\, E_{NEC}x)$ (corollary 1, not present in Gödel's proof)

The assumptions state that: it is necessary that, for any property, the complementary of that property is positive iff that it is not true that that property is positive (gs1 – axiom 1); it is necessary, for any two properties, that, if one of them is positive *and* it is necessary that, for any object, if that object exemplifies the former property, then it exemplifies the latter too, then the latter property is positive too (gs2 – axiom 2); it is necessary, for any object, that that object is God-like iff, for any property, if that property is positive, then it is exemplified by that object (gs4 – definition of being God-like); the property of being God-like is positive (gs5 – axiom 3); it is necessary, for any property, that, if that property is positive, it is necessarily positive (gs6 – axiom 4); it is necessary, for any object and any property, that that property is an essence of that object

[24] See Sobel (1987) and Sobel (2004): 117-138.

iff, for any property exemplified by that object, it is necessary that the essential property implies it (gs7 – definition of being an essence of ...); it is necessary, for any object, that that object necessarily exists iff, for any property, if that property is essential to that object, then it is necessary that there is an object that instantiates it (in other words, an object is necessarily existent iff its essential properties are necessarily instantiated) (gs9 - definition of necessarily existing); the property of necessarily existing is positive (gs10 – axiom 5).

The theorems state that: it is necessary, for any property, that, if that property is positive, then it is possibly instantiated (gs3 – theorem 1); it is necessary, for any object, that, if it is God-like, then the property of being God-like is an essence of it (gs8 – theorem 2); it is necessary that there is something that is God-like (gs11 – theorem 3); it is necessary that there is only one object that is God-like and it necessarily exists (gs12 – corollary 1). It has been shown by Sobel, Anderson and by some other authors that Gödel's assumptions and conclusions are widely questionable.

(1vs.gs1) What does it mean that some property is positive? Maybe it means that, by instantiating that property, something is more perfect than by not instantiating it. Thus, positive properties are properties that make things more perfect. It seems that they are properties that imply perfection(s). Yet, this is only one plausible possible interpretation of Gödel's thought. It is far from being clear, in this proof, what is for something to be positive.

(2vs.gs1) Anderson objects that, given axiom 1, for every property, if that property is not positive, it is necessary that its complementary property turns out to be positive. Yet there, are many properties that are indifferent with regard to positiveness. For example, if it is not positive that I have brown hair, because this property does not make me more perfect, given axiom 1, the property of not having brown hair turns out to be positive. Yet, it seems that this latter property does not make me more perfect, i.e. that it is not a positive property. Thus, there are properties for which (gs1) is not true[25].

(3vs.gs1) Are there negative properties? As we have already seen, the answer to this question is far from being obvious.

(4vs.gs2) Given axiom 2, following Sobel, it seems that every trivial property implied by any positive property, such as the properties of being self-identical or of being red or non-red, turns out to be positive. Yet, this is highly counter-intuitive.

(5vs.gs3-gs4) Given the definition of being God-like and theorem 1, it seems obvious that it is possible that there is a being with all the positive properties. Yet, this fact is not well explained. If positive properties were finite in number, in fact, it is possible to demonstrate that they are

[25] See Anderson (1990).

compossible, so that a being that instantiates all these properties is possible. Yet, Gödel does not demonstrate such compossibility, while Leibniz, in his *Supplementum*, aims at proving this fact. On the other hand, if they were infinite, as Sobel remarks[26], how is it possible to demonstrate their compossibility?

(6vs.gs2-gs5) Given both axioms 2 and 3, Sobel remarks that a disjunctive property such as the property of being God-like *or* being Devil-like would turn out to be positive[27]. Thus, a Devil-like being would have this positive property. I must confess that I do not see any trouble in this fact, at least for the sake of the argument. First, it must be proved that disjunctive properties are genuine properties. Secondly, even if a Devil-like being had the positive property of being God-like or being Devil-like and a God-like being had it and even if these two beings shared all their disjunctive properties, that Devil-like being would be different from that God-like being, because they would have different positive and non-positive non-disjunctive properties. Thus, given (gs4), it is not legitimate to prove that it is necessary that there is a Devil-like being, while it is legitimate to prove that it is necessary that there is a God-like being. On the other hand, accepting disjunctive properties, it would be possible to prove that it is impossible that there exists a being that has no positive property at all. Yet, it is possible to object that it is highly counterintuitive to admit that the property of being God-like *or* being Devil-like is a positive one. However, this objection does not undermine the argument by proving that necessarily a Devil-like being exists.

(7vs.gs5) Is the property of being God-like a positive one because it makes any being instantiating it more perfect *or* because God is the most perfect of all the beings by definition? Anselm would have accepted the second thesis and I agree with him. In fact, if we tried to justify the first thesis, we would probably have to assume that God is more perfect than any other being, i.e., that He is the most perfect of all the beings.

(8vs.gs6) Is every positive property necessarily positive? In other words: is every positive property positive in every possible world? We could imagine worlds in which the positive property of being omniscient, for example, does not make its bearer more perfect. Thus, this assumption should be justified.

(9vs.gs9) Sobel argues that, given this definition of necessarily existing, there could be a necessarily existing being without any essence. In fact, the conditional

(gs9) $\Box\forall x(\mathrm{E}_{\mathrm{NEC}}x \leftrightarrow \forall\varphi(\mathrm{E}_{\mathrm{SSENCE}}\varphi x \rightarrow \Box\exists x\varphi x))$

would be true, even if $\mathrm{E}\varphi x$ were false.

(10vs.gs9) If existence were expressed by the existential quantifier, how could we deal with beings

[26] See Sobel (2004): 121-122, 141-143.
[27] See Sobel (2004): 122-123.

that do not exist within some possible world but that truly have some properties within that world (e.g., fictional beings)?

(11vs.gs10) Why is necessary existence a positive property? Perhaps because it makes things that necessarily exist more perfect than things that contingently or impossibly exist. Moreover, it seems that necessary existence is a positive property because existence is positive too. In fact, as we have already seen, if existence were not a positive property or, in general, following Gödel, if the fact of existing were not more positive (or more perfect) than the fact of not existing, why would a being that necessarily exists be more perfect than a being that only contingently exists?

(12vs.gs) Sobel argues that the God-like being that necessarily exists, following Gödel's proof, is not identical with God, i.e., it is not (or it could be not) the worshipful being that we call "God". I shall not present Sobel's arguments for this conclusion, because this objection is not strictly connected to the topics of this work[28].

(13vs.gs) There is another relevant objection presented by Sobel that I should mention: given further theorems that follow from Gödel's proof, a modal collapse follows from the axioms. In fact, every proposition turns out to be necessarily true or (*aut*) not possibly true and every being that has an essence turns out to be necessarily existent. This is another unwelcome result of Gödel's ontological argument that I cannot analyze here[29].

However, in order to clarify some aspects of Gödel's assumptions and to deal with Sobel's objections, Anderson tries to modify Gödel's proof[30]. I shall follow Sobel's reading of this latter Gödel-Anderson's ontological argument. I shall assume all the previous symbols of (gs) with the same meanings (even though Anderson's second-order property of being positive means something different from Gödel's positivity) and all the previous assumptions about S5 and quantifiers. I shall only add the symbols "I_{MPERF}", that stands for the first-order property of being imperfect, and "E", that stands for the first-order property of existing.

(ga1) $\Box\forall\varphi(P_{OS}\varphi \leftrightarrow (\Box\forall x(\sim\varphi x \rightarrow I_{MPERF}x) \,\&\, \sim\Box\forall x(\varphi x \rightarrow I_{MPERF}x)))$ **(definition of being positive)**

(ga2) $\Box\forall\varphi\forall x(E_{SSENCE}\varphi x \leftrightarrow ((\varphi x \,\&\, \forall\psi(\Box\forall y(\varphi y \rightarrow \psi y))) \leftrightarrow \Box(Ex \rightarrow \psi x))$ **(definition of being an essence of ...)**

(ga3) $\Box\forall x(E_{NEC}x \leftrightarrow \forall\varphi(E_{SSENCE}\varphi x \rightarrow \Box\exists x\varphi x))$ (definition of necessarily existing)

(ga4) $\Box\forall x(G_{OD}x \leftrightarrow \exists\varphi(E_{SSENCE}\varphi x \,\&\, \forall\psi(\Box\forall y(\varphi x \rightarrow \psi x) \leftrightarrow P_{OS}\psi))$ **(definition of being God-like)**

(ga5) $\Box\forall\varphi(P_{OS}\varphi \rightarrow \sim P_{OS}\overline{\varphi})$ **(axiom 1)**

(ga6) $\Box\forall\varphi\forall\psi(P_{OS}\varphi \,\&\, \Box\forall x((\varphi x \rightarrow \psi x) \rightarrow P_{OS}\psi))$ (axiom 2)

(ga7) $P_{OS}G_{OD}$ (axiom 3)

(ga8) $\Box\forall\varphi(P_{OS}\varphi \rightarrow \Box P_{OS}\varphi)$ (axiom 4)

(ga9) $P_{OS}E_{NEC}$ (axiom 5)

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[28] See Sobel (1987) and Sobel 2004: 128-132.
[29] See Sobel (1987) and Sobel (2004): 132-135.
[30] See Anderson (1990).

(ga10) $\Box\forall\varphi(P_{OS}\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond\exists x\varphi x)$ (theorem 1)

(ga11) $\Box\forall x(G_{OD}x \rightarrow E_{SSENCE}G_{OD}x)$ (theorem 2)

(ga12) $\Box\exists xG_{OD}x$ (theorem 3)

The assumptions that are different from (gs) are in **bold** text.

Gödel-Anderson's ontological argument seems to clarify (1vs.gs1) and it seems to avoid (2vs.gs1), (6vs.gs2-gs5) and (13vs.gs). However, it is still open to all the other objections. Furthermore, there are at least two peculiar objections against this version.

(1vs.ga3) The definition of necessarily existing implies that it is necessary that there is a being that has some essential property, i.e., that in every possible world there must be something that instantiates this property. Yet, it does not guarantee that it is always the same being in every possible world[31].

(2vs.ga12) There is no uniqueness condition. Thus, there could be many God-like beings.

In order to avoid the modal collapse (13vs.gs) and the problem of disjunctive properties (6vs.gs2-gs5), Hájek introduces some emendations that I shall only mention[32]. In particular, he suggests that we should replace (gs1) and (gs2) with

(gh1) $\forall\varphi\forall\psi(((P_{OS}\varphi \,\&\, \Box\forall x(\varphi x \rightarrow \psi x)) \rightarrow \sim P_{OS}\overline{\psi})$

and (gs4) with

(gh4) $\forall x(G_{OD}x \leftrightarrow \forall\varphi(\Box\varphi x \leftrightarrow \exists\psi(\Box\forall y(\psi y \rightarrow \varphi y) \,\&\, P_{OS}\psi)))$

I cannot evaluate here Hájek's version, because I cannot discuss the whole problem of the modal collapse. It seems that this version, as well as Anderson's one, clarifies (1vs.gs1) and avoids (2vs.gs1), (6vs.gs2-gs5) and (13vs.gs). Yet, Hájek does not deal with all the other objections.

I.1.5. From God to Existence: some Proto-Conclusive Remarks.

After having examined these versions of the ontological argument, it is time to summarize some of the data and of the problems that we have found out. This discussion have been guided by four questions, although I have made further remarks about the validity of the arguments and the truth of the premises:

(I) what is the concept of existence involved in these versions of the ontological argument?

(II) What is the relationship between mental and real existence?

(III) Is existence a first- or a second-order property? Is it a property at all?

(IV) What is the relationship between subjective conceivability, general conceivability, possibility

[31] See Sobel (2004): 143.

[32] See Hájek (2002). I only mention the version of the emendations without variable domains.

and the ontological status of mental objects?

As regards question (I), it seems that existence is considered a perfection by Descartes, while Anselm only thinks that things that really exist are greater (more perfect) than things that do not really exist, i.e., that exist only in our thought. It seems to me that it is not necessary to justify Anselm's argument by using Descartes' notion of existence as perfection, even though this latter thesis gives some kind of justification to Anselm's thesis (perhaps not a very good one). However, in order to make such versions of the ontological argument sound, it seems necessary to interpret and justify the connection between existence and perfection.

In both Anselm's and Descartes' arguments, real existence is considered a first-order property, i.e., a property of objects (question III). On the other hand, Gödel thinks of existence as something expressed by quantifiers: things that exist are things that are part of some domain of quantification. Thus, if it is possible that there is something that instantiates some property, there is at least one possible world in which that thing exists, even though that world needs not to be our (actual) world. Necessary existence is considered a positive property, i.e., a property that seems to make things instantiating it more perfect. However, necessary existence seems not to be a genuine first-order property: to state that something necessarily exists is logically equivalent to state that, in every possible world, there is something that instantiates some property (in God's case, the property of being God-like). Yet, what is the difference between genuine first-order properties and non-genuine ones? It seems to me that genuine first-order properties are properties that are instantiated by objects and that are informative: objects can instantiate them or not instantiate them and the instantiation of such properties gives some information about objects. Non-genuine first-order properties are trivial properties: their instantiation by an object is simply implied by *there being* that object (maybe they are analytically contained within the notion of object). Gödel's necessary existence seems to be both trivial and informative: it is trivial, because it is simply expressed by the existential quantifier and the necessity operator; it is informative, because things that have it are made perfect (or more perfect) by the instantiation of this property.

Kant's objections against the thesis that existence is a first-order property are not acceptable, at least according to my perspective. However, many philosophers follow Kant's line and try to justify and/or to slightly modify in different ways his theses about existence. In the next chapter, I shall consider this latter line of thought, that seems to be shared by Moore, Broad, Russell, Frege, Quine, and many other authors.

With regard to question (II), in order to make Anselm's arguments sound, it seems necessary to reply to objections (8vs.a'5)-(11vs.a'5). Yet, in order to reply to such objections, it

seems necessary to develop a theory of non-existent objects, i.e., of objects that do not really exist but that nevertheless seem to have some properties and/or to which it seems that we attribute some properties.

Finally, with regard to question (IV), it seems necessary to describe and justify the connections between conceivability and possibility, even though the notion of possibility is not required by Anselm's first version of the ontological argument. I have already distinguished between three different kinds of conceivability. Yet, what is the relationship between conceived objects and actual objects? Moreover, in order to make Descartes' and Gödel's arguments sound, we need to clarify the relationship between existence, necessity and possibility. Finally, is a God-like being (a being that instantiates every positive property) possible?

In the last chapter of this work, I shall try to defend the ontological argument, after having developed a general theory of existence and non-existence that tries to deal with the problems, the objections and the requests of clarification that I have discussed here.

I.2. What are we talking of? Existence and Reference

When we claim something true or false, it seems that we always claim something true or false *about* something. If I claim, for example, that I do not live in France, I claim something true *about* me. Besides, if I claim that Obama is not a politician, I state something false *about* politician. In general and only considering true propositions, if a statement expresses a true proposition that has the logical form

P*a*

(where "P" is a variable ranging over properties and "*a*" is an individual constant), then, by the rule of existential generalization, it is also true that

$\exists x$Px

The problem of the connection between the reference of terms and the existence of objects arises when we try to interpret the existential quantifier. According to *actualists*, there are (i.e., we can successfully refer to, claim something true about) only items that do exist and there is no item that does not exist: to claim that something is an item and that it is such-and-such implies that that item exists[33]. On the other hand, according to *non-actualists*, there are items (in this case, objects) that do not exist and we can claim something true *about* them (we can successfully refer to them and truly state that they are such-and-such). Before considering some varieties of actualism and non-actualism, I shall introduce and discuss some data that such theories aim at explaining. Further data will be introduced in the next sections of this chapter and in the next two chapters.

(datum1) (*existential propositions*) There are statements that seem to affirm or deny the (tenseless)[34] existence of objects, such as

(5) lions exist;

(6) unicorns do not exist;

(7) Obama exists;

(8) Sherlock Holmes does not exist;

(9) this exists (e.g., when I point at my laptop);

(10) this does not exist (e.g., when I see a mirage in the desert and I realize that the object of the

[33] Here I use "items" in order to designate all the entities, i.e., objects, properties, and so on, even if my discussion in this chapter is restricted to objects.
[34] I shall consider the question of tensed existence in chapter I.4.

mirage does not exist);

(11) I exist.

These statements seem to express true propositions. Yet, what makes such propositions true? What are their logical structures? And what are the referents of their logical subjects?[35]

(datum2) (*ambiguities concerning non-existents*) If we now consider the proposition expressed by

(12) Sherlock Holmes is a detective,

it turns out that there seem to be reasons for considering it true and reasons for considering it false. It is true because, according to Conan Doyle's stories, there is a detective who is named "Sherlock Holmes" and is such-and-such. Yet, it is false because there is no real detective named "Sherlock Holmes" who has all the features of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.

(datum3) (*ontological status of non-existents*) It seems that

(13) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character

expresses a true proposition, even though the proposition expressed by (8) seems to be true.

Thus, we can see how the paradox of non-existence arises: if the proposition expressed by (13) is true and if the rule of the introduction of the existential quantifier is valid, then there is something that is a fictional character. Yet, if the proposition expressed by (8) is true and if there are only objects that do exist, there is no such thing. Thus, there is and there is not something that is a fictional character. In order to deal with this paradox, non-actualists deny that there are only objects that do exist, so that the meaning of "there is" is different from the meaning of "exist". On the other side, actualists deny that, by means of statements such as (8) and (13), we actually refer to objects and try to paraphrase such statements in order to make it clear that we do not.

(datum4) (*existence-entailing attributes*) In order for the proposition expressed by

(14) Obama is a politician

to be true, it must be true that (7). In general, in order for someone to be a politician, s/he has to exist. It seems that the truth of (7) is implied by the truth of (14): existence is a necessary condition for the instantiation of (at least some) properties by objects. Yet, provided that (8) is

[35] I shall set aside here the approach based on gappy propositions, according to which, roughly, propositions with empty names such as "Sherlock Holmes" do not express full propositions, but unfilled or gappy ones, that are false, following Braun (1993) and (2005), or truthvalue-less, following Adams, Dietrich (2004). For some problems concerning this view – in particular with regard to its adherence to commonsensical intuitions – see Reimer (2001a) and (2001b).

true, how do we justify the truth of (12) (at least in some respect)? Furthermore: is every property an existence-entailing one?

(datum5) (*intensional contexts*) There are verbs such as "think" or "hope" or "believe" that define contexts in which the rule of the introduction of the existential quantifier seems to fail. It is true that

(15) John thinks of a hobbit,

even if it does not follow from (15) that it is true that

(15') there is (=there exists) something that is a hobbit and that is thought of by John.

A good theory of the relationship between existence and reference has to explain and justify the truth of data (datum1)-(datum5). In the first section of this chapter (I.2.1), I shall analyze the theses of five thinkers who can be considered the fathers of all the current actualist and non-actualist options: Brentano, Frege, Russell, Moore, Meinong. In the remaining sections (I.2.2, I.2.3 and I.2.4), I shall illustrate and discuss some varieties of actualism and non-actualism.

I.2.1. Existence and Reference: the first Arguments and Problems

I.2.1.1. Brentano's Existential Presuppositions.

Developing some intuitions of Kant's, F. Brentano, in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, argues that existence adds nothing to the concept of an object. When I affirm (7), I simply affirm Obama[36]. However, if we try to reconstruct the assumptions of Brentano's argument to prove this thesis, it seems that his proof does not work:

(brentano 1.1) for every combination of two things, both things have to be affirmed (assumption);

(brentano 1.2) everything is affirmed iff that thing exists (assumption);

(brentano1.3) it is not true that (7) iff Obama is affirmed. Yet, it is true that (7) iff there is a combination of Obama and his existence (hypothesis to deny).

The first conjunct of (brentano 1.3) is denied in virtue of (brentano 1.2). The second conjunct is denied in virtue of the fact that, by (brentano 1.1) and (brentano 1.2), we simply have to affirm Obama in order to affirm his existence. Yet, (brentano 1.2) cannot be assumed, because it is what Brentano aims at proving! Thus, this argument, if we assume (brentano 1.2), is question-begging and, if we do not assume it, it is a *non sequitur*[37].

[36] See Brentano 1874 (2009): 161-162.
[37] This criticism is partly inspired by Vallicella (2001).

Concerning (8), Brentano argues that, if (8) were the denial of the combination of existence and Sherlock Holmes, then Sherlock Holmes would not be denied. In fact, when I deny some combination of two things, I do not deny those things, but only their combination. Yet, Sherlock Holmes does not exist iff he is denied. Thus, the denial of the combination of existence and Sherlock Holmes does not imply the denial of Sherlock Holmes' existence. However, it seems to me that this argument works only if we assume that: Sherlock Holmes does not exist iff he is denied. Yet, this latter thesis exactly is what has to be proved! Thus, Brentano's argument concerning (8) is question-begging or it is a *non sequitur*.

Brentano thinks that quantified propositions can be reduced to existential propositions[38]. In order to prove this, Brentano shows that the following logical equivalences are true:

(brentano aff.un.) all men are mortal iff an immortal man does not exist.

(brentano neg.un.) No stone is living iff a living stone does not exist.

(brentano aff.part.) Some man is sick iff a sick man exists.

(brentano neg.part.) Some man is not learned iff an unlearned man exists.

One might try to interpret (5) and (6) by following these equivalences and by using super-ordinate concepts. In this case, we would have:

(5brentano aff.part.) lions exist (a lion exists) iff some animal is a lion.

(6brentano neg.un.) Unicorns do not exist iff no animal is a unicorn.

As it will be argued by Frege, one could introduce the concept of being an existent as the most super-ordinate concept, whose negation does not admit any positive determination (while the negation of being an animal admits, for example, as one of its positive determinations, the concept of being a flower) and then replace the term "animal" with the term "existent". Yet, as Brentano claims, there is nothing such as the concept of existing. In order to claim something true about something, I always need to affirm some object, i.e., the same thing about which I claim something true. Thus, for example, in order to deny that there are immortal men (i.e., in order to claim that it is not the case that there are immortal men), I need to presuppose that there are men and that all men are mortal. This presupposition of existence makes some rules of the square of opposition invalid, at least when we try to use non-referring general terms.

For example, the proposition expressed by

(16) all unicorns are winged

[38] See Brentano 1874 (2009): 165.

turns out to be false, because there exists no unicorn. Yet, if (16) expresses a false proposition, according to the square of opposition, it must be true that

(17) some unicorn is non-winged,

which, according to Brentano, is equivalent to

(17brentano) a non-winged unicorn exists.

Yet, (17brentano) is false, because it is true that (6). Thus (16) and (17) are both false, even though, according to the rules of the square of opposition, they are contradictory, i.e. they cannot be both true or both false.

Elsewhere[39], Brentano claims that seemingly true propositions such as the one expressed by (13) imply the existence of poetic fictions and of characters imaginatively created by authors. This theory of *ficta* is quite confused and not well developed. Thus, I shall not analyze it. I think that Brentano's contribution to our debate lies in his acceptance of existential presuppositions for every true proposition and in his denial of existence as a property. Yet, I have tried to show that his arguments seem not to be sound.

I.2.1.2. First Interlude: the Square of Opposition and some other Actual(ist) Problems.

As we have seen, Brentano is an actualist. According to actualism,

(actualism) there are no items that do not exist[40].

Thus, we cannot quantify over non-existing objects. Yet, actualists have to deal with some problems. For example, since (6) expresses a true proposition, actualists cannot mantain that the square of opposition holds for non-denoting general terms (or, for non-actualists, for general terms that seem to denote non-existing objects). Developing some intuitions of Lambert's[41] and interpreting the square of opposition in a non-Brentanian way, it is possible to prove the general validity of this objection. Let me consider the square of opposition that concerns unicorns' being winged:

(16aff.un.) for everything, if that thing is a unicorn, then that thing is winged;

(18neg.un.) nothing is a winged unicorn;

(19aff.part.) something is a winged unicorn;

(17neg.part.) something is a unicorn and it is not winged.

[39] See Brentano 1874 (2009): 169-170.
[40] As we will see in chapter I.4, actualism is something different from modal actualism.
[41] See Lambert (1967).

Given that it is true that (6), (16aff.un.) and (18neg.un.) always express true propositions, while (19aff.part.) and (17neg.part) always express false ones. Thus, (16aff.un.) and (18neg.un.) cannot express contrary propositions, because they are both true, while contrary propositions cannot be both true. Furthermore, (19aff.part.) and (17neg.part.) cannot express subaltern propositions, respectively, of (16aff.un.) and (18neg.un.), because the superaltern does not have the same truth value of the subaltern. Finally, (19aff.part.) and (17neg.part.) cannot express subcontrary propositions, since they both express false propositions, while subcontrary propositions cannot be both false. Actualists can reply that we can only construct squares of oppositions out of denoting general terms or that the square of opposition only holds with regard to contradictory propositions. Yet, these seem to be too strong restrictions.

Strawson suggests that we should interpret the square of opposition as follows[42]:

(16aff.un.strawson) there is nothing that is a unicorn and that is not winged *and* there is at least one thing that is a unicorn *and* there is at least one thing that is not winged;

(18neg.un.strawson) there is nothing that is a winged unicorn *and* there is at least one thing that is a unicorn *and* there is at least one thing that is winged;

(19aff.part.strawson) there is at least one winged unicorn *or* (*vel*) there are no unicorns *or* (*vel*) there is nothing that is winged;

(17neg.part.strawson) there is at least one unicorn that is not winged *or* (*vel*) there are no unicorns *or* (*vel*) there is nothing that is not winged.

Since both (16aff.un.strawson) and (18neg.un.strawson) are false and both (19aff.part.strawson) and (17neg.part strawson) are true, Strawson does not preserve the law of subalternity, according to which (16aff.un.) and (19aff.part) must have the same truth-value, as well as (18neg.un.) and (17neg.part.). Furthermore, the second and the third disjuncts in (19aff.part.strawson) and (17neg.part.strawson) seem to be suspiciously *ad hoc*: nothing implies in our square of opposition that unicorns might not exist, in order to make particular statements true.

Rescher argues that actualists cannot justify the truth values of some modal propositions and of existential counterfactuals[43]. For example, if we allow that there are things that possibly exist and that do not exist, we have to allow that there are things that do not exist.

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[42] See Strawson (1952): 176-178.

[43] See Rescher (1959): 160-162. I cannot dwell here on the logical definitions of existence provided by free logicians and, more generally, by logicians wishing to reveal the tacit existential presuppositions of logical systems. See Leonard (1956), Rescher (1957), (1959), Hintikka (1959), Lambert (1958), (1961), (1962), (1963a), (1963b), (1964), (1965). See also Lambert (1986) and (1987).

Finally, actualists have to paraphrase statements such as (6), (8), (10), (13), (15), in order to maintain that they are true and that they are not about non-existent objects. There is no object that does not exist. Thus, there is no non-existent object that has properties. Concerning (6), the form of this paraphrase should be:

(act.par. of (6)) (6) iff *p*

where *p* expresses some proposition that does not commit us to non-existent objects, while the truth of (6) seems to commit us to them.

Yet, it seems that such attempts to paraphrase (6) are ambiguous. In fact, from an actualist viewpoint, it is legitimate either to claim that the proposition expressed by *p* has the same logical structure as the proposition expressed by (6) – i.e., they express the same proposition that has the logical structure expressed by *p* – and that such a logical structure seems less ambiguous when we state *p*, *or* that they have two different logical structures, that are nevertheless logically equivalent. In the first case, non-actualists can reply that, by stating (6), we simply mean something different from what we mean by stating *p*. In the second case, non-actualists can provide some counterexamples to the logical equivalence between the logical structure of the proposition expressed by (6) and the logical structure of the proposition expressed by *p*, in order to demonstrate that it does not hold. Yet, in the second case, it would be possible to quantify over non-existent objects. Thus, many actualists choose the first strategy. On the other hand, with regard to (5), (7) and (9), both strategies seem available, as I shall try to demonstrate in what follows. These are only general remarks concerning some problems and strategies of actualism[44].

I.2.1.3. Frege's Second-Order Concepts and Designata.

According to G. Frege, philosophers should distinguish between two different meanings of the predicate "exist": it can mean the same thing which is meant by the predicate "being actual", so that existence, following this interpretation, can be considered a property of objects (a first-order property), but "exist" can be used with another meaning too. Since numbers are not actual, but they do exist, logicians are primarily interested in this latter meaning[45]. I shall use the term "property" instead of the Fregean term "concept", provided that Fregean concepts are not subjective entities and they are the referents of predicates.

However, in his *Foundations of Arithmetic*, Frege argues that there is a parallelism between our uses of the word "one" and of the predicate "exist" (at least following its second meaning). The argument goes as follows:

[44] See also Parsons (2008).
[45] See Frege 1893 (1964): 24.

(frege 1.1) from a logical viewpoint, the word "one" does not stand for a property of things;

(frege 1.2) from a logical viewpoint, the use of the word "one" is similar to the use of the predicate "exist";

(frege 1.3) two words have similar logical uses iff they have the same logical status;

(frege 1.4) thus, the predicate "exist" does not stand for a property of things.

In order to argue for the premise (frege 1.1), Frege points out that: if "one" referred to a property of things, everything would possess it, so that it would be a non-informative property; the word "one" does not admit plural, while genuine first-order predicates admit it; the meaning of "one" is different from the meaning of "unitary", that can be used as first-order predicate. Furthermore, Frege argues that, if I state that

(20) Venus has 0 moons,

I do not state anything about some object that is one of Venus' moons, because such an object does not exist[46]. However, Frege can justify this latter thesis only if he accepts an actualist interpretation of quantification over objects, according to which we can only quantify over existing objects. As I have already shown, it is obviously not legitimate to argue that actualism is right (i.e., that there are no items that do not exist) under actualist assumptions. If we do not accept actualism, we can argue that (20) has the same meaning as

(20non-act.) all the objects that are Venus' moons do not exist.

In this latter case, we claim something true about non-existent objects.
However, the most relevant premise is the one expressed by (frege 1.2). Frege argues that the affirmation of existence is "nothing but the denial of number nought"[47]. Thus, for example, (5) means the same as

(5frege) it is not the case that the property of being a lion has 0 instances,

while (6) means the same as

(6frege) it is the case that the property of being a unicorn has 0 instances.

This seems to assume that we are talking of existent instances of such properties: Frege's thesis is still justified under actualist assumptions. In fact, under non-actualist assumptions, from

(6non-act.) all unicorns do not exist

[46] See Frege 1884 (1960): 40-59.
[47] See Frege 1884 (1960): 64-65.

it is *not* legitimate to infer that

(21) there is no unicorn.

The property of being a unicorn might have at least one non-existent instance. On the other hand, what is expressed by (5) is that the property of being a lion has at least one existent instance. This latter instance, that is a lion, bears the first-order property of existing. Thus, under non-actualist assumptions, the premise (frege 1.2) can turn out to be false. Frege does not provide independent reasons for accepting the actualist perspective.

However, developing Frege's solution, one might claim that the predicate "exists" stands for the property of having at least one (existent) instance, while its negation stands for the property of having 0 (existent) instances. Such properties are properties of properties, i.e., second-order properties. One difficulty immediately arises: if, according to Frege, the expression "the property of being a unicorn" does not stand for a property, but for a property-correlate (a concept-correlate, in Frege's terms)[48], and if property-correlates are objects, existence turns out to be a property of objects. Existence is not a property of ordinary objects, but of objects that are property-correlates. Yet, it is possible to deal with this objection by accepting a Russellian view of properties, according to which they do not turn out to be objects when they instantiate other properties.

Furthermore, Frege's thesis seems quite problematic in dealing with

(22) unicorns are mythical entities, hence they do not exist.

If (22) expresses a true proposition, the property of being a unicorn is instantiated by something that does not exist and that nevertheless is a mythical entity. According to Frege, propositions expressed by sentences containing non-denoting terms do not have any truth-value, at least if we do not use them within intensional contexts. In this latter case, the non-denoting terms denote their "primary" senses (the ones they have within extensional contexts). Yet, (22) is not implicitly contained within any intensional context: it seems to express something that is simply true. Something similar is expressed by (13), that contains one non-denoting singular term. Thus, from Frege's actualist perspective, intensional contexts can be introduced with regard to (12) and (16) (e.g., if I claimed that, *in Greek mythology*, all unicorns are winged), but not with regard to (13) and (22).

Before dealing with statements containing proper names, I wish to consider one further argument of Frege's, that has already been introduced. In his 1884 *Dialogue with Pünjer on Existence*, Frege claims that the property of being an existent can be considered the most super-ordinate

[48] I shall consider the question of property-correlates in chapter II.1.

property, that admits of no contrary[49]. This is the most radical expression of Frege's actualism. A non-actualist could accept the logical equivalence between the propositions expressed by (5) and by

(5act.frege) something existent is a lion.

Yet, according to non-actualists, it does not follow from this equivalence that existence is the most super-ordinate concept, that admits of no contrary. One of the positive determinations of not existing, for example, could be the property of being fictional.

Accepting that existence admits of no contrary and in order to show that existence provides no information about objects, Frege argues that we can replace the property of existing with the property of being self-identical[50]. Thus, (5) can be paraphrased by

(5frege self-id.1) some lions are identical with themselves;

(5frege self.id.2) something identical with itself is a lion.

Nevertheless, it seems that (5) states something different from such paraphrases. If we accept the actualist thesis of self-identity of items according to which

(act. self-id.) everything exists iff it is self-identical,

and if we accept that two coextensive predicates stand for the same property, we can agree with Frege. However, in this latter case, existence as self-identity turns out to be a first-order property. Yet, non-actualists are not forced to accept (act. self-id.). Unicorns are different from hobbits, Sherlock Holmes is different from Mr. Pickwick, but unicorns and Sherlock Holmes are identical with themselves and they nevertheless do not exist.

Finally, we have to consider (7) and (8) from a Fregean view. They seem to claim that

(7frege) the word "Obama" denotes something;

(8frege) the expression "Sherlock Holmes" does not denote anything, it is an empty sound,

and the fact that our words denote something is a presupposition of their use[51]. "Sherlock Holmes" can denote a sense within some intensional context. Yet, as we have already seen, this thesis turns out to be unacceptable with statements such as (13). Furthermore, it can be shown that singular existence is not identical with names' having denotations[52]. Obama could exist, even without being thus named. Let me imagine a situation where our Obama is not thus named and

[49] See the translated text in Frege (1979): 63-64.
[50] See the translated text in Frege (1979): 62.
[51] See the translated text in Frege (1979): 60.
[52] See, for example, Forgie (1972): 260-261. For the defense of a thesis similar to the one of Frege's, see Thomasson (2008).

where there is no object named "Obama", even if our Obama exists. Thus, (7frege) turns out to be false, even though Obama exists. Frege would concede this point and add that, in this latter case, there would be another statement concerning the proper name used to denote that object. Yet, since names are used within communities of speakers, how could it be true that that object exists, if it had no name at all? There could be some statement such as (9). Yet, if no one saw our Obama and Obama did not recognise his own existence by claiming something such as (11), would Obama be non-existent? Thus, it seems to me that the existence of an object is not logically equivalent to some linguistic fact concerning the name (or the indexical) that we use to designate that object. The statement (7frege) expresses a true proposition iff it is true that there is an existent object that is named "Obama".

Furthermore, a non-actualist might reply that the expression "Sherlock Holmes" denotes something that does not exist. We can presuppose that proper names (and words in general) denote something. Yet, it turns out to be problematic to presuppose that they only denote existents. Actualists should demonstrate that non-existent objects are not the legitimate referents of proper names and/or that they are not self-identical and/or that they cannot instantiate properties and/or that it is not legitimate to quantify over them[53].

I.2.1.4. Russell, On Deleting (non-existents).

In his 1903 work *The Principles of Mathematics*, B. Russell claims that being is different from existence[54]. Being can be predicated of every object of thought, of every countable thing, while existence is only predicated of objects that exist. Thus, Pegasus *is*, but it does *not exist*, while Obama *is* and *exists*. Following Frege, in his article on *The existential import of propositions*[55], he argues that existence can be treated in two different ways: it can be considered equivalent to, for example, being spatio-temporally located; from the logical viewpoint, however, it is equivalent to some other thing, since, when we state that some class exists, we do not state that it is spatio-temporally located, but that it has at least one member. In his *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, Russell seems to reject this latter view too[56].

Concerning Russell's view of existence, I shall analyze his well-known article *On Denoting*[57] and some parts of *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*. In this latter text, Russell states that, if existence is considered a first-order property, then the following syllogism turns out to be valid:

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[53] For further discussions on Frege's view of existence, see Dummett (1993): 277-307. For another interesting objection concerning the existence of properties in the Fregean (and Russellian) view of existence, see McGinn (2000): 24-26. For a recent defense of the second-order property view of existence against McGinn's objections, see Katzav (2008).

[54] See Russell 1903 (1996): 449-451.

[55] See Russell (1905a) in Russell (2003): 77-80.

[56] See Russell 1918-1919 (2010): 77.

[57] See Russell (1905b) in Russell (1956): 39-56.

(ex. syll.) Greeks exist. Socrates is a Greek. Thus: Socrates exists.

The first premise can be interpreted with an universal quantifier. In this case, the syllogism seems to be valid. Yet, according to Russell, it is *not* valid: I cannot deduce the existence of anything from its attributes. However, I do not see where the invalidity lies. In fact, if the property of being Greek is an existence-entailing property, we can deduce the existence of all the objects that instantiate it. It is true that there can be Greeks that do not exist. Yet, in this latter case, we might state that non-existent Greeks do not instantiate the property of being Greek and that they have some different kind of relation with this property. If we interpret the first premise with the existential quantifier, this syllogism is as invalid as any other syllogism of the same logical form. For the same reasons, if I state, for example, that at least one Greek is a painter and that Socrates is a Greek, it does *not* follow that Socrates is a painter. However, there are other reasons that ground Russell's denial of existence as a first-order property. I shall not quote them now, because I shall analyze them within the Russell-Meinong debate.

While Russell, presupposing the actualist reading of quantifiers, seems to consider (5) and (6) respectively equivalent to

(5russell) there is at least one thing that is a lion,

(6russell) there is nothing that is a unicorn,

the most interesting part of his proposal is the theory of definite descriptions, that is used in order to deal with (7) and (8). According to Russell, not every grammatical proper name is a logical proper name. Logical proper names, in fact, presuppose their *designata*, while many grammatical proper names do not presuppose them. Indexicals, for example, when they name actual objects of senses, are logical proper names[58]. Yet, "Obama" and "Sherlock Holmes" are not logical proper names: they are abbreviations of definite descriptions, such as "the P", where "P" is replaced by a predicate or by a conjunction of predicates that uniquely defines something. In order for a sentence with some definite description to express a true proposition, that definite description must satisfy two conditions: the uniqueness and the existence conditions. Thus, when we state that

(23) Michelle Obama's husband in 2013 is American,

we presuppose that there is (there exists) at least and at most one husband of Michelle Obama's in 2013 and that he is American. Thus, if "Obama" abbreviates the definite description "Michelle Obama's husband in 2013", by stating (7), we state that

[58] See Russell 1918-1919 (2010): 28-30.

(7russell) it is the case that there is at least and at most one thing that is Michelle Obama's husband in 2013,

and this seems to express a true proposition. On the other hand, by stating (8) and by accepting that "Sherlock Holmes" abbreviates the definite description "the detective who lives in London and who is one of Watson's friends", we state that

(8russell) it is *not* the case that there is at least and at most one thing that is a detective and that lives in London and that is one of Watson's friends,

and this seems to express a true proposition too. Thus, existence is a property of propositional functions, namely, from an ontological viewpoint, a property of properties (or of conjunctions of properties)[59].

A definite description must individuate one property (or one set of properties) that is uniquely instantiated by one individual, provided that that individual exists. It is worth noticing that, by denying a sentence containing a definite description, one might deny the clause of existence and/or the clause of uniqueness. This point will be deepened when I shall examine Quine's treatment of non-existent objects. However, it is difficult to accept that, whenever one states that (7), one has in mind a property (or a set of properties) that uniquely defines Obama and that one states something about that property (or that set of properties). It is difficult to affirm that, in natural language, we do not directly talk of an object. Yet, Russell could reply that this is a defect of natural language and that a logical language can eliminate it. However, there might be many definite descriptions for Obama, which satisfy the uniqueness clause. Provided that there is only one husband of Michelle Obama's in 2013 and that there is only one U.S. President in 2013, (7) is legitimately paraphrased by both

(7russell-1) there is at least and at most one husband of Michelle Obama's in 2013;

(7russell-2) there is at least and at most one U.S. President in 2013.

Thus, (7) might be equivalent to (7russell-1) or (*vel*) (7russell-2). Yet, provided that there might be only one man on earth (Obama), so that "the man" would be a valid definite description of Obama's, (7) would be adequately paraphrased by

(7russell-3) there is at least and at most one man.

Does (7russell-3) adequately paraphrase (7)? This seems to be highly counterintuitive. In order to state that (7) is adequately paraphrased by (7russell), we have to pick out one definite

[59] See Russell 1918-1919 (2010): 66.

description that is only applicable to Obama in every possible situation. It seems that, when we state (7), we do not always have in mind this latter definite description. Finally, Russell seems to presuppose the actualist thesis and not to explain what is for something to exist. This latter point will be clearer after having analyzed sentences concerning non-existent objects.

In fact, (12) turns out to express a false proposition. I accept that there is a sense for which this latter remark is true. Yet, I think that there is also a sense for which (12) expresses a true proposition. According to Russell, (12) expresses a false proposition because it is adequately paraphrased by

(12russell) there is at least and at most one thing that is a detective who lives in London and is one of Watson's friends and that thing is a detective,

and the existence clause is not satisfied. There are some problems with this approach. First, it seems that, if we assume the fact that Sherlock Holmes is a detective as expressed by Sherlock Holmes' description, (12) turns out to be an analytic proposition, even though a false one[60]. Yet, it seems that (12) provides new information about Sherlock Holmes: it does not state anything that is assumed within the description of Sherlock Holmes. Secondly, all fictional entities turn out to be indistinguishable. In fact, if every statement about fictional entities is false, it is also false that

(24) Sherlock Holmes is different from Pegasus.

Thirdly, in order for (13) to express a true proposition, we have to presuppose Sherlock Holmes' existence, that seems to be denied by his being a fictional character.

However, there is a sense for which, according to Russell, (12) and (13) seems to express true propositions. In fact, if there is a secondary occurrence of the definite description within some intensional context, (12) turns out to be adequately paraphrased by

(12russell int.cont.) (in the story *a*) there is at least and at most one thing that is a detective who lives in London and is one of Watson's friends and that thing is a detective,

and this seems to express a true proposition. I wish to remark that (12russell int.cont.) seems to assume that there are fictional contexts, even though Russellian actualists might not accept this assumption. If there were no such contexts, in fact, this solution would seem suspiciously *ad hoc*.

Furthermore, accepting fictional contexts, one might eliminate the story operator and state that (12russell int.cont.) can be paraphrased by

(12russell int.cont.') there is at least and at most one thing that is a detective that lives in London and is one of Watson's friends *in the story a* and that is a detective *in the story a*.

[60] See, for these criticisms, Kripke (1972).

The story operator would turn out to be redundant. In order to deny that (12russell int.cont.') adequately paraphrase (12russell int.cont.), one has to deny that there are properties such as the property of being such-and-such *in the story a*. Thus, one has to assume that every property, when it is truly instantiated by something, is an existence-entailing one (while the property of being such-and-such *in the story a* is not an existence-entailing one). However, if we assumed this latter thesis, how could we deal with (13)? In fact, the property of being fictional seems to be a non-existence-entailing property! Russellians might deny these properties, by stating that (13) is adequately paraphrased by

(13russell int.cont.) it is not the case that there is at least and at most one thing that is a detective that lives in London and is one of Watson's friends and, within some intensional context, there is at least and at most one thing that is a detective that lives in London and is one of Watson's friends.

However, (13russell int.cont.) seems to quantify over intensional contexts, that are suspicious entities: do such contexts exist or not? Admittedly, we could replace this latter quantification with the intensional operator "in the world of fiction", that defines one and only one intensional context. However, in this way, it would be difficult to provide some uniqueness condition for Sherlock Holmes. As we shall see in dealing with C. F. Williams' theory and in the next chapter, the world of fiction is extremely varied, so that there might be no adequate definite descriptions for Sherlock Holmes.

I add one further, brief remark about Russell's theory, in order to clarify the relationship between logical proper names and the existence of their *designata*. Dealing with (9) and (10), Russell seems to claim that (9) is always true and (10) is always false when the indexical "this" stands for a sense-datum, an actual object of perception. However, there are other uses of "this" that do not make this latter indexical a logical proper name. When I claim that the object of this sense-datum exists or does not exist, I do not claim anything that is always true or always false. In this latter case, following Russell, "this" should be replaced with some definite description.

I.2.1.5. "Moore" Senses of Existence and Imagination.

Even though G. E. Moore seems to distinguish between the property of being real and the (supposed property) of existing, he seems to accept that "exists" cannot be considered a predicate that stands for an attribute (in our terms, for a property)[61]. He argues that there are at least two differences between existential statements and non-existential ones. First, we should consider the following statements:

[61] See Moore (1936).

(25) tame lions growl;

(26) tame lions exist.

According to Moore, it is perfectly meaningful to add quantifiers to (25), so that it is meaningful to state that all/some/most tame lions growl. On the other hand, it is meaningless to add quantifiers to (26), except for the quantifier "some". (26) means that some tame lions exist, i.e., that some lions are tame. Following Moore and considering the corresponding negative statements, one could state that it is meaningful to assert that all/some/most tame lions do not growl, while it is meaningless to assert that all/some/most tame lions do not exist. However, by stating that some tame lions do not exist, we could mean that some tame lions are imaginary. Yet, this is another sense of the predicate "exist", that is different from the sense considered in (26) and in its corresponding negative statement. I think that a non-actualist can do justice to the fact that we can claim that all/most/some tame lions exist/do not exist. Moore's objection holds only if our quantifiers range over existent beings.

Moore notices that there is one further difference between (5) and some statement such as

(27) lions growl.

This latter statement can be analyzed as follows:

(27moore) for at least two values of *x*, it is true that *x* is a lion and *x* growls,

while (5) can be analyzed as

(5moore) for at least two values of *x*, it is true that *x* is a lion.

Thus, existence can be paraphrased away by our logical analysis of (5). However, if we admit that there are non-existent lions, existence cannot be paraphrased away. Yet, as I have already claimed, this latter criticism has in turn to face at least one problem: in order for something to be a lion, it must exist, so that the property of being a lion seems to be an existence-entailing property. I shall deal with this problem in the second part of this work.

With regard to (10) and (11), Moore states that these statements are meaningful and that they seem to imply the use of some logical predicate (i.e., in Moore's terminology, of some predicate that stands for some attribute). When (10) is used in order to refer to something that is represented by my sense-datum, it is equivalent to

(10moore-1) this sense-datum is the sense-datum of a physical object,

and, since it is true and meaningful that

(28) this might not have existed,

the statement (11) is meaningful too, though contingently false. Furthermore, if we talk of the sense-datum itself, (10) might mean that

(10moore-2) this sense-datum exists.

Yet, it seems to me that this use of the predicate "exist" is equivalent to the use of the predicate "is real".

However, if existence in (5) and in (26) is different from the property of being real, since non-existence is different from the property of being imaginary, we might try to interpret (8), (12) and (13) by analyzing what happens when we *imagine* something to be the case[62]. Following Moore (1933), (8) might mean that

(8moore) Sherlock Holmes is not real

and this, provided that (13) expresses a true proposition and that Conan Doyle is the creator of Sherlock Holmes, is equivalent to

(8moore-1) in sentences in which the symbol "Sherlock Holmes" occurs, Conan Doyle wasn't telling us about any real man, to whom he was referring by that name.

Trying to interpret (12) from Moore (1933)'s viewpoint, with regard to Conan Doyle, it is legitimate to state that

(12moore-1) the man called "Sherlock Holmes", having such-and-such characteristics, about whom I am telling this story, has the characteristic of being a detective.

If we refer to Sherlock Holmes, we can state that

(12moore-2) the man called "Sherlock Holmes", about whom Conan Doyle tells stories and with such-and-such characteristics assigned to him by Conan Doyle in those stories, has the characteristic of being a detective assigned to him in those stories.

I shall not discuss such theses. Yet, I think that Moore's contributions consist in his having dealt in detail with the thesis that there are two meanings of the predicate "exist" and that, at least with regard to statements (6) and (8), it seems legitimate to use it as a first-order predicate (referring to the property of being real) in a meaningful way and in his having recognized that there might be at least two ways in which something is such-and-such: such-and-such in reality and such-and-such in some work of fiction, in such a way that, in that work, there are some

[62] See Moore (1933).

properties that are assigned to it[63].

I.2.1.6. Second Interlude: Existence and Contradiction.

There is a well-known argument against existence as a first-order property that I should mention. This argument is accepted, among others, by Ayer[64] and Broad[65]. Turning to (5), (6), (7), (8), it is possible to state that (5) and (7) express mere tautological propositions, while (6) and (8) express self-contradictory propositions. In fact, (5) and (7) should be read as: there is something that is a lion and there is such a thing; there is something that is Obama and there is such a thing. On the other hand, (6) and (8) should be read as: there is something that is a unicorn and there is no such thing; there is something that is Sherlock Holmes and there is no such thing.

Yet, as we have already noticed, non-actualists might deny that the meaning of the first "there is" is identical with the meaning of the second "there is": while the first means that there is at least one object that is such-and-such, the second might mean that that object exists.

Furthermore, even accepting the actualist thesis, G. Nakhnikian and W. C. Salmon, considering (5) and (6), argue that Ayer's and Broad's argument is not sound. If, by (5), I claimed that something is a lion, this would not be a mere tautology. In fact, I would state that it is not true that, for everything, if that thing is a lion, then that thing does not exist, i.e., that there is at least one thing that is a lion. On the other hand, (6) might be read as: for everything, if that thing is a unicorn, then it does not exist. Ayer's and Broad's argument against that informativeness of existential statements assumes, in (5), that, for everything, if that thing is a lion *and it exists*, then it exists, and, in (6), that, for everything, if that thing is a unicorn *and it exists*, then it does not exist. These assumptions are not legitimate when we affirm or deny the existence of things[66].

I.2.1.7. Meinong's Realms of Non-Existence.

A. Meinong is perhaps the most influential among non-actualist philosophers. I cannot consider all his theses concerning the theory of objects. I shall only examine some principles of this theory and what follows from these principles in order to deal with our initial data[67]. Meinong

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[63] Pears (1967) and Griffiths (1975) make other interesting remarks about Moore's position, that I cannot examine here. Partly following Alston (1960) and Pears (1967) and somehow anticipating Sommers' theses (see below), Peetz (1982) argues that there are some informative uses of the predicate "exist": for example, we could claim that it is true that King Arthur exists as long as we predicate something of the world of legend (i.e., that it has someone such as King Arthur) and we could claim that it is true that tame tigers exist as long as we predicate something of the real world (i.e., that it has stame tigers).

[64] See Ayer 1936 (1971): 26.

[65] See Broad (1939), in Broad (1953): 182-183.

[66] See Nakhnikian and Salmon (1957). For further discussions on this argument, see, among others, Kiteley (1964) and Child and Goldberg (1970).

[67] Concerning Meinong's philosophy, see, for example, Findlay (1933), Grossmann (1974), Lambert (1983) and Orilia (2005): 81-92. Meinong was deeply influenced by Bernard Bolzano's distinction between presence in the universe and existence (roughly, every item is present in the universe, but not every item exists, e.g., mathematical items do not exist) (see Bolzano (1837)), Brentano's intentionality thesis and Kamizierz Twardowski's distinction between

accepts as a datum that

(dm6) we can single out, refer to, think of objects that do not exist.

If this datum is true, then it seems that actualism is in serious troubles. However, how should we judge the truth of (dm6)? Non-existent objects, such as Sherlock Holmes or Pegasus, seem to be different from one another, even though they do not exist. Namely, it seems that two non-existent objects can be different iff they bear different properties. Furthermore, it seems that they bear properties: in fact, they are at least fictional, for example, or mythical. They are also detectives, winged horses, and so on, and this seems to be the case even though they do not exist. Thus, we can claim something true about them, both concerning their properties, so that (12) seems to express a true proposition, and their ontological status, as in (13). If there were no such objects (i.e., if such objects were not objects), *what* would we think, thinking about them?

Thus, Meinong, accepting (dm6), argues that: the *Sosein* of an object (its being such-and-such) does not depend on its *Sein* (its being or non-being and its kind of being) (principle of the independence of *Sosein*); objects are beyond being and non-being (principle of the indifference of objects); we can assume whatever property or set of properties we want in order to constitute an object (freedom of assumption). Thus, in general, Meinong seems to deny (datum4): there is no existence-entailing property.

With regard to (5)-(8), Meinong's theses are somehow difficult to understand. According to Meinong, objects can have at least two different kinds of being: existence and/or subsistence. Concrete objects exist and subsist, while objectives (the objects of thoughts, similar to states of affairs or propositions) subsist or do not subsist (e.g., the objective that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, expressed by (12), subsists, so that it is true that (12), while the objectives expressed by statements that are false do not subsist) and ideal objects only subsist. Furthermore, there are objects that are not determined with regard to being or non-being and there are objects that are not. Among objects that are not, some of them are logically possible, while others are logically impossible: Sherlock Holmes does not exist but he is logically possible, because the conjunction of his properties does not imply any contradiction, while Meinong's well-known round square is logically impossible. Objects are complete or incomplete, regardless of their ontological status: there are complete objects that do not exist and merely subsist (i.e., ideal objects), complete objects that do not have being, incomplete objects that do not have being or whose being or non-being is not affirmed[68]. However, it is worth noticing that every object, following (dm6), is what it

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acts, contents and objects of thought (objects of thought are different from and independent of the acts by which we think of them and the contents of our thoughts, so that they have their properties and their ontological status independently of our mental activities) (see Twardowski 1894 (1977)).

[68] See Meinong 1904 (1960) and Grossmann (1974). See also Meinong 1899 (1978), 1910 (1983) and (1915).

is, and is different from any other object, only in virtue of its properties.

However, existent objects must be complete in order to exist. Being complete is a necessary, yet non-sufficient condition for existence. Furthermore, as Grossmann remarks[69], according to Meinong, existence is strictly connected with time: existent objects are temporal objects, while non-existing ones are timeless. Thus, it seems that something exists iff it is temporal. Existence turns out to be a first-order and informative property.

Yet, is it legitimate to assert that the property of existing is equivalent to the property of being temporal? These two properties seem to have different contents. In fact, it seems counterintuitive to accept that some timeless objects, such as God (if we admit God's existence), do not in fact exist. When we state that God exists, we do not state that He is temporal. An atheist might hold that, as a matter of fact, only temporal beings exist and that God does not exist, since He is eternal. It is perfectly legitimate to do this. Yet, a theist might legitimately reply: "this is not true! God exists, even though He is timeless, and I can demonstrate that He exists in such-and-such a way". In such discussions, it happens that the two arguers have to find out some common meaning of the predicate "exist", in order to demonstrate that God exists or that He does not exist. This meaning cannot be identified with the meaning of the predicate "is temporal". In this latter case, in fact, there would be no dialogue, while, accepting that to exist is to be P, the atheist might try to demonstrate that only temporal beings are P, while the theist might try to demonstrate that not only temporal beings are P and that God is P.

However, following these intuitions about existence, we can claim that an object is temporal, only if it exists. Being temporal is a sufficient, yet not a necessary condition for existence. Furthermore, if existence is a first-order property, then, according to Meinong's principles, as Russell remarks[70], it is legitimate to assume it as one of the properties that constitute an object. Thus, an existent golden mountain exists (it is *a priori* true that it exists, because existence is assumed to contribute to that object's constitution), even though it does not exist. Following Russell, Meinong's theory implies that the principle of non-contradiction fails, since there are impossible objects, and that existence, in Meinong's theory, can be discovered *a priori* (at least in some cases, namely when it is taken to be part of what constitute an object), while we all know that existence can be only discovered *a posteriori*. In his 1906 reply[71], Meinong claims that we should distinguish between two senses of "existence": existence$_1$ (what is expressed by the predicate "being existent") can be assumed as a constitutive property of objects, while existence$_2$ (what is expressed by the predicate "exist") cannot be thus assumed. Yet, are they

[69] See Grossmann (1974): 103.
[70] See Russell's well-known 1904-1907 letters to Meinong in Russell (2003): 81-84. See also Orilia (2005): 109-115.
[71] For a detailed examination of the Russell-Meinong Debate, see Smith (1985) and Swanson (2011).

the same property? Or: is there any unity of meaning between these two senses of "existence"? If they are not the same property, every property might be duplicated, at least in principle: for example, the property of being a detective instantiated by Sherlock Holmes would turn out to be different from the property of being a detective instantiated by a real detective. Is such a duplication of properties legitimate and well-grounded? As we will see, Neo-Meinongians will deal with this kind of problems.

However, what is for something to exist$_2$? According to Meinong[72], existence$_2$ seems to be identical with the subsistence of an affirmative objective of being (an objective that affirms the being of something) concerning the object that exists$_2$. Thus, (5)-(8) can be interpreted as

(5meinong) there is at least one object that is a lion and for which the objective of being that that lion exists subsists;

(6meinong) for all the objects that are unicorns, the objective of being that that unicorn exists does not subsist (or: for which the negative objective of being that that unicorn does not exist subsists);

(7meinong) there is one and only one object (Obama) that is such-and-such and for which the objective of being that Obama exists subsists;

(8meinong) there is one and only one object (Sherlock Holmes) that is such-and-such and for which the objective of being that Sherlock Holmes exists does not subsist (or: for which the negative objective of being that Sherlock Holmes does not exist subsists).

The predicate "exist" in these statements expresses existence$_2$ since, if it expressed existence$_1$, that predicate could not be part of an objective of being, but only of an affirmative objective of essence (an objective affirming *what* an object is). Yet, if it expresses existence$_2$, existence$_2$ turns out to be unexplained. In fact, this kind of explanation would have the same form of the following explanation: for Obama to exist is for the proposition expressed by (7) to be true. This is not an explanation of existence at all.

Before leaving Meinong's theory, we should mention some problems concerning non-existent objects. Some of them, in fact, as I have already remarked, seem not to obey to logical laws, such as the law of non-contradiction (contradictory objects) and the laws of excluded middle and of bivalence (incomplete objects). In fact, provided that some object is incomplete and provided that P is not one of that object's constitutive properties, it is neither true nor false that, for some property P, that object has P or does not have it. Furthermore, does an incomplete object only have its constitutive properties or its constitutive properties *plus* all the properties

[72] See Grossmann (1974): 116-120.

implied by them? Finally, if I thought of Sherlock Holmes and my friend Francesca thought of Sherlock Holmes too, both assigning to it the same properties, yet, in my case and *not* in Francesca's case, assigning to it the property of having a sister too, would we both think of the same object or of two different objects? Following Meinong, we could state that Francesca's Sherlock Holmes is involved (*implektiert*) in my Sherlock Holmes, even though they are two different objects. Yet, it seems that we think of the same object: Sherlock Holmes, to whom I ascribe one further property, that Francesca does not ascribe to it. I shall deal with these problems in the next chapter.

With regard to (13), one might argue that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character because it does not exist and is incomplete and is created by someone. Yet, if the property of being created by someone is assumed by me in Sherlock Holmes' constitution and it is not assumed in it by Francesca, do we have two different Sherlock Holmes or not? It seems that we both refer to the same Sherlock Holmes, who is, in fact, a fictional character.

I.2.2. Actualists at Work

In this section, I shall explore some varieties of actualism. Actualists are characterized by their acceptance of

(actualism) there are no items that do not exist.

Furthermore, many actualists believe that it is also true that

(actualism-a) existence is *not* a first-order and informative property.

On the other hand, non-actualists believe that (actualism) is false, even though some of them might accept (actualism-a). There are other philosophers who accept (actualism) and do *not* accept (actualism-a): I shall consider them in the fourth section of this chapter. However, all the philosophers mentioned in this section accept (actualism). On the other hand, there might be *internal* and *external* objections against such versions of actualism: internal objections are directed against particular forms of actualist paraphrases that do not quantify over non-existent items and such objections try to show that these forms of paraphrases do not preserve the truth-value and/or the meaning of the original statements; external objections are directed against those arguments that aim at defending (actualism) and/or (actualism-a).

I.2.2.1. Ryle's Conditionals.

According to G. Ryle, the predicate "exists" is a bogus ontological predicate: by claiming that something exists, in fact, we only claim that that thing has some property[73]. In particular[74], when

[73] See Ryle (1933), in Ryle (2009): 67-68.

we claim that (7) expresses a true proposition, we claim that

(7ryle) something is obamish,

while, when we claim that (5) expresses a true proposition, we claim that

(5ryle) something is lionish.

The properties of being obamish and of being lionish might be better understood as identical with the properties of being Obama and of being a lion. However, this thesis seems to presuppose the truth of (actualism). Ryle argues that, when we claim that

(29) there are non-existent detectives,

we always claim something false, because we cannot distinguish between existent and non-existent detectives, i.e., between objects that are detectives and exist and objects that are detectives and do not exist: non-existent detectives are not detectives at all[75]. This seems to happen because the property of being a detective is an existence-entailing one. Non-existent detectives are imaginary objects and no imaginary object is a detective.

However, how can we deal with data (datum2) and (datum3), i.e., with the fact that both (12) (at least in one sense) and (13) seem to express true propositions? Following Ryle[76], "Sherlock Holmes" is a quasi-name, because it has no referent, and (12) is a quasi-statement, because it contains a quasi-name. (12) means that

(12ryle-1) if "Sherlock Holmes" had a referent (i.e., if "Sherlock Holmes" were a name), then that referent would be a detective.

Yet, it seems that "Sherlock Holmes" could name someone in reality and that person could not be a detective: in that case, "Sherlock Holmes" would have a referent, but that referent would not be a detective. Furthermore, if there were a real detective named "Sherlock Holmes", then (12) would turn out to be true: the fictional character named "Sherlock Holmes" and the real detective thus named would turn out to be the same person. However, the fictive Sherlock Holmes and the real Sherlock Holmes would have different so-called ontological properties: for example, the fictive Sherlock Holmes would be created by Conan Doyle, while the real Sherlock Holmes would not be created by him. Furthermore, they could have different non-ontological properties (e.g., the property of having a friend named Watson, attributed to the fictive Sherlock Holmes but that the real Sherlock Holmes could lack). The real and the fictive Sherlock Holmes

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[74] See Ryle (1932), in Ryle (2009): 46.
[75] See Ryle (1933), in Ryle (2009): 68.
[76] See Ryle (1930), in Ryle (2009): 36.

would turn out to be different: *contra hypothesin*, they would not be the same person.

Furthermore, Ryle sketches a theory of imaginary objects that I can only summarize[77]. Considering Conan Doyle's stories, all the propositions used by Conan Doyle in order to claim something about Sherlock Holmes only *pretend* to be true, but they are neither true nor false. Furthermore, when the reader states that (12) expresses a true proposition in the story, s/he does not refer to someone named "Sherlock Holmes": s/he only refers to Conan Doyle's novels and s/he claims that those novels contain the proposition expressed by (12). Finally, when s/he claims that (13) expresses a true proposition, s/he claims that "Sherlock Holmes" pseudo-designates, i.e., that it purports to designate someone but, as a matter of fact, it does not designate anything. Against this latter thesis, I might remark that Ryle does not distinguish between kinds of non-existent objects: in his account, in fact, all the imaginary objects turn out to be characterized by the same feature (the pseudo-designation of their names), without distinguishing, for example, theoretical objects (e.g., numbers in anti-realist theories of mathematics) from fictional objects and hallucinations. Furthermore, as we have already seen, deep problems arise when "Sherlock Holmes" *does* designate someone.

With regard to the second aforementioned thesis, (12) would turn out to be interpreted as

(12ryle-2) Conan Doyle's novels contain the proposition that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, purporting to be about Sherlock Holmes.

If we wanted to deny the existence of propositions about Sherlock Holmes, we could state that (12) is equivalent to[78]

(8ryle-3) some of the sentences in Conan Doyle's books say or imply that Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

However, there are imaginary objects that are not described in books. Thus, according to my perspective, we could accept that

(imag.ob.-thesis-1) if x is an imaginary object and it seems true that x is P, then someone, thinking of x, thinks of x as P,

or that

(imag.ob.-thesis-2) if x is an imaginary object and it seems true that x is P, then there is a thought in someone's mind representing x as P.

Yet, this thought would be *about* the imaginary object x. In someone's mind, x is an

[77] See Ryle (1933), in Ryle (2009): 66-85.
[78] See Ryle (1933), in Ryle (2009): 74.

object, even though an imaginary one.

I.2.2.2. Quine: Bound Variables and Possible Fat Men (in the doorway).

W. v. O. Quine is the most influential among actualist philosophers. In his well-known article *On what there is*[79], Quine argues that existence cannot be considered a first-order, informative property and that there are no non-existent objects, provided that such objects do not have definite identity conditions. Quine develops some theses of Russell's in an original way.

According to him, (7) can be paraphrased as follows[80]:

(7quine-1) something obamizes.

Obama, in fact, is the unique thing that obamizes. Thus, the predicate "obamizes" (plausibly denoting the property of obamizing, even though Quine might not agree with this claim, as we will see) can be used to form a definite description abbreviated by the proper name "Obama". Yet, the property of obamizing seems to be a mysterious one. The idea behind Quine's intuition is that, in order to deal with true singular existential statements, such as (7), we should introduce properties that are instantiated by at least and at most one object. To claim that something exists, then, is tantamount to claim that there is an object that instantiates that property. Thus, it seems necessary that properties such as the property of obamizing are instantiated by at least and at most one object. In other terms, there is no possible world (even though Quine could not accept this interpretation of necessity) in which two different objects obamize. Russell's uniqueness condition is incorporated in such properties.

However, the property of obamizing seems to be logically equivalent to the conjuntive property (or to the conjunction of properties) of being Michelle Obama's husband in 2013 *and* of the President of the United States in 2013, and so on. Quine suggests a different account. In the second edition of his *Philosophy of Logic*[81], the philosopher constructs predicates such as "obamizing" as follows: (14) is logically equivalent to

(14quine) there is a x, such that x is identical with Obama and x is a politician.

Put formally:

(14quine-f1) $\exists x(x = o \ \& \ P_{OL}x)$

where "o" is an individual constant standing for Obama and "P_{OL}" stands for the property of being a politician. The identity sign = is incorporated in one predicate: the predicate "being identical with Obama", that is logically expressed by "O_{BAM}". Something is O_{BAM} iff there is

[79] See Quine (1948), in Quine (1961): 1-19.
[80] See Quine (1948), in Quine (1961): 7-8.
[81] See Quine (1986): 25-26. See also Quine (1960): 176-181.

nothing different from that thing that is O_{BAM}.

Thus (14quine-f1) is logically equivalent to:

(14quine-f2) $\exists x(O_{BAM}x \,\&\, P_{OL}x \,\&\, \forall y(O_{BAM}y \rightarrow x = y))$

and the mysterious predicate "obamizes" is thus explained in terms of the predicate "being identical with Obama". (7) is interpreted as

(7quine-1) there is something that is identical with Obama.

Since Obama is identical with himself, it is legitimate to claim that (7) is equivalent to

(7quine-2) Obama is identical with himself.

Further theses follow from such an interpretation of (7). First, everything exists, since everything is identical with something, namely with itself[82]. On the other hand, non-existent objects are not objects at all: there is no entity without identity[83]. Secondly, "exist" can be considered a first-order predicate, even though a non-informative one[84]. Thirdly, to be is to be the value of a bound variable: in order for an atomic proposition Px to be true, for example, x must be replaced by an individual constant denoting something existent, i.e., simply denoting something[85]. Fourthly, "a theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory must be capable of referring in order that the affirmations made in the theory be true"[86]. Against this latter thesis, Kit Fine points out that, in order to accept the truth of mathematical affirmations, one does not have to believe that numbers are real, i.e., that

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[82] See Quine (1960): 176.

[83] For a critical discussion of the Quinean dictum, see Strawson (1997): 21-51 and Jubien (1996).

[84] See *Ibidem*.

[85] See Quine (1948), in Quine (1961): 12-13.

[86] Quine (1948), in Quine (1961): 13-14. Quine's ontologically committing interpretation of quantifiers is not the only option that is available in the philosophical market. As we will see, Meinongians, for example, argue that our primary quantifiers are not ontologically committing, so that they range over both existing and non-existing items. I shall accept a similar reading of quantifiers in the chapter II.2. Other philosophers provided a substitutional interpretation of them (see, for example, Barcan Marcus (1962) and (1972) (in Barcan Marcus (1993): 75-88)), Dunn and Belnap (1968)). Finally, many thinkers have argued that our quantifiers are always used under some restriction to some domain of the discourse or relatively to some concept (see Eklund (2006) and Chalmers, Manley, Wasserman (eds.) (2009)). I do not wish to argue against such positions. Concerning the latter proposals, it seems to me that it has to assume that: there is no ontologically committing use of quantifiers in the metalanguage that we use when we talk of the different domains of restricted quantifiers; that the domain of such metalanguage quantifiers should not be simply defined by the domain of our richest domain of quantification – roughly, by the domain of the quantifiers that are less contextually restricted. Otherwise, quantifiers ranging over wider domains of the discourse (i.e., ontologically richer ones) would be *per se* apter than quantifiers ranging over narrower domains in order to be used in our ontological investigation and to express our best ontological commitments – *contra* Ockham's razor. For a similar criticism, see Eklund (2008). Another proposal concerning quantifiers consists in distinguishing external and inferential readings (see Hofweber (2000) and (2005)). See also Fine (2009) and Cameron (2010) for further discussion. In particular, Cameron distinguishes between what there is (that is revealed by the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment) and what there *really* is (i.e., roughly, what carves nature at its joints) and argues that ontology is primarily interested in what there *really* is. Furthermore, according to Cameron, not everything there is is what there *really* is.

they exist. One coul be anti-realist in respect of numbers' existence, even accepting that it is true that 2 + 2 = 4[87].

However, Quine could accept that (7) expresses a true proposition (or that (7) is simply true) iff the predicate "is identical with Obama" is truly predicable of something. Does this predicate denote anything or not? If it denotes something, what does it denote? The answer is far from being clear. As I have already noticed, one could state that it denotes a property uniquely instantiated by Obama, i.e., the property of being identical with Obama and with no one/nothing else (or, simply, the property of being identical with Obama). Even though Quine could not accept this answer, it seems to be the most reasonable one. Otherwise, what would that predicate denote? Thus, it is legitimate to claim that this property exists iff Obama exists.

However, can this property exist without Obama's existing? For example, provided that Pegasus does not exist, does the predicate "being identical with Pegasus" denote the property of being identical with Pegasus and with nothing else (or, simply, the property of being identical with Pegasus) or not? If it denoted that property, that property would exist uninstantiated. Yet, given that Pegasus does not exist, this property would not have define identity conditions. Hence, according to Quine, it would not exist![88] Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that this property exists iff Pegasus exists, i.e., that this property is what it is iff Pegasus is what it is. Yet, this seems to explain Obama's existence and Pegasus' non-existence in a circular way: Obama exists *because* there exists the property of being identical with Obama; yet, this latter property exists (it is what it is) *because* Obama is what it is, i.e., *because* Obama exists. A Quinean actualist could reply that we do not have to explain things' existence: things *just* exist. However, we need at least a non-trivial criterion to non-circularly determine what exists and what does not exist, while the property of being self-identical only provides us with a trivial (it seems obvious that ordinary objects are self-identical) and circular one. I shall explore this objection in more depth in chapter I.4.

On the other hand, if those predicates did not denote properties, what would they denote? Perhaps, concepts. Yet, first, it seems reasonable to ask whether our concepts of being identical with Pegasus or with Obama can be individuated, provided that we cannot know all the properties of Obama's and that we cannot determine all the properties of Pegasus. Such concepts could be constructed by selecting a set of uniquely individuating features of Obama or of Pegasus. However, *a parte subjecti*, nothing guarantees that, in reality, there is only one thing that

[87] See Fine (2009).

[88] It is worth noticing that this problem cannot be solved by Plantinga's argument concerning the existence of uninstantiated thisnesses (i.e., haecceities, that can exist instantiated or not). In fact, Plantinga argues that such properties can exist uninstantiated in possible worlds in which Obama does not exist. Yet, on a Quinean account, that does not accept the existence of possible worlds, they do not have definite identity conditions. See, for example, Plantinga (1974) and Plantinga (2003). Wiggins (1995) seems to accept the theory based on thisnesses.

has all the corresponding features. Secondly, we could understand the concepts of being identical with Pegasus and with nothing else, even without knowing that Pegasus does not exist: *a nosse ad esse non valet consequentia*. If we chose non-subjective concepts (something like Fregean senses), such concepts would be similar to Platonic properties and, as we have already seen, there would arise problems concerning their identity and existence. Finally, if those predicates did not denote anything at all (if they were *just* predicates), it seems difficult to understand how their use could determine or explain things' existence.

With regard to propositions such as the one expressed by (15), Quine believes, roughly, that "thinks-of-a-hobbit" should be considered a predicate of the subject "John"[89]. Hence, John seems to instantiate the property of thinking of a hobbit. Thus, it is not legitimate to infer, by the introduction of the existential quantifier, (15') from (15): there is nothing that is thought of by John. It is not clear how a Quinean interpretation could turn out to make the proposition expressed by (13) true.

However, after having accepted both (actualism) and (actualism-a) and after having dealt with all the difficulties concerning the denotation of individuating predicates, Quine's theses could be accepted. On the contrary, denying that such assumptions are true, one could reply that non-existent objects have identity conditions, that it is legitimate to claim something true *about* them, and so on. Are there independent reasons for accepting such assumptions and the Quinean thesis according to which there is no entity without identity, that Quine accepts as equivalent to (actualism)? Let me consider the well-known argument of the (merely) possible fat man in the doorway:

"Take, for instance, the possible fat man in that doorway; and, again, the possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man, or two possible men? How do we decide? How many possible men are there in that doorway? Are there more possible thin ones than fat ones? How many of them are alike? Or would their being alike make them one? Are no two possible things alike? Is this the same as saying that it is impossible for two things to be alike? Or, finally, is the concept of identity simply inapplicable to unactualized possibles? But what sense can be found in talking of entities which cannot meaningfully be said to be identical with themselves and distinct from one another? These elements are well-nigh incorrigible"[90].

Quine seems to assume that: merely possible objects (i.e., unactualized possibles) seem to be mind-independent entities; no two merely possible objects can be identified nor distinguished in virtue of spatio-temporal criteria of identity (they are not in space-time). Thus, Quine seems to argue that their being alike does not guarantee that they are two objects *or* one and the same object and that their supposed countability does not guarantee that they are alike or not. It seems to be undetermined whether two merely possible objects are alike (perhaps because they are incomplete objects, so that they are undetermined with respect to at least one of their properties)

[89] See, for example, Quine (1986): 32-34.
[90] Quine (1948), in Quine (1961): 4.

and whether they are two *or* one and the same object (the possible bald man and the possible fat man in the doorway seem to be two different objects; yet, it could happen that they are one and the same object). Since no clear criterion of identity is applicable to merely possible objects, they do not exist (no entity without identity) *and* they are not objects at all.

This argument has been widely discussed. For example, N. Rescher argues that there are as many merely possible objects as they can be described and that they are identical iff their defining descriptions are logically equivalent[91]. Yet, if they are incomplete objects, it seems not to be possible to determine whether their defining descriptions are logically equivalent: in Quine's example, it is only claimed that there is one possible object that is a fat man in the doorway and one that is a bald man in the doorway. How is it possible to find out whether such defining descriptions are logically equivalent or not? With regard to their undetermined properties, their descriptions seem to be at best disjunctions of predicates. Thus, no two merely possible objects characterized by different properties can turn out to be identical with one another.

T. Parsons claims that there are at least as many possible men in the doorway as there are sets of nuclear properties that contain the properties of being a man and being in the doorway[92], i.e. there are infinite possible men in the doorway. Yet, since the possible fat man and the possible bald man in the doorway are characterized by different nuclear properties (it is not stated whether the possible fat man is bald or not), they turn out to be different. Yet, if they are merely possible (i.e., actualizable yet unactualized) objects and if every actualized or actualizable object should be complete with regard to its properties, they cannot be actualizable objects: if they were actualizable, in fact, they would turn out to be identical *or* (*aut*) different, not simply different.

R. Routley, in his article *On what there isn't*[93], argues that we should distinguish between two aspects of the question: if one asks how many merely possible men (actually) are in the doorway, one should reply that there are no such men in the doorway, because the property of actually being in the doorway cannot belong to merely possible men; on the other hand, if one asks how many merely possible men *possibly* are in the doorway, one should reply that there can be from zero to a certain definite number of such men, depending on some physical criteria (such as how small men can be and how large can the doorway be). Concerning the identity between the merely possible fat man and the merely possible bald man in the doorway, Routley claim that one can find out identity criteria for indeterminate objects too. I think that Routley's answer is partially correct. In fact, one should consider that two different (existing) persons can

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[91] See Rescher (1959): 173-174.
[92] See Parsons (1980): 27-29.
[93] See Routley (1979): 411-426. Routley argues that there are indeterminate existing objects too: quarks (it is not always determinate whether two quarks are identical or not), forests, clouds, etc. See also Priest's criticisms of Quine's argument in Priest (2005): 110-115.

give different replies to such questions and that such answers could turn out to "create" more or less merely possible men in the doorway.

I shall deal with Quine's argument in the chapters II.3 and II.4. However, I think that one can provide identity criteria for such non-existent objects. In this case, they would turn out to be legitimate objects.

I.2.2.3. Carnap's Existential Questions and Chakrabarti's Games.

Accepting Quine's criterion of ontological commitment, it seems that existence is strictly connected with the acceptance of some theory: in fact, by accepting a theory, we are committed to the existence of those entities that make the propositions (or the statements) of that theory true.

In 1950, R. Carnap develops a theory of existential questions that seems to be similar, at least under some respects, to Quine's view[94]. Carnap thinks that we have to distinguish between two kinds of existential questions: internal and external ones. Internal existential questions concern the existence of entities within some linguistic framework (or given the acceptance of some linguistic framework): for example, given the linguistic framework of mathematics, one can affirm that there exists an even prime number between 6 and 8. It seems always legitimate to positively or negatively give an answer to these questions. On the other hand, external existential questions concern the existence of the whole system of entities (e.g., given the system of spatio-temporal entities, they concern the existence of that system). These latter questions cannot be dealt with by rational means: it is only a matter of choice whether we accept that system or not, because it is only a matter of choice whether we accept that form of language or not.

However, it seems that, when one claims that numbers or physical things exist, s/he does not claim anything about linguistic frameworks: numbers or physical things simply exist or do not exist. It is true that, within some fictional linguistic framework, some physical existing things do not exist and that, within the linguistic framework of our talks about the physical world, fictional entities (that exist within fictional linguistic frameworks) do not exist. Yet, if someone aims at explaining fictional entities' nonexistence by their absence within the physical linguistic framework and by their presence within fictional linguistic frameworks, s/he has already to presuppose that entities within the physical linguistic framework exist and that entities within fictional linguistic frameworks do not exist. There is at least one meaningful sense of existence that framework-dependent existence does not explain, i.e., existence *simpliciter* (or reality). Furthermore, this latter kind of existence concerns both entities and the real world, not simply

[94] See Carnap (1950). I shall set the Quine-Carnap metaontological debate about the usefulness of metaphysical investigation aside. For this debate, see, for example, Quine (1951) and Eklund (2006) and (2011).

the acceptance of lingustic frameworks. External existential questions are both legitimate and individual (they are about individual entities). Finally, there should be some neutral linguistic framework within which it could be legitimate to claim that fictional entities do not exist within the linguistic framework of our talks about the physical world, while they do exist within fictional linguistic frameworks.

Developing this idea of (partial, at least) context-dependency of existence and some intuitions of Wittgenstein's about linguistic games, A. Chakrabarti constructs a complex and interesting theory of existential and fictional statements[95]. According to him, by talking of something as existing or not existing, we always play some linguistic game. In particular, there are five major games that we can play: game 1 is the game that we play when we talk of physical items; game 2 is played when we talk in and about fiction; game 3 is played when we talk of our phenomenal experience; we play game 4 when we talk about abstract entities (such as numbers and types); finally, we play the master-game when we simply try to deal with the existence or non-existence of items of all the other games (i.e., when we try to deal with those external individual existential questions that Carnap seems not to recognize as rational).

Thus, existence seems to be game-dependent: playing game 2, for example, we can assume that Sherlock Holmes exists, even though, playing game 1, we cannot assume that he exists, because, within this latter game, we cannot refer to him. However, accepting the paradox of non-existence, if we cannot refer to Sherlock Holmes within game 1, we cannot deny his existence within that game. Thus, we need to talk of Sherlock Holmes within the master-game too. In order for (8) to express a true proposition, we have to recognize, within the master-game, that Sherlock Holmes is neither an item of game 1, nor an item of game 4. Yet, Sherlock Holmes is an item, because we can assume that, in order for something to be an item (i.e., in order to assert that it is legitimate to existentially generalize propositions about it), it must be an item of game 1 or (*vel*) an item of game 2 or (*vel*) an item of game 3 or (*vel*) an item of game 4.

Chakrabarti seems to claim that "exist" is a first-order, informative predicate and that, in order for something to be an item, it is not necessary that it exists (i.e., it is not necessary that it is an item of game 1 or of game 4). Thus, why can he be considered an actualist? First, it is not clear whether existence is a first-order informative property or not (i.e., within Chakrabarti's theory, an item of game 4). Secondly, existence turns always out to be game-dependent. In fact, when we claim that something simply exists, we always claim it while playing some game (the master-game): playing the master-game, items exist or not, while the denial of (actualism) states that there are objects that simply do not exist. However, it is true that every object must exist

[95] See Chakrabarti (1997).

within at least one game.

It seems to me that Chakrabarti does not adequately consider the metaphysical aspects of the questions concerning existence and non-existence. In fact, it seems reasonable to accept that a linguistic game is something that exists iff there is a community of speakers playing it. Chakrabarti's theory seems to deal with the linguistic meaning of existential statements. Yet, it does not deal with what is for something to exist. In fact, if we affirmed that, in order for a chair to exist, it must be an item of game 1, we would not explain what is for that chair to exist, because that chair would depend on the existence of a linguistic game and, since linguistic games existentially depend on the existence of communities of speakers, it would derivatively depend on the existence of that community and of those speakers. Furthermore, something could be an item, even without being an item of any game: if no game were played, chairs and animals could in any case remain existing items, while Sherlock Holmes could remain a non-existing item.

In general, it seems to me that theories of existence connected with linguistic frameworks neither adequately explain what is for something to exist, nor what valid and non-subjective criteria should be accepted to distinguish what exists from what does not exist.

I.2.2.4. Neo-Russellian Denoting Concepts.

Those philosophers who accept both (actualism) and (actualism-a) maintain, in general, that, when it seems that we quantify over non-existing objects, we do not actually quantify over them, but over something else, and that, when it seems that they instantiate properties, we quantify over them within intensional contexts, expressed by intensional operators (such as "it is believed that..." or "in the story *s*..."). This thesis seems to express the received view on non-existents, that represents one further development of Frege's and Russell's theses. Before dealing with the second aspect of this thesis (concerning intensional contexts), I shall try to analyze one plausible interpretation of the first one.

According to some Neo-Russellians (such as N. Cocchiarella, G. Landini and F. Orilia[96]), it is legitimate to reduce fictional entitities to non-referring denoting concepts. Roughly, following Orilia, definite denoting concepts are (non-subjective) concepts (i.e., properties) that are the meanings of definite descriptions: [the politician who is the U.S. President in 2013], for example, is a definite denoting concept that is the meaning of the definite description "the politician who is the U.S. President in 2013", that uniquely denotes Obama. Definite denoting concepts are properties of properties (second-order properties) and they can be referring or non-referring, if they denote or do not denote at least and at most one (existent) object. If they are referring, they have the property E* (namely, a third-order property); otherwise, they do not have it. Thus,

[96] See Cocchiarella (1982), Landini (1990) and (2012) and Orilia (2012a).

accepting the definite descriptions already provided for Obama and Sherlock Holmes and given that definite denoting concepts are not mind-independent, it is legitimate to claim that (7) and (8) are paraphrasable as

(7orilia) E*[the politician who is the U.S. President in 2013];

(8orilia) ~E*[the detective who lives in London and who is one of Watson's friends].

Thus, it seems that all definite denoting concepts (referring and non-referring ones) exist and that something exists iff at least one of its denoting concepts has E*. So far, so good. However, what about (12) and (13)? The proposition expressed by (12) is false because the one expressed by (7orilia) is true. However, within the scope of some story operator, it could turn to be true. For example, within the story *The Valley of Fear*, Sherlock Holmes is a detective (D), namely

(12orilia) *The Valley of Fear*([the detective who lives in London and who is one of Watson's friends]D).

Within *The Valley of Fear*, the property of being a detective is predicatively linked with the definite denoting concept [the detective who lives in London and who is one of Watson's friends], i.e., a second-order property (the definite denoting concept) is instantiated by a first-order one (the property of being a detective). Furthermore, it is also true that, in *The Valley of Fear*, that definite denoting concept has E*, since Sherlock Holmes exists according to that story. Different definite denoting concepts constitute the character set of the fictional character Sherlock Holmes. What about (13)? It seems legitimate to argue that (13) is true iff it is true that

(13orilia) ~E*[the detective who lives in London and who is one of Watson's friends] & *within some story*(E*[the detective who lives in London and who is one of Watson's friends]).

However, (13orilia) seems to quantify over stories, since the operator "within some story" could be replaced by "there is at least one story according to which". Stories, according to Orilia, are complex conjunctions of propositions. Thus, the second conjunct of (13orilia) seems to express the fact that, within some complex conjunction of propositions, the definite denoting concept under consideration has E*. Yet, this seems not to be sufficient to distinguish fictional stories from, for example, true reports of facts. In the case of fictional stories, that complex conjunction of propositions should have some properties distinguishing it from true reports, e.g., the property of having being created by someone. Furthermore, in order to be fictional, that complex conjunction should not be true. I shall deal with such properties of stories in the next section.

Orilia's strategy seems to provide paraphrases for many statements that seem to concern fictional entities. Yet, at first sight, there are many properties that seem to be instantiated by fictional entities and that are not instantiated by definite denoting non-referring concepts: for example, fictional entities do not exist, while those concepts exist; they are detectives or winged horses, while those concepts are simply concepts, and so on. It should be observed that, considering our ordinary language data about *ficta*, these paraphrases cannot have the form of logical equivalences. In fact, if (13) were logically equivalent to (13orilia), the logical equivalence would turn out to be false, at least from an actualist viewpoint, since (13) (by existential generalization) seems to quantify over non-existent items and is always false (there are no such items), while (13orilia) is true. Moreover, since definite denoting non-referring concepts exist and are mind-dependent, it is legitimate to ask what is for them to exist. If their existence consisted in their having some relation E* with some other denoting referring concept, there would be an infinite regress concerning E*, because the latter denoting referring concept should be related to some other denoting referring concept, and so *ad infinitum*. Otherwise, they could simply exist. On the other hand, do non-referring denoting concepts concerning fictional characters *mind-independently* exist? I think that there are strong intuitions against this thesis: where and how would the non-referring definite denoting concept [the detective who lives in London and who is one of Watson's friends] exist before Conan Doyle's creation? If this non-referring definite denoting concept is mind-dependent, however, it seems legitimate to think that there is a mind-dependent object (Sherlock Holmes) that is different from it. In fact, when Conan Doyle thinks of Sherlock Holmes, he does not think of a non-referring denoting concept. Yet, he uses at least this latter non-referring denoting concept in order to refer to some non-existing object, that is different from the former concept. Thus, if it is mind-dependent, Sherlock Holmes seems not to be a non-referring denoting concept and it seems to be an object. Perhaps, it would be much simpler and less revisionary (at least with respect to ordinary language) to admit that John thinks of an object that does not exist.

I.2.2.5. Leave the Object, Keep the Context (whatever it is).

As we have already seen, it seems that there is a sense according to which propositions such as the one expressed by (12) are true, even though they are not literally true (it is not literally true that Sherlock Holmes is a detective). One of the most interesting and accepted actualist suggestions is that such propositions are embedded in fictional operators (or, in general, in intensional operators). Correspondingly, to state that (15) expresses a true proposition amounts to state that, within some intensional context (such as the one expressed by the intensional operator "John believes that"), that proposition is true. Thus, it seems legitimate to quantify over

non-existent objects within intensional contexts, even though it is not legitimate to quantify over them outside such contexts. Hence, (15') does not follow from (15).

What intensional contexts do we have to consider in order to make these kinds of propositions true? After having made some general remarks about intensional contexts theories[97], I shall analyze J. Searle's and G. Evans' pretense theory and D. Lewis' possible worlds theory.

Such theories work as follows. Let us consider some true proposition that seems to be about non-existent objects, such as (8), (12) and (13). Outside intensional contexts, in order to interpret such propositions, we do not have to quantify over non-existent objects, but on something else. For example, with regard to (12) and (13), we can quantify over stories (that can be thought of as sets of propositions), authors (roughly, Conan Doyle could have the property of having written that Sherlock Holmes is detective), definite denoting concepts (as in Orilia's case), conjunctions of properties, and so on. With regard to (15), we can quantify over minds, concepts, beliefs, and so on. By quantifying over such existent items (i.e., over items we are ontologically committed to), we can try to provide adequate paraphrases for such propositions that do not ontologically commit to non-existent objects. Such paraphrases cannot be considered logically equivalent to the original propositions, since such paraphrases do not always preserve the original meaning and/or truth-value: if we accept (actualism), they only express their true logical form. However, we could also try to state that, within some intensional context *c*, such propositions are literally true, because, within such contexts, it is legitimate to quantify over non-existent objects. Thus, we could try to claim that (12) can be interpreted as

(12int.cont.) *c*(Sherlock Holmes is a detective),

where "*c*" could be replaced by "in Conan Doyle's stories" or something else. Propositions such as the one expressed by (15) are more difficult to paraphrase. In fact, they seem to express some relation between an existent item (John) and a non-existent one (a hobbit). Outside intensional contexts (such as the one expressed by "John thinks"), John could have some relation with some concept of a hobbit (or some conjunction of properties). Yet, it seems that John attributes to the hobbit properties that he does not attribute to his concept of a hobbit. If the predicate "thinks of" denotes a relation between John and something else, (15) is not paraphrasable as

(15ext.int.cont.) John thinks of the concept of hobbit,

since John seems to think of two different things, when he thinks of a hobbit and when he thinks of the concept of hobbit. It could be true that (15), even without being true that (15ext.int.cont).

[97] For a classical view on the matter, see Williams (1981): 81-107, 218-276.

However, if we consider intensional contexts, we could try to paraphrase (15) as

(15int.cont.) *Johns thinks that*(there is something that is a hobbit).

Yet, this paraphrase does not work, since it seems that John does not state anything about there being hobbits (in actualists' terms, he does not state that there exist hobbits). Concerning (12), we could try to paraphrase it as

(12int.cont.') *in Conan Doyle's stories*(Sherlock Holmes is a detective).

We could try to restrict fictional contexts in order to grasp relevant stories. However, how can we reidentify the same item across different contexts? How can we claim that we are talking of one and the same item when we are talking of Sherlock Holmes in Conan Doyle's stories and, for example, in some recent movie about Sherlock Holmes? Since we cannot quantify over non-existent items outside intensional contexts, we need to establish that there is some relation between existing items such as definite concepts, conjunctions of properties, authors, stories, and so on, and non-existing items within intensional contexts. This relation cannot be embedded in intensional contexts and, since actualists cannot mantain that there are relations between non-existing items and existent ones (relations are properties and non-existent items cannot have properties outside intensional contexts), there cannot be such a relation. Actualists could deny that this relation cannot be embedded in intensional contexts. For example, they could state that there is some intensional context such as "many people believe that", in which it is true that the denoting concept of Sherlock Holmes pretends to refer to Sherlock Holmes. Yet, first, we would need to identify the items within this context with the items outside it. Secondly, this paraphrase does not work, since people can think that Sherlock Holmes is the same character across different contexts, even without believing that there is some denoting concept that pretends to refer to Sherlock Holmes. This general objection seems to run against several versions of intensional contexts theory.

Furthermore, what about (13)? We could try to claim that (13) is paraphrasable as

(13ext.int.cont.) there is nothing that is identical with Sherlock Holmes and there is a story (i.e., a set of propositions created by someone with fictive intentions) that contains some proposition about Sherlock Holmes,

or as

(13int.cont) there is nothing that is identical with Sherlock Holmes and *c*(Sherlock Holmes has

some property P)[98].

However, considering (13ext.int.cont.), what does the name "Sherlock Holmes" denote in the second conjunct? Accepting ordinary language intuitions, it does not denote the definite concept of Sherlock Holmes, because the story does not state that Sherlock Holmes is a definite concept: it states that it is an object (in the story, an existing one). Considering (13int.cont.), as we have already seen, there are problems concerning the identity of Sherlock Holmes across intensional contexts.

Two of the most well-known intensional contexts theories are J. Searle's pretense theory[99] and G. Evans' make-believe theory[100]. According to Searle, when we use the proper name "Sherlock Holmes" in statements such as (12), we do not really refer to an object. Yet, we only *pretend to* refer to it: it is only pretended that "Sherlock Holmes" refers to an object that instantiates the property of being a detective. On the other hand, when we use it in statements such as (13), we really refer to it, since it seems that we refer to a fictional character, that exists *qua* fictional character (even though it does not exist *qua* detective or *qua* man). Conan Doyle, by pretending to refer to Sherlock Holmes (i.e., by pretending that "Sherlock Holmes" denotes something), creates the fictional character Sherlock Holmes, to which we can really refer when we claim that (13). However, at least from my perspective, it would be equally legitimate to argue that we could use the real reference to the fictional character Sherlock Holmes in order to explain the pretended reference: for example, it is equally legitimate to claim that the fictional Sherlock Holmes instantiates the property of being a detective within some pretense context. The pretense operator would be embedded in the property.

Furthermore, Searle's theory does not avoid our general objection against intensional contexts theories. In fact, the fictional character Sherlock Holmes (existing *qua* fictional characters) seems to be different from the objects we pretend to refer to when we claim that Sherlock Holmes is a man. There should be some kind of relation between the former and the latter objects. Yet, if such latter objects (e.g., Sherlock Holmes *qua* man) do not exist, from the actualist viewpoint, how can they bear relations to the fictional character Sherlock Holmes? Finally, developing my early criticism against Frege, if we claim that (8) expresses a true proposition *iff* it is only pretended that the name "Sherlock Holmes" refers to something, it seems that we claim something false: even if there were no names pretending to refer to anything, Sherlock Holmes would not exist. If we claimed that (8) expresses a true proposition *if* (or *only if*)

[98] In Orilia's terms, this means that the definite denoting concept of Sherlock Holmes does not have E* and that it is a property of P within *c*.
[99] See, for example, Searle (1975).
[100] See Evans (1982): 343-372. As we shall see in the next chapter, even K. Walton and G. Currie accept similar theses.

it is only pretended that the name "Sherlock Holmes" refers to something, we would nevertheless claim something false: facts about our use of names do not explain facts about the existence or non-existence of things.

We could make similar objections against Evans' theory. According to him, everything exists, since "exists" is a first-level, formal (hence, trivial) predicate[101]. When we use empty names, we can use them within make-believe games, in order to state, for example, that it is only make-believedly true that (12). Furthermore, when we claim something true about fictions, we only quasi-understand our statements. Finally, it is possible to argue that there are criteria of identity between things within make-believe games: within such games, two things are identical iff, had the pretense been true, two (or more) people would have thought of the same thing[102]. Yet, given that we could attribute different properties to the same fictional object, we could turn out to have two different objects, had the pretense been true. For example, if it were make-believedly true for me that Sherlock Holmes has a brother and if it were make-believedly true for Francesca that he has no brothers, had the pretense been true, we would have had two different (even though very similar) objects or no object at all (given that an object such as Sherlock Holmes that has *and* does not have brothers is inconsistent and cannot exist). However, Evans distinguishes between the meaning of the adverb "really" and that of the predicate "exist"[103]. Hence, it seems that he recognizes that there are at least two meanings of the predicate "exists".

Finally, let me briefly turn to David Lewis' possible worlds theory. According to him, fictional contexts can be considered possible worlds different from the actual world. I quote Lewis' analysis 2 of fictional discourse, that expresses the philosopher's view about statements such as (12):

"A sentence of the form 'in the fiction *f*, φ' is non-vacuously true iff whenever *w* is one of the collective belief worlds of the community of origin of *f*, then some world where *f* is told as a known fact and *f* is true differs less from the world *w*, on balance, than does any world where *f* is told as a known fact and *f* is not true. It is vacuously true iff there are no possible worlds where *f* is told as known fact"[104].

However, it seems that there are many possible worlds *w* where (12) can be thus interpreted. Thus, given that, according to Lewis, individuals are world-bounded, there are many Sherlock Holmes for whom (12) is true, even considering only one fiction involving Sherlock Holmes. Yet, it seems that, when we talk of Sherlock Holmes within the same context or across different contexts, we talk of one and the same object. Thus, it seems to me that Lewis' analysis does not grasp this important aspect of our talks about *ficta* and that it complicates (much more

[101] It seems to me that Q. Gibson expresses similar theses about existence, even if his account is more detailed. See Gibson (1998). Salmon (as we will see) and Rami (2013) accept a first-order, non-informative property view of existence.
[102] See Evans (1982): 368.
[103] See Evans (1982): 370-372.
[104] Lewis (1978): 45.

than Searle's and Evans' analyses) reidentification of *ficta across* contexts, since it turns out to be difficult to reidentify them *within* singular contexts too.

I.2.2.6. Ficta exist, or: the Existence of Non-Existents (Kripke and van Inwagen).

In his 1973 lessons on *Reference and Existence*, S. Kripke argues that there is a sense according to which seemingly non-existing objects (e.g., fictional ones) exist. Fictional objects are abstract objects that depend on mental and authorial activities[105]. Nevertheless, they exist *qua* fictional objects, i.e., they are part of reality, since we can identify, refer to and talk about them (e.g., in literary criticisms). Furthermore, Kripke argues that, when we deny that Santa Claus exists, we do not simply mention the name "Santa Claus" in order to claim something about him, but we use the name in order to claim something about the object to which the name refers[106]. Thus, according to him, there is nothing incoherent in claiming that there exist fictional objects such as Sherlock Holmes or Pegasus. Sherlock Holmes is not a man and Pegasus is not a horse. Yet, they are both fictional objects: they both exist as fictional characters. Thus, the proposition expressed by (13) is made true by the fact that Sherlock Holmes exists and is a fictional character.

What about (8)? At first, given Kripke's thesis, it could seem that (8) expresses a false proposition, since there exists a fictional object that is the referent of the name "Sherlock Holmes". However, we know that Sherlock Holmes does not *really* exist: it does not have real existence. Thus, following Kripke, we have to distinguish between fictional and real existence, that cannot be considered kinds or degrees of existence, as well as real ducks and toy ducks neither belong to two different kinds of ducks, nor instantiate two different degrees of the property of being a duck[107].

It seems that, in Kripke's theory, existence can be considered a *summum genus*: whatever is an acceptable referent of our talks exists. Real existents and fictional existents do not differ *qua* existents, but in respect of other features: one might add, for example, that real existents are causally efficacious and/or spatio-temporally located and/or mind-independent, while fictional entities are mind-dependent, even accepting that they both exist. Yet, when we talk of existence, it seems that we are primarily interested in real existence, namely in that sense of existence according to which Sherlock Holmes does not exist and Obama does. Kripke's theory is revisionary in respect of our use of common language, according to which (8) simply expresses a true proposition. Is this revision necessary? If we want to preserve the truth of (actualism), it could be. Yet, if we do not want to preserve it, there are no independent reasons for assuming that fictional objects exist.

[105] See Kripke (1973): 53.
[106] See Kripke (1973): 114-116.
[107] See Kripke (1973): 61.

Finally, Kripke accepts fictional operators, such as "fictionally" or "it is fictionally the case that"[108]. Thus, (12) expresses two different kinds of propositions. It could express the true propositions expressed by

(12kripke1') it is fictionally the case that Sherlock Holmes is a detective,

(12kripke1") Sherlock Holmes is a fictional detective,

but it could express the false proposition expressed by

(12kripke2) Sherlock Holmes is a (real) detective.

The same strategy could be used with regard to real and fictional existence: it is true that it is fictionally the case that Sherlock Holmes really exists and it is false that it is fictionally the case that Sherlock Holmes fictionally exists (at least according to some relevant fictions), but it is false that Sherlock Holmes really exists and it is true that Sherlock Holmes fictionally exists, i.e., that he exists as a fictional character.

P. van Inwagen accepts a Quinean account of existence[109] and Kripke's thesis about the existence of fictional objects[110], since such objects are considered legitimate theoretical entities of literary criticism. According to him, there are no kinds of existence. Furthermore, he does not talk of real existence, as opposed to fictional one: fictional entities simply exist. What does the distinction between a fictional detective, such as Sherlock Holmes, and a real one amount to? Van Inwagen does not use fictional operators and he does not distinguish between real and fictional properties, e.g., the property of being a fictional detective and the property of being a real detective. I have already discussed some problems concerning the first solution. With regard to the second one, I think that this distinction is highly counterintuitive, as we will see in the next chapter.

However, van Inwagen thinks that fictional entities *have* some properties, such as logical and ontological ones (e.g., the properties of being self-identical, of being fictional characters, of being talked about in some particular fictional work), and that there are properties that are *ascribed* to them within fictional works. Ascription can be considered a three-place relation between some property, some fictional object and some fictional work: some property P is ascribed to some fictional object *x* within some fictional work *y*. Thus, for example, reading (13) from van Inwagen's perspective, Sherlock Holmes *has* the property of being a fictional character. Furthermore, reading (12) from the same perspective, it is false that Sherlock Holmes has the

[108] See Kripke (1973): 74-76.
[109] See, for example, van Inwagen (1998), (2005) and (2009).
[110] See van Inwagen (1977) and (2000).

property of being a detective, even though it is true that the property of being a detective is ascribed to Sherlock Holmes within Conan Doyle's stories.

What about (8)? Here some difficulties seem to arise within van Inwagen's account. In fact, (8) turns out to be always false, since existence does not make any difference and since real existence is not different from fictional one: there truly exists a fictional object such as Sherlock Holmes. However, how can we maintain that (8) is true in respect of reality and that it is false in respect of Conan Doyle's stories, since in these stories it seems that Sherlock Holmes exists? If we claimed that the property of existing is ascribed to Sherlock Holmes within Conan Doyle's stories, it would seem reasonable to accept that, for example, the property of non-existing is ascribed to Hercule Poirot within Conan Doyle's stories or that the property of existing is not ascribed to him within such stories. Fictional talks seem to accept that existence is a first-order, informative property. However, if this move is allowed with regard to the ascription mechanism, why cannot it be allowed with regard to our talks about reality? Even though van Inwagen could reply that fictional objects really exist (i.e., that they simply exist), there is at least one use of the predicate "exist" that does not legitimize this position: they do not really exist. Since van Inwagen neither accepts that there are kinds nor modes of existence, nor that the properties of fictionally existing and really existing are distinct, he has to account for this datum.

It would be possible to develop the following solution. Everything (i.e., every object in Quinean terms) exists. Let me now consider some mass noun, e.g. "water", and some count noun, e.g. "man": they seem to define kinds of things that exist, since they provide identity and/or countability conditions for them. Even though there are many problems concerning the existence and identity conditions of kinds, I take this account for granted. It would be possible to claim that some fictional object does not really exists, i.e., that there is a sense according to which (8) expresses a true proposition, iff it belongs to the kind of fictional objects (i.e., it has the property of being a fictional object and this property is a kind-property) *and* the property of being a fictional object is not ascribed to it within some fictional work (i.e., within some fictional work, it does not belong to the kind of fictional objects) *and* the property of being P is ascribed to it within some fictional work, where P is any kind-property that is different from the kind-property of being a fictional object. Thus, there is a sense according to which (8) expresses a true proposition, since there is no *man* that *has* Sherlock Holmes' properties *and* Sherlock Holmes is a fictional object (i.e., Sherlock Holmes has the kind-property of being a fictional object) *and* the kind-property of being a fictional object is not ascribed to Sherlock Holmes within Conan Doyle's stories *and* the kind-property of being a man (or something else) is ascribed to him within such stories.

However, if we accept this solution, we can state that everything has the property of really existing iff it is not a fictional object, i.e., iff it does not to belong to the kind of fictional objects (it does *not have* the kind-property of being a fictional object) *and* it belongs to some other kind (i.e., it has some kind-property different from the property of being a fictional object). This seems to assume that fictional objects are the only non-really-existent objects. However, real existence turns out to be a first-order, informative property: every fictional object is a non-really-existing one, while every non-fictional object is a really-existent one. Furthermore, against (actualism), what seems to be involved by (8) is not the contradictory assumption (at least from the actualist perspective) that there are objects that do not exist, but the acceptable assumption that there are objects that do not really exist, i.e., that there exist fictional objects.

On the other hand, if we assumed that real existence and fictional existence are not different properties and that they are not kinds of existence, we could state that they are two ultimate determinates of the determinable existence. Determinates under the same determinable are incompatible (there is no object that has two different determinates of the same determinable) and each determinate belongs to one and only one determinable. Even accepting this solution, real existence would turn out to be informative.

In sum, if real existence is what is denied in propositions such as the one expressed by (8) (and it seems legitimate to assume this perspective), real existence turns out to be an informative, first-order property. If fictional objects really exist (i.e., if van Inwagen's Quinean interpretation of existence is true), then it seems difficult to provide an acceptable interpretation for the truth-value of such propositions.

Furthermore, it seems essential to define the ontological status of fictional works. Are they objects or sets of propositions or something else?

I.2.2.7. The Obamishness of the World (Sommers).

F. Sommers argues that, when we deal with existential propositions, we can think of them as substitutable by beliefs about the world (beliefs *de mundo*)[111]. In fact, by claiming that (5) and (7), it seems that we attribute properties to the world: such (true) statements denote the world. For example, (7) turns out to express the (true) belief that the world has the property of being Obamish, namely

(7sommers) the world is Obamish,

while (8) turns out the express the (true) belief that the world does not have the property of being Sherlockholmish, namely

[111] See, for example, Sommers (1996) and Sommers (2005).

(8sommers) the world is not Sherlockholmish.

In the former case, Sommers claims that the property of being Obamish is a characteristic of the world, while in the latter case the property of being Sherlockholmish is not a characteristic of the world. Mondial properties are properties that express the presence of something in the world: the (true) belief that the mondial property of being Obamish characterizes the world is identical with the (true) belief that the presence of something (in this case, of Obama) characterizes the world.

On the other hand, when we claim that Sherlock Holmes exists (within some story), that he is such-and-such, we refer to domains that are different from the domain of the actual world: fictional domains. For example, in the fictional domain of Greek mythology, it is true that Pegasus exists, i.e., that the fictional world of Greek mythology is characterized by the presence of Pegasus. The world itself does not exist, i.e., we cannot attribute to the world the property of existing, since such a property would not be a property of the world itself, but of something else.

It is difficult for me to understand how Sommers' account can be considered a good interpretation of things' existence and non-existence. First, if (7sommers) and (8sommers) express beliefs about the world, I do not see how they can be identical with the beliefs expressed by (7) and (8). People could believe that Obama exists and that Sherlock Holmes does not exist, even without believing that there is something such as the world and that the world is such-and-such. Children, when they believe that Santa Claus exists, do not believe anything about the world, perhaps because they do not know that there is an (actual) world, i.e., that there is something that comprehends every existing item.

Furthermore, even if we accept a propositionalist reading of Sommers' account, according to which (7sommers) and (8sommers) do not express beliefs, but propositions that are true of the world, there seem to arise further ontological problems. In fact, Sommers' account seems to be committed to two kinds of entities: the world (or the worlds, since it is plausible that there are non-actual worlds, such as fictional ones) and mondial properties. On the other hand, accepting that (7) and (8) express true propositions, we are committed to one (or two) kinds of entities: objects (Obama) and, perhaps, first-order properties (such as the first-order property of existing) or (*vel*) second-order ones too (Obama's properties, that, according to one plausible interpretation of the Russellian account, jointly have the property of being instantiated). Mondial properties seem to be parasitic entities: they depend on the existence of Obama, of lions, and so on. If the (actual) world has the property of having the presence of Obama's (or of being characterized by Obama), Obama must exist in order for such a property to exist. In this case, the fact of the (actual) world's being Obamish would be parasitic on Obama's existence and it would

not ground this latter fact. On the other hand, if the property of being Obamish existed even without the existence of Obama, Sommers' account, in order to be an actualist account of existence, would have to deal with the aforementioned problems concerning individualizing properties.

Finally, why is it not legitimate to attribute the property of existing (or of being real, or of being actual) to the existing (real, actual) world? Since there could be many worlds (for example, the worlds of fiction), one of them could be considered the actual world and could have the property of existing. Yet, if there were such a property, this could be a legitimate mondial property too, yet a property different from Obama's existence, and this thesis seems to be highly counterintuitive since, when we claim that our world exists and that Obama exists, it seems that we attribute one and the same property to two different things. Furthermore, even accepting that there is a mondial property such as the existence of the actual world, Obama's existence would depend on the actual world's being actual and on its being Obamish. An object's existence would depend on (or be identical with) the molecular fact constituted by the fact of some mondial property's (such as the property of being Obamish) being instantiated by the world *and* by the fact of some peculiar mondial property's (the property of existing) being instantiated by the same world. In this latter case, Sommers' account would not be an actualist account (it would admit that there is a property such as the property of existing truly attributed to something, the world, and not to other things) and it would still have to deal with the aforementioned difficulties concerning mondial properties. On the other hand, if we claimed that something else (another world? A set of possible worlds?) has the property of having the presence of the (actual) world, this would not seem to be sufficient to distinguish the actual world from other worlds in virtue of its actuality[112].

I.2.2.8. External Unifications (Vallicella).

W. Vallicella develops an interesting and original approach to the problem of existence. I can only summarize his theses and make some brief remarks about them, even though Vallicella provides a detailed defense that is deeply connected with many ontological problems (e.g., the status of facts and individuals and Bradley's regress concerning the instantiation of properties)[113].

According to him, concrete individuals (thick particulars) should be considered concrete facts. They have ontological constituents that are contingently unified and the contingent unity of such constituents corresponds to the existence of that individual. Thus, concrete individuals' existence is neither a property of individuals, nor a property of properties. Furthermore, it seems

[112] For a more detailed critical exposition of Sommers' account, see Vallicella (2002): 127-151.
[113] See Vallicella (2002): 159-271.

that Vallicella rejects non-existent objects. Thus, it seems that his theory accepts both (actualism) and (actualism-a).

In fact, concrete individuals exist iff their ontological constituents are unified by an external unifier, that is the paradigm existent or existence as such. There is at least and at most one paradigm existent, that determines itself to ground the contingent unity of individuals, that necessarily exists and determines itself to exist and that is a transcendental mind. Thus, Vallicella claims that, for any contingent individual *x* (e.g., Obama), *x* exists iff there is a necessary *y* such that *y* is the paradigm existent and *y*, as the external unifier of *x*'s ontological constituents, directly produces the unity/existence of *x*[114]. On the other hand, it seems that, following the truth expressed by (8), Sherlock Holmes does not exist iff, even if there is a necessary *y* that is the paradigm existent, *y* does *not* externally unifies Sherlock Holmes' ontological constituents and it does not produce his unity/existence. So far, so good.

However, Vallicella claims that properties are ontological constituents of objects. In fact, existence cannot be considered a property of concrete individuals because it is the unity of that individual and the unity of an individual cannot be one of its constituents, since, in this latter case, it would be unified with other constituents in order to produce some other kind of unity, *et sic ad infinitum*. Unity/existence is the result of the activity of the external unifier on concrete individuals' ontological constituents.

Yet, what about Sherlock Holmes? It seems that Sherlock Holmes really has ontological constituents: it *really* is a fictional object, it is *really* considered a detective within some story, and so on. Does he have any kind of unity? It seems that he has it, since he is really distinct, for example, from Pegasus, D'Artagnan, Michele and other objects, and since he is *some* thing that is such-and-such (as we have already seen, he is not reducible to other things, such as the collection of his properties). Yet, he does not exist, since his ontological constituents are not externally unified by the paradigm existent. However, why is it not legitimate to consider Sherlock Holmes an object, even though a non-existent one? Within Vallicella's account, he could be considered an object whose unity is not produced by the external unifier, but by some other mind's activity (e.g., Sherlock Holmes' author's mind). Yet, in this latter case, Sherlock Holmes, in virtue of having some kind of unity different from unity/existence, could have some different kind of being or no being at all. If an object's being and its unity were one and the same, there would be some different kind of being for any different kind of unity. If they were not one and the same, there would be objects with no being at all, yet provided with some kind of unity. As it will be clear in the second part of this work, I accept the latter solution, because I think that objects can be

[114] See Vallicella (2002): 269.

considered objects in virtue of their identity, even without having being.

In this work, I shall not deal with Vallicella's paradigm existent, since I cannot discuss in depth all the problems connected with exemplification, relational and non-relational ties between objects and properties. However, if the paradigm existence is considered existence as such, we have two different perspectives on existence within Vallicella's theory: existence is both an object (the paradigm existent) and a feature of concrete individuals (even though it is not a property of them). I have only tried to argue that it is not true that only concrete objects have unity and that, by having unity, they have existence too. Even non-existent objects have some kind of unity or, according to my perspective, they have unity in virtue of their being objects.

I.2.2.9. Azzouni's Talks about Nothing(s).

J. Azzouni deeply and exhaustively explores the world of non-existent objects and their connection with the problem of reference[115]. Following Azzouni, there are thoughts (e.g., thoughts about Sherlock Holmes) that should be considered empty singular thoughts: they are singular, because they are about singular objects (about an object, not simply about a set of properties); they are empty, because they are about objects that do not exist. However, there seemingly is a contradiction in this thesis, at least from an actualist's perspective: in order for such thoughts to be about singular objects, such objects must exist *qua* objects; in order for them to be empty, such objects must not exist, i.e., they must not be objects at all. Thus, empty singular thoughts are singular, object-less thoughts.

In brief, Azzouni deals with such a difficulty by distinguishing two different senses of reference and aboutness: a thought is about$_r$ something (or a term refers$_r$ to something) iff what it is about exists (or the term refers to something existent); otherwise, a thought is about$_e$ something (or a term refers$_e$ to something). Aboutness$_r$ and reference$_r$ are real relations between thoughts (or terms) and objects, while aboutness$_e$ and reference$_e$ are not relations, since they do not relate objects and terms to anything at all.

Yet, since there are true statements that contain referring$_e$ terms and true thoughts about$_e$ non-existent objects, it seems legitimate to assume that there are truth-value inducers for such statements and such thoughts. These inducers need not include such objects. In particular, Azzouni deals with hallucinated objects, numbers and *ficta*. I cannot discuss here Azzouni's theory of such objects. In general, it seems to me that the author tries to overcome the conflict between actualists and Meinongians by admitting that our experiences and verbal practices can involve some kind of reference to things that do not exist, even though this latter kind of

[115] See Azzouni (2010). See also Azzouni (2004). Another interesting theory of reference without referents is defended in Sainsbury (2005).

reference can be explained away by referring to practices, "as-if" statements, and so on.

However, the core of Azzouni's proposal lies in his distinction between two kinds of reference and aboutness. Following him, the proposition expressed by (7) is made true by the fact that "Obama" refers$_r$ to something (or that every thought about Obama is about$_r$ Obama), while the proposition expressed by (8) is made true by the fact that "Sherlock Holmes" does not refer$_r$ to anything and it refers$_e$ to something (or that every thought about Sherlock Holmes is not a thought about$_r$ anything and it is a thought about$_e$ Sherlock Holmes). In this latter case, since these two kinds of reference (and aboutness) are exclusive, it is legitimate to claim that "Sherlock Holmes" simply refers$_e$ to something (or that every thought about Sherlock Holmes is a thought about$_e$ him). This seems to be acceptable, only if one assumes that, if something exists, there can be thoughts about$_r$ it, while, if something does not exist, there cannot be thoughts about$_r$ it and there can be thoughts about$_e$ it. However, this is not a good theory of existence. In fact, in a world where dinosaurs exist and where there is no minded subject, there cannot be thoughts about$_r$ dinosaurs, even if dinosaurs exist. One could accept some weaker theory of existence, according to which something exists if, in every world where there are minded subjects, it possible to have thoughts about$_r$ that thing. However, in this latter case, since it is possible to have thoughts about$_r$ things only if (among other necessary conditions) those things exists, the explanation turns out to be circular.

Furthermore, why cannot aboutness$_e$ be considered a relation? It cannot be so considered because one of the necessary conditions for the existence of a relation – at least from an actualist's perspective – is the existence of its *relata*. Since non-existent objects do not exist, there cannot be relations involving them. However, if it is true that thoughts about Sherlock Holmes are thoughts about$_e$ him, what does it make true the proposition expressed by this latter statement? Since there exist thoughts about$_e$ Sherlock Holmes and since Sherlock Holmes is not reducible to any other kind of entity, it seems to me that one should admit that there can be relations with non-existent objects. Thus, it is not true that one of the necessary conditions for the existence (or, if we do not want to state that relations properly exist, for the instantiation) of a relation is the existence of its *relata*.

I.2.3. Meinongianisms and some other kinds of non-actualism

Some philosophers deny that both (actualism) and (actualism-a) are true. Many of them are inspired by the works of Meinong in their refusal of the truth of (actualism)[116]. Yet, it is not true that every Meinongian denies (actualism-a), i.e., that existence is not a first-order, informative property. As we will see in this section, there are at least three varieties of Meinongianism:

[116] For a first approach with Meinongian and Neo-Meinongian theses, see Chisholm (1973).

property-centered Meinongianism (that accepts the distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties), instantiation-centered Meinongianism (that accepts that there are different kinds or modes of instantiation of properties by objects) and world-centered Meinongianism (that uses possible and impossible worlds in order to explain some ontological features of objects)[117]. Other philosophers deny the truth of (actualism), even though they are not so deeply inspired by Meinong. In this latter case, I shall deal with H.-N. Castañeda's and C. McGinn's theories. Finally, in section I.2.4, considering the works of P. T. Geach and B. Miller, I shall briefly explore a third way between actualism and non-actualism, according to which there are at least two different senses of existence and two different ways to deal with it.

I.2.3.1. Extra-Nuclear Philosophical Weapons (Routley, Parsons, Jacquette).

The first Meinongian strategy to deal with non-existent objects and their features is grounded on the distinction between two kinds of properties: nuclear and extra-nuclear ones. This distinction was first proposed by one of Meinong's pupils, E. Mally, and it has been accepted by R. Routley, T. Parsons and D. Jacquette.

Routley distinguishes characterising and non-characterising features of objects[118]. However, this distinction is more clearly and deeply explained in Parsons' works, where it plays an important role. According to Parson[119], it is necessary, in order to avoid contradictions (such as in the case of the existent round square), to restrict the principle of the freedom of assumption to some properties: nuclear ones. Thus, a property F is nuclear iff, given a set of nuclear properties X, not containing F, F does not characterize any object characterized by every member of X. This happens because X-objects are only characterized by the members of X and cannot be characterized by F. On the other hand, X-objects are not characterized by the lack of F. Such objects simply do not have F, nor non-F.

On the other hand, extra-nuclear properties are (intuitively) those properties that express the ontological or the modal status or some intentional or technical feature of an object. For example, the properties of existing or of being fictional (ontological), of being possible or impossible (modal), of being thought of by Michele (intentional), of being complete (technical) are extra-nuclear properties. It is not legitimate to assume such properties in order to constitute an object, so that the Meinongian principle of the freedom of assumption should be restricted to nuclear properties. Parsons, for example, claims that, since every object that is a unicorn (i.e., that is characterized by the nuclear property of being a unicorn) lacks the property of existing,

[117] See also, for the history and the characterization of Neo-Meinongianism, Paolini Paoletti, Mari (2013).
[118] See, for example, Routley (1979): 506-510, 595-598. See also Routley (1966). For more details about Routley's theses, see Paolini Paoletti (2013).
[119] See Parsons (1980): 226-26, 42-44, 52-57. See also Parsons (1974), (1975), (1979a), (1979b) and (1982).

existence cannot be considered a nuclear property.

Concerning (5)-(8), it is possible to claim that, according to Parsons, (5) is not true, because there are lions (i.e., objects characterized by the nuclear property of being a lion) that do not exist; (6) is true since no unicorn has the extra-nuclear property of existing; (7) is true since there is an object characterized by some nuclear properties (Obama's ones) that has the extra-nuclear property of existing; (8) is true, because there is an object characterized by some nuclear properties (Sherlock Holmes' ones) that lacks the extra-nuclear property of existing and does not exist (perhaps there is a corresponding property of non-existing or, more simply, for every object, if that object lacks the property of existing, then it does not exist). Furthermore, (13) is true because the same object (Sherlock Holmes) has the extra-nuclear property of being fictional. It is possible to deal with (15) in a similar way: there is an object that is a hobbit (i.e., that is characterized by the nuclear property of being a hobbit) that has the extra-nuclear property of being thought of by John. A corollary: Parsons allows that there are negative nuclear properties, i.e., properties whose instantiation is entailed by the negation of the instantiation of their corresponding nuclear properties[120].

What about the problem of existence-entailing properties and of the consequent ambiguity of propositions such as the one expressed by (8)? It seems that, since the property of being a detective is a nuclear one, Parsons would deny that (12) simply entails that Sherlock Holmes, in virtue of his being a detective, exists. There is no ambiguity in (12): Sherlock Holmes really is a detective, even though a non-existent one. Furthermore, if there were a non-existent politician named "Obama", (14) would still be true. However, there remains at least one difficulty, expressed by the Russellian example of the existent round square. It seems legitimate to assume that there is an object characterized by the properties of being round, of being a square and of existing, and to assume that Sherlock Holmes exists (at least in Conan Doyle's stories). Yet, existence is an extra-nuclear property and it cannot be assumed to constitute an object. If existence simply were an extra-nuclear property, Sherlock Holmes would turn out to be a contradictory object, both having and not having existence.

In order to deal with such problems, Parsons introduces watered-down versions of extra-nuclear properties, i.e., nuclear properties that are so strictly related to their corresponding extra-nuclear properties that it is really difficult to distinguish them[121]. Thus, there is a watered-down version of existence that characterizes Sherlock Holmes, even though he has no extra-nuclear existence, since he is a fictional object. Concerning real objects, the instantiation of their extra-nuclear properties is coextensive with the instantiation of their respective watered-down versions.

[120] See Parsons (1980): 105-106.
[121] See Parsons (1980): 44, 68.

Thus, if it is true that (7), Obama has the watered-down version of existence iff he has extra-nuclear existence[122]. On the other hand, watered-down existence and extra-nuclear existence are two distinct properties and it is not true that, for every object, that object has extra-nuclear existence, if it has watered-down existence.

Some problems affect Parsons' account[123]. First, let me consider two objects: a flying horse and a unicorn. Are they characterized by the same properties, since it seems legitimate to accept that unicorns are flying horses? Strictly speaking, Parsons seems not to concede this. In fact, objects that are characterized by the nuclear properties of being a horse and of flying are distinct from objects that are characterized by the nuclear property of being unicorns. Since there could be unicorns not characterized by the properties of flying and of being horses, nor by the nuclear negations of such properties, these two kinds of objects are not identical. However, what would the property of being a unicorn amount to, without being coinstantiated with the properties of flying and of being a horse? Secondly, it seems legitimate to assume that, within Conan Doyle's stories, Sherlock Holmes exists. Yet, Conan Doyle does not literally claim that Sherlock Holmes exists: since Sherlock Holmes is such-and-such in his stories, it seems legitimate to infer that he exists. Unfortunately, following Parsons' account, it seems difficult to accept that there is such an implicit watered-down property of existing that characterizes Sherlock Holmes. For example, Parsons does not allow that all the squares are not round, but that this is true provided that the laws of Euclidean geometry are true[124]. Yet, no one can guarantee that the law of nature according to which material objects can move only if they exist is valid within Sherlock Holmes' stories: Sherlock Holmes walks within those stories, even if it is neither legitimate to assume that he exists, nor that he does not exist (i.e., it is neither legitimate to assume that he has watered-down existence, nor that it does not have it). Yet, there seems to be a strong intuition according to which Sherlock Holmes exists, at least within those stories. If there were no implicit Sherlock Holmes' watered-down existence, Sherlock Holmes *qua* existent (i.e., *qua* having watered-down existence) would be distinct from Sherlock Holmes, because the latter would neither have, nor not have watered-down existence, while the former would have it.

Thirdly, is there any clear and non-circular criterion to define the distinction between watered-down versions of extra-nuclear properties and their corresponding extra-nuclear correlates? The existing Sherlock Holmes has watered-down existence, but he does not have extra-nuclear existence. He has these properties iff it is assumed that Sherlock Holmes exists, even though he does not exist (i.e., he does not have extra-nuclear existence). Yet, it is possible to

[122] See Parsons (1980): 44, 159.
[123] For a more detailed critical exposition, see Orilia (2005): 164-167, Sainsbury (2010): 52-67, Berto (2013a): 116-128. See also Kit Fine (1984)'s critical review of Parsons' book, Hintikka (1984) and Howell (1983).
[124] See Parsons (1980): 39-40.

assume that Sherlock Holmes exists, even though he does not exist, only if watered-down existence is different from extra-nuclear one, thus having a circular explanation. If there were no such criterion, this distinction would seem suspiciously *ad hoc*.

Thus, is there a more systematic way to deal with the distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties[125]? According to Jacquette[126], a property is nuclear iff it is not true that, for every object that instantiates it (or whose *Sosein* is constituted by it), that object does not have that property iff it has its complement (i.e., the corresponding negative property). On the other hand, a property is extra-nuclear iff it is true that, for every object that instantiates it, that object does not have that property iff it has its complement. Thus, the property of having a father named John is nuclear, since it is not true that all the objects do not have it iff they have the property of non-having a father named John (many fictional objects neither have such a property, nor its complement). On the other hand, the property of existing is extra-nuclear, since it is true that, for every object, that object does not exist iff it has non-existence. Jacquette does not admit watered-down properties: Sherlock Holmes simply does not exist, i.e., he does not have the extra-nuclear property of existing. There is no existent Sherlock Holmes, even though it could be true that Sherlock Holmes exists according to some story, i.e., within some fictional context[127]. According to the author, an object exists (i.e, it has extra-nuclear existence) iff it is both complete and non-overdetermined (possible). It is complete iff, for every nuclear property, it has that property or its complement. It is non-overdetermined (possible) iff, for every nuclear property, it is not the case that it has both that property *and* its complement[128].

Since I have already criticized the approach based on fictional contexts and since I shall consider the definition of existence as completeness in the second part of this work, I shall deal with two other problems concerning Jacquette's theory. First, how do objects instantiate properties according to this theory? An object instantiates a nuclear property iff that property constitutes that object's *Sosein*. Yet, this is not true with regard to extra-nuclear properties, even though objects instantiate them. Jacquette maintains that there is only one kind of instantiation, that cannot nevertheless be identical (following my remark) with an object's *Sosein*'s constitution. On the other hand, if we admitted that there are two different kinds of instantiation, we would have an instantiation-centered version of Meinongianism, according to which properties can be instantiated by objects in different ways.

Secondly, is Jacquette's criterion for the nuclear-extranuclear distinction circular or not? Let me recall that a nuclear property is a property for which there are objects that neither

[125] Cocchiarella (1982) presents this problem.
[126] See Jacquette (1996): 114-116.
[127] See Jacquette (1996): 256-264.
[128] See Jacquette (1996): 116.

instantiate it, nor its complement. It is essential for the truth of this definition that some objects are incomplete. Yet, an object is incomplete, following Jacquette, iff there is at least one nuclear property for which it is neither true that that object has it, nor its complement[129]. Thus, some object is incomplete, only if (among other) some constituting property of that object is nuclear. Yet, on the other hand, some property is nuclear, only if some object is incomplete with regard to it. This seems to be a circular explanation.

I.2.3.2. Castañeda's Guises.

In order to deal with Meinongian paradoxes and with many other data and problems concerning the structure of the world and of our thought, H.-N. Castañeda outlines a complex theory, grounded on guises and many kinds of relations between them[130]. Roughly, a guise is a concrete individual that can be the referent of a definite description. A guise is made up of a set of properties (even a singleton) and a concretizer operator *c*. For example, *c*{being the present King of France} is the guise to which the definite description "the present King of France" refers.

When we attribute properties to objects, following Castañeda, we do not univocally use the copula "is". There are many kinds of uses of the copula and many kinds of predication. For example, we could state that the present King of France *is* the present King of France, thus analytically attributing a property to an object. If the object that we consider is the guise, we claim that the property of being the present King of France is internally predicated of that guise. On the other hand, if we consider the ordinary object that is the present King of France (i.e., according to Castañeda, a cluster of guises having different external relations among them), we have to introduce further kinds of instantiation. This seems to happen with many other properties too: the property of being bald, of being a man, and so on.

In this section, I shall only consider two kinds of external relations: consubstantiation and consociation. Consubstantiation is a relation among guises that stands for their contingent sameness (identity, in fact, properly holds among guises that have the same nucleus, namely are internally constituted by the same properties). This relation is expressed by C*. For example, in order to interpret (14), we will have:

(10castañeda) C*(*c*{being the bearer of the name "Obama", being a man}, *c*{being the bearer of the name "Obama", being a man, being a politician})

The proper name "Obama" denotes a guise that has, within its nucleus, the property of being the bearer of the name "Obama" and some other properties that can be found out

[129] See Jacquette (1996): 117.
[130] See, in particular, Castañeda (1974), in Castañeda (1989): 235-261, Castañeda (1979), in Castañeda (1989): 176-205, and Castañeda (1985-1986). See also Voltolini (1996).

according to the context (e.g., the property of being a man, since we are talking of the man named "Obama"). However, the proper name "Obama" does not directly refer to Obama, since we do not have to consider ordinary objects, but concrete individuals (guises) that constitute them[131]. If we did not want to accept this account of proper names, we could try to use guises internally constituted by individual properties (e.g., the property of being Sherlock Holmes or of being Obama). Since Castañeda cannot be considered an actualist, it is not necessary for him to admit that there exist ordinary objects such as Sherlock Holmes in order for these properties to exist.

Existence is self-consubstantiation and it is neither a property of ordinary objects, nor of guises. Whenever something is contingently the same as itself, that thing exists. Namely, (7) can be interpreted as

(7castañeda) C*(*c*{being the bearer of the name "Obama", being a man}, *c*{being the bearer of the name "Obama", being a man})

On the other hand, since Sherlock Holmes does not exist, (8) can be interpreted as the negation of a proposition similar to the one expressed by (7castañeda), after having replaced the proper name in it with "Sherlock Holmes". There are many principles connected with consubstantiation and existence, in respect of completeness, logical closure, compossibility, and so on[132]. In particular, consubstantiated guises obey existence-entailing principles, while non-consubstantiated ones do not obey them. Furthermore, Castañeda claims that existing ordinary objects are reducible to infinite sets of consubstantiated guises, while fictional characters can be reduced to finite sets of guises[133].

In respect to them, he introduces one further kind of relation between guises: consociation (C**), that holds (at least) among two guises that are only thought of as being consubstantiated. This kind of relation can hold with respect to a context (in this case, we have to introduce a context-index) or not (when we consider culturalized fiction, i.e. fiction that is not restricted to a context). Accordingly, using the context-index *i*, (12) can be interpreted as

(12castañeda) C**$_i$(*c*{being the bearer of the name "Sherlock Holmes", being a man}, *c*{being the bearer of the name "Sherlock Holmes", being a man, being a detective})

Since (12castañeda) does not express any consubstantiation relation, no problem arises in considering Sherlock Holmes a detective, even though a non-real one.

Intentional relations, such as the one expressed by (15), are somehow more complicated

[131] See also Castañeda (1974), in Castañeda (1989): 251-252.
[132] See Castañeda (1974), in Castañeda (1989): 243-244.
[133] See Castañeda (1979), in Castañeda (1989): 196.

and I shall not deal with them. What about (13)? Fictional objects are systems of consociated guises, i.e., systems of guises that are actually thought of as being consubstantiated[134]. Thus, it seems not legitimate to analyze (13) in terms of consubstantiation. Perhaps, within the context of culturalized fiction (i.e., without using any context-index), it could be legitimate to claim that some guise denoted by the proper name "Sherlock Holmes" is consociated with some other guise internally constituted by the properties of the first guise *and* by the property of being fictional. Otherwise, it could be legitimate to claim that, within the same context, there is at least one guise to which the first guise is consociated. Furthermore, if we wanted to preserve the fact that, in order for Sherlock Holmes to be a fictional object, there must be contexts different from the context of culturalized fiction in which he has some property, we could add one corresponding consociation relation. I shall deal with other aspects of Castañeda's theory of fictional entities in the next chapter.

It is really difficult to provide a general evaluation for Castañeda's guise theory. Since he does not primarily consider ordinary objects (real and fictional ones), this theory admits of no simple comparison with other theories. I just want to focus on the notion of existence. Guises exist iff they are self-consubstantiated. On the other hand, it seems that ordinary objects exist only if they are infinite sets of consubstantiated guises. In order for an ordinary object to exist, it must be a set of self-consubstantiated guises that are consubstantiated with one another. Thus, non-existent guises are those guises that are not self-consubstantiated. Furthermore, in general, it could be legitimate to claim that, for Castañeda, non-existing objects can bear properties, given that non-existing (non-self-consubstantiated) guises can bear other relations to each other (consociation relations, and so on). Yet, consubstantiation (even in its reflexive form) of guises seems to presuppose that the ordinary object constituted by a system of consubstantiated guises exists. In Castañeda's system, existence must be assumed as primitive and somehow redundant, even if the *contingent* existence of guises and ordinary objects seems to be explained[135]. In fact, if we wanted to explain existence *in se* in terms of consubstantiation, we would have to assume the existence of ordinary objects, thus having a circular explanation, even though Castañeda does not strictly concede that there are ordinary existing objects. Existence cannot be non-circularly defined in terms of consubstantiation, since consubstantiation must be somehow defined in terms of existence.

This seems to be a general difficulty that characterizes non-actualist analyses of existence. In fact, even if we denied (actualism) and (actualism-a), we would have to find out a non-circular and informative definition of existence (of what is for something to exist) *or* to assume existence

[134] See Castañeda (1979), in Castañeda (1989): 192-193.
[135] See Castañeda (1974), in Castañeda (1989): 246-247.

as primitive. In the latter case, we would provide no definition for existence, while the former task seems to be really difficult to deal with, as I have already tried to show.

I.2.3.3. Dual strategies (Zalta).

In this section, I shall analyze one of the most interesting dual-copula strategies, that well represents the key-features of the instantiation-centered Meinongianism: the theory developed by E. N. Zalta in his work *Abstract Objects*[136]. Developing another suggestion of Mally's, according to whom it would be possible to deal with Meinongian paradoxes by using two different meanings of the copula "is" and being perhaps inspired by W. J. Rapaport's distinctions between constitution and exemplification and between Meinongian and actual objects[137], Zalta distinguishes two ways in which an object can instantiate a property: encoding and exemplification. This distinction is assumed as primitive, even if one could try to understand it after having defined the notion of abstract object. An object is abstract iff it does not exemplify existence. Thus, (8) expresses a true proposition, because Sherlock Holmes is an abstract object, i.e., an object that does not exemplify existence. On the other hand, in order for (7) to express a true proposition, Obama must be considered a non-abstract object, i.e., an existing one (at least according to this sense of existence, since Zalta distinguishes different senses of existence).

Abstract objects encode properties and "for every expressible condition on properties, there is an abstract object which encodes just the properties meeting the condition"[138]. They exemplify properties too, such as the property of being abstract. Non-abstract objects fail to encode properties: they only exemplify them[139]. Given two different objects (an abstract and a non-abstract one), that seem to instantiate the same properties (e.g., Obama within a work of fiction and the real Obama), it is legitimate to claim that one of such objects (the abstract one) is the blueprint of the other (the non-abstract one), i.e., of its correlate, iff the former object encodes all the properties that the latter object exemplifies[140]. I shall not consider here two paradoxes (Clark's and McMichael's ones) that instantiation-centered Meinongianism seems to

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136 See Zalta (1983).

137 See Rapaport (1976), (1978) and (1985). Rapaport was one of Castañeda's pupils. Thus, it seems to me legitimate to consider Castañeda one of the fathers of instantiation-centered Meinongianism. As Rapaport claims in Rapaport (1978), if we simply assumed guises as ordinary existing or non-existing objects (i.e., if we turned to a Meinongian interpretation of Castañeda's theory), constituency would correspond to internal predication, while exemplification would correspond to external relations, such as consubstantiation.

138 See Zalta (1983): 12, 34. Furthermore, Zalta claims that: two objects can be considered identical iff they exemplify the same properties (if they are non-abstract objects) or they are both abstract and encode the same properties; two properties are identical iff they are encoded by the same objects.

139 See Zalta (1983): 33.

140 See Zalta (1983): 35. This distinction seems to recall Rapaport's distinction between blueprints and *Sein*-correlates: see Rapaport (1978): 163-165.

entail[141].

However, dealing with (12)-(14), it is legitimate to claim that, according to Zalta, (12) expresses a true proposition since there is an abstract object (Sherlock Holmes) that encodes the property of being a detective. We can also introduce a fictional context operator, in order to explain the fact that, according to that context (for example, Conan Doyle's stories), Sherlock Holmes exemplifies the property of being a detective[142]. In general, native fictional objects (namely, objects that are native with respect to some fiction), are those objects that encode all the properties that, according to that fiction (or that story), they exemplify. On the other hand, such objects do not exemplify those properties. Thus, there remains no ambiguity in (12). With regard to (13), the abstract object Sherlock Holmes exemplifies the property of being fictional, while, with respect to (14), we could claim that Obama's being a politician entails Obama's existence iff Obama exemplifies the property of being a politician. However, considered apart from the exemplification nexus between objects and properties, the instantiation of the property of being a detective does not entail the instantiation of the property of existing or the fact that Sherlock Holmes exists. With respect to (15), we could claim that the object thought of by John only encodes the property of being a hobbit[143]: there is such an object, even if it does not exist. Furthermore, we could introduce an intensional-context operator in order to deal with John's beliefs (or John's thoughts) about that hobbit[144].

Meinongian paradoxes are thus eliminated by claiming that, for example, the existent golden mountain encodes existence, even if it does not exist (i.e., it does not exemplify existence); that the round square is both round and square, since it encodes the properties of being round and of being a square, even if no existent object exemplifies both these properties[145]. Furthermore, the round and non-round square encodes the properties of being round and of being non-round: since this object only encodes these properties, it does not entail any "logical explosion" following the Pseudo-Scotus Law (*ex falso quodlibet*)[146].

Yet, Zalta recognizes that there are many senses of existence, that cannot be simply reduced to the property of being concrete (or existent), i.e., of being non-abstract[147]. This seems to be one of the most interesting parts of Zalta's book – at least with regard to the topic of this work. The first sense of existence (existence$_1$ or real existence) has been already considered by claiming

[141] For a brief exposition and discussion of these paradoxes, see, for example, Orilia (2005): 167-171. See also Clark (1978).
[142] See Zalta (1983): 146.
[143] Concerning the problems connected with intentionality, see also Zalta (1988).
[144] See Zalta (1983): 140-145.
[145] See Zalta (1983): 47-50.
[146] See Zalta (1983): 145-146.
[147] See Zalta (1983): 50-52.

that abstract objects do not $exist_1$. The second sense of existence ($existence_2$) characterizes abstract objects that have correlates: in this case, an abstract object $exists_2$ iff it encodes all the properties that some object exemplifies. Finally, $existence_3$ (or, following Zalta, Platonic existence) characterizes every object: both abstract and concrete objects (non-abstract ones) $exist_3$ and no object fails to exemplify this property[148]. In sum, abstract objects do not $exist_1$, they could $exist_2$ (e.g., a fictional character such as Napoleon in *War and Peace* has a correlate, i.e., the existing Napoleon) and they $exist_3$.

Zalta's theory seems not to be immune to the problems that characterize Parson's account. For example, the existent Sherlock Holmes (i.e., the abstract object that encodes the properties of being Sherlock Holmes and of existing) is different from Sherlock Holmes, just as the round square is different from the round non-round square, even though we all know that the property of being a square entails the property of non-being round, at least according to the Euclidean geometrical laws. In reply to these problem, one could try to distinguish encoding from exemplification as follows: when an object encodes some property, it does not encode all the properties that are implied by that property when it is exemplified. This seems to be a good solution to preserve the Meinongian freedom of assumption principle against such criticisms.

However, Zalta assumes that the distinction between encoding and exemplification is primitive. In fact, if it were defined in terms of the distinction between abstract and non-abstract objects, the criterion of distinction between encoding and exemplification would turn out be circular, since abstract and non-abstract objects are defined in terms of encoding and exemplification. Yet, there is no intuition that guarantees the legitimacy of this primitive distinction: objects simply seem to have properties, regardless of their being abstract or non-abstract.

Finally, since it is assumed that Sherlock Holmes encodes all the properties that are attributed to him within his native story, it would be possible to ask whether Sherlock Holmes, when he appears within other stories, is the same object or not. It seems plausible to answer that he is not the same object, since other properties are attributed to him within other stories. Yet, how could we individuate similar Sherlock Holmes' characters across different stories? We could admit some kind of similarity between different objects that are Sherlock Holmes in terms of the possession of (i.e., of encoding) some relevant properties. Thus, there would be some "essential" Sherlock Holmes (some Sherlock Holmes who encodes all and only those relevant properties)

[148] See also Zalta (1988): 102-105. There are three senses of existence in Rapaport's accounts too (see Rapaport (1978): 165): existence as an assumptible property that can constitute a Meinongian object too; existence as actuality (that only characterizes actual objects); existence as having a *Sein*-correlate. Yet, Rapaport seems to follow the original theory of Meinong's more than Zalta, since he does not mention any Platonic existence. In fact, according to Meinong, it is simply not the case that every object has *Sein*.

who resembles every Sherlock Holmes' character. We could claim that Sherlock Holmes in the story *a* resembles Sherlock Holmes in the story *b*, even if they are two different objects, since they both resemble the "essential" Sherlock Holmes. Yet, this seems to run against the intuition that it is one and the same Sherlock Holmes that appears in the story *a*, in the story *b* and that encodes all the properties of the "essential" Sherlock Holmes too. In sum, in order to preserve Zalta's theory, we could have to multiply objects. On the other hand, it seems to me that a theory of fictional objects that could justify the reference to one and the same object across different stories is preferable to a theory that explains the same datum by introducing many objects.

I.2.3.4. Strange Worlds (Priest, Berto).

G. Priest[149] and F. Berto[150] both develop a modal version of Meinongianism, that I have called world-centered Meinongianism. As we will see, this version has some advantages over the other two forms of Meinongianism. The idea behind this proposal is that we should accept an unrestricted Meinongian principle of freedom of assumption, even if we should qualify it in respect to worlds. Thus, for example, Berto claims that, for any given condition on properties, there is some object that satisfies it in some world[151]. In addition to the actual world, there are other possible worlds and impossible ones too (i.e., worlds where the law of non-contradiction does not hold). In fact, such theories are strictly connected with particular solutions given to some logical and ontological problems (concerning consistency and modality), that I shall not discuss here[152]. Furthermore, existence is considered by these authors a first-order, informative property[153]: there are things that exist and things that do not exist. Finally, since we can quantify over, talk about and refer to objects that do not exist, it seems acceptable that, even in our world (the actual world), there are such non-existing objects. This is a crucial assumption, since it simplifies the interpretation of propositions such as the one expressed by (13). Finally, there are some properties that are existence-entailing: for example, the property of being taller than someone is an existence-entailing property[154]. We could add that there are properties that are non-existence entailing (e.g., the property of being fictional) and properties that are indifferent (e.g., the relation of being more famous than someone: both existent and non-existent objects can be the *relata* of this relation). In general, world-centered Meinongianism tries to preserve the fact that the instantiation of some properties implies the instantiation of some other properties:

[149] See, for example, Priest (2000a) and Priest (2005). For Priest's well-known defense of the thesis that there are true contradictions, see Priest (2006).
[150] See Berto (2010) and (2013a).
[151] See Berto (2013a): 141.
[152] For example, it seems that these theories are better justifiable if one accepts that there is some kind of trans-world identity, grounded on the fact that singular terms such as "Sherlock Holmes" rigidly denote objects.
[153] See, for example, Priest (2005): 13-14.
[154] See Priest (2005): 59-60.

for example, the instantiation of the property of being a square implies the non-instantiation of the property of being round, so that, within some impossible world, there really is a round square that is not round too, in virtue of its being a square. This seems to be a great advantage over other versions of Meinongianism. Furthermore, this solution does not counter-intuitively distinguish between different kinds of predication or of properties. On the other hand, it modifies our logic in order to allow that there are at least impossible worlds (since there are impossible objects, such as the round square), where the law of non-contradiction does not hold, even though the Pseudo-Scotus law is not valid.

Thus, concerning (7), one could state, from this perspective, that it expresses a true proposition, since, in the actual world, the object Obama instantiates the property of existing. On the other hand, (8) expresses a true proposition too, since Sherlock Holmes does not instantiate, in the actual world, the property of existing, while he instantiates it in other worlds (e.g., the relevant worlds defined by Conan Doyle's stories). Conan Doyle's worlds can be considered fictional worlds, i.e., worlds in which what Conan Doyle claims in his stories is true. In order to select such worlds, one has to consider implicit information too. For example, it could be implicitly (but not explicitly) claimed in Conan Doyle's stories that London is in England. Thus, one has to select all the worlds where there is a town named London that is in England. Concerning (13), Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character since he instantiates the property of being a fictional character in the actual world. In respect to (12), world-centered Meinongianists claim that it does not express a true proposition in the actual world (the property of being a detective is an existence-entailing one and, since Sherlock Holmes does not exist in the actual world, he cannot instantiate this property in it), while it express a true proposition in some non-actual world (where Sherlock Holmes exists). On the other hand, (14) expresses a true proposition, at least in respect to the actual world, since Obama actually exists and he is a politician. Finally, with regard to (15), since the property of thinking of does not entail existence, John can think of non-existent objects too. Furthermore, as Priest claims[155], many intentional attitudes define possible (and impossible) worlds where objects have properties that do not have in the actual world.

Even though the introduction of worlds seems to resolve many problems connected with Meinongian theories, it seems to me that there remain at least three problems to deal with. Since such problems concern fictional objects and the attribution of modal properties, I shall explore them to a larger extent in the next chapter. First, if we accept that Conan Doyle's stories are consistent, even though incomplete, there could be many possible worlds in which Sherlock

[155] See Priest (2000a).

Holmes is such-and-such. In fact, such stories do not claim, with regard to every object and every property, whether that object has or does not have that property. Being human and having hands, Sherlock Holmes is right-handed or left-handed or both, but this is not claimed in Conan Doyle's stories. Thus, (12) could express a true proposition in at least three worlds where Sherlock Holmes exists: one world in which he is right-handed, one world in which he is left-handed and one world in which he is both right-handed and left-handed. Yet, it seems that, when we claim that Sherlock Holmes is such-and-such according to some story, we only refer to one world (the world defined by that story). Thus, it seems that, following the world-centered Meinongian perspective, one has to maintain that there are many maximal possible worlds in which it is true that (12) *or* that there is only one world (at least considering only one story) where it is true that (12) and that this world is not maximal in respect to some feature(s) (it is not maximal since Sherlock Holmes must be right-handed or left-handed or both, given the assumption that possible worlds are maximal, but neither alternative is true, nor false). Accepting that there are many worlds in which it is true that (12) for one and the same object (Sherlock Holmes), Priest argues that such incompleteness does not involve that there are non-maximal worlds[156]. In fact, it is true that, in the actual world, Sherlock Holmes is represented by Conan Doyle as being right-handed or left-handed or both, but it is false that, in the actual world, he is represented by Conan Doyle as being right-handed (or that he is represented by Conan Doyle as being left-handed, or right-handed and left-handed). With regard to other worlds, there will be worlds where he is right-handed, worlds where he is left-handed and worlds where he is right-handed and left-handed. However, even though this solution seems to work, it seems to me preferable and nearer to our intuitions about fictional objects to maintain that there is a one-one correspondence between stories and fictional worlds. This will be clearer in the second part of this work, where I shall develop a theory grounded on the thesis that both fictional objects and fictional worlds are mental objects.

Furthermore, Priest argues that, by creating Sherlock Holmes, his author selects some features characterizing that object across fictional possible (and impossible) worlds. One and the same object has such features in many worlds. Authorial creation (and the creative representations of its products in different minds) bifurcates worlds. Yet, following this account, there is no proper creation of fictional objects. In the actual world, there is one fictional object that is represented as being such-and-such. In other worlds (the worlds corresponding to the story), it has other features that it is not represented as having in the actual world: in Conan Doyle's stories' worlds, for example, Sherlock Holmes neither has the property of being created

[156] See Priest (2005): 123-124.

by Conan Doyle, nor he is represented as having it. Thus, one has to deny that, in the actual world, a fictional object is created (and this seems to be highly counterintuitive), since it is not created by any author in other worlds, or s/he has to affirm that one and the same fictional object is created in the actual world and it is not created in other worlds, where it exists and it is not fictional. However, accepting this latter solution, there would be no unique definition of the ontological status of fictional objects: they would be fictional in this world and non-fictional in other worlds. On the other hand, if someone in other worlds represented Obama as being such-and-such, Obama could be a fictional object in other worlds, even being a non-fictional one in the actual world. Thus, if we do not give any special status to the actual world, we can only state that an object is fictional or non-fictional in respect to some world. We cannot state that it is *simply* fictional or non-fictional, since this seems to happen only in respect to the actual world.

Finally, concerning the round square, it seems that it is both round and non-round in some impossible world w_1, even though it only has the properties of being represented as round and of being represented as non-round in the actual world. However, might it have, in the actual world, the property of being round in the impossible world w_1? If it had this property, it would also *not* have the same property in the actual world: since in w_1 it is also not round, it would *not* have, in the actual world, the property of being round in the impossible world w_1. Yet, given this situation, the actual world would turn out to be an impossible one! One could try to deal with such a difficulty in several ways. It is possible to claim that the actual world is an impossible world, i.e., that there are counterexamples to the law of non-contradiction in the actual world too. Furthermore, it is possible to argue that, in the actual world, there is no property such as the property of being such-and-such in some world, even though there are properties such as the property of being represented as such-and-such. In contrast with the modal properties that I have introduced in my objection, these latter properties, as we have already seen, do not entail any contradiction in the actual world. Yet, assuming that there are non-existent objects and that such objects can have, in the actual world, properties that do not entail existence (such as the modal properties introduced), I do not see any reason to exclude that, in the actual world, they really instantiate those properties too. Finally, one could try to argue that the round square has, in this property, the property of being round in w_1 and the property of non-being round in w_1, so that no contradiction results. However, this strategy seems legitimate only if we admit that there are negative properties and that the instantiation of a negative property does not correspond to the non-instantiation of the corresponding positive one. In the second part of the work, I shall try to deal with this problem by both preserving this datum and the validity of the law of non-

contradiction in the actual world[157].

I.2.3.5. Free-style Semi-Meinongianism (McGinn).

C. McGinn argues that existence is a first-order informative property, even though a *sui generis* one[158]. After having criticized what he calls the Russellian orthodox view[159], McGinn claims that it is legitimate to quantify over and refer to things that do not exist by accepting a non-existentially-loaded interpretation of the *partial* quantifier ∃[160]. According to this perspective, it seems to him legitimate to admit that some things exist, i.e., that some things instantiate the first-order property of existing (since "exist" can be considered a legitimate first-level predicate, that attributes a property to an object), and that some things do not exist. However, non-existent things are those things that are not mind-independent[161]: Sherlock Holmes, for example, as a fictional character, is mind-dependent (he depends for his having properties on the authorial mind and, perhaps, on other minds thinking of him). Properties are ascribed to non-existent objects by minds. Thus, for every object, that object exists iff it is mind-independent. On the other hand, according to McGinn, there are objects that seem not to exist, but that are not properly mind-dependent. For example, my merely possible sister is a merely possible object that does not depend on my mind for her having properties. Impossible objects such as round squares are mind-independent too. Following him, merely possible objects and impossible objects are objects that exist (since they are mind-independent), even if the former ones *do not actually* exist and *could actually* exist and the latter ones *do not actually* exist and *could not actually* exist[162]. Thus, existence is a first-order, informative and *sui generis* property. It is *sui generis* since, while for every ordinary first-order property if that property is a contingent one, then its negation is contingent too, there is nothing to support the same view about existence: in fact, even if existence is *contingently* instantiated by objects, its negation (non-existence) is *necessarily* instantiated by those objects that do not exist[163]. Non-existence can be considered equivalent to failed intentionality of mental acts directed towards objects (I think of Sherlock Holmes, but Sherlock Holmes fails to exist), representation-dependence of objects, and so on[164].

It seems quite easy to interpret our data according to McGinn's perspective, so that I shall not focus on them. Yet, why do we have to think that merely possible and impossible objects are

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[157] For another objection concerning the relation between existent and non-existent objects in modal Meinongianism, see Sauchelli (2012). See also Berto's reply in Berto (2013b).
[158] See McGinn (2000): 15-51. For an interesting semantic analysis of "exist" as a predicate of individuals that partly agrees with McGinn's account, see Moltmann (2011) and (2013).
[159] See McGinn (2000): 21-30.
[160] See, in particular, McGinn (2000): 35-37.
[161] See McGinn (2000): 37.
[162] See McGinn (2000): 38-41.
[163] See McGinn (2000): 39.
[164] See McGinn (2000): 42-44.

not mind-dependent? Perhaps, this seems legitimate because their modal properties do not depend on minds' ascriptions. My merely possible sister does not actually exist, even though she could actually exist, not simply because I ascribe to her these properties. Thus, she exists, i.e., she is mind-independent. On the other hand, round squares do not actually exist and could not actually exist, not simply because I think of them as such. Thus, they exist, because they are mind-independent. On the other hand, fictional objects such as Sherlock Holmes are fictional only because someone thinks of them as such-and-such: if there were no thinking minds, there would be no such objects, so that they would not be fictional.

However, what does the property of *actually* existing amount to? Or, if we do not wish to accept that there is such a property, how does the operator expressed by "actually" work? McGinn does not explain this point. Plausibly, something does not actually exist iff it does not exist in the actual world. Merely possible objects do not exist in the actual world, even if they could exist in it, while round squares do not exist and could not exist in the actual world. Thus, actual existence is different from existence *simpliciter*. There follows that non-actual worlds exist too, since they are mind-independent. Yet, how can we justify McGinn's thesis that existent objects *contingently* exist (*simpliciter*), while non-existent ones *necessarily* do not exist (*simpliciter*)? Existent objects contingently exist in the actual world (they might not exist in it, since there are other possible worlds, that are accessible from the actual world, in which they do not exist), but it seems that they necessarily exist (*simpliciter*). In fact, if we claim that, in the actual world, merely possible objects do not actually exist, even if they exist (*simpliciter*) since there are non-actual worlds in which they actually exist, Obama exists (*simpliciter*) in every world in which he does not actually exist, i.e., he necessarily exists[165]. One could reply that these assumptions are contradictory, since, if merely possible objects exist (*simpliciter*) in the actual world, they do *actually* exist. Yet, they do *not* actually exist. Thus, they do not exist (*simpliciter*) in the actual world. True. Yet, what would existence (*simpliciter*) and actual existence amount to? Existence (*simpliciter*) could be considered actual existence in some world. However, in this case, actual existence would not be simply equivalent to existence in the actual world, since merely possible objects would turn out to exist in the actual world too: it is true, in the actual world, that merely possible objects actually exist in some world, i.e., that they have existence *simpliciter* in the actual world (they are mind-independent in the actual world too). Thus, we should have to find out one definition of existence in the actual world that does not involve the notion of existence *simpliciter*. In other terms, existence in the actual world cannot be considered equivalent to existence *simpliciter* in the actual world. Following McGinn's account, this task is really hard to deal with.

[165] For a similar objection, see van Inwagen (2008).

We could reply that an object contingently exists (*simpliciter*) iff there are worlds in which it does not exist (*simpliciter*), i.e., where it is mind-dependent. Yet, in this case, nothing guarantees that the same cannot be claimed with regard to Sherlock Holmes: there might be worlds in which Sherlock Holmes is mind-independent, as well as there might be worlds in which Obama (a mind-independent object in the actual world) is mind-dependent. Thus, non-existing objects would turn out not to be necessarily non-existent.

In sum, if we accept some kind of distinction between actual existence and existence (*simpliciter*), it turns out to be really difficult to claim that some objects contingently exist (*simpliciter*) and that some objects necessarily do not exist (*simpliciter*). If we do not accept any kind of distinction between them, we cannot claim that there are objects that exist (*simpliciter*), even if they do not actually exist. In the second part of this work, I shall accept McGinn's definition of non-existent objects as mind-dependent ones (at least with regard to fictional objects). However, I shall argue that merely possible objects and impossible ones are mind-dependent too.

I.2.4. The Third Way: Many Senses Theories of Existence (Geach, Miller)

As I have already remarked, Frege distinguishes two different senses of existence: existence as actuality and existence as the second-order property of being instantiated in at least one case. P. T. Geach develops this intuition[166] in order to explain some data concerning pretended use of names, the relation between existence and change (a relation that I shall explore in the chapter I.4), and between form and existence. According to him, it is possible to find out three different senses of existence[167]. In fact, in respect to (5) and (6), one could claim that they express true propositions in virtue of some kind of "there is" sense of existence: there are lions, since the Fregean concept (in our terms: the property) of being a lion is instantiated in at least one case, while there are no unicorns, since the Fregean concept of being a unicorn is not instantiated. On the other hand, by claiming (8), we claim something about the use of the proper name "Sherlock Holmes", i.e., the fact that, by using it, we do not refer to anything: we only *pretend* to refer by that name. There is no Sherlock Holmes (no object) to which we can refer by that name. Thus, Geach seems to accept (actualism). What about (12) and (13)? Even though Geach does not claim anything about the propositions expressed by statements such as (12), it is legitimate to argue that, according to his Fregean perspective, they are neither true, nor false. However, Geach could have accepted a pretense theory of fiction, according to which, by using the proper name "Sherlock Holmes" and by claiming that the object to which that name seems to refer is a detective, we only pretend to use that name and pretend to claim something true about its

[166] See Geach (1955) and Geach (1968).
[167] See Geach (1955): 262-268.

pretended bearer. Yet, since that name has no real bearer, (12) would not express a true proposition, but a pretended true one. This seems to contrast with our data: there is at least one sense according to which (12) expresses a simply true proposition. Finally, in respect to (13), we might qualify the pretense involved by the use of "Sherlock Holmes" as fictional pretense. However, it seems to me that Geach's account does not solve the problems involved by the meta-linguistic analysis of non-referring names and by the pretense theories of fiction that I have already mentioned.

Yet, there is at least one sense of existence according to which it seems legitimate not to accept (actualism-a). In fact, when we claim something like

(30) Socrates exists,

at least if we appropriately interpret it, we do not claim anything about the use of the proper name "Socrates": we claim something about Socrates. On the one hand (even if Geach does not mention this part of the Fregean theory of existence), if we simply claimed that Socrates exists (regardless of time), we would simply claim something about the use of the proper name "Socrates" (i.e., that that proper name is used to refer). Yet, on the other hand, if we state by (30) that Socrates exists *now*, we express by (30) a false proposition. On the contrary, if we state something like (7), we express a true proposition, since Obama is *now* existent. On the other hand, by

(31) Socrates does not exist,

we could express the (unluckily) true proposition that Socrates does not exist anymore. Accordingly, there is a third use of "exist" that corresponds to the use of an acceptable predicate of individuals. We use this predicate when we claim that something comes to exist, no longer exists, still exists, and so on. Furthermore, mentioning an argument of Wittgenstein's, Geach claims that, in (31), "Socrates" still refers, since the reference of a proper name does not die when its bearer dies[168]. What are the ontological implications of such an analysis? According to Geach, for an individual to continue to exist is for that individual to be the same X for a certain period of time (where "X" expresses a *Begriffswort*, so that it stands for a form, according to him)[169]. Existence seems to be a property of individuals: it is the X-individual that continues to exist. However, if we claimed that the form expressed by "X" is nothing more than a property, then continued existence would turn out to be a peculiar property. In fact, it would be equivalent to the property of being the same X for a certain period of time.

[168] See Geach (1955): 267.
[169] See Geach (1955): 268.

Yet, provided that we can find out appropriate criteria of identity for him, why cannot we claim that Sherlock Holmes continues to exist, i.e., that he is the same fictional character for a certain period of time (e.g., as long as stories about him exist)? In order to deal with this problem from Geach's perspective, we could try with five different solutions. First, we could distinguish between independent and dependent continued existence: Sherlock Holmes has dependent continued existence iff he is the same fictional character for a certain period of time, that corresponds to the period of time of the continued existence of the stories about him (on which Sherlock Holmes depends for its existence), while Socrates' (and Obama's) continued existence does not depend on stories' existence. However, Sherlock Holmes' stories seem not to have independent continued existence. Thus, we should have to find out something independently existing on which both Sherlock Holmes and his stories depend. Secondly, we could deny that Sherlock Holmes is an object, by adopting the strategies already analyzed and rejected (at least in my perspective). Thirdly, we could simply deny that Sherlock Holmes exists, so that he cannot have continued existence.

Fourthly, we could deny that forms are properties. Geach's account is ambiguous. In fact, according to him, the same form X-ness can occur both in nature (as having *esse naturale*) and in mind (as having *esse intentionale*)[170]. In this latter case, is it an object (the individualized form, not identical with its bearer) or a property that occurs in two different ways? By definition, objects cannot be borne by other objects. Thus, forms are objects that are not borne by other objects in the same way as properties are borne by objects. It seems to me that Geach thinks of forms as Fregean concepts' (i.e., properties') correlates: humanity is the correlate of the property of being human, while Socratishness or Obamishness, for example, are the correlates of the properties of being Socrates and of being Obama. Even accepting this distinction (according to which, for example, humanity has *esse naturale* in men and *esse intentionale* in minds), the criterion of continued existence does not work with forms, but with properties. Socrates, for example, continues to exist iff he is the same man (i.e., he instantiates the property of being a man) for a certain period of time. Thus, Sherlock Holmes can be the same fictional character for a certain period of time, since the property of being a fictional character seems to be a legitimate property. Fifthly, we could reply that this criterion is restricted to actual, existing objects.

Yet, accepting the third and/or the fifth solution, we could also be able to find out a notion of existence that could ground the notion of continued existence, i.e., the third Geachean sense of existence. There might be a fourth sense of existence, corresponding to actuality. Furthermore, accepting a presentist view of the relationship between property instantiation and

[170] See Geach (1955): 271-272.

time, this fourth sense would be identical with the third one: something exists now iff it is actual now. On the other hand, if we do not accept this perspective, we can claim that the property of being actual expresses an independent sense of existence and that it can express, for example, tenseless real existence too. Geach clarifies this notion when he claims that something is actual iff it either acts, or undergoes change, or both[171]. Continuants are actual in this sense, as well as other entities, while there are entities that are not actual. Nevertheless, what about the notion of change involved in this definition? According to Geach, one has to consider here real changes, in contrast with mere Cambridge ones: for example, the change involved by Plato's being thought of by Socrates (according to which, at first, Plato is not thought of, *then* he is thought of by him) is a mere Cambridge change in Plato. Yet, since, following Geach, thoughts are actual entities[172], Socrates' thinking of Plato is a real change in Socrates. Thus, it seems to me that, in Geach's perspective, one and the same action can produce two different changes: a real and a mere Cambridge one. However, in order to define real changes in some non-circular way, it is preferable to claim that real changes are not simply non-mere Cambridge changes: in this case, in fact, it could seem that real changes are those changes that are undergone and/or produced by actual entities.

B. Miller develops one of the most interesting and detailed contemporary accounts of existence[173]. According to him, there are two meanings of the predicate "exist": it can be considered a second-order predicate or a first-order one. For example, when we claim that (6) expresses a true proposition, we claim that the property of being a unicorn does not have instances, while when we claim that

(32) dinosaurs do not exist,

we do not claim that some property is not instantiated (since there were dinosaurs, i.e., instances of the property of being a dinosaur), but that individual dinosaurs no longer exist[174]. Yet, in order to preserve the second-order property account of existence, one could reply that (32) expresses a true proposition under some temporal qualification: in particular, we could claim that it *was* the case that the property of being a dinosaur had at least one instance (i.e., that dinosaurs existed) and that it *is now* the case that it has no instances. It is legitimate to accept Miller's objection against the second-order property account only by accepting a presentist interpretation of the instantiation of properties.

Accepting this second meaning of "exist", there is a real, first-order property of existing,

[171] See Geach (1968): 7.
[172] See Geach (1968): 14.
[173] See, in particular, Miller (1975), Miller (1986) and Miller (2002).
[174] See Miller (1975): 342-346 and Miller (1986): 246-250.

even if this property is somehow unique. The property of existing is a real one (in Miller's terms), since it can be demonstrated that "exist" is not a Cambridge predicate (Miller provides an interesting interpretation for such predicates[175]) and since existence makes a real and important difference: in fact, if Obama did not exist, he would not have any property. Let me now consider Socrates, in order to analyze Miller's account. In respect to (30), Miller argues that, (a) since the possession of his thisness (i.e., the possession of some property that is Socrates' individual essence) has made a real difference for Socrates and (b) since his having possessed existence has been a necessary and sufficient condition for his having possessed his thisness, Socrates' possession of existence has made a real difference for him[176]. In order to argue for the second premise, as I have already remarked, Miller accepts a presentist perspective. Furthermore, he claims that the proper name "Socrates" did not refer to anything before the existence of Socrates and that Socrates had no properties before his having come into existence[177]. Yet, Socrates' thisness and Socrates' existence are not one and the same thing: they really differ, since it is true and non-contradictory that Socrates no longer exists, while it is contradictory to claim that he is no longer characterized by his thisness, and since Socrates' existence has been a sufficient condition for Socrates' having possessed his own thisness, while Socrates' having possessed his own thisness has not been a sufficient condition for his existence[178]. However, this formulation is not clear: in fact, following a presentist perspective, it is not only non-contradictory, but also true that Socrates is no longer characterized by his thisness (Socrates does not exist anymore and he cannot instantiate any property). Moreover, if we add to the presentist perspective the acceptance of (actualism) (Miller seems to accept this thesis), then the possession of every property is a sufficient condition for Socrates to exist, since the instantiation of existence is implied by the instantiation of any property.

Miller discusses such aspects of his theory in his last work: *The Fullness of Being: A new Paradigm for Existence*[179]. He argues that Socrates had his own instance of existence (i.e., his individual existence, interpreted as an individual first-order property, yet different from a trope), that is *logically prior* to Socrates' element (i.e., to what Socrates was, to his essence) in respect to actuality, since Socrates could neither be actual, nor instantiate any property before his having come into existence, and *logically posterior* to it in respect to individuation, since Socrates' element individuated Socrates' instance of existence (i.e., it made Socrates' existence *that particular* instance

[175] See Miller (1986): 258-264.
[176] See Miller (1986): 264-269.
[177] See the interesting argument in Miller (2002): 87-95.
[178] See Miller (1986): 269.
[179] See Miller (2002).

of existence)[180]. Yet, how could Socrates' element individuate Socrates' existence, even without having any kind of independent actuality (or existence)? Miller admits that Socrates' instance of existence was not borne by Socrates in the same way as every other property of Socrates'. Socrates' instance of existence was *bounded* by Socrates[181]. Yet, it seems to me that this relation is far from being clear: perhaps it did not involve Socrates *qua* individual, but Socrates' element. If one were not an actualist *and* a presentist (i.e., if one admitted that objects have properties independently of their existence and of their existence at some time), it would be less complicate to defend Miller's account[182].

What about (8), (12) and (13)? At first, Miller clarifies that there is no negative property of non-existing: when we claim that something does not exist, we simply deny that it is true that that thing exists. We deny the truth of a proposition. Thus, we do not have to use any negative property[183]. However, what does "Sherlock Holmes" refer to? Miller claims that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character, i.e., a collection of properties (that can include inconsistent properties, namely conjunctions of positive and corresponding negative properties, and that can be indeterminate in respect to some property)[184]. A collection of properties is not a set of properties, since it does not depend for its identity on its members: one can add, subtract and change the properties within a collection, even accepting that that collection is still identical with itself. Thus, we can interpret (13) by claiming that "Sherlock Holmes" refers to a collection of properties. Furthermore, we can claim that (12) expresses a true proposition since the property of being a detective is one of the properties within Sherlock Holmes' collection. However, first, Sherlock Holmes as a fictional object and Sherlock Holmes as a collection have different properties, at least within intensional contexts. One could ask: if Miller's account is correct, what do we think of when we think of Sherlock Holmes as a fictional object? This account seems not to resist the objections that I have already made against the Neo-Russellian accounts. Secondly, it seems to me that the identity conditions for collections of properties are not clear at all.

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[180] See, for example, Miller (2002): 95-99.
[181] See Miller (2002): 103.
[182] Following Geach, Miller tries to interpret Aquinas' thesis concerning the real distinction between essence and existence. Yet, it is far from being clear that our notion of existence is identical with Aquinas' notion of *actus essendi*. Furthermore, the author wishes to maintain that objects cannot have properties (nor essences) without existing, so that existence should be interpreted as a unique property. This seems to be guaranteed by Aquinas' metaphysics. However, one could argue that, at least with regard to some properties (those that are existence-entailing), existence is a unique property and that non-existent objects have some other kind of being (*ens commune*, for example) or no being at all.
[183] See Miller (1986): 255-258.
[184] See Miller (1985).

I.3. The Importance of Being (Non-)Existent

In this chapter, I shall investigate the ontological status of seemingly non-existent objects and I shall deal with some problems and some theories concerning them. It seems that there are many kinds of seemingly non-existent objects, at least in accordance with different concepts of existence and different kinds of ontological commitment. For example, accepting nominalistic theories of universals, universals can be considered non-existent objects. Furthermore, if one considers existence equivalent to concreteness, mathematical objects (numbers, geometrical figures) do not exist, even though one might nevertheless accept that there are such objects.

However, I shall concentrate here on one kind of non-existent objects: fictional objects. In fact, it is widely accepted that, if there are such objects (i.e., if they can be adequately considered objects), there is at least one sense of existence according to which they do not exist. Recalling the propositions expressed by

(8) Sherlock Holmes does not exist

and

(13) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character,

it seems legitimate to ask whether there are fictional objects that make the propositions expressed by such statements true or not (provided that something else could make them true). Furthermore, if there are such objects, are they necessarily non-existent? Namely: could it be the case that some existent object turns out to be identical with Sherlock Holmes? Fictional objects seem to be somehow dependent on their creators, i.e., on their authors. The proposition expressed by

(33) Conan Doyle is Sherlock Holmes' creator

seems to be true, even if the relation of being some fictional object's creator is far from being clear. First, what does this relation imply with regard to Sherlock Holmes' ontological status? Secondly, is this a necessary or a contingent relation between Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle? Namely: could Sherlock Holmes have had a different creator? However, modal problems concerning non-existent objects can be only mentioned here, since I shall deal with them in the next chapter. Fictional objects can be killed off and resurrected by their creators, as it happened in Sherlock Holmes' case:

(34) Conan Doyle killed off Sherlock Holmes;

(35) Conan Doyle resurrected Sherlock Holmes.

Yet, it seems that only living, existing objects can be killed off and (perhaps!) resurrected. Furthermore, if we take (34) and (35) non-metaphorically, non-existent objects could have intermittent existence.

Finally, Sherlock Holmes is the protagonist of many stories written by Conan Doyle. Namely,

(36) Conan Doyle is the author of Sherlock Holmes' stories

seems to express a true proposition. Yet, as regards the relation of being some fictional story's author, it seems legitimate to ask the same aforementioned questions connected to the relation of being some fictional object's creator. With regard to other features of fictional objects, we have already noticed that such objects always seem to be incomplete and that they sometimes seem to be impossible. This seems to be problematic, since it implies that the laws of bivalence, of excluded middle and of non-contradiction do not hold for every object.

When we read Sherlock Holmes' stories, we all believe that Sherlock Holmes does not exist and that he is somehow bounded to his stories. Yet, there are fictional objects that are not story-bounded and/or that are believed to exist, even though they do not exist. For example, Greeks believed that mythical gods such as Apollo existed. Furthermore, we do not believe that Santa Claus exists, even if he is not explicitly bounded to any story. Thus, what does the relation of story-boundedness amount to? And what is a story?

Furthermore, partly following A. Voltolini's list of sentences involving fictional objects[185], we can individuate, at first, internal fictional sentences (and the corresponding propositions), such as

(12) Sherlock Holmes is a detective

and

(37) Sherlock Holmes exists,

that seem to express true propositions at least in some story, even though, as we have already noticed, they express false propositions outside stories. There are problematic true internal fictional sentences, that seem to imply the migration of real objects to fictional stories:

(38) Sherlock Holmes lives in London;

(39) Sherlock Holmes had a tea with Gladstone.

On the one hand, it seems that Conan Doyle refers to the real London and to the real

[185] See Voltolini (2006): 127-186.

Lord Gladstone when he talks of them in his stories. On the other hand, the real London and the real Lord Gladstone do not have the properties of having been inhabited by and of having had a tea with Sherlock Holmes. Thus, by the law of the indiscernibility of identicals, they cannot be identical with London and Lord Gladstone in Conan Doyle's stories.

Internal fictional sentences should be distinguished from internal metafictional sentences, such as

(40) in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

Internal fictional and metafictional sentences can be explicit (they can be present in the list of a story's sentences) or implicit (they can be deduced by that list). For example,

(41) in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sherlock Holmes is English

seems to express a true proposition, even though Conan Doyle (perhaps) does not explicitly claim that Sherlock Holmes is English. Are such inferences acceptable? And to what extent are they acceptable? There are also mixed sentences, such as the one expressed by

(42) although Sherlock Holmes is a detective, he is a fictional character.

Finally, there are sentences in which fictional objects are considered independently of their stories. These are external metafictional sentences. For example, (8), (13), (33)-(35) can be classified into this category. Other examples of such sentences are

(43) Sherlock Holmes is more intelligent than Emma Bovary;

(44) Sherlock Holmes is more beloved than Darth Vader;

(45) John admires Sherlock Holmes;

(46) Conan Doyle died some years after Sherlock Holmes;

(47) Sherlock Holmes is more famous than any real detective;

(48) Sherlock Holmes is still the paradigmatic detective character;

(49) Ulysses inspired both Dante Alighieri and James Joyce;

(50) the Faust of Goethe's *Faust* is an aspect of Faust itself;

(51) the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet*;

(52) the Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle's stories is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of a recent movie directed by Guy Ritchie;

(53) in *Hamlet*, Gonzago is a fictional character,

since *The Murder of Gonzago* is a story within the story *Hamlet*.

In particular, in order to justify the truth of the propositions expressed by (51) and (52), it seems necessary to define a criterion of identity for fictional objects. J. L. Borges, for example, imagined a fictional character which had all the properties of Cervantes' Don Quixote but which was created by another (fictional) author, Pierre Menard. Are Cervantes' Don Quixote and Pierre Menard's Sherlock Holmes identical or not? Are they the same fictional object?

In general, a complete theory of fictional objects needs to define and justify the truth-value of the propositions expressed by all the aforementioned examples of sentences.

I.3.1. Taking Fictional Objects (too) Seriously: Meinongian Theories.

I cannot analyze all the Meinongian interpretations of the statements that I have mentioned. In this section, I shall only focus on the ontological status of stories (and on the subsequent problem of the identification of fictional objects across different stories), on the relation of authorship, on comparative propositions, such as the ones expressed by (43), (44), (47), and on the relations between real objects and fictional ones, such as the relations paradigmatically expressed by (38) and (39).

In fact, we have already seen (at least in part) what is, according to Meinongian theories, for an object to be fictional and what is for it not to exist *and* instantiate some property. It is quite easy to understand the different interpretations given by the three versions of Meinongianism to many of the aforementioned statements. Yet, what about stories? In a recent paper[186], Zalta defines stories and fictional characters as follows: a story is a situation (i.e., an abstract object that encodes propositional properties) that is authored by some existing object. Thus, stories are individuated in virtue of their encoded propositional properties. When we assert that a proposition is fictional in a story, we assert that that proposition is implied by that story, i.e., that that story has a propositional property that corresponds to that proposition. By definition, a character of a story is an object that encodes some property that is implied by the story. There are characters that originate in stories and characters that do not originate in them. A character that originates in a story is an abstract object that is a character of that story and that is not a character of any earlier story. Thus, a fictional character is a character that originates in some story. In Zalta's terms, we could claim that a fictional character encodes all and only the properties that it exemplifies according to the story. The difference between (12) and (40) lies in the fact that, according to (12), the abstract object Sherlock Holmes encodes the property of

[186] See Zalta (2000).

being a detective while, according to (40), he exemplifies that property according to the story *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in which he originates. Yet, it might be noticed that Sherlock Holmes does not originate in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, but in *A Study in Scarlet*. Thus, he encodes all the properties that he exemplifies according to *A Study in Scarlet*. Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character in *The Hound of the Baskerville*, but he is a fictional character that originates in *A Study in Scarlet*. However, this (partly) new version of Zalta's theory does not explain how it is possible that one and the same object both encodes the properties it exemplifies according to two different stories without being contradictory (it could happen that that object encodes incompatible properties according to those stories). We could try to widen the story operator, in order to consider Sherlock Holmes' originating stories all the stories authored by Conan Doyle about Sherlock Holmes, but there would remain the problem of understanding whether or not one and the same Sherlock Holmes (Conan Doyle's one) encodes all the properties he exemplifies according to stories not authored by Conan Doyle. If the answer to this latter question were positive, then Sherlock Holmes would probably encode contradictory properties or, at best, he would encode *too many* properties (all the properties ascribed to him by several stories): depending on stories, he could be a gardener, a cook, a taxi driver, and so on. If the answer were negative, then there would be many Sherlock Holmes and we would have to deal with the problems of identification already considered in the last chapter. In sum, one could try to deal with (51) in Zalta's terms by widening the story, but it seems to me difficult to deal with (52). Furthermore, if there are no definite identity conditions for fictional objects across different stories and if stories are abstract objects that encode propositional properties, it is possible to ask if it is truly necessary to admit that there are fictional objects. In fact, an anti-Meinongian could notice that, once we admit that stories are not real (i.e., that they perhaps do not exemplify the property of reporting real facts), stories could do all the work that fictional objects are supposed to do. This seems to be one of the major arguments in favor of a make-believe theory of fictional objects.

With regard to the other Meinongian theories, Routley claims that a fiction is an authored discourse or communication consisting of imagined or invented statements or narrative, which conveys a story, as contrasted with factual or reportative discourse, and which is about fictional items[187]. A work of fiction defines a world of fiction, which has some structural requirements (e.g., it should be as coherent as possible) and which does not have many requirements of other worlds, e.g. modal worlds (it is not complete and it might be impossible). This world does not only include what is true according to the author "sayso", but it requires some formal and

[187] See Routley (1979): 539.

material additions too. It seems to me that this distinction is a good one: by claiming that Sherlock Holmes has some properties *in* a story, we do not claim that it has some properties *in* a set of sentences (provided that a story can be considered a set of sentences), but within a world (or a context) which is determined by those sentences and which is somehow different from our world. Fictional objects are characterized by the properties they have in these worlds. Yet, how can it be possible to identify a fictional object across different worlds? Routley replies that it is necessary to consider the author's sayso and, in particular, a core of features uniquely identifying that fictional object[188]. Sherlock Holmes, in virtue of such core features, is one and the same object in many worlds and in the actual world too (since it is possible to claim, for example, that Sherlock Holmes, in the actual world, does not have extra-nuclear existence). Yet, let me assume that the core of features includes three properties: the property of living in Baker Street 221B, London, of being a detective and of having a friend named Watson. If in a fictional world w_1 Sherlock Holmes is a detective who lives in Baker Street 221B, London (but he does not have a friend named Watson), in a fictional world w_2 he is a detective who has a friend named Watson (but he does not live in Baker Street 221B, London) and in a fictional world w_3 he lives in Baker Street 221B, London, and he has a friend named Watson (but he is not a detective), would we claim that we are talking of one and the same fictional character or not? There are strong intuitions in favor of the first hypothesis, even if the properties of the core seem not to identify Sherlock Holmes across such three fictional worlds[189].

Concerning Priest's and Berto's accounts, we have already noticed in the last chapter that, according to them, there is no one-one correspondence between stories and possible worlds. On the one hand, their solution justifies the re-identification of fictional objects across worlds. Yet, on the other hand, it might be preferable to maintain that each story (even a large one, such as the story constituted by Conan Doyle's stories) defines a world. These latter worlds do not have to be complete, such as modal worlds, while the acceptance of the completeness assumption seems to be the reason for which they deny that one-one correspondence.

There are at least two different ways for Meinongians to deal with the authorship relation. One the one hand, Priest argues that fictional objects are inhabitants of other possible worlds, that exist in those worlds with all their properties and that authors only fix the reference to such objects by their names, by telling stories about them[190]. Sherlock Holmes, for example, lives in all the worlds in which Conan Doyle's stories are realized, but such worlds are not properly created by Conan Doyle. On the other hand, Castañeda claims that fictional objects are created (at least

[188] See Routley (1979): 593-594.
[189] For another problem concerning Routley's account, see Paolini Paoletti (2013).
[190] See Priest (2005): 118-121.

in some sense) by their authors by putting some individual guises together (e.g., the detective who lives in Baker Street) and by giving them some properties. Yet, such individual guises preexist as possible objects of thought, i.e., as possible referents of definite descriptions within some linguistic framework[191]. Thus, according to Meinongians, there is at least something, within the constitution of fictional objects, that is not created. Yet, it is not clear how it is possible to assert, within such a theory, that (34) and (35) express true propositions: Sherlock Holmes can neither die, nor resurrect. What about the possible destruction of all the literary works about Sherlock Holmes and of every memory connected with this character? Priest could argue that, in such cases, the name "Sherlock Holmes" would not refer, because this name would have stopped existing. Yet, if someone else used another name in order to pick out an object with the same properties ascribed to Sherlock Holmes, would Sherlock Holmes have been resurrected or not? Facing such problems, Meinongians might continue denying that fictional objects are neither created, nor killed off, nor resurrected. Yet, no explanation would have been given for the apparent truth of the propositions expressed by (33)-(35). Following Castañeda, a Meinongian could argue that such objects are created by putting different properties together. This seems to be intuitively true. Yet, extending the analysis beyond Castañeda's account (which is not purely Meinongian), there would nevertheless be problems for this position. For example: would there be anything true about fictional objects before their supposed creation? Are fictional round squares impossible objects, even before people put together the properties of being a square and of being round in order to create them? If the answers were positive, then creation would simply amount to something like what is suggested by Priest. If the answers were negative, then such objects' *Sosein* would depend on their *Sein*: they would not be round, for example, before their creation, i.e., (intuitively) before acquiring some being. I shall try to solve this problem in the second part of this work.

Before dealing with the third problem I have mentioned (the comparison between objects), it seems to me interesting to deal with the fourth one, i.e., the relation between real and fictional objects. In this case, Meinongians can assert, following Zalta, that real objects do not encode properties and that there are real objects' blueprints (such as Lord Gladstone in Conan Doyle's stories) that encode all the properties exemplified by their correlated real objects, or at least some of them. Yet, Lord Gladstone's blueprint might not encode, within Conan Doyle's stories, properties exemplified by his real correlate: in such a case, Lord Gladstone would turn out to have too many properties, since he would encode both the properties exemplified by his real correlates (but not explicitly encoded according to the stories) and the properties attributed

[191] See Castañeda (1979), in Castañeda (1989): 192.

to them within the stories. This object would turn out to be, if not an impossible one (both encoding and not encoding some properties), at least problematic with regard to its consistency. Yet, there seems to be nothing problematic in Lord Gladstone when we think of him within Conan Doyle's stories. If Lord Gladstone's blueprint encoded just some properties exemplified by his correlate, it would be difficult, as we have already seen, to individuate his core features and to maintain this core across different fictional contexts (or different fictional works).

On the other hand, Meinongians could argue that, dealing with propositions such as the one expressed by (39), we refer to the real Lord Gladstone. Yet, the real Lord Gladstone does not stand in the relation of having taken a tea with Sherlock Holmes, roughly because rules governing relations between real objects cannot be applied to fictional objects, as it is argued by Routley and Parsons[192]. Yet, if not *ad hoc*, such strategies seem to presuppose the negation of the principle according to which, when we think of properties as attributed to fictional and real objects, such properties work in the same way. It seems to me that the best solution has been suggested by Priest and Berto: according to them, some real object stands in some relation (at least in some existing-entailing relation) with some fictional one in all those worlds where they both exist.

Finally, what about comparisons involving fictional objects? Roughly, Zalta claims that such comparisons do not involve blueprints and correlates, but real and fictional objects as such. For example, with regard to (43), he argues that there is a degree of intelligence that Sherlock Holmes encodes and another degree of intelligence that Emma Bovary encodes and that the first degree of intelligence is greater than the second one[193]. Introducing worlds, world-centered Meinongianists follow a similar path[194]. However, comparisons between degrees of intelligence are based on what happens in the real world. Thus, Emma Bovary and Sherlock Holmes would be comparable in such a way only according to the laws of our world. Yet, they do not exist in our world! Even in this case, world-centered Meinongianists, by selecting those worlds in which there are rules similar to the ones of the real world, seem to develop a better strategy.

I.3.2. Make-Believing that Conan Doyle is right (Walton, Currie and Wolterstorff's kinds). K. Walton's theory of make-believe is one of the most remarkable and complete theories of fiction. In order to understand what is for something to be a fiction and what distinguishes

[192] Parsons, for example, introduces functions that transform relational predicates into non-relational ones. He also suggests that we can consider the property of having taken a tea with Lord Gladstone, that is attributed to Sherlock Holmes, as an unanalyzable one. See Parsons (1980). Routley, on the other hand, argues that we do not have to use, in the case of Sherlock Holmes and London, the rules that govern the conversion between active and passive relational sentences. See, for example, Routley (1979): 579-588.
[193] See Zalta (2000).
[194] See, for example, Berto (2008), (2011).

fiction from non-fiction, Walton introduces the key-concept of make-believe games: roughly, whenever we deal with fiction, we take part in such games and, following some rules that are given by certain elements of reality (the props), we make-believe that something is the case. At first, Walton considers fictionality a property of propositions: to claim that *p* is fictional amounts to claim that, within some fictional world, it is true that *p*[195]. Fictional worlds are sets of propositions as indicated by a given work (or by a game of make-believe or a dream or a daydream). They are associated with clusters of fictional truths (since the fact that a proposition is fictional is a fictional truth) and they are distinct from possible worlds because they are usually incomplete and sometimes impossible[196]. Thus, what is fictional is fictional in a given world, the world of a game of make-believe. Yet, it seems to me different to claim that some proposition is true within a world of a game of make-believe and that the same proposition is fictional in the same world. That proposition is simply true in that world: considered from an external point of view, that proposition is a fictional truth and it is one of the fictional truths that are associated with that world. However, considered within that world, *p* is not fictional: *p* is true in that world.

Yet, this is only a preliminary sketch of Walton's theory, since he does not aim at using the concepts of fictional proposition and of fictional world as basic elements of his account of make-believe. The concept of make-believe (and all the other concepts associated with it, such as the concept of game of make-believe) seems to be a primitive one. It seems to be grounded on the phenomenology of imaginative and aesthetic experience. As I have already noticed, games of make-believe have rules, that are introduced by their props. A prop is a generator of fictional truths, since it introduces what is mandatory in an imaginative experience. Props generate fictional truths independently of particular (actual) imaginers. Yet, they do not work without any actual or potential imaginer. Furthermore, they function within social settings (e.g., within linguistic conventions). Thus, these features of props seem to give some peculiar features to make-believe too: objectivity, control, possibility of joint participation, spontaneity, a certain freedom from the constraints of the real world[197]. A literary work can be considered a prop: it introduces what is mandatory within a game of make-believe, by introducing some principles of generations, i.e., some conditional rules according to which, given the existence and the features of the prop, people should make-believe that something is the case. Since props prescribe both propositional and non-propositional imaginings, fictionality cannot be just considered a property of propositions. Furthermore, Walton adds that, in some cases (e.g., dreams), we could have

[195] See Walton (1990): 35.
[196] See Walton (1990): 67-69.
[197] See Walton (1990): 68.

fictionality without props[198].

Thus, restricting our examination to works of fiction, what is fictional in a certain work is what is fictional in every game of make-believe where that work serves as prop and whose fictionality is generated by that work alone[199]. Literary works seem to generate authorized games of make-believe, i.e., games of make-believe that follow acceptable rules (at least, with regard to what is claimed in those works)[200]. In order to deal with the semantics of empty names (such as "Sherlock Holmes") and in order to deny that they refer, Walton does not talk of fictional propositions anymore: he talks of statements that appear to refer to fictional entities, such as the ones mentioned in our examples. In order to deal with statements such as (12) and (37), Walton uses the concepts of authorized game and of pretense and he must refer to some work of fiction (for the sake of the argument, Conan Doyle's stories). Thus, this is Walton's interpretation of (12):

(12walton) Conan Doyle's stories are such that one who engages in pretense of kind K (i.e., in a certain relevant kind of pretense) in a game authorized for it makes it fictional of himself/herself in that game that he speaks truly when s/he states that Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

And the same seems to happen with (37)[201]. With regard to (8) and (13), the situation is a little bit more complicated. By asserting (8), one both indicates and betrays a kind of pretending-to-refer, possibly by engaging in or alluding to a further pretense: for example, s/he indicates and betrays the kind of pretending-to-refer that is involved in (12walton) and, perhaps, s/he engages in a different kind of pretending-to-refer, such as the one indicated by (13)[202]. On the other hand, if someone says that something exists, s/he claims that to attempt to refer in a certain manner (e.g., the manner in which we ordinarily attempt to refer to something by a certain proper name) is to succeed in referring to something[203]. *Precisely* to *that* thing? Yes, if in the ordinary manner we attempt to refer to *precisely that* thing. However, we have already seen the problems of metalinguistic analyses of existential statements. By statements such as (13), at least if we pretend to refer to purely fictional characters, we acknowledge, while betraying the pretense, that there is a work in whose authorized games pretending to refer by those empty names is fictionally to refer successfully[204]. A similar betrayal might be expressed (in a somehow more complicated manner) by (42). Furthermore, we could appeal to works of fiction and to similar pretenses to refer in

198 See Walton (1990): 35-43.
199 See Walton (1990): 60.
200 See Walton (1990): 397-398.
201 See Walton (1990): 400.
202 See Walton (1990): 424.
203 See Walton (1990): 427.
204 See Walton (1990): 422.

order to deal with statements such as (36). With regard to the implicit (and fictional) truth of (41), it seems that it is guaranteed by two principles: the reality principle and the mutual belief principle. The first principle affirms that, if the fictionality of some propositions is directly generated by some representation, another proposition *p* is fictional iff, were the former propositions true, then it would be the case that *p*. The second principle affirms that the fictionality of some propositions (generated by some representation) implies the fictionality of a proposition *p* iff it is mutually believed in the artist's society (i.e., in the society of the narrator, not of the author) that, were the former propositions true, then *p* would be true[205]. Yet, the second principle seems to make too many fictional inferences valid: for example, inferences about cultural and religious beliefs that are not relevant to the stories. And the same thing seems to happen with regard to the first principle. Furthermore, it is difficult simply to ground the inferences on the artist's society mentioned in the second principle: the author could introduce in the story his/her own beliefs, in contrast with the beliefs of the story's narrator's society.

In order to deal with the other kinds of statements, we have to talk of unofficial games of make-believe, i.e. of games of make-believe that are partly inspired by, but not authorized by works of fiction, since some of their principles of generation are modified[206]. Among others, there are unofficial games that combine the games of two different works of fictions and unofficial games in which it is legitimate to assert that (33), (34) and (35). For example, even if it is not literally true that Conan Doyle is Sherlock Holmes' creator, since we cannot successfully refer to anything by the name "Sherlock Holmes", one who engages in an unofficial game could assert (33), by pretending to refer to something by the name "Sherlock Holmes" and by fictionally giving to Conan Doyle the property of being that thing's creator[207].

Furthermore, in order to deal with (47), one could invoke degrees of fame and get engaged in some unofficial game. With regard to (43), one could get engaged in an unofficial game which is the combination of two authorized games. Statements such as (44) and (45) are more difficult to interpret. Yet, one could think of himself as being engaged in an unofficial game in which he has some fictional relation with something, even though this seems highly counterintuitive: John seems to really admire Sherlock Holmes, even if this relation might depend on getting engaged in some game of make-believe[208]. On the other hand, concerning (48)-(52), it

[205] See Walton (1990): 144-152.
[206] See, for example, Walton (1990): 407, 410.
[207] See, concerning creation, Walton (1990): 410-411. Concerning (34), see Walton (1990): 414.
[208] This point is somehow connected with Walton's counterintuitive solution to the paradox of fiction (see Walton (1978)), that invokes quasi-emotions. See more in Paolini Paoletti (forthcoming). Other problems for Walton's account of intentional and non-intentional relations between *ficta* and real objects are examined in Kroon (1994a) and (1994b): roughly, if one maintains that occurrences of real proper names in fictional contexts have their usual

is possible to simply introduce relations between works of fiction[209]. Finally, what about (38) and (39)? There might be unofficial games of make-believe in which what we believe about reality is mixed with some authorized game of make-believe.

So far, so good. Yet, I think that Walton's account has at least one defect: it does not explain the ontological status of games of make-believe. Such games are not identical with works of fiction. Perhaps, they can be considered mind-dependent objects, even though not private ones. They can be considered objects, since it is legitimate to claim something true about them and since they have some properties, while on the other hand they cannot be exemplified by (or instantiated by, or attributed to) anything else (roughly, they are not properties). They seem to be mind-dependent since, with regard to the relation between props and such games, we have already noticed that it is not possible that props generate fictional truths, if there is no actual nor potential imaginer living in a social setting. Thus, in general, it seems that there cannot be games of make-believe without such imaginers: there would be no game, without anyone (at least potentially) playing it. Yet, if games of make-believe can be considered mind-dependent objects and if they are invoked in every statement that seemingly concerns fictional objects, such as in (12walton), it is not clear to me how it is possible to successfully refer to such games and not to successfully refer to fictional objects. In fact, if we considered fictional objects mind-dependent, they would be on a pair with games of make-believe and they would be intentionally distinguished from such games. In sum, why do we have to admit that there are games of make-believe, provided that they are mind-dependent objects, and not to admit that there are mind-dependent fictional objects? If Zalta does not provide adequate reasons for admitting in our ontology fictional objects, as distinct from stories, it seems to me that Walton does not provide adequate reasons for excluding them and for accepting mind-dependent games of make-believe.

G. Currie's account shares many features with Walton's theory. However, it is perhaps more adequate with regard to the definition of fictional works and the semantics of fictional names. According to Currie, something is fictional iff it is the product of some fictional intent and, if it is true, it is only accidentally true[210]. Fictionality is a property of propositions: to claim that some proposition is fictional amounts to claim that it is fictional that that proposition is true[211]. Partly following Lewis, Currie adds that it is legitimate to assert that some proposition is fictional in a story iff it is reasonable for the informed reader to infer that the fictional author of

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reference (e.g., "Napoleon" in *War and Peace* refers to Napoleon), then it turns out to be difficult to make attitude ascriptions without invoking fictional surrogates, i.e. without committing to their existence.

[209] See Walton (1990): 414. For a recent defense of the make-believe approach towards fiction, see Everett (2013).

[210] See Currie (1990): 45. For the definition of fictional intent, see Currie (1990): 33.

[211] See Currie (1990): 56.

that story believes that that proposition is true[212]. Concerning Sherlock Holmes' stories, for example, the fictional author is not Conan Doyle but, more generally, a member of Conan Doyle's community (the late Victorian society). Yet, the introduction of fictional author's beliefs seems not to be appropriate: what about, for example, a fictional author who lies? If the informed reader finds out that the fictional author lies, i.e., that s/he does not believe that something is such-and-such, even if s/he tells that thing in the story, that reader could nevertheless accept that the propositions expressed by the fictional author's sentences are part of the story.

However, I cannot discuss Currie's general theses about fiction to a large extent, since his theory of the semantics of fictional names seems to be more interesting and original. A fictional proper name is an empty name: a name that picks out a fictional character, i.e., a character that does not exist and that is part of a fiction. In order to understand the use of fictional proper names, it is not necessary to introduce particular individuals referred to by those names. It is sufficient to understand the content of the fiction and to pick out the worlds where that content is realized, i.e., the worlds in which there is someone who, for example, does (and is) everything that Sherlock Holmes is said in the story to do (and to be) and in which everything else that is part of the story is literally true. Nevertheless, in order to understand the uniqueness of Sherlock Holmes, it is also necessary to postulate an authorship relation between the story and its author: this seems to guarantee that Cervantes' use of the name "Don Quixote" is different from Pierre Menard's use of that name[213]. Thus, the fictive use of fictional proper names, such as in (12), neither requires that such names properly are names, nor that they refer to fictional individuals: (12) does not express any independent proposition, but it is part of a larger proposition (the one expressed by the content of the whole authored story) that is fictionally true. In fact, in the former case, (12) would require a reference for "Sherlock Holmes" that should be independent of the way in which we use that fictional proper name in other sentences. However, it seems to me that this solution is highly counterintuitive: if there are two stories in which Holmes is a detective, why is it not legitimate to think that there is only one proposition, the one expressed by (12), that is a part of the contents of both stories? The assumption behind this thesis seems to be that logical constituents of propositions need to refer to something existent, in order for those propositions to refer to the True or to the False. However, could it not be the case that propositions have logical constituents that refer to things that to do not exist (e.g., fictional objects) and are nevertheless true or false? In sum, by denying that there are fictional objects referred to by fictional proper names, it seems that we have to introduce useless complications in

[212] See Currie (1990): 80.
[213] See Currie (1990): 154.

our account.

Yet, there are two other uses of fictional proper names: metafictive and transfictive ones (I follow here Currie's terminology). Sentence (40) is a typical metafictive sentence: it seems to mean that it is part of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* that Sherlock Holmes is a detective. Roughly, in such cases, fictional proper names seem to abbreviate definite descriptions: within the worlds of some fiction, there is at least and at most one individual that is such-and-such (e.g., that has all or at least all the relevant features of Sherlock Holmes') and that is a detective. Outside those worlds, there is no such thing as that individual. Thus, we have to introduce fictional operators in order to preserve the apparent truth of such sentences: the fictional proper name "Sherlock Holmes" works like a definite description within the scope of such operators[214]. Many difficulties surrounding this approach have already been shown.

Finally, Currie considers the transfictive use of fictional proper names. We transfictively use a fictional proper name when we do not use it within the scope of some fiction operator. In order to deal with transfictive cases, Currie uses the concept of role: a role is an office of some individual defined in terms of what is true in a story or, better said, it is a function from worlds to individuals, i.e. to those individuals that occupy that role. It can be considered a theoretical, non-concrete entity. There are roles for all the fictional objects.

The identity of fictional objects across different stories, such as the identity expressed by (51) and (52), can be explained in terms of the fusion between two different stories: there is only one story, in which the Holmes role is enlarged in order to comprehend what is ascribed to Sherlock Holmes, for example, in a recent movie directed by Guy Ritchie. Fictional objects might turn out to be contradictory. Yet, as Currie remarks, this is not a problem: first, we can deal with contradictions within stories even without denying the truth of the law of non-contradiction; secondly, Holmes needs to be consistent as a person, but not as a fictional character. In other terms, if it cannot be true that Holmes, as a person, is P and non-P, it can be fictionally P and fictionally non-P *qua* fictional character. However, it does not seem to me that, when one considers Holmes across different stories, s/he enlarges the same role, so that s/he includes within that role contradictory features. Sherlock Holmes, *qua* fictional character, should remain, if possible, non-contradictory within singular stories (at least if no one explicitly ascribes to him contradictory properties within those stories) and across stories. If there were an account capable of preserving this intuition, it would be preferable to Currie's account. However, concerning (52), Currie complicates his account by claiming that roles are author-bounded. Thus, Guy Ritchie's

[214] See Currie (1990): 158-162.

Sherlock Holmes' role seems to be different from Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes' role[215]. However, it seems to me not to be necessary to duplicate entities just in order to preserve an account based on roles. The limits of such an account are best shown by the interpretation of (47). One could state, following Currie, that Sherlock Holmes is more famous that any fictional detective in virtue of some features of roles[216]. Yet, since real detectives are plausibly not identical with roles, one would have to affirm that (47) expresses a true proposition one of whose constituents does not refer to individual detectives, but to the role of being a real detective. This seems to introduce some troubles that I cannot discuss now, since I have partly discussed them in the previous chapter.

Is it possible to give a more plausible account of roles? I shall briefly examine N. Wolterstorff's theory of fictional characters. According to Wolterstorff, the task of a fictional work is to project a fictional world, that obeys certain rules in its being connected with that work and anchored to reality[217]. I cannot deepen this aspect of his theory. I shall only claim that, according to Wolterstorff, each work is connected to its world, i.e., to the world it projects. Fictional characters play some role within such works' worlds. In particular, they are not properly objects, but kinds, i.e., complex conjunctions of properties that are essential in order to define each character. Kinds are properties[218]. Thus, each work's world is partly anchored to existing objects (e.g., existing persons, countries, and so on)[219] and partly inclusive of such kinds. In particular, a kind that is a component of a state of affairs (and a work's world is a state of affairs) is such that, by definition, if that state of affairs occurs, it is essential for that state that an example of that kind exists at some time[220].

Thus, fictional characters are, for example, person-kinds and fictional names introduce them. Fictional characters exist *qua* kinds, but they are not exemplified in the actual world[221]. Every property attributed to fictional characters is an essential property of their kinds. Yet, this seems not to be sufficient to grasp all the features of fictional characters. Wolterstorff adds that, for example, Sherlock Holmes in the Sherlock Holmes' stories is a maximal component of those works' world, i.e., there is no other kind different from Sherlock Holmes in Sherlock Holmes' stories' world such that every property essential within the latter kind is essential within the former and some property essential within the former is not essential within the latter.

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[215] See Currie (1990): 171-180.
[216] See Currie (1990): 174.
[217] See Wolterstorff (1980): 106-134. For another interesting account based on fictional worlds interpreted as possible ones, see Howell (1979).
[218] See Wolterstorff (1980): 142-143.
[219] See Wolterstorff (1980): 141.
[220] See Wolterstorff (1980): 143.
[221] See Wolterstorff (1980): 144.

Furthermore, fictional characters' kinds are non-determinate since, given at least one property P, neither being P, nor being non-P is essential to them, even if it is perhaps essential the disjunctive property of being P or non-P[222].

It seems to me that Wolterstorff's account is in trouble in identifying characters across different works, i.e. it is in trouble with propositions such as the ones expressed by (50)-(52). In fact, Wolterstorff claims that we should distinguish, for example, the Ulysses' character-kind (or the Sherlock Holmes' one) in a certain tradition or in a certain set of works, by individuating some central features of that character, and the Ulysess-in-the-work-*w*'s (or the Sherlock Holmes-in-the-work-*w*'s) character-kind: the former is not a maximal component of work *w*'s world, while the latter is a maximal component of it and included in the former[223]. This theory does not seem to resist the objection I have made against Routley's theory of fictional objects, based on characters that have some, but not all the essential features of a character-kind. Furthermore, by claiming that all the properties of Sherlock Holmes' kind are essential, Wolterstorff multiplies entities: if there were a solution based on only one character (or character-kind), it would be preferable.

Concerning other data and problems about the relational fictive statements, such as (38), (39), (43)-(45) and (47), Wolterstorff adds that such relations are borne by fictional character-kinds in different ways. For example, the relation of being one of Watson's friends turns out to be essential within Holmes' kind. Yet, what about the relation of being more intelligent than Emma Bovary? Is it essential within Holmes' kind, even if Holmes' stories do not tell anything about it? Intuitively, this option does not seem to be a good one, since every character-kind might have too many properties (even non-ascribed ones) essential within it. The same seems to happen with regard to (38), (39), (44), (45): relations turn out to be essential within character-kinds, even if real objects (London or Lord Gladstone) do not stand in such relations with those characters[224]. Yet, even if we accepted that such relations are essential within one and the same work's world, as it happens with (38) and (39), it is highly difficult to accept that they are essential in all the other cases. For example, would the Sherlock-Holmes' character-kind that has the relation of being more intelligent than Emma Bovary be the same character-kind that is exemplified within Conan Doyle's stories' world, even if no such relation is ascribed to Sherlock Holmes within that world?

Finally, concerning (38) and (39), one character might occur historically or mythically or fictionally within the same story or within different stories. For example, it seems that Napoleon

[222] See Wolterstorff (1980): 145-147.
[223] See Woltertorff (1980): 148-149.
[224] See Wolterstorff (1980): 160-161.

occurs historically in *War and Peace*. However, according to Wolterstorff, to claim that such characters occur in different ways mostly amounts to claim that they are different characters[225]. Thus, does Lord Gladstone in (38) (and in Conan Doyle's stories) occur historically or fictionally? Do we have a character-kind or a real entity that historically occurs within a work of fiction? I do not know how Wolterstorff could answer.

I.3.3. Nothing More than Artifacts (Thomasson).

One of the most discussed recent theories of fictional objects is A. Thomasson's artifactualism. Roughly, Thomasson thinks that, in order to explain the existence and identity conditions of fictional objects (provided that there are such objects), we have to deal with two intuitions. First, fictional objects seem to depend on the particular (mental and physical) creative acts of their authors: if there were no particular creative acts of Conan Doyle's, such as his thinking of a detective with certain features and his writing books about him, there would perhaps have not existed a particular fictional object such as Sherlock Holmes. Secondly, in order to continue to exist, fictional objects seem to depend on the existence of fictional works about them[226].

Fictional objects are abstract artifacts: they are artifacts, since they depend on some creative act in order to exist; they are abstract, since they lack spatio-temporal location. Yet, after their coming into existence, i.e., after their creation, they cannot be considered Meinongian non-existent objects: they simply exist, even if they lack concreteness (provided that something is concrete iff it has spatio-temporal location). Concerning their existence conditions, fictional objects (or entities, as Thomasson calls them) rigidly historically depend on the intentional creative acts of their author(s) and generically constantly depend on some literary work[227]. Some entity constantly depends on some other entity iff, necessarily, the former entity's existence requires the latter entity's existence at every time at which the former entity exists. On the other hand, some entity historically depends on some other entity iff, necessarily, the former entity's existence requires the latter entity's existence at some time prior to or coincident with every time at which the former entity exists. Furthermore, some entity rigidly depends on some other entity iff it is necessary that, whenever the former entity exists, the latter entity exists too. Finally, some entity generically depends on some other entity of a certain kind K iff, necessarily, whenever the former entity exists, some other entity of kind K exists too[228].

Thus, considering Sherlock Holmes *qua* abstract artifact, he rigidly historically depends on Conan Doyle's creative acts: if those acts had not existed, then Sherlock Holmes would have not

[225] See Wolterstorff (1980): 162-163.
[226] See Thomasson (1999): 5-14.
[227] See Thomasson (1999): 35-38.
[228] See Thomasson (1999): 29-34.

existed. Yet, Sherlock Holmes does not remain in existence as long as those acts exist: Conan Doyle and his creative acts have died, but Sherlock Holmes still exists. In fact, Sherlock Holmes constantly generically depends for his existence on fictional works about him, i.e., he exists as long as there exists at least one copy (or one memory) of Sherlock Holmes' stories (i.e., one copy of a certain kind of literary work). This seems to justify the truth of the propositions expressed by (13), (33) and (36). However, it seems that Conan Doyle cannot kill off Sherlock Holmes and resurrect him: one might properly kill off a fictional object not only by writing a story in which Sherlock Holmes dies, but by destroying all the copies (and memories) of fictional works about him. However, in this case, would it be possible to resurrect Sherlock Holmes? After this destruction, another author could create another object with all the properties of Sherlock Holmes'. Would this latter character be identical with the old Sherlock Holmes? No, he would not, at least following Thomasson's account. Yet, he would have all the properties of the old Sherlock Holmes'! This seems to be an interesting problem for every artifactualist account. Perhaps, the case I have outlined is not quite plausible: it might be really difficult to meet another author creating by coincidence another exactly similar fictional character. Yet, it is not impossible and, since the artifactualist account is expressed in modal terms, it has to deal with every possible situation involving fictional objects. Furthermore, Voltolini adds that, if Shakespeare had written *Hamlet* some years after his date of creation, Hamlet, *qua* fictional object, would have been dependent on another creative act. Hence, he would have been a different fictional character[229].

However, before dealing with the identity conditions for fictional objects within and across different works, it seems necessary to deal with Sherlock Holmes' non-existence, as it is expressed by (8). Like van Inwagen, Thomasson has to recognize that fictional objects, *qua* abstract artifacts, exist, namely that (8) expresses a false proposition. According to Thomasson, given a proper name such as "Sherlock Holmes", the proposition expressed by (8) might turn out to be true iff there is an erroneous use of "Sherlock Holmes" in order to refer to an entity of a certain ontological kind K and that use is then recognized as erroneous, since that entity does not belong to K. For example, I might have erroneously used "Sherlock Holmes" in order to refer to a concrete object, and then I might have recognized that Sherlock Holmes (the entity to which I meant to refer) is not a concrete object[230]. Sainsbury has criticized this thesis by claiming that "Sherlock Holmes" has no referent, when I tell a story about him[231]. Yet, it might be possible to

[229] See Voltolini (2006): 59-60. Concerning the creation of *ficta*, Deutsch (1991) objects that, if *ficta* are abstract artifacts, they have necessary existence *qua* abstract entities and they cannot be caused to exist. Brock (2010) points out that it is not determined within the creationist account of *ficta* when *ficta* start their existence. The same author suggests that we should be fictionalist about realism about fictional characters (see Brock (2002)).
[230] See Thomasson (2003): 217.
[231] See Sainsbury (2010): 109.

maintain that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional object, that "Sherlock Holmes" refers to that object and that, nevertheless, Thomasson's thesis is false. In fact, it seems that her account does not work with every ontological kind K: if I claimed that Sherlock Holmes is a man, but then I recognized that he is a frog, I would not have to claim that Sherlock Holmes does not exist in order to deny my previous erroneous use of his proper name. Thus, there are kinds whose members are concrete objects (e.g., frogs and humans) and Thomasson's strategy does not work when we consider two of such kinds. On the other hand, there are kinds whose members are not concrete (e.g., fictional objects). Thus, if we recognize that (8) is meaningful as long as it expresses the negative state of affairs of Sherlock Holmes' non-being concrete, there is no need to introduce any previously-erroneous-then-recognized-as-erroneous use: by claiming (8), we simply claim that Sherlock Holmes is not concrete. Is it necessary to claim that Sherlock Holmes *exists qua* fictional, i.e., abstract entity, even if he does *not exist*, i.e., he is not concrete? No, it is not, since there is no need to attribute to fictional objects any kind of being nor existence, as I shall try to argue in the second part of this work[232].

Concerning the identity of fictional characters, Thomasson claims that two fictional characters are identical if they both appear in the same fictional work and exactly the same properties are attributed to them within that work[233]. Yet, even if the author declares that properties are attributed to fictional objects within fictional works, the ontological status of attribution is still not clear: it cannot be identical with ordinary instantiation of properties, since, in this latter case, Sherlock Holmes would both be and not be a detective. Perhaps, it might be better to think of attribution as a relation between literary works, fictional objects and properties (as it is thought of by van Inwagen[234]): some literary work attributes to Sherlock Holmes the property of being a detective. However, Thomasson adds one necessary condition for the identity of fictional objects, which turns out to solve the problem of identification across fictional works: some fictional character *x* in a literary work K and some fictional character *y* in a literary work L are identical only if the author of L is competently acquainted with *x* of K and intend to import *x* into L as *y*[235]. The author of L is competently acquainted with *x* of K whenever s/he is a competent user of the name of *x*, provided that *x* is named. Thus, it might happen that the author uses the name of the fictional character, but s/he does not want to

[232] Yagisawa (2001) examines negative existentials for artifactualists from a similar perspective. He shows that Thomasson's account has further problems: what about fictional entities whose kind is not specified? And what about a concrete individual who has all the properties attributed to Sherlock Holmes? In this latter case, would Sherlock Holmes turn out to exist?

[233] See Thomasson (1999): 63. Furthermore, in the same section, Thomasson deals with the identity conditions of fictional works.

[234] See van Inwagen (1977).

[235] See Thomasson (2003): 67.

import it into the new literary work. In this case, we would have two different fictional characters. It is easy to show that both (51) and (52) express true propositions, since Conan Doyle and Guy Ritchie are both competently acquainted with Sherlock Holmes and they wish to import him into their works.

However, it seems to me that this theory turns out to be problematic in at least two different cases. First, let us imagine a situation in which the author of L is competently acquainted with *x* of K, but s/he attributes to *y* in L properties that are completely different from the ones attributed to *x* within K and attributes to *y* the negation of these latter properties: there might be a literary work L where a fictional character named "Sherlock Holmes" is a rapper who lives in New York. The author of L is competently acquainted with Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*. Does s/he want to import Sherlock Holmes within the new literary work? It seems that s/he does not want to, since *x* and *y* seem to have completely different properties. Yet, if that author actually wants to import the fictional character Sherlock Holmes into L, following Thomasson's criterion, we have a necessary condition for the identity of such fictional characters. Thus, the author's intentions and competent acquaintance constitute a criterion for the identity of fictional characters that seems to be too weak. In fact, it does not define any sufficient condition for the identity of fictional characters. Perhaps, author's intentions should be better specified in order to define cases in which such intentions follow some objective rule that is grounded, for example, on the attribution of some essential properties to *x* and *y*.

Secondly, let me consider a quite similar case to the one examined with regard to the resurrection of fictional characters: the author of L is not acquainted at all with *x* in K and she does not want to import it into L, but she produces a fictional character *y* in L that is very similar to *x* in K, perhaps by using the same name. Following Thomasson's criterion, *y* is different from *x*. Yet, on the other hand, it seems that they are the same character or that, at least, they are much more similar than Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle's one, that are the same fictional character in Thomasson's perspective.

However, the artifactualist theory, by admitting that there exist fictional objects, seems to deal in some better way with propositions such as the ones expressed by (44), (45), (47)-(49). On the other hand, Thomasson does not investigate the difference between attribution and instantiation and she uses fictional works' operators in order to deal with (38) and (39), thus having all the aforementioned problems involved by the use of such operators[236].

[236] See Thomasson (1999): 105-114. In addition, Everett (2005) claims that realism about *ficta* (that is implied by Thomasson's artifactualism) introduces identity and ontic indeterminacy (and inconsistency too) in the actual world. For a reply to Everett's arguments, see Schnieder, von Solodkoff (2009). See also Everett (2013). For another artifactualist approach, see Lamarque (2010).

I.3.4. Holmesque Syncretism (Voltolini).

Before concluding this chapter, it is appropriate to briefly examine A. Voltolini's syncretistic theory. Voltolini tries to combine elements from Meinongian, artifactualist and pretense/make-believe theories in order to give a complete account of the ontology of fictional objects and of the semantics of fictional statements. According to Voltolini, fictional objects are abstract and existent. They exist because they are part of the necessary conditions for the identity of fictional works: since fictional works exist and have definite identity conditions, fictional objects must exist and have definite identity conditions too[237]. A make-believe process-type (that is part of a story-telling process-type) is a necessary condition for the existence of an abstract object (i.e., fictional objects generically and historically depend for their existence on story-telling processes), while a set of properties is a necessary condition for its identity. Put together, these two conditions constitute a sufficient and necessary condition for the identity of two fictional objects: fictional objects *x* and *y* are identical iff they share both the same make-believe process-type and the same property set, since that process-type and that set literally constitute those objects[238]. A *fictum* is "the *outcome* of an *operation*: the result of taking the make-believe process-type as regarding a certain property set"[239]. Thus, in Menard's case, there is no single fictional object, but there are two different *ficta*, since they are constituted by two different make-believe process-types.

Concerning (33), one could claim that, in Voltolini's perspective, Conan Doyle is Sherlock Holmes' creator since a make-believe process-type depending on Conan Doyle is a necessary condition for Sherlock Holmes' existence. What about the idea that there might be, in another possible world, a fictional object provided with all Sherlock Holmes' properties, created by an author different from Conan Doyle? In this case, since the make-believe process-type is different (following Voltolini, the two processes are not causally-related, even if they imply the same make-believe instructions, hence they are not tokens of the same make-believe process-type[240]), this latter Sherlock Holmes is different from the former one. On the other hand, if one denies the necessity of origins thesis concerning transworld identity, it seems legitimate to assert that they are trans-worldly identical.

Concerning (52), Voltolini seems to admit that a movie about Sherlock Holmes and his stories, even when they involve causally related make-believe process-tokens, do not have the same make-believe instructions, hence they do not imply the existence of two different process-tokens of one and the same process-type. However, these two different make-believe process-

[237] See Voltolini (2006): 223-246.
[238] See Voltolini (2006): 66-80.
[239] Voltolini (2006): 88.
[240] See Voltolini (2006): 70.

types take part in the constitution of a larger Sherlock Holmes character[241]. In fact, Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes' make-believe process-type protracts Conan Doyle's one, thus creating one larger Sherlock Holmes. Thus, (52) turns out to express a literally false proposition. On the other hand, concerning (51), do two different stories involve two different make-believe process-types? On the one hand, the process-tokens involved by them might be causally related. Yet, on the other hand, they do not contain the same instructions. Thus, (51) would turn out to express a false proposition too.

However, developing this account, one might focus on properties and on the contrast between (12) and (40)[242]. Voltolini thinks that stories are sets of propositions. Since stories exist and since they can contribute to the identity conditions of properties, one might introduce story-indexed properties. Thus, it is possible to imagine that there is one large Sherlock Holmes that has the property of being such-and-such in the story S_1. In this sense, there would be only one Sherlock Holmes, having properties in different stories and according to different make-believe process-types. In fact, if one did not want to admit a one-one correspondence between stories and such process-types, s/he could nevertheless introduce properties provided with make-believe process-type indexes. Process-types' protractions would turn out to be useless: non-protracting process-types might involve Sherlock Holmes and attribute to him different (and, perhaps, contrasting) properties.

In other parts of his book, Voltolini examines almost all the statements I have mentioned in the first section of this chapter. He thinks, for example, that there are no concrete immigrant objects. Hence, roughly, Sherlock Holmes' London and Sherlock Holmes' tea-partner Lord Gladstone are different from their real correlates[243]. It is not possible to further discuss his analyses, that constitute the most detailed account of fictional objects ever provided. I have only tried to demonstrate that problems do not disappear by accepting both the existence of fictional objects and their dependence on make-believe process-types.

[241] See Voltolini (2006): 105.
[242] Voltolini analyzes propositions such as the one expressed by (40) in Voltolini (2006): 193-200.
[243] See Voltolini (2006): 122. See also Voltolini (2013).

I.4. The Times and Worlds They Are A-Changin'

In this chapter, I shall investigate some problems concerning the connections between existence, modality and time. In particular, with regard to modality, I shall deal with the status of merely possible non-existent objects (i.e., objects that do not exist and might have existed), of contingently existing objects (objects that exist and might have not existed) and fictional non-existent objects (fictional objects that do not exist and might perhaps have existed – even though most philosophers, inspired by Kripke[244], would deny such a possibility). With regard to time, I shall focus on existent objects' coming-to-existence and ceasing-to-exist and, more generally, on the possibility of such existential changes[245].

I.4.1. There Actually Is a Problem: Noman and Some Other Problematic Guys.

Let me imagine one particular sperm cell of my father's and one particular ovum of my mother's that do not unite in reality. If that sperm cell had fertilized that ovum, there would have existed one particular individual: Noman[246]. It seems legitimate to accept that

(54) Noman might have existed.

Furthermore, let me consider my possible non-existence, i.e., the fact that

(55) I might have not existed.

Finally, with regard to some fictional object (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), one might argue that such an object, even if it does not exist, might have existed, i.e., that

(56) Sherlock Holmes might have existed.

(54) and (55) both seem to express true propositions or, if we do not wish to accept that there are propositions, their particular tokens in this page seem to be tokens of true sentence-types. Yet, considered from an actualist viewpoint, according to which

(actualism) there are no items that do not exist[247],

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[244] See Kripke (1973).

[245] It is important to investigate such topics, provided that some philosophers (such as Pears (1967)) believe that, even if the predicate "exist" is not an informative predicate in statements such as "tame tigers exist", it nevertheless is informative when it is used in order to affirm the existence in other possible worlds of things that do not exist in the actual world and in order to affirm that something no longer exists.

[246] An analogous example is discussed by Salmon (1987), in Salmon (2005): 9.

[247] It is worth remarking in this chapter that I distinguish between actualism and modal actualism: actualism is more comprehensive than modal actualism, since even modal realists (who do not accept modal actualism) such as D. K. Lewis, as we will see, accept the thesis (actualism), that implies that there are no (purely) non-existent objects. Modal actualists assert that there is only one actual and real possible world, while modal realists assert that there is more than one real possible world and that each possible world is actual at itself. For the distinction between modal actualism and modal realism, see, for example, Divers (2002).

their truth-values might turn out to be problematic. First, let me consider (54). If we accept that

(arg.mod.I.1) the sentence-type (54) has a truth-value;

(arg.mod.I.2) for every sentence-type and for every proper part of a sentence type, if that sentence-type has a truth-value and that proper part is a part of that sentence-type, then there exists something to which that proper part refers;

(arg.mod.I.3) "Noman" is a proper part of the sentence-type (54),

then there follows that

(arg.mod.I.4) the sentence-type (54) exists and there exists something to which "Noman" refers.

The premise (arg.mod.I.2) is a combination of the Fregean principle of compositionality and of (actualism). If we accept this argument, then "Noman" has to refer to something existent. Yet, this thing cannot be Noman, since it is implied by (54) that Noman does not exist. One might use propositions instead of sentence-types:

(arg.mod.II.1) the sentence-type (54) expresses the proposition [Noman might have existed];

(arg.mod.II.2) the proposition [Noman might have existed] has a truth-value;

(arg.mod.II.3) for every proposition and for every logical constituent of a proposition, if that proposition has a truth-value and that constituent is a logical constituent of that proposition, then that proposition exists and there exists something to which that logical constituent refers;

(arg.mod.II.4) if "Noman" is a proper part of the sentence-type (54) and the sentence-type (54) expresses the proposition [Noman might have existed], then [Noman] is a logical constituent of the proposition [Noman might have existed];

(arg.mod.II.5) "Noman" is a proper part of the sentence-type (54);

then

(arg.mod.II.6) the proposition [Noman might have existed] exists and there exists something to which [Noman] refers.

An actualist might deny that the sentence-type (54) expresses the proposition [Noman might have existed]. Yet, if we accept that there exists such a proposition and that it is expressed by sentence-type (54), it is possible to give another argument, based on truthmakers and that do not involve the principle of compositionality:

(arg.mod.III.1) the proposition [Noman might have existed] has a truth-value;

(arg.mod.III.2) for every proposition, if that proposition has a truth-value, then there exists something that makes it true;

then

(arg.mod.III.3) there exists something that makes [Noman does not exist] true.

Thus, actualists aiming at maintaining all the assumptions of at least one of these arguments have to deal with a problem: since Noman does not exist, "Noman" and/or [Noman] do not refer to Noman or Noman is not the truthmaker (or part of the truthmaker) for [Noman might have existed], provided that truthmakers (and their parts) should exist, at least according to actualists[248].

It is more complicated to construct a similar argument with (55), since I exist. Yet, it seems that no feature of mine guarantees my possible non-existence: I exist and I have all my properties. Yet, if it is true that (actualism), my possible non-existence is neither a property of mine, nor a property whose instantiation by me is implied by the instantiation of other properties of mine. In a similar vein, there exists nothing such as Sherlock Holmes in order for sentence-type (56) to be true or for it to express a true proposition.

I.4.2. Possible Worlds: With or Without Them - We Can't Live.

Possible worlds can be considered in different ways: for example, maximal and consistent propositions, maximal and possible states of affairs, properties or worlds just like ours. Possible worlds are often introduced in order to deal with (54), (55) and (56). Yet, can we (Noman, Sherlock Holmes and I) live (or not live) without possible worlds? In this section, I shall briefly examine some strategies that use or do not use possible worlds.

At first, it is possible to distinguish between *de dicto* and *de re* readings of (54)-(56) (or of the propositions expressed by them). The distinction is justified by the fact that, while a *de re* reading of (54)-(56) presupposes the existence of Noman and Sherlock Holmes and my possible non-existence (at least from an actualist perspective), a *de dicto* reading does not have such presuppositions. Thus, adopting a *de dicto* reading, (54) turns out to express that: it is possible that Noman exists *and* it is true that Noman does not exist. On the other hand, it is not legitimate, from an actualist viewpoint, to adopt *a de* reading, according to which Noman might exist *and* he does not exist (in this case, the latter conjunct would be obviously made true by something different from Noman): Noman does not exist and he cannot have the property of possibly existing. The same might happen with (56). Finally, adopting a *de dicto* reading, (55) turns out to

[248] The problem of merely possible non-existents for modal actualists is examined, among others, by McMichael (1983), Lewis (1986): 158-165, and Bennett (2005). For general inquiries into possible worlds' ontology, see, for example, Divers (2002) and Melia (2003).

express that: it is possible that I do not exist *and* I exist, even if the corresponding *de re* reading (I exist *and* I might not exist) is not legitimate or it is legitimate only if it is legitimate to introduce properties such as my possible non-existence. Yet, it is important to ask what truth-conditions can be given to our *de dicto* readings. For example, is (54)'s *de dicto* reading true because the proposition [Noman exists] has some property? Is it true because some state of affairs (the state of affairs of Noman's existence) has some property? From an actualist viewpoint, such propositions and states of affairs must exist, in order to have such properties. Can such propositions and states of affairs exist, even if Noman does not exist? Do they have any different way of existing? Do they exist in other possible worlds? Thus, *de dicto* readings' truth-values have still to be grounded on something existent.

Furthermore, if we accept the Barcan formula[249], according to which

(Barcan formula) if it is possible that something is P, then there is something such that it is possible that is P (i.e., such that it is possibly P),

and if it is possible that Noman is my twin, then there is something (Noman) that is possibly my twin, so that actualists are forced to quantify over mere *possibilia*, that do not exist. The *de dicto*/*de re* distinction does not help[250].

Secondly, one might notice that "Noman" and "Sherlock Holmes" do not pick out any particular individual and do not have to refer to any particular existent individual in order for the sentence-types (or the propositions) in question to be true[251]. However, even if this objection might seem legitimate with regard to "Sherlock Holmes", it does not seem to me legitimate with regard to Noman (Noman is the particular individual that might have existed, if one particular sperm cell of my father's and one particular ovum of my mother's, both existent, had united and, obviously, if the resulting zygote had not split into two) and it is obviously not legitimate with regard to me (provided that I am one particular individual). However, as we will see, many philosophers look for an interpretation of (54) and (55) not involving any particular individual.

Yet, a Spinozian necessitarianist might deny that (54)-(56) are true sentence-types or express true propositions: it is necessary that everything is such as it actually is, there is no non-obtaining possibility and, in general, states of affairs that do not occur *cannot* occur. I cannot deal here with such a thesis. I shall assume that Spinozian necessitarianism is false and that it is at least

[249] See Barcan Marcus (1946) and Barcan Marcus (1961), in Barcan Marcus (1993): 3-38.
[250] See also Menzel (2008) and, for an actualist analysis of the Barcan formula, Simchen (2013).
[251] The specificity problem for mere *possibilia* is mentioned, among others, by Yagisawa (2009), recalling the problem of the identity conditions for Quine's merely possible fat man in the doorway.

true that (55)[252].

A fourth strategy that does not give too much weight to possible worlds was elaborated by D. M. Armstrong[253]. The key idea behind Armstrong's account is that the actual world is constituted by states of affairs and that merely possible worlds and merely possible states of affairs are recombinations of actual simple individuals and actual simple properties instantiated by them. A simple individual is an individual that does not have any individual as a proper part, while a simple property is a property that is not constituted by any other property. When an actual simple individual instantiates an actual simple property, there is an atomic state of affairs. More complex (i.e., molecular) states of affairs supervene on atomic ones and are "ontological free lunches". Merely possible atomic states of affairs are possible recombinations of actual simple individuals and actual simple properties: they are possible, because those individuals and those properties can be recombined, but they are just *merely* possible, because they are not combined. However, what is the rule that determines what actual simple individuals and what actual simple properties can or cannot recombine with one another? If actual simple individuals are bare individuals, they do not have any nature, i.e., they do not have any essential property determining what recombinations are possible and what are not possible. On the other hand, if they have a nature, then actual atomic and essential states of affairs (i.e., actual simple individuals instantiating their essential properties) are the real subjects of recombinations. However, in this latter case, it would still not be determined what atomic and essential states of affairs can recombine with one another and how this can happen. Furthermore, what about merely possible existence or possible non-existence? Armstron'g solution is not clear in this respect. Finally, if we invoke the notion of recombination, then we have to accept that only actual recombinations (produced by some minded subject?) define possibilities or that recombination should be in turn defined in modal terms, as recombinability, so that modality would be grounded on... modality!

Some strategies to ground the truth of (54)-(56) are based on the notion of essence. An object's essence is its own nature, what that object is. Many philosophers agree that essences are properties or conjunctions of properties and that they are somehow connected with modal notions. However, during the last 20 years, after the publication of an important article of K. Fine's[254], this connection has been investigated in several ways, in order to deal with the following question: do essences precede necessity or do they have to be defined in terms of necessity?

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[252] As regards the problem of necessitarianism, see, among others, Nelson (2009). I shall not consider here the fictionalist approach to possible worlds proposed by Rosen (1990) and (1995) and recently defended by Woodward (2008), (2011), (2012).

[253] See Armstrong (1989): 37-87.

[254] See Fine (1994) (see also other papers in Fine (2005)). Lowe (2012), (2013a) and (2013b): 139-160, adopts a similar strategy.

Before Fine's article, essences were generally regarded as properties that it is necessary that objects possess, if they exist: P is an essence of an object x iff it is necessary that, if x exists, then x is P. Yet, Fine demonstrates that this thesis proves too much: for example, that too many properties (even existence) are essential to an object. On the other hand, Fine claims the an object's essence can be found out by considering its real definition and that necessity and all the other modal notions can be defined in terms of essences. In particular, it seems to me that, from this viewpoint, necessity can be considered what is essential to an object and what is somehow implied by the essence of an object, i.e., something whose negation is excluded by that object's essence: it is necessary that an object x is P iff $\sim Px$ is excluded by x's essence. It is contingent that x is P iff Px is true but $\sim Px$ is not excluded by x's essence. It is merely possible that x is P iff $\sim Px$ is true but Px is not excluded by x's essence. However, it is still not clear what an object's essence is. Furthermore, how can we define exclusion?

With regard to the former question, many answers are available: an object's essence is its natural kind (e.g., with regard to Obama, his being human), or the conjunction of all (or some) of its properties, or its origin (e.g., with regard to me, some relation connecting me with the actual sperm cell and ovum that actually united in order to constitute my zygote), or its material constitution, or some relation between its material constituents, or some non-qualitative property (e.g., with regard to Socrates, its haecceity, i.e., the property of being Socrates or of being identical with Socrates). An actualist essentialist has to deal with (54)-(56) by only introducing existing essences or essences of existent objects. For example, considering Noman, the actualist essentialist should try to demonstrate that our premise (arg.mod.II.1), admitting the existence of the proposition [Noman might have existed], is false *or* that, even if there is such a proposition, it is made true by some existing thing's essence or by some existing essence.

What about exclusion or, in general, the relation between an object's essence and the necessity/contingency/mere possibility that that object has some property? If we defined this relation in modal terms, then Fine's task would fail, since we would obtain that: it is necessary that an object x is P iff it *cannot* be the case that $\sim Px$, i.e., iff it is necessary that Px! Yet, if what is necessary for an object is its essence and what is implied by its essence, then essences turn out to be defined in modal terms.

Let me consider, at first, the position of those actualist essentialists who accept essences' priority on modality. Such philosophers can neither invoke non-obtaining facts, nor non-actual objects. How do they deal with (54)-(56)? It obviously depends on what essences they accept[255]. An actualist maximal essentialist (i.e., someone who accepts that an object's essence is the

[255] For a survey of the different kinds of essential properties, see Robertson (2008).

conjunction of all its properties) should immediately deny that it is true that (54)-(56). Let us consider Noman: Noman depends for his existence on the particular union of those particular gametes that do not actually unite. If the essences of those gametes comprehend their external relations too, then it is excluded that they unite, so that it is necessarily false that (54). If such essences do not comprehend their external relations, then maximal essentialists have to select monadic properties on which such relations *cannot* supervene, since they are external. Yet, they would have to reintroduce modal discourse in order to define essences: they cannot simply claim that, *as a matter of fact*, such relations *do not* supervene on their monadic properties. This point is quite important and can be appreciated by using a different example. If all the ever existing men had black eyes, then, *as a matter of fact*, it would be essential for every man to have black eyes. Yet, that all men have black eyes seems only to be an accidental generalization: it does not seem to be a law of nature, nor the property of having black eyes is comprehended within the essence of every man. Let us call R_1 the external relation between Noman's gametes (the union relation), that does not in fact hold between them. If all the ever existing gametes had, by accidental generalization, some property (or properties) on which there seems to supervene a relation R_2 that is incompatible with R_1, then R_1 is excluded by those gametes' essences. On the other hand, a similar property preventing my non-existence might have been accidentally instantiated by existing objects. Furthermore, Sherlock Holmes would be essentially fictional, because he would have the property of being fictional within his essence. Thus, he would be essentially non-existent.

Among others, Armstrong and E. J. Lowe have tried to avoid this situation, by defining laws of nature not simply in terms of actual instantiation of properties by objects. According to Armstrong, a law of nature is a relation between universals[256]. Following Lowe, it consists of some kind's being characterized by some attribute (or of two kinds' standing in some relation, i.e., of their being characterized by a relational attribute)[257]. This seems to introduce us into sortal essentialism, i.e., that version of essentialism according to which kinds (or sorts) are essential to an object's being that object. Let me consider gametes again. Roughly, there is no attribute of the gametes' kind that prevents that Noman's particular gametes unite, nor that my particular gametes do not unite. Thus, it is both true that (54) and (55). Yet, it is difficult to find out what attributes characterize each kind (its *propria*?). It is also difficult to adopt a method that does not simply generalize on objects. Furthermore, might I have had most of the properties I actually have, even without being human? If I had been a disembodied minded subject, for example, would I have existed as *this* particular individual I am or not? In order to exclude such

[256] See Armstrong (1983).
[257] See, for example, Lowe (2006): 24-133.

possibilities, sortal essentialism would have to reintroduce modalities.

If his origin is essential to Noman and my origin is essential to me, then there must be some relation connecting Noman with his origin and me with my origin. This relation turns out to be essential. Such a relation is not instantiated in Noman's case (since Noman does not exist) and it is instantiated in my case (since I exist): this seems to ground Noman's non-existence and my existence. However, we should add that it is also essential to me (and to Noman) that my (or Noman's) zygote did not (would not have) split into other zygotes. Yet, how can this particular relation (the origin relation) be defined? It seems to me that it can be only defined in terms of the essences of the particular gametes taking part in it. Thus, we shall have at first to define such gametes' origins, and the essences of objects originating them, and so on, until we shall have one non-originated object's essence. Thus, origins are only in part essential to an object. Furthermore, Noman's origin relation seem to exist uninstantiated, floating in the actual world, and this seems to be a high ontological price to pay, at least for many theorists of properties.

I shall spend few words on other solutions, at least from the perspective according to which modality depends on essence. Material constitution and relations between material constituents do not seem sufficient to define an object's essence: I change my constitution, even without stopping existing, and relations between my constituents seem to change too. If only some constituents (or some relations among constituents) were essential, then we would perhaps have to justify our choice in terms of the constituted objects' nature: if such-and-such constituents (or relations among constituents) do not exist anymore (do not hold anymore), then that particular object stops existing, thus stopping being what it is. Finally, with regard to haecceities, they would have to exist uninstantiated (at least in Noman's case), thus lacking identity conditions. Furthermore, with regard to me, it seems that my haecceity exist *because* I exist, and not the opposite. I shall examine the solution based on haecceities and possible worlds in few pages.

What does it happen if we use essences with possible worlds? Before analyzing this case, it is worth talking of the ontology of possible worlds. Let me recall that, from an actualist perspective, it is true that

(actualism) there are no items that do not exist.

Yet, as I shall try to demonstrate, actualists fall in trouble when they try to ground the truth of some modal propositions[258]. I shall summarize here such difficulties. First, the actual world can be considered the sum of everything that exists. Accepting (actualism), the actual

[258] For an interesting outline of the modal actualist strategy for dealing with mere *possibilia* (that seems to be valid for actualists in general too), see Einheuser (2012).

world is thus the sum of everything there is, i.e., the sum of everything. This is the actual $world_1$. Secondly, the actual $world_2$ can be considered a maximal and consistent proposition (or a set of propositions, or a conjunction of propositions) that has all non-modal true propositions as constituents. This seems to be the most commonly held view of possible worlds from the actualist perspective: the actual $world_2$ is a maximal and consistent existing (non-modal) proposition (or conjunction of propositions, or set of propositions); something is a maximal and consistent existing (non-modal) proposition (or conjunction of propositions, or set of propositions) iff for every (non-modal) proposition [p] it is not the case that both [p] and its negation [~p] are constituents of it *and* it is the case that [p] or [~p] is a constituent of it. Furthermore, considering possible worlds in general, each possible world can be considered a maximal and consistent existing (non-modal) proposition (or conjunction of propositions, or set of propositions). Thus, there will be non-modal propositions such as [Noman exists] or [I do not exist] or corresponding propositions [p_1] and [p_2] not involving any reference to Noman, nor to my possible non-existence, that will be parts of possible worlds different from the actual $world_2$. Since they exist *qua* propositions, possible worlds (and the actual $world_2$) are part of the actual $world_1$. Thus, their constituent propositions ([Noman exists] and [I do not exist] or [p_1] and [p_1]) exist too. Thirdly, the actual $world_3$ can be considered a maximal and consistent proposition (or a set of propositions, or a conjunction of propositions) that has all true propositions (included modal ones) as constituents. Thus, the actual $world_3$ has propositions [54] and [55] as constituents. In order to avoid the reference to non-existent objects (such as Noman) and in order not to commit to my merely possible non-existence, actualists can substitute [54] and [55] with other propositions, such as [p54] and [p55]. The propositions [54] and/or [55] and/or [p54] and /or [p55] are parts of the actual $world_3$ and their truth is somehow grounded on the actual $world_2$. Thus, there might be in the actual $world_2$ propositions that, in turn, ground the truth of proposition(s) [54] and/or [p54] and of proposition(s) [55] and/or [p55]. The truth of the actual $world_2$ is in turn grounded on the actual $world_1$. Since it is legitimate to choose among different options with regard to propositions (e.g., we can choose to admit [54] and [55] or [p54] and [p55]), there will be different actualist solutions. So far, so good. Yet, as we will see, if we do not admit Noman as an object (i.e., if we do not admit that there is something like Noman, even if he does not exist), it will turn out to be problematic to ground the identity of [54] and [p54]. Furthermore, if there is nothing such as Noman (since he does not exist), how will the truth of propositions [54] and/or [p54] be grounded on element(s) of the actual $world_1$? In fact, it seems that Noman might have existed and I might have not existed in the actual $world_1$. With regard to [55] and [p55], there seems to be nothing in me in the actual $world_1$ that non-circularly (i.e.,

without using modal discourse) grounds the truth of such propositions.

I shall now consider individual essences from a possible worlds perspective. [p_1] and [p_2] can be respectively substituted by: [Noman's individual essence is instantiated] and [my individual essence is not instantiated].

If one accepts that individual essences are properties, s/he can think of them as Aristotelian individual essences (they are instantiated iff they exist) or as Platonic individual essences (they exist even if they are not instantiated).

Let me first consider Aristotelian individual essences. The problem with the actualist solutions is that Noman's Aristotelian individual essence does not exist in the actual world$_1$ (since Noman's does not exist) and it cannot contribute to the truth of any conjunct. With regard to my individual essence, things are less clear. Provided that my Aristotelian individual essence exists iff I exist, my Aristotelian individual essence exists (and can contribute to the truth of propositions) iff I exist and I instantiate it. Thus, my Aristotelian individual essence turns out to be redundant and parasitic on me for existing: provided that I exist, I am the truthmaker (or I am part of the truthmaker) for [55] and/or [p55].

What about Platonic individual essences? Such essences exist even if their bearers do not exist. However, in Noman's case, if Noman does not exist, such essences do not have any clear identity condition: what does it differentiate two distinct merely possible individuals' Platonic individual essences, if such individuals do not exist and cannot contribute to their identity and distinctness conditions? Thus, they do not contribute to the identity conditions of propositions [Noman's individual essence is instantiated] and [Noman exists]. Yet, such propositions must be identified, in order to attribute to them some properties and to deny that they have other properties. However, with regard to my Platonic individual essence, this solution seems to work. Thus, in general, the Platonic individual essences' solution, even if it works with existent individuals, does not work with non-existent ones and it is a partial solution to our problems. Furthermore, it might turn out to be trivial.

In order to justify my latter claim, let me consider Plantinga's theory of possible worlds, that combines Platonic individual essences (conceived of as haecceities) with states of affairs[259]. Plantinga claims that possible worlds are maximal and consistent states of affairs, that actually exist but are abstract: they do not obtain, even if they might have obtained, and they are somehow part of the actual world, since they actually exist. Furthermore, he adds that haecceities necessarily exist, i.e., that they exist in every possible world, that they are constituents of every possible world, even if there do not exist in those worlds individuals instantiating them. Thus,

[259] See Plantinga (1974) and (2003).

they are Platonic haecceities. Since the actual world is the only obtaining maximal and consistent state of affairs, Noman's (and perhaps Sherlock Holmes') haecceities exist in the actual $world_1$, in the actual $world_2$ and in the actual $world_3$ too. Furthermore, my Platonic haecceity exist even in worlds in which I do not exist. Let me take one such world: it is true that (55) since it is true that, if one such world had obtained, my Platonic haecceity would have not been instantiated, even existing in that world. On the other hand, it is true that (54) since, assuming a world in which Noman actually exists, it is true that, if one such world had obtained, Noman's Platonic haecceity would have been instantiated, but it is not actually instantiated, even if it actually exists. This is, roughly, Plantinga's theory. However, it seems to me that Noman's Platonic haecceity must be identified by Noman, that does not actually exist. Does Noman *qua* object exist in other possible worlds, so that he exists in the actual $world_1$? It seems that he does not: when we analyze such worlds, we just find out that some Platonic haecceity might have been instantiated, had that world obtained. In sum, Noman's Platonic haecceity is identified (and thus actually exists as *that* particular Platonic haecceity) iff Noman $actually_1$ exists[260]. Yet, Noman does not $actually_1$ exist! What about me? I identify my actually existing Platonic haecceity and that haecceity would not have been instantiated, had a world in which I do not exist been actual. Yet, is this not trivially true? A world in which I do not exist is a world in which my Platonic haecceity is not instantiated. Thus, this would amount to claim that, had a world in which my Platonic haecceity is not instantiated been actual, then my haecceity would have not been instantiated. Right! Yet, what contribution does this analysis give to our understanding of contingent existence?

R. M. Adams argues that there are only thisnesses of actual individuals[261]. Noman is not actual (he does not exist in the actual $world_1$), so that he does not have any thisness. Furthermore, he claims that world-stories, i.e., maximal and consistent sets of propositions, define types of worlds. This distinction among worlds and world-stories make it difficult to apply to Adams the above mentioned distinctions among different senses of the expression "actual world". On the one hand, it seems that the actual $world_1$ comprehends both Adams' worlds and world-stories. On the other hand, it seems that worlds and world-stories do not properly exist in the actual $world_1$, since there exist in other worlds propositions that neither exist in in the actual $world_1$, nor are part of the actual $world_2$ (i.e., of the actual world-story). In order to respect Adams' original theses, we can consider possible worlds different from the actual one useful fictions. Anyway, we cannot introduce into world-stories propositions about non-actual individuals: such propositions do not exist. Thus, we should paraphrase them into something else. Let me now focus on (55). It

[260] Concerning this point, see Fine (1985), in Fine (2005): 176-213. For Plantinga's replies, see the papers in Plantinga (2003). For another interesting defense of haecceities, see Rosenkrantz (1993).
[261] See Adams (1981). See also Adams (1974) and (1979).

is true that (55), since it is true that I am only contingently existent, i.e., that I do not necessarily exist, i.e., that my thisness is not necessarily exemplified. The proposition [I might have not existed] exists in the actual world, since I actually exist, and this proposition is true in it for the reasons already explained. Yet, why is my thisness not necessarily exemplified? In order to give an answer to such question, we should consider the difference between truth *in* a world and truth *at* a world. A proposition is true *in* a world iff it is contained within the world-story that defines that type of world. A proposition is true *at* a world iff it is not contained within the world-story that defines that type of world, but it correctly characterizes that type of world. For example, [I do not exist] is not true *in* worlds in which I do not exist, since it does not exist in those worlds (because I do not exist in them), but it is true *at* those worlds: it aims at expressing something true about those worlds, i.e., that they do not contain me. Can we claim that [I might have not existed] is true *in* the actual world iff I exist in the actual world but there are worlds *at* which it is true that I do not exist? Well, it does not seem that this solution makes it the case that [I might have not existed] is true *in* the actual world: it only claims something that is true *at* other worlds. Thus, should we accept as a primitive fact that [I might have not existed] simply expresses my contingent existence? It seems that we should. Furthermore, if propositions such as [I do not exist] are not true in our world, they seem to be part of world-stories that exist in our world. Thus, when we claim that [I do not exist] is true *at* some world, why cannot we claim that the proposition [it is true *at* some world that I do not exist] is true *in* the actual world that? However, such a proposition seems to be partly constituted by the proposition [I do not exist], that does not exist in the actual world. Thus, how can the proposition [it is true *at* some world that I do not exist] exist and be true *in* our world? On the other hand, if such a proposition is only true *at* the actual world, the actual world would be truly and correctly characterized by a proposition that does not exist, since it does not actually exist! It is true that the actual world is not a world-story. However, since world-stories exist in the actual world, the latter remark does not seem to imply that propositions such as [it is true *at* some world that I do not exist] do not exist in the actual world. One might reply that propositions such as [Noman does not exist] exist *simpliciter*. Yet, in order to find out their identity conditions, we have to accept the existence of Noman (i.e., the existence of a non-existent) or we have to claim that we are ontologically committed to some individual haecceity of Noman's or to some conjunction of properties constituting Noman's essence. I have already criticized such theses. If we now go back to our terminology, it seems that, if Adam's actual world is the actual world$_1$, then all the aforementioned problems arise. On the other hand, if Adam's actual world is the actual world$_2$, then it is not clear what is the place of true modal propositions within the actual world. Finally, if it is the actual world$_3$, then it is not

necessary to introduce the distinction between truth at a world and truth in a world: every true modal proposition is true in the actual $world_3$, even though the problem of grounding the truth of true modal propositions about mere *possibilia* on something $actual_3$ is left unresolved.

There are two strategies that try to deal with modal problems by relativizing existence to worlds (and times). These solutions are (partly) inspired by D. Lewis' claim that actuality is relative to worlds. Thus, before dealing with such strategies, I shall briefly deal with Lewis' modal realism. Lewis claims that possible worlds are worlds just like ours[262]. He thinks that possible worlds are existing, concrete, maximal spatio-temporal regions, occupied by existent, concrete things. Possible worlds (and things that live in them) are isolated: they do not have relations with one another. Furthermore, things existing in possible worlds are world-bounded: they only exist in their world, they do not exist in other worlds. It is worth noticing that Lewis distinguishes between existence and actuality: every world and every possible individual exists, while worlds are just actual *at* themselves and no world is absolutely actual. In fact, "actual" is, for Lewis, an indexical term, i.e., a term whose reference varies from context to context: within the context of our world, our world is actual (and everything contained in our world is actual too), but within the context of another world, that world is actual. Existing within another possible world, Noman is not actual, even if he exists (he exists in that world, he is concrete, he exists *simpliciter*, since that world exists *simpliciter*). On the other hand, I am actual and I exist. Yet, since I am world-bounded to the actual world (i.e., to *this* world), I do not exist in any other world. It is not true that I might have not existed in *this* world (I exist in *this* world) and it is not true that Noman might have existed in *this* world (he does not and he cannot exist here). Yet, it is true that there are many worlds in which I do not exist (I only exist in this world) and that there is one world in which Noman exists. Thus, if (54) and (55) state something about this world, they are false; if they state something about other worlds, they are true. How can they be made true? Perhaps by claiming that (54) expresses the proposition [Noman is not actual and Noman exists *simpliciter* and Noman is actual in another world], that is made true by the fact that Noman is not actual and Noman exists *simpliciter* and Noman is actual in one other world, and (55) expresses the proposition [I am actual and I exist *simpliciter* and I am not actual in many other worlds, except ours], that is made true by the fact that I am actual and I exist *simpliciter* and I am not actual in many other worlds, except ours. In order to make such propositions true, it is not necessary to deny the truth of (actualism). However, in Lewis' perspective, one should accept the following principle:

[262] See Lewis (1986). I shall not deal here with counterparts theory, since counterparts seem not to be able to guarantee the truth of (54)-(56). For example, *I* do not exist in other worlds, not a counterpart of mine, and it is not one of Noman's counterparts that does not exist in the actual world, but Noman himself. See the famous example of Humphrey in Kripke (1980): 45n.

(actualism-lewis) there are things that exist and are not actual, but there are no things that do not exist.

The problem with our propositions is that they are made true, at least in the third conjunct, by facts (or by entities, in Noman's case, or by worlds) that exist and that are not actual. If one claimed that there exists the proposition [I am not actual in infinitely other worlds, except ours] and that such a proposition is true, I would not be the truth-maker for this truth, nor would it be the actual world, nor any other fact in the actual world. This proposition is true in the actual world, but it is not made true by anything actual (even if it is made true by something existent). Furthermore, the proposition [Noman is actual in one other world] exists and is true in the actual world, but it is not made true by Noman, nor by the actual world, nor by facts in the actual world. Thus, there would be some kind of transworld relation between such propositions in the actual world and something that does not exist in the actual world, i.e., that is not actual. Yet, if other possible worlds are inaccessible from our world, such a relation cannot exist. Furthermore, it is impossible that it exists, because it does not exist in any possible world (it does neither exist in our world, nor in any other possible world, since in both cases it would lack one of its *relata*).

It is now time to examine the two aforementioned strategies that consist in relativizing existence to worlds (and times). As well as Lewis' account, such strategies are not grounded on our distinction between different senses of the expression "actual world". Possible non-actual worlds seem to be something more than propositions. Anyway, if we accept (actualism), we can think of such worlds (whatever they are) as elements of the actual $world_1$. The last two solutions I shall consider (grounded on some distinction between actuality, or existence, and concreteness) seem to involve the same assumption.

T. Yagisawa thinks of possible worlds in terms of modal parts. Yagisawa argues that, while reality is a monadic property (something is real), existence is always relative to time, space and worlds, i.e., to temporal, spatial and modal parts[263]. Such parts are always real. However, things exist or do not exist at different times, at different spaces and at different worlds by having or not having some temporal, spatial or modal parts at those times, spaces and worlds. Thus, I do not exist in some possible worlds, since there is at least one possible world in which I do not have a modal part (i.e., simply, I do not have some modal part, since possible worlds seem to be constituted by modal parts). Yet, it seems to follow that I do not *wholly* exist in possible worlds in which I exist: I only have some modal parts (and, perhaps, some temporal and spatial parts too) in those worlds. This might be unacceptable for a modal endurantist. However, even conceding that Yagisawa's thesis is true, what about (54)-(56)? I am real, such as Noman and (perhaps)

[263] See Yagisawa (2010): 49-61.

Sherlock Holmes. Noman does not exist in our world (i.e., he does not have modal parts in our world or, simply, he does not have some modal part), but he exists in some world, by having modal parts in that world, and it is legitimate to claim that we can truly attribute something to Noman in all the other worlds (this is one of Yagisawa's assumptions). However, this does not amount to claim that Noman might have existed in our world: what we claim is that Noman has some modal parts in other worlds (perhaps similar to ours), but not that he might have had modal parts in our world. What about me? By claiming that I do not have modal parts in some world and that I have a modal part in our world, I do not claim that I might have lacked modal parts in our world, that is what (55) seems to imply.

One of the most interesting and complex theories of the relation between existence and modality is N. Salmon's theory[264]. According to Salmon, it is necessary to distinguish between two different kinds of actuality predicates: actuality$_A$- and actuality$_B$-predicates. I shall only consider such predicates when they are applied to individuals. The predicate "actual$_A$" correctly applies to a possible individual, with respect to a context of utterance *c*, a possible world *w* and some other parameters (such as a time *t*) iff that possible individual exists in the world of *c* (at *t*). On the other hand, the predicate "actual$_B$" correctly applies to a possible individual, with respect to a context of utterance *c*, a possible world *w* and some other parameters (such as a time *t*) iff that possible individual exists in the world *w* (at *t*). With regard to Noman, Salmon claims that "Noman" is a weakly non-referring term, namely a term that does not actually$_A$ (i.e., in the world of the context *c* in which we are) refer to anything, even if *there might have been* someone to which that term would have referred. The reference of such a term is fixed by description. On the other hand, "Sherlock Holmes" is perhaps not a weakly non-referring term, because there is no description that fixes the reference to one and only one individual. [Noman might have been such-and-such] is actually$_A$ true, even though [Noman is such-and-such] is not actually$_A$ true (at least with respect to many properties supposedly instantiated by Noman). This latter proposition, according to Salmon, does not exist, even if it might have existed and it might have been true: this is the reason for which the former proposition is actually$_A$ true. However, there are some properties that Noman has (that he really has, not only that he might have had): for example, Noman has the properties of non-existing and of merely possibly existing.

However, what about [Noman might have existed]? If we simply affirm that such a proposition is true only because "Noman" is a weakly non-referring term, it seems that we affirm something false: it is because Noman is not actual$_A$ that "Noman" is a weakly non-referring term! Furthermore, do we have to use actuality$_A$ or actuality$_B$ in order to talk of Noman's merely

[264] See Salmon (1987) and (1998), in Salmon (2005): 9-90.

possible existence? Since actuality$_B$ is, according to Salmon, what we mean when we talk of existence (it is what is meant by Hamlet in asking his question: "to be or not to be?"), it seems that Noman might have been actual$_B$. Yet, if he is not actual$_A$ (i.e., he does not actually$_A$ exist), how might he have actually$_A$ existed? Perhaps, he might have actually$_B$ existed in some other world, but not in our world. Thus, it is perhaps true that Noman might have actually$_A$ existed, but what we are interested in is actual$_B$ existence.

With regard to my contingent existence, Salmon might claim that I actually$_A$ exist and I actually$_B$ exist. It is false that I do not actually$_A$ exist, and perhaps it is necessarily false, because it is not actually$_A$ the case that I do not exist (there is no context *c* where the proposition [I do not exist] is true). What about actuality$_B$? Perhaps, there is a world in which I am not actual$_B$, but it is not *this* world: I am actual$_B$ since I exist in this world. Thus, with regard to this world, it is not the case that I might have not been actual$_B$ (i.e., the proposition [I might have not been actual$_B$] is not true with regard to this world).

Two other strategies to deal with (54)-(56) are grounded on a distinction between concreteness (and abstractness) from existence and actuality. B. Linsky and E. Zalta, for example, claim that actualists might accept that there are three kinds of objects: actually concrete, contingently non-concrete and essentially abstract ones[265]. Concrete objects are spatio-temporal, while abstract objects are non-spatio-temporal. However, both concrete and abstract objects exist and they exist in the actual world. Furthermore, it seems that they necessarily exist, even if concrete objects, that are essentially concrete, are not necessarily concrete (necessity is different from essentiality). There are contingently non-concrete objects, such as Noman, that exist in the actual world (and in every world), even if they are abstract in the actual world. On the other hand, I am concrete in the actual world, but I am abstract in other worlds, so that I do not exist (= I am not concrete) in such worlds. Sherlock Holmes is essentially abstract, since he is a fictional object. Is he only contingently (i.e., non-necessarily) abstract? It is not clear. However, given Zalta's theory of abstract objects, it seems that Sherlock Holmes cannot be concrete.

T. Williamson also seems to accept such a distinction between existence and concreteness[266]. With regard to (55), he argues that, since

(williamson1) necessarily, if I do not exist, then the proposition [I do not exist] is true;

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[265] See Linsky, Zalta (1994). After Tomberlin's criticisms (see Tomberlin (1996)), the authors clarified their theory in Linsky, Zalta (1996). See also Bennett (2006), according to whom Linsky's and Zalta's theory is not a form of modal actualism, as it claims to be, since it distinguishes between two different domains of quantification within the actual world. For a reply, see Nelson, Zalta (2009). More recently, Cowling (2013) has suggested that concreteness and abstractness should be understood as relations and in terms of being worldmates. Thus, an object is concrete in respect to another object iff those objects are worldmates, while an object is abstract in respect to another object iff they are not worldmates.

[266] See Williamson (2002). See also Williamson (2013).

(williamson2) necessarily, if the proposition [I do not exist] is true, then that proposition exists;

(williamson3) necessarily, if the proposition [I do not exist] exists, then I exist;

then

(williamson4) necessarily, if I do not exist, then I exist,

so that

(williamson5) necessarily, I exist.

I cannot deal here with Williamson's arguments in defense of such premises. They seem to assume some of the actualists' intuitions that I have already discussed. According to Williamson, there are possible worlds in which I exist and I am not concrete, so that it is true that (55). Perhaps, if Noman is an individual, he might accept that (54) is true for similar reasons: even if Noman is not concrete in the actual world, he nevertheless exists here and there are possible worlds in which he is concrete. However, first, how is it possible to positively characterize the property of being abstract, in order to guarantee that there actually exist abstract objects? It seems that I do not become something abstract like a number or a proposition (paradigmatic abstract objects) when I do not exist in some possible world. Furthermore, even if Noman is concrete in other worlds, what is required by (54) is that he might have been concrete *in the actual world*, where he is, in fact, not concrete[267].

I.4.3. A Matter of Tense.

We have already seen in the chapter I.2 that it is arguably true that

(7) Obama exists

and that, provided that Socrates is not a purely non-existent object (e.g., he is not a fictional object),

(30) Socrates exists.

However, with regard to (30), things are not so easy. In fact, one might notice that, even if it is true that

(57) Socrates existed,

it is not true that Socrates *now* exists, i.e., it is true that

[267] I cannot examine here R. Stalnaker's analysis of possible world as properties and his theses on mere *possibilia*. His solution is grounded on the admission that there are propositions that only contingently exist and that it is legitimate to distinguish between specific and generic containment properties. See Stalnaker (1976), in Stalnaker (2003): 25-39 (revised version) and Stalnaker (2012).

(58) Socrates does not exist anymore,

that explicitly conveys the true information already implicitly conveyed by our (31).

Why does (58) seem to be true? Because it seems to be true that

(59) Socrates has ceased to exist.

On the other hand, it is arguably true that

(60) Michele exists *now*,

that seems to convey the true information that is already implicitly conveyed (with regard to Obama, provided that Obama *now* exists) by (7). Yet, since it is also true that, before my birth,

(61) Michele did not exist,

by (60) and (61), it seems legitimate to infer the truth of

(62) Michele has started to exist.

Let me now consider one particular individual that will exist, provided that two particular and now existing gametes of two persons will unite and the resulting zygote will not split into two. Let me call him (or her) Nothan. Is it true that

(63) Nothan will exist?

All the aforementioned statements have two features in common: they use tensed forms of the verb "to exist" (I have used the adverb "now" in (60) only to remark that we are talking of Michele's present existence); their truth seems to imply that there is something like substantial (or absolute) change, i.e., that things start to exist and (unfortunately) stop existing. On the other hand, (30) does not seem to contain a tensed form of the verb "to exist" or, perhaps, it is not clear whether it contains it or not. I shall distinguish between tensed and untensed verbal forms by adding an index *t* (or *u*) to the verb. We now have two major problems:

(I) is it true that (57)-(63) (or that just some of them)? And why?

(II) What is the relation between the existence in (30) and the existence in (57)-(63), namely between seemingly untensed existence and tensed one?

Before trying to examine the answers given to such questions, I shall introduce the distinction between A-theories and B-theories of time. In order to do this, let me first distinguish between statements, such as (57)-(63), propositions, such as [57]-[63], and the facts that (57)-(63). There are philosophers (i.e., those who defended old B-theories) who think that statements such

as (57)-(63) can be paraphrased into other statements that do not contain any tensed verbal form. On the other hand, there are philosophers who think that such statements are irreducibly tensed, even if their logical reading might be somehow different from the natural language reading. New B-theorists seem to think that, even if (57)-(63) are irreducibly tensed, the propositions that they express or the facts that make such statements (or such statement's tokens, or such propositions) true (or false) are somehow untensed. In fact, according to A-theorists, there is something like objective present, while B-theorists deny that there is such an objective present (at best, present is regarded as subjective)[268]. Since verbs in (57)-(63) are tensed because of their reference to the present, this is the first and most relevant distinction among ontological theories of time.

Furthermore, I shall distinguish between presentist and non-presentist theories of time. According to presentists

(presentism) there are no items that are not present[269],

while, according to non-presentists, (presentism) is not true: there are things that are not present (there are also merely past and, perhaps, merely future things). Thus, presentists roughly claim that, even if Socrates existed, he does not exist *now*, i.e., he does not exist. The thesis (presentism) is accepted by presentists with regard to objects, events and times. Yet, it seems to me legitimate to deal, at first, with presentist theories of objects. I shall talk of merely past and merely future objects, in order to refer to objects that do not exist anymore and do not still exist (at least according to presentists). In fact, since I exist now, but I also existed two minutes ago, I am a past object too, but not a merely past one. Presentism is one of the most important A-theories of time. However, there are many A-theorists that are not presentists. Since many presentists are actualist too, it is legitimate to combine actualism and presentism as follows:

(actualist-presentism) there are no items that do not exist$_t$ (i.e., that do not exist *now*).

In what follows, I shall examine some varieties of presentism and non-presentism, in order to deal with the truth of (57)-(63).

I.4.4. Carpe Present!

Before examining the problems connected with merely past and merely future objects and absolute change, let me first consider the thesis (presentism). Some philosophers have argued that this thesis is trivially true or necessarily false. In fact, if we interpret the quantifier "there are" as tensed, presentists seem to claim that there are no present things (i.e., that there are$_t$ no things) that are not present things. This is trivially true, but it does not exclude that there are$_u$ things that

[268] See Mellor (1998), Dainton (2010) and Orilia (2012b).
[269] Or: necessarily, everything is present. See Markosian (2004).

are not present. On the other hand, one could try to interpret the quantifier in a disjunctive or untensed way. Thus, if we follow the first strategy, what is asserted by (presentism) is that there neither *was*, nor are$_t$, nor *will* be things that are not present. The second strategy turns out to assert that there are$_u$ no things that are not present. However, both strategies are problematic. The first one is plainly false: for example, there were things that are not present (e.g., Socrates). Concerning the second one, presentists seem forced to admit that there is an untensed reading of the existential quantifier, that is somehow different from the disjunctive tensed reading. Yet, what does this untensed existence expressed by this reading of the quantifier amount to? It might amount to Socrates' existence as it is expressed in (30), that seems to be untensed. Yet, for a presentist, it is also true that Socrates does not exist$_t$ anymore (or his individual essence is$_t$ not instantiated anymore, or the proper name "Socrates" does not have$_t$ a referent anymore). Thus, he is$_t$ not present anymore. This second strategy turns out to express something that is plainly false, provided that, even if Socrates exists$_u$ (or his individual essence is$_u$ instantiated, or the proper name "Socrates" has$_u$ a referent), Socrates does not exist$_t$ (or his individual essence is$_t$ not instantiated, or the proper name "Socrates" does not have$_t$ a referent), i.e., Socrates is$_t$ not present[270].

I cannot discuss all the answers to this problem. According to me, the best reading of (presentism), even if a non-standard one, is given by:

(presentism') there were no things that were not present and there are$_t$ no things that are$_t$ not present and there will be no things that will not be present.

This reading seems to capture the fact that, for presentists, everything existent is present. On the other hand, it does not use untensed quantifiers, that some presentists do not accept. Finally, even if it is denied that there are now things that are not now present, it is not denied that there were such things. Is (presentism') consistent with (actualist-presentism)? If we read the first quantifier in (actualist-presentism) ("there are") in a tensed, or untensed, or disjunctively tensed way and if we granted that to exist *now* is the same as to be present, we would have the same troubles already met with (presentism), since (actualist-presentism) would simply turn out to be identical with (presentism). Does (actualist-presentism) tell us anything more than (presentism) or, better, (presentism')? In order to answer this question, we should compare negative existential statements with positive and negative tensed ones. Let me consider:

(8) Sherlock Holmes does not exist;

(60tensed) Michele exists$_t$;

[270] Concerning the triviality objection against presentism, see Meyer (2005) and Lombard (2010).

(58tensed) Socrates does not exist$_t$ anymore.

(60tensed) and (58tensed) seems to express what is expressed by (60) and (58), i.e., that Michele exists now and that Socrates does not exist anymore. If we wanted to analyze (8) from an actualist-presentist perspective, we could claim that Sherlock Holmes was not present and he is$_t$ not present and he will not be present. Yet, this seems not to be sufficient to grasp what is expressed by (actualist-presentism). In fact, we could obtain, following this analysis, a tensed version of the paradox of non-existence: Sherlock Holmes should have existed in order not to have been present (i.e., presently existing in the past), and so on. Thus, from the actualist-presentist perspective, there was no Sherlock Holmes that was not present and there is$_t$ no Sherlock Holmes that is$_t$ not present and there will be no Sherlock Holmes that will not be present, i.e., Sherlock Holmes did not have and does not have$_t$ and will not have any property such as present existence: in order to lack$_t$ this property, he did have to be present and has$_t$ to be present and will have to be present. Thus, those who accept (actualist-presentism) seem to be forced to accept a presentist version of (actualism-a) too, i.e., that

(actualist-a-presentism) present existence was not and is$_t$ not and will be not a first-order and informative property.

Yet, if we accept (actualist-a-presentism), why do we have to accept that the present is so special, at least following presentists? In order to answer this question, let me now examine (30). According to (presentism'), even if Socrates is$_t$ not present and he will not be present, he was present. Thus, it is true that (30). However, from the actualist-presentist perspective, in order to avoid any kind of disjunctivism, we should accept (actualist-a-presentism) in this case too, i.e., we should accept that present existence is not a first-order and informative property that Socrates had and that he does not have$_t$ anymore: there should be no asymmetry between present existence in Sherlock Holmes' case and in Socrates' case. Furthermore, there cannot be any first-order, informative property of existing that objects have$_u$, in virtue of having been present or of being$_t$ present or of going to be present. In fact, if there were such a property, it would contradict (actualism-a), i.e., the thesis that existence is not a first-order and informative property, so that it would sound strange to accept the tensed and presentist version of (actualism-a), i.e., (actualist-a-presentism), and not to accept (actualism-a).

Yet, considering (60tensed) and (58tensed), if what we have claimed with regard to presentist actualism is true, Michele cannot exist$_t$ now in virtue of presently instantiating present existence and Socrates cannot exist$_t$ anymore in virtue of presently lacking present existence, even if he had present existence, at least according to this perspective. Thus, present existence is

not a property that some objects instantiate$_t$, so that, if they instantiate$_t$ it, they simply instantiate it too. However, it seems to me legitimate to be a presentist even from a non-actualist (and a non-actualist-a) perspective, so that there might be non-actualists thinking of present existence as a first-order informative property without accepting the tensed version of the paradox of non-existence. Furthermore, as I have already claimed, that something is$_t$ not present, according to my latter analysis, does not imply that there is a fundamental first-order property of being present that things have$_t$ or lack$_t$. In fact, there might primarily be present facts, or present events, or whatever else. Finally, using tensed quantifiers, one could interpret (presentism') by claiming that, for example, in order for something to have been present, a certain individual essence might have been instantiated by that thing. In sum, those who accept (presentism') *and* (actualist-presentism) seem to be forced to accept (actualist-a-presentism) too. On the other hand, nothing forces us, in order to accept (presentism'), to accept (actualist-presentism) and (actualist-a-presentism) too. As we will see, it is legitimate to imagine at least one version of (presentism') not committed to the truth of (actualist-presentism) and (actualist-a-presentism).

Yet, if actualist presentists have to accept both (actualist-presentism) and (actualist-a-presentism) and if they want to avoid any kind of disjunctivism, they cannot introduce the property of being present as a first-order and informative property. On the one hand, they could try to paraphrase statements such as the ones considered (and the ones introduced in the section I.4.3) or they could try to argue that those statements express propositions that do not contain [Socrates] or [Michele] or [Sherlock Holmes] as their constituents. On the other hand, they could accept that there are propositions such as [60tensed], i.e., [Michele does not exist$_t$ now], but they are not made true by any fact such as Michele's presently existing, i.e., Michele's presently instantiating the first-order property, informative of presently existing.

In what follows, I shall consider two actualist versions of presentism (property-based and proposition-based presentism), using tense operators before quantifiers. In turn, property-based presentism can be defined in three different ways: Russellian-based presentism (by introducing conjunctions of properties), reference-based presentism (by introducing reference of proper names such as "Socrates") and Plantinga-based presentism (by introducing haecceities).

After A. Prior's works[271], presentists commonly use tense operators in order to render our talks of past or future events. In particular, the operator **P** is used as meaning "it was the case that" and the operator **F** is used as meaning "it will be the case that". The existential quantifier ∃ is always used as tensed, i.e., as meaning "there is$_t$ some". Is there any tenseless quantifier? Given a disjunctive tensed reading, there might be, even if it would not be primitive. However, let me

[271] See, for example, Prior (1957), Prior (1967) and Prior (1968).

now try, using tense operators, to analyze property-based presentism. The idea behind this strategy is that singular existential statements can be paraphrased into statements about properties and/or reference of proper names *or* that they express propositions about properties and/or reference of proper names *or* are made true by facts about properties and/or reference. Let me consider, at first, the Plantinga-based version of property-presentism. I shall assume "M" as standing for the property of being identical with Michele; "N_{OTHAN}" as standing for the property of being identical with Nothan; "S" as standing for the property of being identical with Socrates. Finally, the operator $\mathbf{P}_n$ means that, at some *n*-degree of the past (a degree that precedes my existence, in my case), it was the case that such-and-such. Thus we shall have:

(57plantinga) $\mathbf{P}\exists x\mathrm{S}x$

(58plantinga) $\sim\exists x\mathrm{S}x \,\&\, \mathbf{P}\exists x\mathrm{S}x$

(60plantinga) $\exists x\mathrm{M}x$

(61plantinga) $\sim\mathbf{P}_n\exists x\mathrm{M}x$

(63plantinga) $\mathbf{F}\exists x\mathrm{N}_{\mathrm{OTHAN}}x$

The problem with this strategy is that haecceities have to exist even when the object that instantiate them did not or do not or will not exist. Thus, as we have already argued, the most coherent way to interpret haecceities consist in considering them Platonic properties. However, such haecceities do not have clear identity conditions when Socrates, Michele or Nothan do not instantiate them, since they do not exist. The haecceity N_{OTHAN}, for example, does not have now and did not have before now clear identity conditions. The haecceity M did not have clear identity conditions before my birth (and, perhaps, it will not have it after my death). Finally, the haecceity S does not have now clear identity conditions, since Socrates does not exist anymore. On the other hand, it seems highly counterintuitive to claim that objects depend for their identity on their haecceities – and not the opposite. Thus, the Plantinga-based account of property-presentism seems not to be a good solution.

What about a Russellian account? Perhaps, it seems to work better. A conjunction of properties was instantiated by at least and at most one thing, so that there was at least and at most one thing that was such-and-such. Yet, this conjunction of properties is not instantiated by anything anymore, even if the conjuncted properties (in a Platonic conception of properties) continue existing. However, at first, one has to clarify what properties we have to introduce when it is made true that it is not the case that there is now at least and at most one individual that is such-and-such. We cannot use properties that do not now have definite identity conditions, even

if they had such conditions: for example, with regard to Socrates, we cannot use the property of being the master of Plato, since Plato does not exist anymore. If not impossible, it is not easy to find out such properties. Again: I am not talking here of names, predicates and other linguistic entities.

Finally, the third solution, namely the one based on reference of names, seems to be really attractive. It is followed by some presentists and it is worth considering it. N. Markosian, for example, talks of the truth-conditions of (58) by analyzing an attributive statement about Socrates[272]. However, one could claim that, according to this solution, (57), (58), (60), (61) and (63) are true, respectively, iff

(57ref.) **P**$\exists x$("Socrates" refers to x)

(58ref.) $\sim\exists x$("Socrates" refers to x) & **P**$\exists x$("Socrates" refers to x)

(60ref.) $\exists x$("Michele" refers to x)

(61ref.) $\sim$**P**$\exists x$("Michele" refers to x)

(63ref.) **F**$\exists x$("Nothan" refers to x)

The problem with this account is that it seems to explain the existence of things in terms of linguistic facts and I have already criticized such an approach. However, even granting that this is legitimate, what about the first conjunct of (58ref.)? According to it, the proper name "Socrates" does not have any referent: it exists, it referred to Socrates but it does not refer to anyone presently existent (and this is the reason for which we can claim that it is now true that (58)). If we accept the perspective grounded on (presentism'), (actualist-presentism) and (actualist-a-presentism), there cannot now be such a relation of referring to between "Socrates" and Socrates, since Socrates does not exist anymore. However, "Socrates" seems to have a reference, as long as we use this name: perhaps this reference is given by something that happened in the past (an initial baptism) and that was prolonged until today by some causal chain of reference transmission; perhaps it is *now* given by the fact that "Socrates" abbreviates some definite description that stands for a conjunction of properties, that *was* in turn instantiated by at least and at most one individual. The problem is that what seems to relate (directly or via a conjunction of properties) "Socrates" with its referent is something that existed in the past (some initial baptism and some part of the causal chain or, in the other case, the instantiation of that conjunction of properties by at least and at most one individual). Again: we can meaningfully use "Socrates" (an existing grammatical proper name) in order to refer to Socrates but, from the

[272] See Markosian (2004).

actualist-presentist ontological perspective, there exists now no appropriate reference relation. Perhaps, "Socrates" just has a reference, even if the referent has died. Yet, this seems to be a fact about language, not a fact that is relevant from an ontological viewpoint and it needs to be grounded from that viewpoint. We are not interested here in the reference of grammatically proper names as a linguistic fact: we are interested in the ontological implications of such a reference relation[273].

What about proposition-based actualist presentism? C. Bourne argues that temporal propositions can be considered present-tensed propositions that can be embedded or not embedded within tense operators[274]. Thus, we will have, for example, the proposition [Michele $exists_t$]. This proposition is true *simpliciter*, since it is now true. Other tensed propositions, such as [Socrates $exists_t$] are not true *simpliciter* (they are false *simpliciter*), even if they are true at a time. Furthermore, after having embedded [Socrates $exists_t$] within a past operator, thus having **P**[Socrates $exists_t$], that proposition is true *simpliciter*. This happens because times are maximal and consistent sets of true tensed (not embedded) propositions and because, roughly, there is some relation between some time at which [Socrates $exists_t$] is true and the present time[275]. Bourne, however, could not accept the proposition [Socrates $exists_t$], since it is perhaps better to use a proposition with a tensed quantifier and some conjunction of properties. Yet, the problem with this account does not lie in which proposition we choose, but in the counterintuitive conception of times it adopts. If times simply are maximal and consistent sets of true tensed and not embedded propositions, time's passage seems to depend on change within the present set of true propositions: some propositions become false *simpliciter* (e.g., the proposition [Socrates' $exists_t$] becomes false after Socrates' death) and other propositions become true *simpliciter*, and this seems to be the reason for which the present set of true propositions becomes a past one and a new set arises (i.e., times change). However, it seems that the truth and falsity of propositions depend on facts that happen in time: the proposition [Socrates' $exists_t$] becomes false only because there is a time at which Socrates does not exist anymore, and this seems to be the reason for which a new time (a new set of true *simpliciter* propositions) arises, only after Socrates' death. The passage of time seems to be presupposed by (and it does not depend on) change within the present set of true propositions.

Another interesting account of proposition-based presentism (even if not necessarily an actualist one) can be given in the following terms. Tensed propositions are abstract objects that exist at every time. However, they are_t true if they $have_t$ truth-makers and they are_t false if they

[273] For some replies to this problem, see Orilia (2012): 118-125.
[274] See Bourne (2006).
[275] However, it is worth remarking that Bourne talks of relations between ordered pairs.

lack$_t$ them. A proposition such as [Socrates exists$_t$] is$_t$ false, because it lacks$_t$ a truth-maker but, since it had a truth-maker, [Socrates existed] is$_t$ true. Thus, it seems that the proposition [the proposition that [Socrates exists$_t$] had a truth-maker] exists$_t$ and is$_t$ true. The truth-maker needs not to exist$_t$, in order for this latter proposition to be$_t$ true. We could defend this conception even claiming that propositions are atemporal, i.e., that they do not exist in time. However, in this case, a problem would arise: propositions change their truth-values, thus having tensed truth-values, so that they turn out to exist in time. If we gave them eternal truth-values, in order to make them atemporal, such as the truth-value of being true at t_1, then tensed propositions would have untensed truth-values (and this is denied by many A-theorists). In this latter case, how would we be able to avoid fatalism, i.e., a doctrine that most presentists do not accept?

On the other hand, what does it happen if we accept that propositions exist at every time? Well, [Nothan exists$_t$], for example, or some corresponding proposition about some particular future individual, might be$_t$ false. However, in order for such propositions to exist at every time, they must have clear identity conditions at every time. Hence, what identity conditions would they have before Nothan's existence? Thus, there are$_t$ no propositions that will be true or there are$_t$ propositions that will be true, but which are$_t$ not about Nothan (and we have already noticed the difficulties of this position). So far, so good. However, every singular tensed proposition such as [*x* exists$_t$] is a proposition that, before having a truth-maker (i.e., at least before *x*'s existence), is$_t$ false and exists$_t$, even without having definite identity conditions. Thus, providing the difficulty of finding out such identity conditions, it is perhaps not true that every proposition exists at every time. At the end of the first part of this work, we are left with a twofold problem: on the one hand, it seems neither legitimate to claim that singular tensed (or untensed) existential statements can be paraphrased into non-existential ones, nor that they express non-singular and/or non-existential propositions, nor that they are made true by anything not implying singular objects' existence. On the other hand, it seems that there are (tensed or untensed) singular existential propositions (positive or negative, true or false ones) iff there exist singular objects that give them definite identity conditions. Thus, the propositions [Socrates exists$_t$] and [Socrates exists$_u$] can neither exist, nor have any truth-value, before Socrates' existence, since they do not have any definite identity condition before Socrates' birth. This does not merely happen because Socrates himself is a constituent of such propositions: even denying this latter thesis, one could maintain that, before Socrates' existence, the singular existential proposition [Socrates exists$_t$] does not exist, because it can have an identity by only referring to Socrates and, since Socrates does not exist$_t$ before his existence, that proposition has no identity and, from the Quinean perspective, no existence. With regard to [Socrates exists$_u$], this

proposition would not exist$_u$ (for the same reasons) and would not be false, if Socrates did not exist$_u$: it cannot exist and be false only because Socrates does not exist$_u$. This is the ultimate difficulty of Quinean existence. Is it possible to escape from it?

Before leaving presentism, let me consider one non-actualist versions of the same doctrine. According to Q. Smith[276], only present things fully exist. Yet, past and future things are not simply non-existent: they are less existent (or less real) than present ones. Present existence is full existence or, better, present existents are fully existent. Thus, Socrates still exists, even if he does not fully exist, while I fully exist, even if I (unfortunately) will decrease in my existence, and Nothan does not fully exist, even if he will fully exist. Things that do not fully exist do not have monadic properties: they have their properties by a relation to times. I confess that I do not understand such a kind of presentism. For example, accepting Smith's solution, it is not true that Socrates does not exist anymore, since Socrates continues existing: it is true that Socrates does not *fully* exist anymore. Nevertheless, this would merely turn out to avail a verbal dispute: full existence can be considered a yes/no property, while it seems to be far from clear that it is necessary to introduce degrees of existence in order to state that Socrates existed and that Nothan will exist. Perhaps, this strategy is dictated by an actualist worry. Yet, it seems to me that few actualists would consider it acceptable.

Yet, the problem of absolute change perhaps reveals the major virtues of presentism. If we accept that it is true that (59) and that (62), i.e., that Socrates has ceased to exist and that Michele has started to exist, presentists could argue that their theory is the most compatible ontological theory with such facts. Furthermore, it is the most compatible one with what common sense takes it to be absolute change: something that involves Socrates and Michele themselves. In fact, presentists think, roughly, that something were present but it is now not present anymore (considering Socrates) and that something were not present, but it is now present (considering Michele). If this analysis does not work, then it turns out to be really difficult to conceive of absolute change. However, if, according to the actualist presentists, there are no things that do not exist now and existence was/is now/will be not a first-order and informative property, things become more complicated. In order for (59) and (62) to be true now, there must now be something different from Socrates and from Michele's existence that make them true.

For example, property-based actualist presentists could reply that some property or relation (some individual essence or haecceity or some conjunction of properties or grammatically proper names' having a referent) has ceased to be instantiated (in Socrates' case) or

[276] See Smith, Q. (2002).

has started to be instantiated (in Michele's case). However, in order to claim that it is the case that such-and-such property has started or has ceased to be instantiated, one has to presuppose that it was the case that it was not instantiated and it is now instantiated (in Michele's case) or that it was the case that it was instantiated and it is now not instantiated (in Socrates' case). Regardless of the problems of identity and existence for properties that are not now instantiated (or that was not instantiated in the past, with regard to the past), one could think that it is *because* Socrates existed and does not exist anymore that such things happened (and happen) to properties, and not the opposite. What happened and happens now to these properties seems to depend on Socrates' and Michele's present and past existential status.

The same seems to happen with propositions. Regardless of the problems of identity and existence of propositions such as [Socrates has ceased to exist] and [Michele has started to exist], they seem to be true (and to be true now) in virtue of something that happened to Socrates' existential status and Michele's existential status. To appeal to the opposite would amount to reverse the order of explanation.

Thus, if presentism is true, actualist presentism seems nevertheless to be forced to face many problems. If it were the most attractive perspective for a presentist, as many presentists argue, then the task of presentism would be quite complicated, as I have tried to argue. However, it is not necessary to be an actualist in order to be a presentist and, if what I have claimed is true, a non-actualist presentism seems to define a legitimate and not so "frivolous"[277] variety of presentism.

I.4.5. Thank Goodness it still exists!

In general, non-presentists deny both the truth of (presentism) and (presentism'), i.e., they claim that

(non-presentism) there are things that are not present;

(non-presentism') there were things that were not present or (*vel*) there are$_t$ things that are not present or (*vel*) there will be things that will not be present.

However, many non-presentists argue that we do not have to talk of what happens in time by using tensed forms and properties such as the ones of being present, past or future or that, even though it is legitimate to use such forms and properties, no tensed statement is made true by irreducible A-facts (e.g., the fact that Michele exists in the present). There are many varieties of non-presentist theories. For example, according to eternalists, there are$_u$ events (and things) that are not properly present, but are future or past. When we claim that some event is

[277] See Crisp (2005).

present or that something exists in the present, we do not talk in a perspicuous way or our statements express propositions that do not involve any reference to the objective present for their being true or such tensed statements and propositions are made true by B-facts. If the present is not objective, then everything exists, regardless of its being present, past or future, i.e., of its being simultaneous with us (and with the tokens of our tensed statements) or of its being many years *distant* from us. While presentists generally think that there is no analogy between time and space, eternalists generally admit that time is analogous to space, that it is something like a fourth dimension, in which events (and things) are more or less distant from one another. Yet, not all the non-presentists are eternalists. For example, I shall briefly analyze one position according to which, while past and present events (and things) exist, future events (and things) do not exist or are less-than-real.

D. H. Mellor has developed one of the most interesting versions of eternalism. While "old" eternalists thought that each tensed statement should be reduced to an untensed one, Mellor argues that there are legitimately true or false irreducible tensed statements' tokens and beliefs, that nevertheless express B-propositions and are made true by B-facts. Thus, what about the statements (57)-(63)? Mellor argues that it is always true, given any event *e*, that *e* $exists_u$. In fact, if *e* exists at some time *t*, the B-proposition [*e* exists] is true and, accepting eternalist theses, it is always true[278]. Concerning things, it is possible to argue that, since it is always true that there exists some event involving something, then it is always true that that thing exists too. In fact, if we argued that there exist events even if things involved in those events do not exist, we should defend an account of events as existentially independent of things and of things as existentially independent of events.

Yet, if events always exist and things always exist, it is literally false that (58), (59), (61)-(63). In fact, Socrates simply $exists_u$, even if he $lives_u$ in spatio-temporal regions that are inaccessible to us: he has not ceased to $exist_u$. On the other hand, I have not started to exist: I simply $exist_u$, even before my birth, and Nothan simply $exists_u$ too. Yet, with regard to such statements, I think that Mellor's account falls in trouble. In fact, Mellor argues that there are B-facts that make A-beliefs and A-statements' tokens true or false at given times (or that, in general, determine the truth-value changes of such beliefs and statements). So far, so good. Yet, there is no B-fact that makes the A-statements (58), (59), (61)-(63)'s tokens true at any time! In sum, there is no true token of such statements. Thus, there are some A-statements' tokens that are always false. One could reply that they are not always false, since their truth-makers do not involve any reference to Socrates' or Michele's or Nothan's existence. However, as I have already tried to

[278] See, in particular, Mellor (1998): 81-83.

argue with regard to specular presentist attempts, such strategies do not seem to work.

Even if Mellor does not accept that events' existence is time-relative, we could try to introduce time-relative existence in order to deal with such statements' tokens[279]. Thus, for example, a token of (58) is true at some time *t* (i.e., it is simply true, since it exists at that time) iff Socrates $exists_u$ at some time before *t* and does not exist at *t*. Yet, it is literally false that Socrates does not exist at *t*: if eternalism is true, it is always (i.e., at every time *t*) true that Socrates $exists_u$. On the other hand, if it were true that there are things that exist at some time *t* (e.g., that have the property of existing at *t*), but that do not simply exist, there would be non-existent things that would nevertheless exist: eternalism would contradict (actualism) and (actualism-a). If that token of (58) were true at some time *t* (i.e., if it were simply true) iff some event involving some property (e.g., some individual essence) occurred at *t*, then that property would nevertheless have to exist at *t*. Thus, according to eternalism and (actualism), it would exist at any time, with all the problems already examined with regard to its existence and identity.

This is only a sketch of the eternalist doctrines of existence. The result of such a sketch is simply that, if every object and event always $exist_u$, then things and events neither start to exist, nor they stop existing. There is no substantial change. Furthermore, if what Mellor claims about existence at times is correct, then events' existing at times does not seem to be relevant with regard to their existential status: to claim that some event exists at some time simply is to claim that that event occurs at that time. Yet, if every event exists at every time, then every event also exists at every time before and after the time at which it occurs.

However, Mellor, even being an eternalist, seems to adopt an endurantist approach on things' change. What about a perdurantist or an exdurantist eternalism? T. Sider defends an exdurantist version of eternalism, according to which, roughly, things are temporal stages of processes[280]. In order to deal with the problem of change and, more generally, with tensed true statements, Sider introduces temporal counterparts relative to kinds. For example, if we claim that it is true that Michele once was a boy, the truth-value of this statement depends on there $being_u$ a person stage *x* at some time prior to the time of utterance, such that *x* is_u a boy and *x* is_u a temporal counterpart of Michele's (who is, in turn, a person stage)[281]. Yet, it seems to me that the relation of being a temporal counterpart is too weak in order to guarantee any continuity between Michele and that past person stage. For example, I could have two different past temporal counterparts relative to one and the same kind and one and the same criterion of identity determined by that kind. If we claim, for example, that, in order for some person stage *x*

[279] For a similar approach, see Dorato (2006).
[280] See Sider (2001).
[281] See Sider (2001): 193.

at some time t_1 to be a temporal counterpart of some person stage y at some time t_2 it is necessary that x is at t_1 the most similar person stage to y at t_2 according to some criterion C, then nothing excludes that there could be some other person stage z at t_1, different from x, that is equally similar to y at t_2 according to C. Furthermore, following Sider's account, stages could have different temporal counterpart relations in respect of different kinds. On the other hand, with regard to qualitative change, it seems legitimate to admit that there must be some one-one relation between stages, even if we do not wish to admit that the whole thing changes its properties while remaining one and the same thing. Furthermore, when we claim that things substantially change, i.e., that they start and cease to exist, that they did not exist before some time and that they will not exist after some other time, it seems that there must be no temporal counterpart at all of *this* stage of Michele's (i.e., the present stage of Michele's, the stage that is simultaneous with the time of these true written utterances) before the time of Michele's birth. Finally, Sider's account is still committed to an eternalist notion of existence, according to which everything exists_u at every time, i.e., nothing properly starts nor ceases to exist_u.

Yet, not all the non-presentists are eternalists. For example, M. Tooley believes that there are past and present events, while there are no future events, i.e., the past and the present are real, while the future is not real. He distinguishes two different notions of actuality: actuality *simpliciter* and actuality as of a time. Both notions are primitive: we cannot reduce actuality as of a time to actuality *simpliciter*. A state of affairs or an event is actual as of the time of its occurrence: it does not exist before that time[282]. If a state of affairs exists at a time, then its constituents exist at that time too[283]. Yet, when it is actual as of a time, it becomes actual *simpliciter* too. In fact, Tooley thinks that, in general, x is an actual, temporal entity or state of affairs iff x is part of the mereological whole that is composed of every state of affairs that is actual as of some time t or other[284]. Since, considering all the times, no future state of affairs (or entity) is actual as of some time, no future state of affairs (or entity) is actual *simpliciter*. According to Tooley, the present is the point at which states of affairs come into existence (and entities too). It is possible to think that some entity comes into existence at the time as of whose its first state of affairs (i.e., the first state of affairs having that entity as one of its constituents) is actual.

The problem with Tooley's account is that, while it tries to preserve the truth of many commonsensically true statements by differentiating actuality *simpliciter* and actuality as of a time, the primitiveness of actuality as of a time is not well-grounded. In fact, as we have already noticed, it seems that actuality *simpliciter* depends on actuality as of a time. On the other hand, the

[282] See Tooley (1997): 113.
[283] See Tooley (1997): 237.
[284] See Tooley (1997): 153.

notions of actuality as of a time and of the totality of existence are both primitive. From Tooley's perspective, this is requested by a dynamic view of the world: if such notions were not primitive, then the world would not be dynamic[285]. In fact, the eternalists' world is a static one: things do not really come into existence, nothing substantially changes. In order for something to come into existence, it cannot be thought of, at first, as actual *simpliciter* and then, secondly, as actual as of a time. However, what is for something to be actual as of a time, if being actual *simpliciter* is something different? What does the non-actuality of Socrates' being a philosopher as of a time after Socrates' death amount to, if actuality as of some time is not connected with actuality *simpliciter*? In general, what does being actual mean in this case? I confess that I do not understand this notion: one might well take it as a primitive one, even if s/he does not understand it, but I think that this would not be a good philosophical move.

Furthermore, following Tooley's account, things do not cease to exist: there are states of affairs involving Socrates that are actual *simpliciter*, even though they are not actual as of a time after Socrates' death (e.g., Socrates' being a philosopher). Yet, there are other states of affairs (e.g., the state of affairs of Michele's thinking of Socrates) that are actual as of a time after Socrates' death. Are they legitimate states of affairs? Do they involve the actuality of Socrates as of a time after Socrates' death? If they are legitimate states of affairs, then Socrates must be actual *simpliciter* and actual as of a time at which Michele thinks of him: Socrates neither stops being actual *simpliciter*, nor he is not actual anymore as of any time after his death. If such states of affairs do not involve the actuality of Socrates as of a time after Socrates' death, why is it necessary to admit (at least in this case) that Socrates is actual *simpliciter* and that the past is actual *simpliciter*?

Finally and more generally, is the past, being actual *simpliciter*, actual as of any time after its occurring? On the one hand, it seems that past states of affairs cannot be actual as of times after their occurring, even being actual *simpliciter*. On the other hand, if we claim that the past and the present are both real and if we do not wish to adopt a presentist perspective, I do not understand how it is possible not to consider past states of affairs actual as of the present time (or the time which is simultaneous with some utterance of ours). This difficulty is caused by the confusion between actuality *simpliciter* and actuality as of a time that we have already analyzed and that seems to be part of the general confusion between different meanings of existence from non-presentist perspectives.

Yet, a non-presentist could simply grant this point and reply that there is no evidence in favor of substantial change. In particular, a non-eternalist non-presentist could argue that there is no evidence in favor of things' ceasing to exist. I do not have any knock-down argument against

[285] See Tooley (1997): 39-42.

such a thesis, i.e., I cannot demonstrate that there is something like substantial change. However, I think that, if one rests on commonsensical assumptions, Socrates is something that does not exist anymore: perhaps his atoms (and/or his soul, or whatever else) continue existing, but it seems to me legitimate to accept that Socrates himself is now non-existent. The ambiguity between non-existence *simpliciter* and non-existence at a time (provided that it is legitimate to introduce existence and non-existence at times as something different from existence and non-existence *simpliciter*, and I have tried to argue that it is not) constitutes a case against non-presentism. Is this sufficient to demonstrate that non-presentism is wrong and presentism is right? I do not think it is. Yet, if we do not have any acceptable argument against substantial change, it is perhaps better to accept a theory that accommodates this commonsensical datum, rather than a theory that denies it.

Part II. To Be and Not To Be. A Theory

II.1. One and Many: Objects and Properties

The first chapter of this second part is concerned with a preliminary account of objects and properties. In fact, in order to know whether existence is a first- or second-order property and whether there is any real difference between existent and non-existent objects, we have first to clarify the notions of object and property. According to my perspective, these notions are primitive and strictly connected. They are primitive, because they cannot be reduced to other notions. They are strictly connected, because it is legitimate to think of an object as something which bears properties and to think of a property as something which is borne (or it is thought of as being borne) by (at least) one object or by (at least) one property. However, even though these notions are primitive, it is important to characterize objects and properties by describing some of their relevant features and to distinguish between them, i.e., we wish to find out some distinguishing feature(s) of objects *qua* objects and of properties *qua* properties. Secondly, we wish to deal with four problems concerning properties:

(I) how many properties are there? Namely, is there a property for each grammatical predicate?

(II) If it is possible, how can we identify one property with another property?

(III) What is the nexus/relationship between objects and properties?

(IV) Are there seemingly "superfluous" properties, such as negative ones?

The answers to problems (II)-(IV) strictly depend on the answer to problem (I). In particular, given that predicates represent one of our most immediate ways of access to properties, we have to clarify the nature of the connection between predicates and properties.

In the next sections, I shall try to deal with such problems, in order to ground the solutions to the several problems concerning objects' existence and non-existence.

II.1.1. Objects and Properties: Some Preliminary Definitions.

What is for something to be an object? At first sight, this question seems to be redundant. In fact, in order for something to be an object, it seems that it must simply be *something*. However, we do not have to confuse this question with another, quite different one: is some thing (e.g., this table, my pen, Tibbles the cat) an object? In asking the former question, we wish to know if there is some distinguishing feature of something's objecthood, while in asking the latter one we wish to know if some definite thing is an object.

Let me consider something, e.g., Obama. Obama is an object. Yet, why is Obama an object? Quite trivially, he is an object because he is something. Yet, what is for something *to be something*? And, provided that something can also be a property, are properties objects? Our experience of the world, our knowledge of reality seems to be qualified by objecthood: we have

to distinguish objects, to separate *different* things, which can be counted as one and which cannot be identical with other things. However, we could think of the world as one object and of the several objects of our experience and knowledge as several aspects of this all-embracing object. Yet, this would not be a good objection to objecthood in reality and/or in our field of knowledge: even if there were only one object (the world), this object would nonetheless be an object. It is possible to claim that objecthood qualifies not only our thoughts and experiences, but also reality, even if we can ask whether there are several real objects or only one real object (the world). However, it seems acceptable that there are many real objects, given that it is legitimate to think of something without thinking of other things. For example, in order to think of Obama, I do not have to think of a chair. Why do we have to think that there is only one real object (the world) and that all the apparent objects of our knowledge and experience (i.e., Obama, my chair) are different aspects of the world? We think of real objects as independent objects, which can be thought of by themselves. Yet, we can find out that, for example, in order for something to have existence, there must exist some other thing and in order for something to be thought of we have to think of other things. For example, if I wish to claim that Obama is (exists), I have to think that he was generated by something and that he lives because there are other things (the food, the water, the air), so that he has no independent existence. And if I wish to think of Obama as a man, I have to know what is for something to be a man and (perhaps) I have to know things/real objects which are men. Yet, there is another datum: Obama, this definite object, is different from my chair or from Putin, so that I can think of Obama even without thinking of my chair or of Putin, and Obama would perhaps exist, even if Putin and/or my chair did not exist. In the former case, there would be at least three real objects: Obama, Putin and my chair. Thus, I do not think that the former remarks on Obama's independent existence and conceivability would be sufficient to prove that there is only one real object (the world). It may be true that some things are existentially or conceptually dependent on other things. Yet, this is not sufficient to prove that nothing is existentially independent, except the world[286].

However, if we accept that we think of several objects and that there are several (real) objects, it seems that we have already accepted that, in order for something to be an object, it is sufficient that it is something. The notion of *something* is qualified by some relevant features: being a thing and being one. An object *is one* because it has some kind of intrinsic unity (if it has parts, it is not identical with its parts, nor with the sum of its parts), in virtue of which it bears certain properties which are not borne by its parts nor by the sum of its parts, and because it is legitimately considered different from other objects (it is not identical with other objects).

[286] For a defense of existence monism, see Horgan, Potrĉ (2012).

Furthermore, it seems that an object *is a thing* because it has some kind of independence (in our mind and/or in reality): I can think of Obama, even without thinking of Putin, and it seems that Obama's existence does not depend on Putin's existence (even though it perhaps depends on the existence of Obama's atoms).

Thirdly, an object bears properties, both trivial and non-trivial ones (e.g., a trivial property is the property of being an object)[287]. The properties which are borne by an object imply other properties, which are also borne by that object. For example, if it is true that Obama is a man and if it is true that all the men are animals, it is also true that Obama is an animal. Obama bears the property of being an animal only because he bears the property of being a man. Finally, accepting an Aristotelian conception of objects *qua* primary substances, objects are neither borne by objects, nor by properties[288]. Our first definition of objects goes as follows:

(d1) *x* is an *object* = *x* is *something* = it is one (it has some kind of intrinsic unity and it is different from other entities, so that is has definite identity conditions) *and* it is a thing (it has some kind of independence, in mind and/or in reality) *and* it bears trivial and non-trivial properties *and* it is not borne by any entity.

With regard to properties and considering properties which are directly expressed by predicates (abundant properties), I think that they share certain features of objects: one property (e.g., the property of being human) is different from other properties; it can bear certain trivial and non-trivial properties (e.g., the property of being a property and all the other properties which are implied by it; concerning the property of being human, the property of implying the instantiation of the property of being an animal). Do properties have some kind of intrinsic unity? Are they independent? Let me consider the property of being human: it can be defined, following a traditional definition, as logically equivalent to the conjunction of the properties of being an animal and of being rational (i.e., its instantiation by any object is logically equivalent to the instantiation of that conjunction of properties by that object). This property is connected with other properties, which are implied by the properties of being an animal and/or by being rational: the property of being able to think, the property of living, etc. Yet, we do not claim that the property of being human *has* the property of thinking. We only claim that Obama, for example, *qua* human, thinks or can think.

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[287] I accept here an abundant conception of properties (that will be discussed in the next sections), according to which, roughly, every predicate denotes a property. For the distinction between abundant and sparse conceptions of properties, see Lewis (1986): 50-69, and Swoyer, Orilia (2011). Furthermore, as we will see in the next page, I accept the idea that every property is borne (or it is thought of as being borne) by (at least) one object or (at least) one property.

[288] I shall ignore here Ramsey's problem concerning the distinction between particulars and universals on the basis of the distinction between bearers and borne entities (see Ramsey (1925)). However, for a solution to that problem, see Lowe (2006): 101-118.

Moreover, is the property of being human identical with the conjunction of its defining properties? And is this conjunction a mere sum? Following Armstrong's theses[289], if a property is logically equivalent to a conjunction of properties (which are not reducible to conjunctions of other properties), these latter properties have ontological import (we are ontologically committed to their existence or, if we do not aim at accepting that properties exist, to there being such properties), while the former property does not have any ontological import. Well, it does not seem that the property of being human does not have any ontological import, even though it seems to be strictly connected with other properties, i.e., even though it seems to be logically equivalent to the conjunction of at least two properties (the properties of being an animal and of being rational). In fact, we cannot eliminate the property of being human by only claiming that there are the properties of being an animal and of being rational: even provided that the property of being human is the conjunction of those latter properties, that conjunction is one further property, i.e., the property of being human. Thus, that object seems to have *three* properties: the property of being human and, *in virtue of* this property, the properties of being an animal and of being rational. I do not see any reason for claiming that there are only two properties or only one conjunctive property[290]. I shall discuss this problem in the next sections. However, given that properties seem to be ways objects are, it is legitimate to accept this definition:

(d2) P is a *property* = P is one (it has some kind of intrinsic unity and it is different from other entities, so that it has identity conditions) *and* it is an attribute of some entity (in mind and/or in reality) (i.e., it is borne or it is thought of as being borne by some entity).

It is worth adding to (d2) that: a property bears some trivial properties (the property of being a property and all the other properties which are implied by it) *and* it has relations with other properties.

After having defined objects and properties, it is possible to make four important remarks. First, according to our definitions, it is legitimate to quantify both over objects and properties, since they both have identity conditions. Thus, on the one hand, only objects are things. Yet, on the other hand, even properties are something. In order to distinguish these two meanings of "something", I shall claim that everything that is an object is something, while everything that has identity conditions (i.e., both objects and properties) is something* or, better, an item. Secondly, we can be sure that objects *cannot* be properties and that properties *cannot* be

[289] See Armstrong (1997): 12, and Armstrong (1978).
[290] This point can be reinforced by considering Moore's paradox of analysis and, in particular, by claiming that, if the properties of being a human were identical with the conjunctive property of being an animal and being rational, then they would nevertheless not be substitutable within non-extensional contexts. See, for example, Moore (1968), Varzi, Orilia (1998), Orilia (2000).

objects. Properties are always properties *of* something, i.e. of an object or of another property. On the other hand, it is possible that objects (really and/or conceptually) depend on other objects, but they are not borne by anything and there is always at least one property that can be instantiated by and/or be thought of as attributed to an object and which is not instantiated by and/or be thought of as attributed to the objects on which it depends. Thus, for example, it is legitimate to claim that Obama and his body are two different objects (at least in our minds), since there are properties that we think of as being instantiated by Obama and not by his body (and/or the opposite), even though they might be one and the same concrete object. Thirdly, as it has been already implicitly claimed, I have to remark that I am not only thinking of concrete objects, but also of non-concrete ones, which can be considered objects too, according to object's definition (d1), of events, facts, and so on, i.e., of everything that fits that definition. Thus, my framework will be a two-category ontology, even though the category of objects comprehends items that are traditionally not thought of as primary substances. Fourthly, there is no need to mention the existential status of an item (i.e., to claim or to presuppose that that item exists) in order to consider it an object or a property. In the next chapter, I shall develop this intuition.

II.1.2. Properties are only Properties.

After having defined the notions of object and property, we should deal with problems (I)-(IV). With regard to problem (III), it seems to me that we should at first distinguish two different, yet strictly connected problems:

(IIIa) are objects simple entities (simple in regard to their properties)? And, if they are not simple, what is their internal structure? Are the differences between their supposed constituents real or only conceptual?

(IIIb) What is the nature of properties in regard to their being instantiated by objects?

Let me consider the true proposition expressed by

(64) Obama is human.

In regard to problem (IIIa), we should investigate the nature of the object named "Obama": is Obama a simple object or not? What is his internal structure? Does Obama have internal constituents which are really distinct from one another?

Accepting a classical distinction between theories of objects, it is legitimate to interpret (64) in two different ways, i.e., as

(64aa) Obama is a particular which bears the property of being human,

or as

(64ab) Obama is a bundle of properties (universal and/or particular ones), which comprehends the property of being human.

Such solutions follow from two radically different assumptions: given (64aa), which generally expresses substance theorists' positions, the object seems to be considered more primitive than its properties; given (64ab), which generally expresses bundle theorists' positions, properties are considered more primitive than their object(s)[291]. Among substance theories, it is possible to introduce further distinctions:

(64aaa) Obama is a bare particular, numerically distinct from other bare particulars, which bears Obama's properties, including the property of being human.

(64aab) Obama is a thick particular, which is constituted by a thin particular and all of Obama's properties, including the (universal) property of being human.

(64aac) Obama is a substance which has a real essence and which belongs, in virtue of its essence, to one or more type(s) of substances, including the type expressed by the property of being human.

Accepting some traditional objections, it is possible to show that solutions (64aaa) and (64aab) present some problems: if it is true that (64aaa), then bare particulars seem to be qualitatively identical with one another and they nevertheless have to bear some properties *qua* bare particulars (e.g., the property of being particular), even though this seems to be excluded by the fact that they are bare; if it is true that (64aab), then the nature of thin particulars is not clear because, if they have no qualities, they are only bare particulars, while, if they have qualities, they are similar to essences of objects, so that thick particulars (at least according to Armstrong, who defends this position[292]) are nothing more than objects considered in regard to all their properties, while thin particulars turn out to be the same objects considered only in regard to their essential properties. Yet, if it is true that (64aac), then we should remark that each substance can belong to several types, that it is not simple to identify such types and that the nature of ontological dependence of substances on other substances (e.g., of complex substances on simple ones) is not clear.

Among bundles theories, it is legitimate at least to distinguish between properties bundle theorists and tropes bundle theorists:

(64aba) Obama is a bundle of universal properties, one of which is the property of being human.

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[291] For this distinction, see, for example, Armstrong (1978): volume I.
[292] See Armstrong (1978): vol. II.

(64abb) Obama is a bundle of particular properties (tropes), one of which is the particular humanity of Obama.

There are several problems connected with bundle theories: does an object remain the same object, if it changes one of its properties/tropes over time? Does it have essential properties? How do we explain the similarity between two different bundles?[293]

I think that the best theory of objects' constitution is the one expressed by (64aac). In particular, if something is an object, it must have some kind of identity-independence in regard to its properties (as it is made clear by the arguments in chapter I.4, I do not think that objects identity-depends, for example, on their haecceities). Furthermore, if we consider identity-dependence grounded on identity of properties, it seems reasonable to accept the following definitions:

(d3) a certain object *a* is *totally ontologically identity-dependent* on a certain object *b* iff every property of *a* is instantiated by *b* or it is implied by the properties of *b*.

(d4) A certain object *a* is *partly ontologically identiy-dependent* on a certain object *b* iff at least one property of *a* is instantiated and/or implied by one or more than one property of *b*, but not all the properties of *a* are instantiated by *b* or implied by the properties of *b*.

(d5) A certain object *a* is *totally conceptually identity-dependent* on a certain object *b* iff every property of *a* should be thought of as instantiated by *b* or implied by the properties of *b*.

(d6) A certain object *a* is *partly conceptually identity-dependent* on a certain object *b* iff at least one property of *a* should be thought of as implied by one or more than one property of *b*, but not all the properties of *a* should be thought of as instantiated by *b* or implied by the properties of *b*.

It follows from these definitions that two objects can be ontologically identity-dependent, even without being conceptually identity-dependent.

I shall not report all the objections against the theories expressed by (64aaa), (64aab), (64aba), (64abb) and against nominalism of predicates and conceptualism, i.e., against the major rivals of the theory expressed by (64aac). It seems to me that the intuition behind the interpretations expressed by (64aaa), (64aab), (64aba) and (64abb) is that properties should be considered objects, which constitute other objects. Yet, from my perspective, properties cannot be objects: where can we find properties, except *in* objects or as properties instantiated by other properties? What kind of ontological identity-independence do they have from objects? How do they subsist without objects? Objects, in fact, if they are not identical with other objects, have

[293] For a detailed examination of theories of universals, see also Moreland (2001) and Calemi (2012).

some kind of identity-independence. Yet, with regard to properties, even though it is true that the property of being human is not identity-dependent on its instantiation by *certain* human beings, it seems to me unreasonable to assume that this property subsists without being instantiated (or without being thought of as instantiated) by objects that are human. From my Aristotelian perspective, it is part of the nature of properties that they are instantiated (or that they are thought of as being instantiated) by objects or by other properties.

In sum, the distinction between a certain object and its properties is different from the distinction between different objects: the object and its properties do not really subsist apart from one another, as different objects. Furthermore, properties have other properties: for example, the property of being human has the property of being a property. Properties can be related with other properties too, but they do not seem to properly instantiate these latter properties: the property of being human, for example, is related to the property of being an animal, but the property of being human does not instantiate the property of being an animal.

If properties are not objects and if we accept (64aac), there follows that properties depend on objects in a peculiar way, which is different from the kinds of identity-dependence expressed by (d3)-(d6). The following thesis seems to me acceptable:

(t1) every property P depends on at least one object (or on at least one other property) because there must be at least one object (or at least one other property) which instantiates it and/or which is thought of as instantiating it.

The notion of object is assumed with a wide range, in order to comprehend both concrete and non-concrete objects.

Thus, I do not wish to claim that there are no uninstantiated properties (i.e., properties that are not instantiated by concrete objects). Yet, I wish to claim that

(t2) every property must be instantiated by and/or thought of as being instantiated by at least one object (or by at least one other property).

This is nothing more than a widened version of the Principle of Instantiation. I think that (t1) and (t2) express adequate replies to our problem (IIIb). With regard to (IIIa), it is legitimate to claim that objects are simple with regard to their properties, because they are not really constituted by properties.

Before leaving this topic, I would like to face two questions: the question of nominalized predicates and the question of uninstantiated and alien properties.

According to Frege[294], when we use "is human" in (64), we refer to the concept of being

[294] See Frege 1892 (1960): 42-55.

human as a concept. Concepts, in this case, are not mental and subjective entities: they seem to be functions, so that the Fregean term "concept" seems to have a meaning quite similar to the meaning of our term "property". Yet, if we use "the concept of 'being human'" or "the concept of 'humanity'" or simply "humanity" as subject in

(65) humanity is a concept,

we claim something false, because "humanity", in this case, at least from the Fregean perspective, does not refer to a concept, it does not occupy the predicate-place, but it refers to a concept-correlate, i.e., to an object.

On the other hand, according to Russell[295], this distinction is not well-grounded. In fact, following our example, when we truly claim that

(66) being human is a concept,

we claim something true, even though "being human" is used in subject-place. A concept does not become a concept-correlate (i.e., an object) when we talk of it: it only remains a concept. In general, I agree with the Russellian view and I think that properties can bear other properties, even without becoming objects. Both properties *qua* properties and objects *qua* objects can bear properties. However, I think that we can build non-concrete objects out of properties: for example, the (subjective) concept of humanity. Yet, these objects are objects, they are not properties, and the difference between the property of being human and the (subjective) concept of humanity is not revealed by syntactic analysis, but only by metaphysical analysis.

With regard to alien properties, I would like to distinguish between

(d7) alien properties = properties which cannot be instantiated by this world's objects;

(d8) natural not yet instantiated properties = properties which have not been instantiated by this world's objects, but which can nevertheless be instantiated by them;

(d9) natural no longer instantiated properties = properties which have been instantiated by at least one object in this world, but which are no longer instantiated.

It is difficult to distinguish between alien properties and natural not yet instantiated ones. For example, the property of being a unicorn can be considered an alien property (it is not possible in our world that something is a unicorn) or a natural not yet instantiated property (it is possible that, in the future, something will be a unicorn). Yet, alien properties and natural not yet instantiated properties are not simply non-instantiated properties: they can be thought of as being instantiated by non-concrete objects (e.g., by mental ones, as I shall claim in the next

[295] See Russell 1903 (1996): 44-46.

chapters). This preserves (t2) from objections grounded on this distinction between properties.

However, even though I admit that there are both concrete and non-concrete objects (e.g., Obama and Pegasus) and I do not think, in general, that there are predicates which do not refer to properties, I do not consider other possible worlds real entities: as I shall argue, other possible worlds are nothing more than fictional contexts. Thus, alien properties and natural not yet instantiated properties can be considered properties of non-concrete objects (or, better, of mental objects) within fictional contexts, even though natural not yet instantiated properties can become genuine natural properties. Genuine natural properties are properties instantiated by concrete objects and properties no longer instantiated by them.

Furthermore, I think that the following principle is generally valid:

(t3) alien properties and natural not yet instantiated properties are constituted by an act of abstraction *and* by a recombination of genuine natural properties instantiated by concrete objects.

Yet, (t3) seems not to hold for mathematical objects' properties and for other properties implied by them. For example, how can we constitute the property of being perfectly elastic, provided that there are elastic concrete objects, but there is no perfectly elastic object? And how can we constitute the property of being circular, provided that there are no perfectly circular concrete objects? However, the perfect circle is thought of by our minds and it can be studied. For now, I assume that mathematical properties and other properties involving them are special alien properties, for which (t3) is not valid. We can restate (t3) as follows:

(t3*) except some alien properties (mathematical properties and other properties involving them), alien properties and natural not yet instantiated properties are constituted by an abstraction and a recombination of genuine natural properties instantiated by concrete objects.

II.1.3. The Identity of Properties.

In order to answer questions (I) and (II), I shall consider one typical example of (supposed) identity between properties:

(67) being trilateral is being triangular.

Are the properties of being trilateral and of being triangular identical? If they are identical, it seems to me that it is legitimate to justify this answer in two different ways:

(67a) the properties of being trilateral and of being triangular are identical because something is trilateral iff the same thing is triangular.

(67b) The properties of being trilateral and of being triangular are *naturally* identical because something is trilateral iff the same thing is triangular, but they are *not intentionally* identical,

because some minded subject can believe that something is trilateral even without believing that that thing is triangular, and the opposite.

The former solution (67a) expresses a purely extensionalist approach: two properties are identical iff they have the same extension. Yet, this solution has to deal with many troubles. For example, according to this solution, it is legitimate to claim that

(68) having a kidney is having a heart,

because everything which has a kidney has a heart too and everything which has a heart has a kidney too. Yet, we know that the property of having a kidney is different from the property of having a heart: it is only a contingent fact that they have the same extension. Let me imagine a possible world in which all the men are blue and men are the only blue objects: could we claim that the property of being human is identical with the property of being blue? We could obviously not.

Yet, extensionalists could deal with this trouble by introducing extensions over possible worlds. In this respect, (67) is true because there is no possible world in which something is trilateral without being triangular, nor there are possible worlds in which something is triangular without being trilateral. On the other hand, (68) is false, because there are possible worlds in which the properties of having a kidney and of having a heart do not have the same extension. In other terms:

(67a*) the properties of being trilateral and of being triangular are identical iff it is necessary that they have the same extension.

This solution seems to be intuitively acceptable. Yet, I have some doubts. How do we fix the possibility of something? According to the laws of geometry, it is necessary that something is trilateral iff the same thing is triangular. Yet, can there be possible (non-contradictory) worlds in which these laws are different, so that there are things (in those worlds) which are trilateral, but not triangular? The fact that we cannot conceive of them does not imply that they are not possible: a serious modal extensionalist should admit this possibility. Yet, the modal extensionalist could answer in three different ways: s/he could claim that (67) is analytically true; s/he could reply that a world with different geometrical laws is an impossible world; s/he could reply that there are different properties in worlds with different geometrical laws. The first solution seems to be circular or incomplete*:* is this analytical truth grounded on the necessary sameness of extension or not? If it is, the solution is circular. If it is not, the modal extensionalist has to find out other criteria for analyticity. The second solution is rather vague: an impossible world could be a world too. Furthermore, even if the modal extensionalist did not admit impossible worlds,

s/he should demonstrate that it is overtly contradictory that something is trilateral without being triangular. In order to demonstrate this contradiction, s/he should use those geometrical laws from which there follows that it is not possible that something is trilateral and not triangular. In order to demonstrate that those geometrical laws are necessary, a *reductio ad absurdum* of their negation should be possible. Given the postulates of Euclidean geometry, this *reductio* is possible. Yet, what if such postulates were not accepted and/or were not valid in other possible worlds?

According to the third solution, if we define in different ways in another possible world w_1, different from the actual world *a*, the properties of being trilateral and being triangular and the properties used in the postulates, we can obtain different properties and different laws. In w_1, the properties of being trilateral and of being triangular would not be instantiated, while in *a* and in other possible worlds accessible from *a* (at least with regard to these properties) the same properties would be instantiated. Thus, (67) is necessarily true because, in every possible world in which the properties of being trilateral and being triangular are instantiated, they have the same extension. This solution seems to represent the best modal extensionalist approach. Yet, it is legitimate to address at least one objection to it: is there (at least) one possible world in which, for example, the property of being trilateral is instantiated, while the property of being triangular is not instantiated? If there is such world, those properties do not necessarily have the same extension. On the other hand, we should find out some reason for which there is no such a world. The range of possible worlds, in fact, is much wider than the range of what is conceivable. Thus, there are possible worlds in which there are trilateral geometrical figures, but not triangular figures (perhaps because angles are absent). Are these worlds impossible? We do not know, as we have seen. Yet, if we wish to affirm that the third modal extensionalist solution is true, we must exclude the fact that there are possible worlds in which one of the considered properties is instantiated, while the other is not. This supposed non-instantiation could not be a mere fact about possible worlds: in this case, in fact, it would be something contingent and the supposed necessary identity of extension between properties would be contingent too. Yet, if this non-instantiation is necessary, what is the necessary law which implies it? It must be a trans-wordly necessary law: a law which holds in every possible world. Are there such laws? I do not know. Yet, I suspect that the necessary coinstantiation (i.e., instantiation in the same possible worlds) of these two properties is not one of such laws. In fact, if it were a trans-wordly necessary law, it would be a highly suspicious one, because it would be grounded on the geometrical laws of our world.

Furthermore, if the properties of being trilater and of being triangular were one and the same property, that property would be neither exhaustively defined by our concept of

triangularity, nor by our concept of trilaterality, that would at best express two different aspects of that property. Thus, it would be a neutral and partly mysterious property, since it would be only partly described by the (supposed) property of being triangular and only partly described by the (supposed) property of being trilateral.

I have tried to show that the extensionalist approach expressed by (67a) and/or (67a*) is not satisfactory.

With regard to the approach expressed by (67b), I think that we can consider at least two different interpretations of it:

(67ba) the properties of being trilateral and of being triangular are naturally identical *qua* properties (they stand for the same natural property), but they are different *qua* concepts.

(67bb) The properties of being trilateral and of being triangular are naturally identical *qua* properties, yet they are intentionally non-identical, because someone can ascribe to some object, e.g., the property of being trilateral, even without ascribing to it the property of being triangular or without ascribing the negation of this property.

The first interpretation (which is somehow inspired by Bealer's approach[296]) is grounded on a distinction between the notions of property (in Bealer's terms, quality) and concept, which does not correspond to the distinction between sparse and abundant properties. A concrete object (or a mathematical one, in our example) may have two properties which stand for one natural property in virtue of some logical equivalence. Yet, an abstract object (in Bealer's terms), thought of by a minded subject, may have two different corresponding concepts which are not logically equivalent. Thus, the properties of being trilateral and of being triangular are naturally identical. Yet, the concepts of being trilateral and of being triangular are not identical.

This interpretation has to face some problems. First, I do not think that logical equivalence between extensions of properties is sufficient to admit that two properties are identical, as I have already shown, and necessary logical equivalence, when it is interpreted using possible worlds, seems to run into difficulties too. Secondly, even if there were such a necessary logical equivalence between properties, this would not suffice to delete the two coextensive properties and to claim that there is only one (natural) property, P_1. In fact, the object which has P_1 really has the properties of being trilateral and of being triangular too. Those who adopt (67ba) could reply that these two concepts stand for only one property. Yet, thirdly, these two concepts express two different aspects of the same (natural) property: their distinction seems to have some *fundamentum in re*. In this case, would P_1 be a composite property or a simple one? If it

[296] See Bealer (1982): 177-198.

were composite, the composing natural properties could be the properties of being trilateral and of being triangular and some other properties and P_1 would supervene on the conjunction of these properties. If it were simple, we would have to find out some *fundamentum in re* of this conceptual difference. Yet, if P_1 were not really constituted by other properties, what would this *fundamentum* be? Fourthly, there is at least one intuition against (67ba): when we think of an object as having a property, we do not think of it as having a concept, in contrast with its having a property in reality. It seems that we think of the same properties.

Following (67bb), (67) expresses a natural identity between properties, but it cannot express an intentional identity between them. In other terms, two properties are naturally identical iff they have the same real extension, while they are intentionally identical iff they have the same intentional extension, i.e., iff they are thought of as being instantiated by all and only the same objects. Thus, it is almost impossible that two properties are intentionally identical: we think of an indefinite number of objects and nothing prevents us from thinking of those objects in different ways. It seems to me that this second interpretation runs into the same difficulties expressed with regard to the first one, except the fourth difficulty: it has to admit that two properties are naturally identical iff they are necessarily logically coextensive; it has to deal with the nature (composite or simple) of the natural property; it has to find out some *fundamentum in re* of that intentional distinction.

I will sum up my replies to problems (I) and (II) as follows:

(t4) the identity of properties is primitive. We can try to find out the nature of properties by studying their extensions and the relations between objects which instantiate them, but this is not sufficient to demonstrate that one property is identical with another property.

(t5) We should be tolerant with regard to the number of properties. For example, if I claim that something is a man, that thing really has the properties of being human, of being an animal and of being rational.

There could be an infinite (or an indefinite) number of properties and this is not a deep problem for our metaphysics: properties are not objects, which constitute other higher objects and which can be superfluous for the constitution of such higher objects. Properties are only properties. Thus, it seem to me legitimate to accept an abundant conception of properties.

II.1.4. Superfluous and Non-Superfluous: the Case of Negative Properties.

There are (or there could be) properties which are considered impure and superfluous: negative, conjunctive and disjunctive properties. These properties seem to be reducible to the union between some positive property (or some positive properties) and (or by means of) some logical

operator. Yet, every serious metaphysician should reflect on the ontological status such properties without prejudices: are these properties *really* superfluous? Are there only positive properties?

I shall only consider here negative properties. Accepting a truthmaker theory of truth (according to which a true proposition – or some other truthbearer – is made true by something, e.g., a fact), it is possible to argue that there are true negative propositions, which are made true by negative facts, which consist of the instantiation of some negative property by an object. Thus, there really are negative properties. This is the thesis that I shall defend. Let me consider the false proposition expressed by

(69) Obama is a dog.

This proposition is false because there is some fact which makes it false (a falsemaker). For once we accept that there are truthmakers, it is not really difficult to accept that there are falsemakers too. What is this fact? It is the fact that makes it true that

(70) Obama is not a dog, i.e., Obama is a non-dog.

If it is true that (70), there must be some fact which makes it true. This fact is a negative one. Thus, there are negative facts. Against this thesis, which was partially defended by Russell[297], many objections have been made:

(nf1) the truthmaker principle is not acceptable. Yet, the acceptance of the truthmaker principle is perhaps the best way to find out if there really are certain properties. Furthermore, if we deny that there are truthmakers, how is the difference between true and false propositions grounded? Thus, those who deny the truthmaker principle should develop a better alternative to investigate the reality of properties and to give reason to the truth-values of propositions.

(nf2) The truthmaker principle only holds for true propositions and it does not hold for false ones. Yet, it is true that (70). Thus, (70) must be made true by something: by what?

(nf3) When we claim that it is true that (70), we claim something redundant[298]. In fact, we express the same thing as

(70') it is false that Obama is a dog.

Yet, a proposition such as the one expressed by

(64) Obama is human

is made true by the same (positive) fact which makes it true that

[297] See Russell 1918-1919 (2010): 41-45.
[298] See, for example, Mumford (2007).

(64') it is true that Obama is human;

(64'') it is true that it is true that Obama is human.

We do not have to admit another fact, in addition to the one which makes it true that (64). Thus, (64) more directly reveals the fact which makes it true that (64), (64') and (64''). Yet, even though (70) and (70') are made true by the same fact, this fact is the same fact which makes it false that (69). If (69) did not have a falsemaker, in fact, we could not claim that it is true that (70'). And this falsemaker, according to my perspective, is a fact.

(nf4) There are no negative facts, nor negative properties, but only positive facts and incompatibilities between properties[299]. Yet, such incompatibilities are nothing more than general negative facts or negative facts about properties: the fact that the properties of being human and of being a dog are incompatible is the general negative fact that it is not the case that something is both human and a dog *or* it is a negative fact about properties (the fact that the properties of being human and of being a dog are not compatible). Thus, there must be negative facts (at least general ones or negative facts about properties).

(nf5) The proposition expressed by (69) is false not simply because there is some negative fact which makes it false, but because it does not have a positive fact which makes it true, i.e., it does not have any truthmaker[300]. Yet, is this absence of truthmakers a genuine fact or a genuine entity? If it is, there must be negative facts and/or mysterious negative objects (such as absences). If it were not, there would be no truthmakers for some true propositions, such as the ones expressing the absences of truthmakers. And if the truthmaker principle were restricted to positive true propositions, how would we ground the truth of true negative propositions?

(nf6) (69) is made false by a totality fact involving Obama: Obama has *just* a set of properties which exhaust all of his properties[301]. Yet, this totality fact about Obama can be expressed in negative terms too: there are no other properties of Obama's, except the ones which constitute his set of properties. Is it legitimate to accept the positive interpretation and to refuse the negative one? I do not think it is. Furthermore, if we accept that both such interpretations are legitimate, let me consider the positive one: it seems to involve that there is a huge conjunctive fact (the fact that Obama has positive property P_1 and positive property P_2 and so on) *and* that there is no other property instantiated by Obama, except the ones which constitute the former conjunctive fact. This latter fact is a negative one.

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[299] See Demos (1917).
[300] See, for example, Mellor (2003).
[301] See Armstrong (2004): 53-62. I shall not consider here of the so-called "polarity solution" (see, for example, Beall (2000) and Priest (2000b)), because its metaphysical implications are still not clear.

Thus, if there are negative facts, there are negative properties too. I do not see other means to interpret negative facts, except the instantiation (or the attribution of instantiation) of negative properties: the nexus of negative exemplification or the presence of a negative constituent, expressed by "not" or "non" in (70), are much more mysterious and less simple solutions. Thus, (70) is made true and (69) is made false by the fact that Obama instantiates the negative property of non-being a dog.

D. M. Armstrong and L. Wittgenstein notoriously argued against the reality of negative properties. According to Armstrong[302], these properties have four inacceptable features:

(Anp1) they are not grounded on any kind of identity between particulars (e.g., between the things which are not dog). Yet, it seems that there is some kind of identity between them: a negative one, grounded on the fact that such particulars are non-dogs.

(Anp2) Admitting negative properties, every particular would have the same number of properties. Yet, it seems to me that there would be no trouble in admitting that particulars have the same (indefinite or infinite) number of properties.

(Anp3) Negative properties do not have (or confer) causal powers. Yet, within an agnostic metaphysics (agnostic at least with regard to Armstrong's physicalism), it is not obvious that particulars have just those properties which give them causal powers. Moreover, negative properties seem to have causal powers in determining negative effects, in counterfactuals and in determining positive effects too. Furthermore, there are some properties that we admit in our scientific explanation (e.g., the property of being inert) which seem to be negative properties. Thus, it seems that an object can have negative scientifically relevant properties too.

(Anp4) If we admit negative properties, by means of logics, we have to admit disjunctive properties too. Yet, if we accept that properties are ways things are, I do not see any problem in admitting that one of such ways is, for example, the property of being a philosopher *or* a carpenter.

Wittgenstein notoriously made another objection[303]:

(Wnp1) if we accept that there is a property such as the property of non-being a dog, we have to accept that there is a property such as the property of non-non-being a dog, which is nevertheless logically equivalent to the positive property of being a dog. Thus, there are infinite logically equivalent properties. Yet, I have already remarked that I do not think that logical

[302] See Armstrong (1978), volume II: 23-29.
[303] See Wittgenstein 1921 (1961), 5.44. See also Grossmann (1992): 79-80. I have not analyzed here conceptions of truthmaking that do not involve facts, e.g. Cameron (2008)'s and Schaffer (2010)'s ones.

equivalence is a good criterion for properties' identity. Furthermore, the negation in non-non-being a dog could be considered recursive and not metaphysically relevant (while the negation in the property of non-being a dog is metaphysically relevant, since it plays a role in determining the falsemaker for some false propositions and the truthmaker for some true ones). However, even though there were this property of non-non-being a dog, it would be true that something which has the property of being a dog has the property of non-non-being a dog. Thus, being tolerant with regard to the number of properties, I would have no troubles in admitting this last property too.

Thus, in reply to question (IV), I admit that there are negative properties. They obviously seem to be acceptable by any abundant conception of properties. Are they acceptable by sparse conceptions of properties too? For the sake of this chapter, I cannot investigate the legitimacy of the distinction between abundant and sparse conceptions properties. However, as I have already tried to explain, I think that every way an object (or a property) is can be considered a legitimate property of that object (or of that property).

Yet, accepting the validity of this distinction, sparse properties have three functions: they ground objective similarity between things; they carve out causal powers; they serve as a minimal ontological base. As I have already claimed in my reply to Armstrong's objections (Anp1) and (Anp3), I think that negative properties ground objective similarity between things and that they carve out causal powers too. Furthermore, if negative facts are not reducible to positive facts, negative properties cannot be reduced to positive ones. Thus, they can serve as a minimal ontological base. Therefore, it seems to me that negative properties are acceptable by sparse conceptions of properties too.

II.2. Existence: about a Genuine Property

In this chapter, that represents the core of this work, I shall try to develop and defend a conception of existence as a first-order, informative property. Furthermore, I shall argue that, even though existence cannot be identified with any other property, there are properties that characterize only existent objects: dispositions to act (i.e., dispositions to make, to produce something). Finally, I shall deal with the problem of non-existents (what are non-existent objects?) and with some other questions connected with existence, such as: are there degrees of existence? And are there kinds of existence?

II.2.1. A Genuine and Really Robust First-Order, Informative Property.

It is commonsensical to take first-order predicates in true atomic statements as denoting first-order properties. For example, if it is true that

(14) Obama is a politician,

then it seems reasonable to accept that there is an object (Obama) that instantiates a first-order property (the property of being a politician). This statement seems to be made true by Obama's instantiating the property of being a politician. Why cannot we claim that the same happens with

(7) Obama exists?

As we have already noticed, there are many strategies to deny that we can deal with (7) in the same way as we deal with (14). However, is it *necessary* to adopt one of these strategies? In general, actualists argue that we cannot deal with (7) in the same way as we deal with (14), since every object must exist in order to have some property. Yet, this does *not* imply that existence is *not* a first-order property. In fact, in order to maintain the validity of (actualism), actualists could argue that existence is a first-order property instantiated by every object. Other actualists claim that (7) does not express the true proposition [Obama exists], whose truth somehow ontologically commits us to Obama's being an object and existence's being a first-order property instantiated by Obama. There is another proposition, that I shall call [p7], whose truth does not commit us to such things. For example, one could claim that there are such true propositions:

[p7a] [the grammatical proper name "Obama" has a referent];

[p7b] [the logical proper name[304] [Obama] has a referent];

[p7c] [some conjunction of properties or some conjunctive property (e.g., comprehending the properties of being a politician, of being Michelle Obama's husband, and so on) is uniquely

[304] Logical proper names are names that directly aim at referring to their referents.

instantiated];

[p7d] [some haecceity (e.g., the property of being Obama or of being identical with Obama or of obamizing) is instantiated];

[p7e] [there is some peculiar property (e.g., a kind, or any other existence-entailing property) that Obama instantiates];

[p7f] [the world is Obamish],

and so on. In such cases, there is no constituent of such propositions that involves any reference to existence as a first-order property. However, why is it legitimate to claim that there is no true proposition such as the proposition [Obama exists] expressed by the statement (7)? Actualists cannot reply by claiming that the acceptance of the proposition [Obama exists] implies the paradox of non-existence. First, it is possible to maintain that existence is a first-order property that is instantiated by every object, so that [Obama exists] is always true and [Obama does not exist] is always false. Secondly, every formulation of the paradox of non-existence seems to assume that (actualism) is true. Yet, why do we have to assume that (actualism) is true?

Furthermore, even maintaining that there is a true proposition such as [Obama exists], actualists could reply that that proposition is not made true by an atomic fact, such as the fact that Obama exists, that he instantiates the first-order property of existing, but by something else. In particular, one could argue that Obama himself makes such a proposition true or that some other fact (e.g., the world's being Obamish, or some property's being instantiated) makes it true. However, why do we have to accept such solutions, if we do not accept the truth of (actualism)? Perhaps, it is true that Obama himself makes [Obama exists] true, but only if Obama himself exists! Furthermore, it is true that some property's being instantiated makes [Obama exists] true, but only if there exists some object (i.e., Obama) that instantiates such a property! As I have already noticed, there are some internal problems within each strategy. Yet, I think that the major problem for actualists is that the truth of (actualism) needs to be taken as a presupposition of every strategy. And I do not think that we have any good reason for assuming that (actualism) is a true presupposition.

As far as I know, there is only one explicit defense of (actualism): Quine's defense. According to Quine, there are no non-existent objects, given that such objects would not have definite identity conditions and, provided that each object has definite identity conditions, they would not be objects. Yet, first, let me notice that Sherlock Holmes is different from other objects: he is neither identical with Emma Bovary, nor with Watson. Secondly, according to the

best current physical theory, there are existent objects (e.g., quanta[305]) that do not *always* have definite identity conditions: do we have to claim that quanta cease to exist and to be objects whenever their identity with other quanta is not ontologically determined? Finally, even if there were not only one Sherlock Holmes, but *many* Sherlock Holmes (in virtue of their instantiating or not instantiating some properties that are not ascribed to Sherlock Holmes by Conan Doyle), each Sherlock Holmes would be distinct from any other Sherlock Holmes and would nevertheless be non-existent. Yet, I do not accept this latter solution, since I think that there is only one Sherlock Holmes. I shall deal with this problem in the next chapter.

Another strategy to deny that existence is a first-order property consists in denying that objects are involved in the truthmakers of our (true) propositions concerning Obama's existence. For example, with regard to [p7c], one could argue that, in order for it to be true, it is only sufficient that some properties stand in some relation. Thus, according to bundle theorists, there is no object such as Obama: there are only (universal or particular) properties that are coinstantiated (or, in Russell's terminology, compresent). Furthermore, with regard to [p7d], one could simply argue that the first-order property of being identical with Obama has the second-order property of being instantiated. Yet, this latter solution seems to be quite *ad hoc*, since the property of being identical with Obama, as we have already noticed, in order for having its identity conditions, requires that there is an object such as Obama. The former solution seems to be more attractive. However, for the same reasons concerning properties' identity conditions, one should not claim that [Obama exists] is true in virtue of the instantiation (and coinstantiation, or compresence) of properties involving reference to singular objects (e.g., one should not claim that [Obama exists] is true in virtue of the coinstantiation of the property of being Michelle Obama's husband with other properties). Thus, if we do not use such properties, we are maybe left with properties that are not sufficient to ground the truth of [Obama exist], i.e., to ground the truth of the proposition that seems to concern *that* particular object's existence. In sum, if there are no objects, objects cannot determine the identity conditions of properties, i.e., there cannot be properties that must refer to objects in order to have their identity conditions. Yet, if there are only properties not determined by objects in their identity conditions, it is far from clear how their standing in some relation(s) can provide the truth conditions for propositions such as [Obama exists] or [Obama is a politician].

After having clarified that there are no compelling reasons for accepting the truth of (actualism) and that there is no reason for denying that Obama is an object, I can briefly develop my arguments in favor of a conception of existence as *only* a first-order and informative property.

[305] See, for example, French (2011).

First, in order to argue that existence is a first-order property, one could claim that:

(arg.I.1) in the true atomic statement "Obama exists", "Obama" denotes an object;

(arg.I.2) in the true atomic statement "Obama exists", the predicate "exists" is attributed to the subject "Obama";

(arg.I.3) for every true atomic statement, if the subject denotes an object and if the predicate is attributed to the subject, then the predicate denotes a first-order property;

(arg.I.4) thus, the predicate "exists" in the true atomic statement "Obama exists" denotes a first-order property, i.e., the property of existing.

The same conclusion could be reached by considering the true atomic proposition [Obama exists]. However, let me assume, for the sake of the argument, that (7) expresses some other proposition [p7]. It is legitimate to formulate another argument:

(arg.II.1) the proposition [p7] is true;

(arg.II.2) for every true proposition, there is something that makes it true and there is whatever is part of what makes that proposition true;

(arg.II.3) the fact that Obama exists makes the proposition [p7] true or is part of whatever makes the proposition [p7] true;

(arg.II.4) if there is a fact such as the fact that Obama exists, then Obama is an object and existence is a first-order property;

(arg.II.5) thus, there is a fact such as the fact that Obama exists;

(arg. II.6) thus, Obama is an object and existence is a first-order property.

Some brief remarks about the premises (arg.II.2) and (arg.II.4) are in order. The premise (arg.II.2) does *not* claim that every true proposition has its own truthmaker: it does not exclude that there could be only one truthmaker for many propositions and there could be many truthmakers for only one proposition. Furthermore, it is clear that, if we accept that there is some definite fact, we must also accept that there is whatever is a part of that fact: if there is a fact such as Obama's being a politician and the property of being a politician is a part of that fact, then there is a property such as the property of being a politician. I assume here that facts are not ontologically simple and that there can be no fact without its parts. With regard to (arg.II.4), it seems to me that, if we do not accept (actualism), we do not have any reason for believing that the fact that Obama exists (if there is such a fact) is not a fact involving an object

and a first-order property – as any other atomic fact, such as the fact that Obama is a politician.

With regard to the informativeness of existence, I shall consider the following argument::

(arg.III.1) it is true that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character;

(arg.III.2) if it is true that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character, then it is true that Sherlock Holmes does not exist;

(arg.III.3) Sherlock Holmes is an object (following my definition (d1));

(arg.III.4) thus, Sherlock Holmes does not exist;

(arg.III.5) thus, there are objects that do not exist.

Since a first-order property is informative iff there is at least one object that instantiates it and at least one object that does not instantiate it (while a first-order property is non-informative iff every object instantiates it), existence is an informative, first-order property. Against (arg.III.1), assuming the truth of (actualism), it has been argued that it is not literally true that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character, because there is no proposition such as [Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character] *or* because such a proposition is made true by something else not involving Sherlock Holmes. Against (arg.III.3), one could recall the Quinean objection concerning the lack of identity conditions of non-existent objects. Yet, I have already tried to argue that such objections do not work. I shall defend (arg.III.2) in the next section.

In sum, my defense of existence as an informative, first-order property is grounded on three points: first, this thesis is nearer than rival views to some commonsensical assumptions concerning true statements such as (7) and true propositions such as [Obama exists]; secondly, we have no clear and valid reason for accepting (actualism); thirdly, there are internal difficulties within each actualist strategy. In order to demonstrate that existence is *only* an informative, first-order property, I shall now try to develop this third, dialectic line with regard to six alternative theses concerning existence:

(a) existence is only a non-informative, first-order property (i.e., a property that is instantiated by all the objects and only by objects);

(b) existence is only an informative, non-first-order property;

(c) existence is only a non-informative, non-first-order property;

(d) existence is not a property at all;

(e) existence is an informative, multi-level property;

(f) existence is a non-informative, multi-level property (i.e., a property that every item has).

In particular, theses (e) and (f) seem to be justified by the fact that existence's being an informative, first-order property does not imply that properties do not exist, so that existence could be a multi-level property (e.g., a property of objects, namely a first-order property, and a property of first-order properties, namely a second-order property, and so on), which could be informative (or non-informative) with regard to objects and/or to other properties.

Let me consider these theses in turn. With regard to (a), some philosophers argue that Sherlock Holmes is not properly a non-existent: he is an object and he exists, even if he is not a man, or a concrete object, and so on. There is no difference in existence between Sherlock Holmes and Obama: the difference between them comes from other sources. I have to remark that I assume, with regard to (a), that it is legitimate to take Sherlock Holmes as an object, even if (a) is also consistent with the denial of Sherlock Holmes' being an object. Yet, such a denial implies that (actualism) is true and we are not forced to accept such a thesis.

First, it is legitimate to question the status of existence according to (a). Existence turns out to be a property whose instantiation is coextensive with the instantiation of the disjunction of objects' categories. For example, if we assume that there are only two categories of objects (abstract and concrete objects), some object exists iff it is an abstract or a concrete object. Since it is not possible that one and the same object is both abstract and concrete, this disjunction is strong one: the instantiation of existence is equivalent to the instantiation of a strongly disjunctive property or of a strong disjunction of properties or (perhaps) of a determinable. Furthermore, existence turns out to be coextensive with the property of being an object. Nothing prevents us from assuming that there is such a property of existing. Yet, this property seems not to ground any real commonality among objects *or* it grounds a real commonality that is already grounded by the property of being an object. On the other hand, it seems to me that existence in (7) turns out to ground some peculiar real commonality among existents.

We can understand this point by looking for the truth conditions of

(8) Sherlock Holmes does not exist

within this perspective. Following (a), it is not literally true that Sherlock Holmes does not exist. Thus, how can it seem to be true that (8)? Theorists who accept (a) can reply in two different ways:

(aa) there are two different properties denoted by the grammatical, first-order predicate "exists" or by the logical, first-order predicate [exists] (e.g., by the logical constituent [exists] of the proposition [Obama exists]);

(ab) there is only one property denoted by the grammatical first-order predicate "exists" or by the logical first-order predicate [exists] and singular negative existential statements (or propositions) are made true by something that does not involve such a property.

With regard to (aa), I shall assume, for the sake of the argument, that such properties are the property of existing according to (a) (as it has been introduced in the previous paragraphs) and the property of being concrete. Yet, first, I do not see any valid reason for considering the grammatical predicate "exists" or the logical predicate [exists] equivocal (they would be equivocal since they would have two different senses and they would denote two different properties). Secondly, even if such a predicate were equivocal, one could ask: if the property of being concrete is what is not instantiated by Sherlock Holmes according to (aa) and if such a property is an informative, first-order one, why do we have to introduce one further non-informative, first-order property (the property of existing) in order to claim that it is true that (aa)?

With regard to (ab), one could choose a strategy grounded on kinds. Thus, it is not literally true that Sherlock Holmes does not exist, but it is true that Sherlock Holmes does not instantiate some kind-property (e.g., the kind-property of being human), even if such a property is attributed to him within some fiction, and he instantiates some other kind-property (e.g., the kind-property of being a fictional character). Anyway, as we have already seen considering van Inwagen's and Thomasson's theories, this makes it necessary and legitimate to introduce one further property (e.g., the property of being concrete), whose instantiation is implied by the instantiation of the kind-property of being human and is not implied by the instantiation of the kind-property of being a fictional character. If there is such a property, why cannot we simply claim that Sherlock Holmes does not instantiate it, leaving kind-properties apart, and that a fact involving Obama (i.e., the fact that Obama instantiates the property of being concrete) is precisely what makes it true that (7)?

Furthermore, even not accepting this objection, one could simply ask: when I believe that Sherlock Holmes does not exist, following the kind-based version of (ab), do I have a true belief or a false one? It seems that I have a true belief. Thus, for example, I truly believe that Sherlock Holmes does not exist iff I believe that Sherlock Holmes exists *and* is a man within some fictional context *and*, outside that context, Sherlock Holmes exists and he is not a man and he is a fictional character. Yet, I do not have to believe that Sherlock Holmes is a man (or whatever else) within some fictional context in order to truly believe that Sherlock Holmes exists within that context. There are stories in which it is not possible to ascribe to fictional characters definite kind-properties, even if it is legitimate to claim that such characters exist within those contexts.

In order to deal with such a difficulty, one could reply: I believe that there is a disjunction

of kind-properties that might be attributed to that character within that context (e.g., the disjunction of the kind-properties of being human, of being a cat, and so on) and that no kind-property belonging to that disjunction is instantiated by it outside that context. Yet, not all the kind-properties would belong to that disjunction. For example, if the kind-property of being a fictional character belonged to that disjunction, our belief would turn out to be a false one. In fact, let me consider a fictional character that is also a fictional character within some fictional context. I truly believe that it is a fictional character within that context and it is fictional outside that context too. Thus, it is simply false that, outside that context, it does not instantiate that kind-property that I attribute to it within that context! Philosophers who accept the kind-based version of (ab) could reply that the property of being a fictional character is not a kind-property and that it is only sufficient that Sherlock Holmes does not instantiate any kind-property (outside some fictional context). However, in such a case, there would be existing objects (since Sherlock Holmes would exist) not instantiating any kind-property. The difference among existents and (seemingly) non-existents would be stated as follows: existents instantiate kind-properties (i.e., they belong to kinds), while (seemingly) non-existents do not instantiate them. Yet, is it true that (seemingly) non-existents do not instantiate any kind-property? A mirage that I see in the desert and Sherlock Holmes are both (seemingly) non-existents. They seem to have something in common: they are produced by human imagination. Thus, why is it not legitimate to claim that there is one further kind-property, the property of being imaginary objects, that they both instantiate? Those philosophers might in turn reply that the kind of imaginary objects is not a natural kind. Yet, if whatever exists is part of nature, imaginary objects belong to nature too. On the other hand, if nature only comprehended physical objects, they would still have to explain why there are *only* natural kinds. Furthermore, let me reconsider the aforementioned fictional object that is fictional within some fictional context too. If such philosophers conceded that there is a kind such as the kind of imaginary objects, they would have to add that no concreteness-entailing kind is instantiated by our fictional object outside the fictional context. This will lead them back to my first objection against (ab).

I shall consider (b), (c) and (d) in brief. In fact, if, according to (b), existence is only an informative, non-first-order property, what does objects' existence amount to? One could accept an ontology based only on properties. However, I have already tried to argue that such an ontology has to deal with heavy troubles. The same troubles seem to arise with regard to (c). The difference among (b) and (c), in fact, does not consist in their relationship to objects' (supposed) existence, but in properties' existence: according to (b), not all the properties exist, while, according to (c), all the properties exist. However, they both imply that objects do not instantiate

existence, while properties instantiate it. Furthermore, properties' existence seems to be different from objects' (supposed) existence (or from whatever makes it true that (7)). Finally, (d) is quite mysterious: if existence is not a property at all, what is it? It could be what is expressed by an ontologically committed existential quantifier. Yet, *what* is expressed by that quantifier?

Theses (e) and (f) seem to be grounded on a good intuition: if objects exist, why cannot we claim that properties exist too? Are not properties part of reality? If both objects and properties exist, existence is a multi-level property: it is a first-order property with regard to objects, but it is a second-order property with regard to first-order properties, a third-order property with regard to second-order properties, and so on. According to (e), there are objects and/or properties that do not exist, i.e., that do not instantiate existence, while, according to (f), there are neither objects, nor properties that do not exist: every object and every property instantiates existence. Furthermore, it is consistent with (e) that:

(ea) existence is a multi-level property, that is informative with regard to objects and non-informative with regard to properties;

(eb) existence is a multi-level property, that is non-informative with regard to objects and informative with regard to properties;

(ec) existence is a multi-level property, that is informative both with regard to objects and properties.

Concerning (ea), every property that has identity conditions (i.e., every property) exists, while, considering (eb) and (ec), there are properties that have identity conditions and that, nevertheless, do not exist. As we have already noticed in the previous chapter, in order for something to be a property, among other, it has to be instantiated by some object (or some property) or to be thought of as being instantiated by some object (or some property). Thus, with regard to (ea), a property exists iff it is a property, i.e. it is instantiated by some object (or some other property) or it is thought of as being instantiated by some object (or some property). Yet, this hypothesis is quite strange: in order for some object to exist, it has to instantiate the first-order property of existing, while, in order for some property to exist, it only has to be a property. Why do we have to accept such an asymmetry?

On the other hand, by (eb) and (ec), it is necessary to provide some criterion for properties' existence. One could claim, for example, that a certain property exists iff it is instantiated by some existent object. Yet, since, according to (eb), every object exists, there are properties such as the property of being a fictional object that exist too! On the other hand, if we accept that the property of being a unicorn is not instantiated by any object, but it is only

thought of as being instantiated by some object, that property does not exist. According to (ec), there are objects that do not exist. Thus, the property of being a fictional object does not exist, since it is not instantiated by any existent object.

It might be objected against such an account that, in order for some property to exist, it is not sufficient that it is instantiated by some existent object: it should be a natural property, i.e. a property that grounds objective similarities, that confer causal powers to objects and that is fundamental. However, my account is as tolerant as possible. First, it is obvious that, in order for a natural property to be instantiated, it must be instantiated by some existing object (provided that, in order for an object to exist, it must be thus-and-thus, e.g., it must be physical, for physicalists, or material, for materialists, and so on). Secondly, I wish to be neutral with regard to *what* properties exist, since I am inclined to accept an abundant conception of properties. However, if existence is only a first-order, informative property, then it seems that it is also a natural one: it grounds objective similarities between existing objects (and those similarities could be explained by appealing to dispositions to act, as we will see), it is connected, within my account, to the possession of causal powers, it is fundamental, as long as it cannot be reduced to other properties within non-foundational accounts of existence (see below).

Furthermore, one might add that second-order properties exist iff they are instantiated by first-order existing properties, that third-order properties exist iff they are instantiated by second-order existing properties, and so on. Provided that such a criterion is acceptable, both (eb) and (ec) imply that existence itself exists and that it is a multi-level property with regard to itself. It exists, since existence itself exists iff it is instantiated by existing objects, which obviously instantiate existence. It is a multi-level property with regard to itself, since every first-order existent property has the property of existing and therefore existence turns out to be a second-order property too. Thus, existence is instantiated by entities at various levels and it instantiates itself too. I shall accept such consequences for the sake of the argument.

The problem with such an account does not lie in its being contradictory, but in some strange consequences implied by it. Except for some trivial properties (the property of being a property and the negative property of not being an object) and for the property of being informative (with regard to properties and, considering (ec), with regard to objects too), existence turns out to be connected to opposite features. For example: if every existing object (and no non-existent object) has some feature F (e.g., the property of being spatio-temporal, or the property of having causal powers), it is not guaranteed that properties, by existing, have F. In fact, if every existing object (and no non-existent object) has some definite spatio-temporal location, this seems not to be true for existing properties (i.e., for properties that are instantiated by

existing objects). Furthermore, considering another example, it could be redundant to ascribe the same features both to properties and objects: if only existing objects have causal powers, why do we have to claim that their properties, in virtue of existing, have causal powers too? Thus, existence would be connected to some features with regard to objects and not connected to the same features with regard to properties (both existing and non-existing properties would not have those features). Theorists could accept such a fact, but they should try to demonstrate that the possession of such features is not connected to the instantiation of the property of existing, but to something else (for example, by the fact that every property is such-and-such, whereas every object is so-and-so).

In addition, it would be unclear whether properties' existence is grounded on objects' existence or objects' existence is grounded on properties' existence. The existence of the property of being human seems to be grounded on the fact that some existing object (e.g., Obama) instantiates that property. Yet, on this account, Obama's existence seems to be grounded on the fact that he instantiates some existing property, such as the property of being human. Finally, considering every item (i.e., both objects and properties, regardless of their ontological status), that entity exists iff it instantiates existence. Yet, if what we have already noticed with regard to properties is true, for every entity, that entity exists iff it instantiates existence (with regard to object's existence) *or* it is instantiated by an existing object (with regard to first-order properties) *or* it is instantiated by an existing property (with regard to upper-order properties). This seems to imply that existence is equivalent to a mere disjunction of properties or to a disjunctive property *and* that the attribution of existence is not grounded on any real commonality between existents. Thus, items' informative existence (that seems to be a mere disjunction of properties or a mere disjunctive property) seems to be different from objects' existence, since this latter existence seems to be grounded on some real commonality between existents (see more below). In general, I think that we should not accept that existence does not imply any commonality, unless we can clearly demonstrate that there is no unique feature (besides existence itself) that all and only existents have.

One could reply: both existing objects and existing properties share one feature, i.e., they are both part of reality. However, if we claim that they are both part of reality, we only claim that they exist. Thus, in this latter case, the question concerning what is for something to exist would have no informative answer: in order for something to exist, it must only... exist! On the one hand, we should try to settle what is for something to exist without simply concluding that the instantiation of existence is only equivalent to the instantiation of a mere disjunction of properties (i.e., of a disjunction of properties that do not share any commonality). On the other

hand, we should try not simply to conclude that there is nothing to explain about existence, i.e., that, in order for something to exist, it must only and simply exist. In sum, we should accept such solutions as conclusive only if there were no other valid solution concerning the nature of existence.

Thesis (f) is perhaps the most coherent one with (actualism). In fact, according to (f), existence is a multi-level, non-informative property. Provided that we accept into our ontology both objects and properties, every object exists and every property exists, i.e., there are neither non-existing objects, nor non-existing properties. Thus, in order for some entity to exist, it must only be an entity, i.e., it must only be a property or (*aut*) an object. The instantiation of existence turns out to be equivalent to the instantiation of some trivial properties, such as the properties of being self-identical (since every object and every property is self-identical), of being different from any other entity, of being an entity, of being an item, of being an object or (*aut*) a property, and so on. Existence would add nothing to objects *qua* objects and to properties *qua* properties. For objects, the instantiation of existence would turn out to be the instantiation of the property of being an object, while, for properties, it would turn out to be the instantiation of the property of being a property. Furthermore, existence would itself exist, i.e., it would instantiate itself. Finally, it would be a multi-level property, provided that there are second-order properties, third-order ones, and so on, and that they would exist just in virtue of their being properties. Such an account has the features of primitive and/or merely disjunctive conceptions of existence. Furthermore, it implies the acceptance of (actualism). Yet, we have no valid reason neither for accepting (actualism), nor for claiming that primitive and/or merely disjunctive conceptions of existence represent the "last word" on the nature of existence.

Furthermore, it seems that existence in (f) is different from whatever property is involved in the truth conditions of (7). In order to argue for such a conclusion, let me first reconsider the solution based on haecceities: it is true that (7) iff it is true that some property (the property of being identical with Obama) has the property of being an instantiated haecceity. In fact, we can claim that, if some property (i.e., that property of being identical with Obama) is a haecceity and it is instantiated, it has the property of being an instantiated haecceity too. Furthermore, concerning the Russellian solution, it is true that (7) iff it is true that some conjunctive property (or some conjunction of properties) is an instantiated conjunctive property (or an instantiated conjunction of properties). Thus, we could obtain the following properties as involved in the truth conditions of (7):

(i) the property of being a referring grammatical proper name;

(ii) the property of being a referring logical proper name;

(iii) the property of being an instantiated conjunctive property (or an instantiated conjunction of properties);

(iv) the property of being an instantiated haecceity;

(v) the first-order property of instantiating some existence-entailing property or some natural kind;

(vi) the first-order property of being a *x*-ish world (e.g., a Obamish world);

(vii) the first-order properties of being real or of being spatio-temporal or of having causal powers,

and so on. We should add that such properties are instantiated by different items (by names, by other properties, by objects, etc.) in order to construct the truth-conditions of the proposition expressed by (7). Thus, for example, concerning haecceities, it is true that (7) since the property of being identical with Obama instantiates (iv), i.e., it is an instantiated haecceity.

Secondly, we can claim that one necessary condition for two properties E_1 and E_2 to be identical is that they are instantiated by the same properties and by the same objects. Thus, it is a sufficient condition for E_1 and E_2 to be different that they are instantiated by different objects or (*vel*) by different properties.

In each case, it is easy to demonstrate that properties (i)-(vii) are not identical to the non-informative, multi-level existence accepted by (f). Not every grammatical proper name, while existing, has the property of being a grammatical referring proper name, nor any name has the property of being a referring logical proper name. Not every property is an instantiated conjunctive property, nor is any conjunction of properties an instantiated one or any property an instantiated haecceity. Finally, not every object, even if existing (according to (f)), has the first-order properties of instantiating some existence-entailing property or some natural kind, or of being a *x*-ish world (since not every object is a world), nor of being real or of being spatio-temporal or of having causal powers (at least if we do not argue that there are/exist no objects that do not have such properties). In sum, what seems to be requested by the truth of (7) is an informative property, while existence, according to (f), is a non-informative property. Thus, the property that is involved in the truth-conditions of the proposition expressed by (7) is not identical with the property of existing that is described by (f).

In reply to this argument, one might add that there are different conditions for properties' and objects' existence and that we have only considered objects' existence. Thus, it might be possible to provide a disjunctive property, involving both objects' existence conditions (i.e.,

properties such as (i)-(vii)) and properties' existence conditions. However, this would not be sufficient to claim that (f)'s existence is identical with such a disjunctive property. Furthermore, this reply seems to imply that existence is, by itself, only equivalent to a merely disjunctive property. Is my argument question-begging, since it assumes that statements such as (7) are informative? No, it is not, at least if those who accept (f) recognize that there is one further task to perform, i.e., the task of providing adequate truth-conditions for the seemingly true propositions expressed by (7) and (8) or, in other term, the task of explaining our commonsensical intuition that not everything exists (i.e., that there are true statements such as (8)). Such theorists cannot simply deny that there are true negative existential statements (at least singular ones): they should at least explain why it is the case that we take some of such statements as true.

In sum, if we do not have any valid reason for accepting (actualism) (and it seems that we do not have any such reason) and if we aim at obtaining a non-merely-disjunctive and non-primitive account of the nature of existence, it seems reasonable to accept that existence is *only* an informative, first-order property[306].

II.2.2. It's All in your Head!

Sherlock Holmes is a non-existent object, i.e., he does not instantiate the first-order, informative property of existing. Yet, he is an object. What kind of object? In my perspective, Sherlock Holmes is a mental object, i.e. an object that depends for its identity conditions (for its being an object) on the activity of some mind. In order to argue for such a thesis, let me consider Sherlock Holmes' story in the actual world. Sherlock Holmes was invented by Arthur Conan Doyle: if Arthur Conan Doyle had not written Sherlock Holmes' stories, we would not have known any object such as Sherlock Holmes. This does not imply that Sherlock Holmes could not have had any other author. Yet, it is true that Conan Doyle is Sherlock Holmes' author. Without Arthur Conan Doyle's mental activity, we would not have known that Sherlock Holmes is a detective who lives in London and who has a friend named Watson. We would not have known that Sherlock Holmes is different from Anna Karenina and from Watson and from Emma Bovary, since there would not have been such a fictional character, i.e., Sherlock Holmes would not have had any identity condition making it different from any other non-existent object and from any existent one. Yet, do we have to think that Sherlock Holmes is an object, regardless of his author's mental activity? Perhaps, because he continues to be an object even if Conan Doyle is

[306] Crane (2011), (2012), (2013) believes that it is legitimate to quantify over non-existent objects, so that our use of quantifiers does not reveal our ontological commitments. I agree with him, even though I do not think that the domain of quantifiers only comprehends objects of thought (as Crane does), but it comprehends objects that have identity conditions.

now dead and because he might have had another author, i.e., he might have been invented by someone else's mental activity. I shall deal with such problems in the fourth chapter of this part. However, excluding temporal and modal discourse about fictional objects, it seems fair enough to claim that fictional objects such as Sherlock Holmes are mental objects. Furthermore, in the next chapter, I shall investigate Sherlock Holmes' and other fictional objects' identity conditions *qua* mental objects and their ways of instantiating properties such as the property of being a detective, of being a man, and so on. Moreover, I do not agree with the Meinongian perspective, according to which Sherlock Holmes is an object regardless of any mental activity, *at least* since he has some ontic properties (and he always has them) even before his invention by some author. I shall address an objection to the Meinongian account in the conclusions of this work.

However, in my perspective, authors do not properly create fictional objects, i.e., they do not make them existents. In fact, in such a case, these objects would be both existent and non-existent, thus having those problems concerning existence that I have already investigated. Minded objects (such as authors) simply establish their identity conditions, i.e., they simply make them entities and, more specifically, objects (since fictional objects are objects). Given the truth of such premises, it is easy to argue that Sherlock Holmes is a mental object:

(arg.IV.1) for every object, that object is a mental object iff it depends for its being an entity (and, more specifically, an object) on some minded object(s);

(arg. IV.2) Sherlock Holmes depends for his being an entity (and, more specifically, an object) on some minded object;

(arg.IV.3) thus, Sherlock Holmes is a mental object.

Provided that it is true that Sherlock Holmes is an object and that he does not exist, there are objects that do not exist, *contra* (actualism). Yet, someone could claim that not every mental object is a non-existent: for example, I could think of my girlfriend, and she would not become a non-existent because of my thinking of her! However, in order for something to be a mental object, it is not sufficient that it is thought of as being such-and-such by some minded object. It must be defined in its identity conditions by some minded object and my girlfriend is (luckily) not defined in her identity conditions by my thinking of her. If you wish, we can claim that something is a *weakly* mental object iff it is thought of as being such-and-such by some minded object and that something is a *strongly* mental object iff it is defined in its identity conditions by (i.e., it depends on its being an object on) some minded object. *Weakly* mental objects exist or do not exist, while *strongly* mental objects do not exist. Sherlock Holmes and other fictional characters are *strongly* mental objects and they do not exist.

Finally, it seems quite evident that minded objects, in order to define the objecthood of mental objects, must exist. Considering a fiction within a fiction, it might be true that there is someone, within the fiction, who defines some fictional object, that turns out to be fictional within the fiction too. However, both characters (the one that seems to exist within the fiction and the one that is fictional within the fiction) depend on their non-fictional author in order to be objects. It might well be argued that reality is a fiction, that is thought of by some minded object (by God?). However, God would thus be non-fictional, i.e., He would be existent. If He were fictional, He would depend for His being an object on some other minded subject (a Super-God), and so on, *ad infinitum*. If we wish to stop such a regress, we can claim that, at the end of the process, there is some existing minded object that defines the objecthood of every fictional object.

However, even if it seems to me legitimate to conclude that fictional objects are mental objects, many problems are still open: how do they instantiate properties that seem to be existence-entailing? What are their identity conditions *qua* mental objects? How is their ontological status *qua* mental objects related to time and modality? For example, concerning this latter question, we could ask: is Sherlock Holmes *now* an object, even if no one is *now* thinking of him? Could have Sherlock Holmes had another author? Could have he been existent? Some answers will come after having dealt with problems of time and contingency in the fourth chapter of this part.

II.2.3. The Power(s) of Existing.

My aim in this section is to provide an account of existence in terms of the possession of causal powers. However, before explaining and trying to justify such an account, I need to deal with two questions: what are the features of an adequate account of existence? Why are other accounts (e.g., the ones based on the notions of spatio-temporal extension or of completeness) not valid or, at least, partial?

Concerning the first question, I need to clarify that I do not wish to identify the first-order, informative property of existing with other properties. Furthermore, I do not wish to defend the thesis according to which something exists *in virtue* of the fact that it is thus-and-thus (i.e., that it has some properties, such as the properties of being spatio-temporally extended and/or of being complete and/or of having causal powers). Such accounts of existence, that I shall call "foundational accounts of existence", immediately have to face one strong objection: they seem to be circular. In fact, it might be equally legitimate to claim, for example, that every object that has causal powers has such powers *in virtue* of the fact that it exists. How might we break this circle? What comes first? How can we decide whether existence or the possession of

causal powers comes first? I do not know. Yet, I think that such a difficulty makes foundational accounts of existence highly suspicious.

Thus, I shall use a different approach. Provided that there are objects that exist and objects that do not exist, I shall simply claim that all and only existing objects instantiate the first-order, informative property of existing E. Nevertheless, all and only existing objects have some property different from E, that I shall call M_{ARK}. This property is a "mark" of existence. Even if it might not be true that existing objects exist *in virtue* of instantiating M_{ARK} (while it might be true that they instantiate M_{ARK} *in virtue* of existing), it seems to me legitimate to accept that such a logical equivalence is true:

(existence) it is necessary that, for every object, it exists (i.e., it instantiates E) iff it instantiates M_{ARK}.

The modal context introduced by "it is necessary that" is obviously justified by the fact that we are not looking for an accidental generalization about the nature of existence. We are interested in finding out what is, in every metaphysically possible world (if we interpret modality in possible worlds' terms), for an object to exist (i.e., what is the "mark" of existing in every metaphysically possible world). Furthermore, our account should be non-relational. A relational account of existence works as follows:

(existence-rel.) it is necessary that, for every object, it exists iff there is some object with whom the former object has some relation R.

In order to avoid complications, I shall call the first object "$object_1$" and the second object with whom $object_1$ has some relation R "$object_2$". Does $object_2$ have to be different from $object_1$ or not? Does $object_2$ have to exist or not? There are four possibilities:

(rel-a) it is necessary that $object_2$ is different from $object_1$ and that it exists;

(rel-b) it is necessary that $object_2$ is different from $object_1$ and it is not necessary that it exists;

(rel-c) it is not necessary that $object_2$ is different from $object_1$ and it is necessary that it exists;

(rel-d) it is not necessary that $object_2$ is different from $object_1$ and it is not necessary that it exists.

I shall consider one intuitively plausible relational account of existence: the one based on being part of reality. Thus, I shall assume that reality is $object_2$ and that the considered relation is the relation of being part of. According to this account, it is necessary that, for every object, it exists iff it is part of reality. I shall set aside further questions, such as: does reality only comprehend the actual world (so that it is necessary that only actual objects exist) or every

possible world (so that it is necessary that every object in every possible world exists)? I only aim at showing the structural problems of relational accounts. If it is true that (rel-a), then it is necessary that reality is different from $object_1$ and that it exists while, according to (rel-b), it is still necessary that it differs from $object_1$, but it is not necessary that it exists, i.e., it is possible that reality itself does not exist. On the other hand, according to (rel-c), it is not necessary that reality differs from $object_1$, but it is necessary that it exists, while, according to (rel-d), it is not necessary that reality is different from $object_1$ and it is not necessary that it exists.

If it is true that (rel-a), then it is necessary that reality exists and it is necessary that it is different from itself in order to exist (since it is also necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff it is part of reality, given (existence-rel.)). Otherwise, it cannot be among those objects that exist. If it is true that (rel-b), then it is possible that reality itself does not exist. Yet, in this case, reality exists iff it is necessary that it is different from itself *and* it is possible that it does not exist *and* it is part of itself. Yet, it is obviously not necessary that reality is different from itself. Thus, reality itself does not exist – and the same happens with any other $object_2$! It is quite implausible that reality itself does not exist. However, in order not to focus on the example of reality, it seems to me that, if no $object_2$ necessarily exist, why do we have to choose certain possibly non-existing $objects_2$ and not others, in order to make sense of (rel-b)? On the other hand, if there were no such criterion for choosing among $objects_2$, then every possibly non-existing object would turn out to be suitable and many non-existent objects would then turn out to exist: Sherlock Holmes, for example, would exist in virtue of being part of some possibly non-existing object, i.e., of some fictional context.

Concerning (rel-c), it implies that reality itself exists iff, among other, it is necessary that it exists. Yet, this account is circular, since it assumes that reality itself exists.

Finally, dealing with (rel-d), many non-necessarily existing object would turn out to be suitable for the role played by $object_2$. Why reality? In sum, if we accepted (rel-d), we would have to deal with some weaker version of the problem already met with (rel-b).

I have considered this example of relational account in order to concede as much as possible to those who accept relational accounts. In fact, it makes it possible to think of the same relation (the relation of being part of) as explaining both $object_2$'s (reality) and other objects' existence. Corresponding non-modal versions fare no better. In fact, they still have to determine whether reality exists or not and whether such accounts only work with objects different from reality or with reality too.

Thus, my account of existence will provide a mark for existence and will be non-relational and modal. This seems to exclude many accounts of existence. It obviously excludes

relational accounts and accounts that seem to be non-relational, but that are covertly relational[307]. For example, every account of existence in terms of objects' being spatio-temporal or temporal is covertly relational. According to such accounts

(ex.spatio-temporal) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff it is spatio-temporal;

(ex.temporal) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff it is temporal.

Yet, it is necessary that, for every object, that object is a spatio-temporal (or a temporal) object iff there is some spatio-temporal (or some temporal) region such that that object occupies that region. Namely, it is true that

(ex.spatio-temporal') it is necessary that, for every $object_1$, that object exists iff there is some $object_2$, such that that $object_2$ is a spatio-temporal region and $object_1$ occupies $object_2$;

(ex.temporal') it is necessary that, for every $object_1$, that object exists iff there is some $object_2$, such that that $object_2$ is a temporal region and $object_1$ occupies $object_2$.

One brief remark: the objectual quantifier in the right-hand of these logical equivalences cannot be within the scope of any possibility operator. In fact, in such a case, there would exist objects for which it would be *only* possible that there is a spatio-temporal (or a temporal) region such that... etc. Merely possible objects would thus turn out to exist. It is easy to show that, with regard to the status of that $object_2$, we will have all the aforementioned problems of every relational accounts. Furthermore, if we do not accept a substantivist conception of space-time or of time, spatio-temporal and temporal regions' existence seem to depend on existing objects' relations and, in turn, on objects' existence. There are many problems connected with spatio-temporal and temporal accounts, but I think that the most serious one lie in their being relational accounts.

One of the most interesting (truly) non-relational accounts of existence can be given in terms of completeness:

(ex.completeness) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff it is complete,

namely

(ex.completeness') it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff, for every property, that object has that property *or* it does not have it.

Since properties do not exist and *cannot* exist (at least in my perspective), such an account

[307] For a detailed investigation of accounts of existence, see Routley (1980): 697-768.

can be considered non-relational. Furthermore, our choice of properties is not arbitrary (as it happens with regard to supposedly non-existent objects involved in some relational accounts): we do not have to choose *certain* properties, since we only claim that existent objects are all and only those objects for which it is true that, for every property, they instantiate it or do not instantiate it. Yet, this account has to deal with notorious objections. First, if non-existent objects are objects for which it is not true that, for every property, they instantiate it or they do not instantiate it, then the law of bivalence (according to which every proposition exactly has one truth-value, either truth or falsehood) and the law of excluded middle (according to which, for every proposition [p], either [p] or [not-p]) do not work for every proposition concerning objects. In fact, for some property not explicitly ascribed to him within his stories, it is neither true nor false that Sherlock Holmes instantiates that property (in fact, he is a non-existent object). One might reply that Sherlock Holmes does not have any property not explicitly ascribed to him within his stories, i.e., that it is false that he instantiates properties that are not ascribed to him within his stories. However, in such a case, Sherlock Holmes would turn out to be complete, so that he would exist!

Secondly, there are also (seemingly) existent objects (such as forests) that are not complete. Let me consider some forest and some tree that is at the edge of the forest, such that it is really difficult to decide whether that tree is part of that forest or not. Since the forest exists and since it is necessary that the forest exists iff it is complete, there follows that the forest bears or does not bear with the tree the relation of having it as a part. Yet, it is not determined whether it bears such a relation with the tree or not. Thus, the forest both exists and does not exist. In order to preserve (ex.completeness'), one could argue that the forest does not exist or that it is determined whether it bears or does not bear with the tree such a relation or that (ex.completeness') works only with monadic properties. However, it seems to me that each solution is problematic. I do not want to set aside solutions grounded on completeness. In the next chapter, I shall provide an account for non-existent objects' (supposed) non-completeness.

My favorite account of existence is the one based on the possession of causal powers:

(ex.causal powers) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff it has some causal power.

This account is partly inspired by Geach, but I do not accept his disjunctive account of actuality-sense of existence, according to which, for every object, that object exists (is actual) iff it either acts, or undergoes change, or both[308]. In fact, first, even non-existent objects *qua* mental objects undergo change: for example, Sherlock Holmes somehow changes when he is thought of

[308] See Geach (1968): 7.

as an expert of martial arts within some works; he undergoes change (some kind of substantial change, even if he does not properly start to exist) when he is constituted as an object. In such cases, how might we individuate appropriate and non-appropriate changes in order to defend Geach's account? Secondly, as we will see, it is not sufficient to claim that existent objects act. There might exist objects that never act. Furthermore, this solution is inspired by S. Alexander's well-known dictum (to be real is to have causal powers) and seems to be accepted, among others, by F. Berto[309].

Before trying to provide an account for objects' possessing causal powers, it is necessary to make some remarks. First, I do not obviously wish to argue that, necessarily, objects exists iff they act. A similar solution would be inconsistent with the hypothesis of there being possible worlds in which objects do not produce any action. For example, a possible world in which there exist only two balls that are millions of kilometers far from one another is a world in which those two balls do not act, i.e., according to such a hypothesis, they do not exist. The atoms that constitute each ball act on one another, so that they exist, but the balls do not exist, because they do not act on their atoms and they do not act on one another.

Secondly, it is important to remark that the possession of causal powers by existing objects does not entail that such objects only act on existing objects. In such a case, (ex.causal powers) would turn out to be relational. On the other hand, if Conan Doyle (an existing object) constitutes Sherlock Holmes (a fictional object, i.e., a mental one) as an object, it seems that Conan Doyle has the causal power of constituting Sherlock Holmes as an object: he can produce something.

Thirdly, it is not necessary that the possession of causal powers is relative to times. Namely, it is not necessary that I can produce something iff I can produce it at some time or another. If God exists and if He aims at creating the actual world, He does not have the power of producing it at some time or another, since time (if it exists) and times (if they exist) are created with the (actual) world. One might reply to this objection in different ways. For example, one could claim that, assuming our account, it simply turns out that God does not exist, since He cannot have any causal power before the (supposed) existence of time and times. Yet, this reply already assumes that the possession of causal powers entails the existence of time and times. Furthermore, I have only introduced the possibility of God's existence, i.e., I have only claimed that it is metaphysically (and logically) possible that God exists and that, in a metaphysically (and logically) possible world in which God exists, God can create the (natural) world, even without having the power of creating it at some time or another. Thus, it is not true that it is

[309] See, for example, Berto (2013a): 61-84.

metaphysically necessary that God exists iff He has some causal power at some time or another. On the other hand, our ideal sparring partner could claim that, even if it is logically possible that God exists, it is not metaphysically possible that He exists and, since we are interested in metaphysical possibility, we cannot "use" God's logically possible existence in order to refute that it is metaphysically necessary that, for every object, it exists iff it has some causal power at some time or another. However, s/he might provide some reasons for such a strong claim about the metaphysical impossibility of God's existence.

Yet, there is a second reply that it is worth considering: God has somehow the power of creating the natural world at one definite non-created time, i.e., the time before the existence of other times (i.e., of created times). This "first" and somehow eternal time is different from any other time, so that it has identity conditions. However, such a time would not be an existent time. If it existed, it would be different from God or identical with it. If it were different from God, then there would exist two different objects before the existence of the natural world. Yet, what reasons do we have for thinking that, before the existence of the natural world, there exist two different objects, i.e., God and that eternal time? That time's existence would depend on God's existence or not. Furthermore, God's existence would depend on that time's existence or not. Yet, if it is metaphysically possible that God exists, it is also metaphysically possible that God is an existentially independent being, while any other existing object different from God existentially depends on God (this seems to be implied by the metaphysical possibility of God's existence). Thus, if it is metaphysically possible that God exists, it is metaphysically possible that God exists and that no eternal time exists. Thus, it is metaphysically possible that God exists and that He has the power of creating the natural world, even if He does not have the power of creating the natural world at that eternal time. On the other hand, if that time were identical with God, it would not properly be one time as other created times, but it would be God himself. Thus, I think that there are good reasons for thinking that that eternal time does not exist. Yet, if it does not exist and if what I have claimed about relational accounts of existence is true, why do we have to assume that God's power of creating the natural world is relative to some time or another?

Fourthly, one could claim that each causal power is relative to something. For example, it is metaphysically possible that God has the power of creating the natural world, so that God's causal power is relative to the natural world, which does not exist before its creation by God. Thus, God exists iff, among other conditions, there is some non-existent object that is thus-and-thus. However, this does not imply that there must be *a certain* object with regard to which God has that power. Perhaps, every causal power is relative to something: for example, I can think iff

there is some thought, such that I can think of it. This does not imply that there is *a certain thought*, such that I can think iff I can think of that thought. Furthermore, this account of existence in terms of the possession of causal powers is not restricted to *certain* causal powers, which are such that there are some objects with regard to whom I have those powers. Thus, it is not a relational account, since it does neither imply that I exist iff there is a *certain* object with regard to whom I have a *certain* causal power, nor that I exist iff there is some object with regard to whom I have a *certain* causal power. Finally, following (existence-rel-b) and (existence-rel-d), some objects with regard to whom I have some causal powers might be necessarily non-existents ones.

Fifthly, it might be argued that even causal powers are objects, so that this account is relational, because it is relative to causal powers. However, I have already claimed that no possession of *certain* causal powers is involved in objects' existence. Furthermore, if we think of causal powers as dispositions to act, they are only properties, that are instantiated by existing objects and only by them. For example, I have the disposition to constitute some fictional object, even if (provided that I do not actually think of fictional objects) there is no particular fictional object such that I actually constitute it. It is true that there might be such an object but, in fact, there is no such object. Nevertheless, I have that causal power.

It is now possible to give two different readings of (ex.causal powers), according to two different notions of having causal powers:

(ex.causal powers-1) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff it is possible that there is some other object (regardless of its being identical with or different from the first object), such that the first object acts on it;

(ex.causal powers-2) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff there is some property, such that that property is a disposition to act and that object instantiates that property.

These readings are equivalent, since

(dispositions to act) it is necessary that, for every object, that object instantiates some disposition to act iff it is possible that there is some other object (regardless of its being identical with or different from the first object), such that the first object acts on it[310].

However, it is necessary to develop such theses in order to get rid of two problems: the (supposed) possession of causal powers by non-existent objects and the problem of the existence of too many objects that instantiate the same causal power(s) (e.g., both an ordinary object and a

[310] This reading of dispositions to act concedes as much as possible to conditional analyses of dispositions, even though it admits that the second object could be a non-existing one.

fact could instantiate the same causal power, so that they would both turn out to exist).

With regard to the first problem, I shall consider the following case against my thesis[311]. Let me imagine that there is a castle in Scotland where (many people believe that) there is one and only one ghost. This ghost is different from any other ghost: it is different from ghosts in any other Scottish castle and it is different from ghosts that are supposed to "live" in any other castle around the world. In sum, it is exactly one ghost. Since ghosts do not exist (even if many people think otherwise), it seems legitimate to claim that our unique Scottish ghost is a fictional object, i.e. a mental one. Let me suppose that Franz, a friend of mine, visits that castle and that he believes that that unique Scottish ghost lives there (even if this is, in fact, a false belief). Nothing really happens in the castle. Yet, Franz fears the ghost. Thus, it seems that the ghost, even if it does not exist, has the power of causing fear in Franz. The argument against my thesis assumes these premises:

(ghost-1) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff there is some property, such that that property is a disposition to act and that object instantiates that property;

(ghost-2) our unique Scottish ghost does not exist;

(ghost-3) Franz fears our unique Scottish ghost;

(ghost-4) if Franz fears our unique Scottish ghost, then our unique Scottish ghost instantiates the disposition to produce fear (i.e., a disposition to act),

and it concludes that

(ghost-5) our unique Scottish ghosts both exists and does not exist.

It is possible to reply to this argument in different ways. Actualists could argue that (ghost-2) is false, since the ghost exists or it is not an object, so that it does not instantiate any property. However, we have already seen that there are valid reasons for assuming that our unique Scottish ghost is an object: it is different from any other object and, when people believe that it has some properties, they believe that exactly *that* ghost has those properties. On the other hand, it might be suggested against (ghost-3) that Franz does not fear that unique ghost, but something else (perhaps, an existing thing): a strange and unexpected noise, for example, or the thought that that ghost is really evil. Yet, Franz might answer: no, Sir, everything is calm here, and I do not fear that thought, I fear *the* ghost! Furthermore, it might be argued that the disposition to produce fear is not a disposition to act and that, perhaps, it is not a disposition at all, so that

[311] This case seems to be nothing more than a case of the so-called "paradox of fiction". For an introductory survey of this paradox, see, for example, Schneider (2009).

(ghost-4) is false. Yet, it truly seems to be a disposition to act. If there were an evil person in the castle and if Franz knew that that person is evil, that person would have the disposition to produce fear. Thus, it might seem legitimate to conclude that (ghost-1), i.e., our thesis (ex.causal powers-2), is false, and that (ex.causal powers-1) is false too, since it is possible that there is an object (i.e., Franz) such that the ghost acts on that object, even if the ghost does not exist: in fact, Franz is our unlucky object.

Yet, why do we have to admit such conclusion? In fact, there is another solution for our case. We might admit that some existent object produces Franz's fear. For example, the thought of that ghost's existence and of that ghost's being evil, provided that those thoughts exist. In such a case, it might be legitimate to argue that, even if Franz believes that the ghost produces his fear, he has a false belief, since the (existing) thought of that ghost's existing and of that ghost's being evil produces that fear. However, Franz truly has the false belief that our Scottish ghost produces his fear and that that ghost (i.e., a mental object that is thought of by Franz) exists. Thus, if the ghost is a mental object, why cannot we claim that that object produces that fear, instead of Franz's thought? In other terms, it seems that both the ghost (with all the properties that are ascribed to it by Franz and other people) and Franz's thought of that ghost's existing and being evil are sufficient to produce Franz's fear.

This remark introduces our second problem. In fact, there might be objects that share one and the same disposition to act. For example, let me consider Conan Doyle's thinking of Sherlock Holmes. In order for Sherlock Holmes to be constituted as an object, it might be sufficient that there is a complex fact, such as the fact that Conan Doyle takes some properties (e.g., the properties of being a detective, of living in London, etc.) *and* that he thinks that those properties are instantiated by one and only one object (within some fictional context, I add, even if I shall justify this addition in the next chapter). Thus, if that complex fact is sufficient to constitute Sherlock Holmes as an object, so that it has the disposition to constitute Sherlock Holmes as an object (i.e., a disposition to act), then that fact exists. Now, if every disposition to act possessed by Conan Doyle is possessed by some complex fact too, both Conan Doyle and all the complex facts involving Conan Doyle exist. Yet, it seems that too many objects (facts are objects too, following my terminology) turn out to exist. Thus, this account is too ontologically rich. On the other hand, many philosophers think that facts or events (and *only* facts or events) have causal powers, since only facts (or events) might be causal relata. Thus, this account, if not too ontologically rich, might turn out to be too ontologically poor, since it would exclude the existence of objects such as Franz, Conan Doyle, and so on.

It is possible to deal with such problems following three suggestions. First, it is worth

noting that many objects share many dispositions to act. For example, both Conan Doyle and I have the disposition to constitute a fictional character as an object. Thus, considering a certain existing object, one might try to individuate some unique disposition to act that that object (and only that object) has:

(ex.causal powers-1a) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff it is possible that there is some other object (regardless of its being identical with or different from the first object), such that the first object acts in some unique way on it and there is no other object different from the first object, such that it possibly acts in that same way on the second object;

(ex.causal powers-2a) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff there is some property, such that that property is a disposition to act and that object instantiates that property and there is no other object different from that first object, such that it instantiates that property.

Yet, (ex.causal powers-1a) seems to be too complicated for the aims of this exposition, even if I accept it. Thus, I shall concentrate by now on the examination of (ex.causal powers-2). However, both solutions have to meet another difficulty: given the possible world that is occupied only by two perfectly similar balls, if those balls exist, they have the same dispositions to act or it is possible that they act in the same ways. Thus, following these solutions, they would turn out to be non-existents.

I here introduce the second and third suggestions. One could claim that there is no other object *of any different kind* that has that unique disposition to act and that, even if there is some other object of some different kind that has that unique disposition to act, this latter object *depends* on the first one for its identity conditions. This identity-dependence cannot be expressed in purely modal terms, since it is necessary that, for example, Sherlock Holmes has his own identity conditions iff there exists some thought of Sherlock Holmes' author's that is about Sherlock Holmes (provided that Sherlock Holmes is a mental object), but it is also necessary that that existing thought of Sherlock Holmes' author's that is about Sherlock Holmes has its own identity conditions iff there is an object such as Sherlock Holmes. However, it seems that, provided that Sherlock Holmes is a mental object, Sherlock Holmes depends for his identity conditions on his author's thoughts about him, while those thoughts do not depend for their identity conditions on Sherlock Holmes. In fact, such thoughts constitute Sherlock Holmes as an object, i.e., they provide identity conditions for Sherlock Holmes.

We can now formulate our thesis in order to deal with the aforementioned problems:

(ex.causal powers-2b) it is necessary that, for every object, that object exists iff there are some property and some kind, such that that object belongs to that kind and that property is a

disposition to act and that object instantiates that property and there is no other object such that it does not belong to the same kind of the first object and it does not depend on the first object for its identity conditions and it instantiates that disposition to act.

Put formally (using the variable "K" as ranging over kinds, the property constant "D" as expressing the second-order property of being a disposition to act and the property constant "I" as expressing the relation of depending for its identity conditions):

(ex.causal powers-2b) $\Box\forall x(Ex \leftrightarrow \exists P\exists K(Kx \,\&\, DP \,\&\, Px \,\&\, \sim\exists y(\sim Ky \,\&\, \sim Iyx \,\&\, Py))$

Since *x* and *y* belong to different kinds, they obviously are different objects. Kinds are properties that are different from dispositions to act: no disposition to act is a kind and no kind is a disposition to act.

Following (ex.causal powers-2b), it is easy to show that our problems disappear. Let me consider Franz himself, the thought that the Scottish ghost exists and is evil and Franz's thought that the Scottish ghost exists and is evil. These two latter thoughts depend on minded subjects: the thought that the Scottish ghost exists and is evil depends on some minded subject in order for its being a thought and for its being a thought about a Scottish ghost (i.e., about a non-existent, mental object that is constituted as an object by some minded subject); Franz's thought that the Scottish ghost exists and is evil depends, for its identity conditions, on Franz. Thus, if Franz himself has the disposition to cause his own fear, then neither the general thought, nor Franz's thought have that disposition. Yet, Franz has the disposition to cause his own fear by thinking that there is a unique Scottish ghost which exists and is evil, that entails his possession of the disposition to cause his own fear. Thus, Franz himself has such a disposition and, following (ex.causal powers-2b), there is no disposition to cause fear that some object different from Franz in its kind and independent of him for its identity conditions has. Thus, Franz's thought that the Scottish ghost exists and is evil does not have the disposition to cause Franz's fear. It seems reasonable to claim that such a thought does not exist. Furthermore, by analogy, the thought that the Scottish ghosts exists and is evil does not have any disposition to cause anyone's fear: as in Franz's case, there exists some minded subject that has the disposition to cause its own fear. Thus, in our argument, the premise (ghost-4) is false: Franz himself (an existing object) has the disposition to produce his own fear. With regard to complex facts, it seems that such facts depend for their identity conditions on objects such as Conan Doyle (and properties). Thus, they do not properly have Conan Doyle's dispositions to act. One could reply that, following this thesis, no fact turns out to exist. I am inclined to concede this point: I think that facts have some properties and that they are objects, but I think that it is not necessary to

admit that they exist. However, if they had dispositions to act as the ones introduced in (ex.causal powers-2b), they would turn out to exist.

It is worth remarking that my strategy is strongly anti-reductive and anti-eliminativist with regard to existing objects. For example, I exist since I have dispositions to act that are not borne by any constituent of mine (e.g., my atoms or the sum of my atoms)[312].

Existence makes a great difference: its possession is a necessary condition for the possession of any disposition to act by existing objects. Furthermore, it is legitimate to argue that there are kinds that confer dispositions to act and kinds that do not confer any disposition to act, i.e., existence-entailing kinds and non-existence entailing ones, and that this happens in virtue of identity-dependence.

Let me consider one final worry about kinds' existence. One could claim that, contrary to what I have concluded in the previous sections, kinds have the dispositions to confer dispositions to act to objects that instantiate them. For example, the kind-property of being human has the disposition to confer to all humans the disposition to think (provided that only human beings are able to think). Since there are such higher-order dispositions that do not depend for their identity conditions on other entities and are uniquely instantiated by kinds, it might be legitimate to claim that kinds exist too. However, such dispositions are not properly dispositions to act, at least given the following:

(dispositions to act) it is necessary that, for every object, that object instantiates some disposition to act iff it is possible that there is some other object (regardless of its being identical with or different from the first object), such that the first object acts on it.

Nevertheless, quantifying more generally over items (i.e., in my two-category ontology, over objects and properties), one could obtain that

(dispositions to act-1) it is necessary that, for every item, that item instantiates some disposition to act iff it is possible that there is some other item (regardless of its being identical with or different from the first object), such that the first item acts on it.

According to (dispositions to act-1), even kinds turn out to have dispositions to act, such as the disposition to confer the disposition to think (in the case of the property-kind of being human). In order to admit that there are properties that exist, we should change (ex.causal powers-2b) too, by quantifying over items. How can we restrict (dispositions to act-1), in order to imply that kinds do not exist? Let me notice, at first, that dispositions to act such as the

[312] This line of thought can be adopted in response to T. Merrick's eliminativist account of non-minded ordinary objects. See Merricks (2001).

disposition to confer the disposition to think are complex dispositions: they contain within themselves further dispositions. We could introduce one restricted kind of dispositions to act, i.e., dispositions to act that do not contain other dispositions within themselves, namely dispositions to act that are *not* dispositions to confer dispositions to act. Let me call them dispositions to act_A. Thus, it is possible to amend (dispositions to act-1) as follows:

(dispositions to act-2) it is necessary that, for every item, that item instantiates some disposition to act_A iff it is possible that there is some other item (regardless of its being identical with or different from the first entity), such that the first item acts on it and such that this action does not consist in conferring dispositions to act.

Finally, quantifying over items, we could amend (ex.causal powers-2b) as follows:

(ex.causal powers-2c) it is necessary that, for every item, that item exists iff there are some property and some kind, such that that item belongs to that kind and that property is a disposition to act_A and that item instantiates that property and there is no other item, such that it does not belong to the same kind of the first item and it does not depend on the first item for its identity conditions and it instantiates that disposition to act_A.

Thus, kinds do not exist, since they do not have any disposition to act_A.

II.2.4. What Kind and Degree of Existence do you have?

Our quantifiers are not ontologically committing: they range over whatever (objects and properties) has identity conditions. There is only one kind of quantifiers and existence is only a first-order, informative property that some objects (and not all the objects) have.

It is now worth asking whether there are several ways or kinds of being. K. McDaniel and J. Turner have defended a thesis named "ontological pluralism", according to which there are many ways or kinds of being, that are expressed by different restricted quantifiers[313]. For example, if we quantify over objects, we have to use a restricted quantifier that expresses the way of being an object, while, if we quantify over properties, we have to use a restricted quantifier that expresses the way of being a property, and so on. Every fundamental ontological category has its own restricted quantifier. On the other hand, unrestricted quantifiers are nothing more than mere disjunctions of restricted quantifiers: by using an unrestricted existential quantifier, we only claim that there is something that has the way of being a property, or an object, and so on, i.e., that there is an object or a property (or whatever else) that is such-and-such. Ways of beings are not properties of entities that fall under unrestricted quantifiers: they are simply and

[313] See McDaniel (2009), (2010a), (2010b), and Turner (2010).

primitively what is expressed by restricted quantifiers. Furthermore, according to McDaniel, ways of being are more natural than that "being in general" that is expressed by the unrestricted quantifier.

So far, so good. Yet, I think that items falling under unrestricted quantifiers have something in common: they have identity conditions. Thus, such quantifiers are not merely disjunctive: they express a real commonality among items. On the other hand, I do not see the advantages given by the postulation of many ways of being (or of existing, perhaps). First, why cannot we introduce properties that are instantiated by all the items over whom restricted quantifiers range? For example, we can introduce the properties of having the way of being an object, or a property (or the way of "being in" something, that is postulated by McDaniel in order to define the ontological status of accidents). Such properties are non-informative properties, at least with regard to certain domains of items (i.e., with regard to the different domains of restricted quantifiers). Secondly, if it is legitimate to introduce such properties, then their instantiation turns out to be equivalent to the instantiation of the properties of being an object, of being a property (or of being an accident). If they express something more than the instantiation of such properties, then one might had one further property, i.e., the property of having the way of being an object. Yet, this does define anything new in the world: why is it necessary to add that there is a way of being an object, in addition to the property of being an object? What commonality does this way of being express, in addition to the commonality that is already expressed by the property of being an object? I do not know. Thirdly, ontological pluralists have some problems when they try to determine (and to logically express) how many ways of being there are[314].

Thus, it seems to me that ways of being (or of existing) and restricted quantifiers are redundant. My account of unrestricted quantifiers and of existence only as a first-order, informative property seems to be clearer and better grounded. However, I would perhaps agree with those who claim that there is a way of temporally existing, that is different from the way of atemporally existing, as I shall argue in the fourth chapter of this part.

What about degrees of existence? Following my account, even provided that existence is a yes/no property, it is possible to make sense of such degrees. In fact, one might use dispositions to act in order to claim that some object has a higher degree of existence than some other object. Let me call such objects $object_1$ and $object_2$. The following rule seems to be acceptable in order to justify that $object_1$ has a higher degree of existence than $object_2$:

(degrees) it is necessary that, for any two different objects $object_1$ and $object_2$, $object_1$ has a higher

[314] See Paolini Paoletti (manuscript).

degree of existence than object$_2$ iff object$_1$ has more dispositions to act than object$_2$.

Let me notice that, since the possession of some dispositions to act is sometimes entailed by the possession of other dispositions to act (e.g., if I have the disposition to freely act with my body, I have the disposition to freely move my arm, since my arm is part of my body), it is possible to claim that, for example, a minded object has a higher degree of existence than a non-minded one and that a free object (such as a human person) has a higher degree of existence than a non-free one. Degrees of existence are somehow connected with moral value, but it is not necessary to claim that there is such a connection. One could claim that God has every disposition to act, since He is omnipotent. Thus, if God exists, He has the highest degree of existence.

I cannot explore such topics to a larger extent. I have only tried to demonstrate that my account of existence can set kinds of existence apart and that it can make sense of the idea of there being degrees of existence.

II.2.5. "Living" on the Edge: Mathematical Objects, Propositions and Facts.

I have claimed and tried to demonstrate that some non-existent objects (at least, fictional ones) are mental objects. Yet, are all non-existent objects mental objects? Let me consider numbers and geometrical figures. On the one hand, it seems that numbers and geometrical figures have, for example, the disposition to produce our knowledge that they are such-and-such (e.g., that the number 1 is a prime number). Thus, they exist. On the other hand, such a disposition can be thought of as being borne by minded subjects too: I have the disposition to know that the number 1 is a prime number. What other dispositions do numbers have? I think that they only have epistemic dispositions, that also minded subjects have: they cannot cause things to happen, they do not introduce any real possibility of change that is not already introduced by anything else. Thus, it seems reasonable to me to conclude that numbers do not exist.

However, even if numbers (and geometrical figures) do not exist, are they mental objects? Do minded subjects define their identity conditions? If they are mental objects, then minded subjects should be able to define such conditions. If they are not mental objects, then minded subjects somehow discover them and their features. My theory would be more elegant, if it would be able to provide a mentalistic account for mathematical objects. Yet, I have at least two doubts: *amica theoria, sed magis amicus Plato*!

The first doubt is that, when we claim that a triangle is such-and-such, its features do not depend on our minds. This seems to happen because we do not abstract from something in the nature the property of being triangular (nothing is perfectly triangular in nature!). However, in order to defend a mentalistic account of triangles, one could reply that the property of being

triangular is the product of some higher-level abstraction: we find out objects that seem to be triangular (that are not perfectly triangular, but are different from other objects that have other shapes) and we imagine a property such as the property of being (perfectly) triangular, with the aid of some "intensive" abstraction (an abstraction by degrees). Yet, do such properties (the properties of being perfectly or imperfectly triangular) depend for their identity conditions on there being triangles or not? If they depend on there being triangles, then triangles must be objects prior to any mental abstraction, even if they do not exist. If they do not depend on triangles, then there should be some way to reduce such properties of being (perfectly or imperfectly) triangular to other properties, with the aid of which we could construct triangles.

One could perhaps immediately think of numbers and of their properties. Yet, this would simply postpone the problem, since numbers seem to be non-existent and non-mental objects too. In fact (here is my second doubt), how can we construct the number 1 with all its features in our minds? One of the most interesting accounts could be given in terms of identity and difference. I cannot explore such an account here. Yet, I have some doubts about the possibility of constructing numbers in such a way without already presupposing that there are such numbers. Thus, it seems to me that we have no reason for thinking that numbers depend on our minds for their being objects. Perhaps, we might think that they depend on God's mind, so that they are divine mental objects. I cannot follow here such a suggestion. I can only conclude that numbers are non-existent objects that do not depend on human minded subjects. This does not exclude that they have properties and that they can be thought of by us as having properties, and the same seems to happen with regard to geometrical objects.

What about propositions? It seems that propositions are true or false regardless of there being minded subjects thinking of them and constituting them as propositions. For example, let me consider a possible world in which there is no minded subject, but in which there are stones. In that world, there is a proposition, such as the proposition [stones exist], and that proposition has the property of being true, independently of the existence of any minded subject. On the other hand, given my mentalistic account of propositions, we think of that proposition and we constitute it in our world (where minded subjects exist) and we attribute to it the property of being true in that possible world. Thus, such a proposition is true in that possible world iff there is some minded subject that constitutes it as a proposition and that attributes to it the property of being true in that possible world. Furthermore, such a minded subject constitutes it as a proposition iff it ascribes to each part of that proposition the relation of referring to something and to the whole proposition the property of having some truth-value (i.e., of being true or false). Which one is the correct account? The argument for the mind-independence of the

proposition [stones exist] runs as follows (assuming that "w_1" is a constant standing for one possible world in which stones exist and no minded subject exists):

(prop.I) [stones exist] has the property of being true in w_1;

(prop.II) [no minded subject exists] has the property of being true in w_1;

(prop.III) if [stones exist] has the property of being true in w_1, then [stones exist] is an item in w_1;

(prop.IV) for every possible world and for every item, if that item has some property in that possible world and no minded subject exists in that possible world, then that item is mind-independent;

(prop.V) [stones exist] is mind-independent.

However, one could perfectly accept premises (prop.I)-(prop.III) and deny the truth of (prop.IV). Let me recall the distinction between different senses of being the actual world introduced in chapter I.4 by provisionally accepting that possible worlds are sets of propositions: the actual$_1$ world is the sum of everything there is; the actual$_2$ world can be considered a maximal and consistent proposition (or a set of propositions, or a conjunction of propositions) that has all non-modal true propositions as constituents; the actual$_3$ world can be considered a maximal and consistent proposition (or a set of propositions, or a conjunction of propositions) that has all the true propositions (included modal ones) as constituents. In this perspective, [stones exist]'s being part of a possible world – i.e., of a set of propositions – does *not* imply that there is an item such as [stones exist]. Furthermore, what is requested in order for [stones exist] to be a mind-independent item is that the proposition [[stones exist] is a mind-independent item] is part of the actual$_2$ world, so that [stones exist] is a mind-independent item according to the actual$_2$ world. Yet, premises (prop.I)-(prop.III) only make it legitimate to conclude that [stones exist] is true in w_1, i.e., that the proposition [[stones exist] is true in w_1] is part of the actual$_3$ world. Furthermore, by weakening (prop.IV) as follows:

(prop.IV') for every possible world and for every item, if that item has some property in that possible world and no minded subject exists in that possible world, then that item is mind-independent in that possible world,

we can only conclude that the proposition [[stones exist] is a mind-independent item in w_1] is part of the actual$_3$ world, but we cannot conclude that [[stones exist] is a mind-independent item] is part of the actual$_2$ world – i.e., the desired conclusion. It is necessary to replace (prop.IV) with two new premises that, if they are jointly accepted, imply (prop.V):

(prop.VI) for every item, if there is some possible world in which that item does not depend on any minded subject, then that item does not (actually$_2$) depend on any minded subject, i.e., it is (actually$_2$) mind-independent;

(prop.VII) for every item, if there is some possible world in which there is that item and there is no minded-subject, then that item does not depend on any minded subject in that possible world.

Furthermore, it can be claimed that the consequent of (prop.III) – whose truth is implied by the truth of (prop.I) and (prop.III) – *and* (prop.II) jointly make it true the antecedent of (prop.VII). Namely, it can be claimed that: that [stones exist] is an item in w_1 *and* that no minded subject exists in w_1 jointly imply that there is some possible world in which there is a proposition such as [stones exist] and no minded subject exists in that world. Yet, it should be still demonstrated that it is true that (prop.VI): given (prop.VI), mind-dependence is necessary, i.e., if an object is mind-dependent in the actual$_2$ world, then it is necessary that it is mind-dependent. In fact, by transposition, we obtain

(prop.VI-trans.) for every item, if that item (actually$_2$) depends on some minded subject, i.e., it is (actually$_2$) mind-dependent, then it is necessary that it is mind-dependent.

This line of reasoning assumes that merely possible objects are non-mental objects. Otherwise, if mere *possibilia* were considered mental objects, it would be obviously false that (prop.VI-trans.): merely possible objects *qua* mental objects would be mind-dependent in the actual$_2$ world, even if that mind-dependence would not be a necessary one (e.g., if Noman is a actually$_2$ merely possible object and a mental one, he is a mental object, but it is not necessary that he is a mental object, provided that he can exist and that, in those possible worlds in which he exists, he is not a mental object). I shall question this assumption about the necessity of (actually$_2$) mental objects' (and, in particular, of fictional objects') being mental in chapter II.4.

Furthermore, the necessity of mind-dependence amounts to the claim that, for every mental object (i.e., for every object that is mental in the actual$_2$ world), it is true in every possible world that that object is a mental one. Yet, what about possible worlds in which there are no minded subjects? In those worlds, there would be no mental objects at all, so that it would not be true in every possible world that objects that are mental in the actual$_2$ world are mental in that world too. This is a strong reason for doubting about the truth of (prop.VI). In order to defend the non-mentalistic approach, one could invoke distinctions such as the one between truth in worlds and truth at worlds[315] – in order to claim that it is not true that actually$_2$ mental objects are

[315] For this distinction, see §I.4.2. However, King (2007) uses this distinction in order to defend the opposite thesis that – at least from a modal actualist perspective – propositions should be thought of as mind-dependent items.

mental *in* possible worlds in which no minded subject exists, but that it is true *at* those worlds – or s/he could invoke two different kinds of necessity, by claiming that the necessary mind-dependence of actually$_2$ mental objects is a conditional necessity – it is true that actually$_2$ mental objects are mental in every possible world in which there are minded subjects – and it is not an absolute one (i.e., it is not true in every possible world). Yet, if it is legitimate from a non-mentalistic perspective to use such strategies and to reformulate (prop.VI) and (prop.VII) in order to fit them, we should take the necessary mind-dependence of mental objects as follows:

(nec.ment.1) for every item, if that item is actually$_2$ mind-dependent, then it is true *in* every possible world in which minded subjects exist that it is mind-dependent *and* it is true *at* every possible world in which no minded subject exists that it is mind-dependent;

(nec.ment.2) for every item, if that item is actually$_2$ mind-dependent, then it is true in every possible world in which minded subjects exist that it is mind-dependent *and* there is no such an item in every possible world in which no minded subject exists.

Both (nec.ment.1) and (nec.ment.2) are revised versions of (prop.VI-trans.). There should be new formulations of (prop.VI), i.e.,

(prop.VI'-1) for every item, if it is *not* the case that: (it is true *in* every possible world in which minded subjects exist that that item is mind-dependent *and* it is true *at* every possible world in which no minded subject exists that it is mind-dependent), then that item is actually$_2$ mind-independent;

(prop.VI'-2) for every item, if it is *not* the case that: (it is true in every possible world in which minded subjects exist that that item is mind-dependent *and* there is no such an item in every possible world in which no minded subject exists), then that item is actually$_2$ mind-independent.

How does (prop.VII) make the antecedent(s) of (prop-VI'-1) and/or of (prop-VI'-2) true? The possible world w_1 is a possible world in which no minded subject exists. In the former case, (prop.VII) claims that the truth *at* w_1 of [stones exist] does not depend on any minded subject if there is in w_1 a proposition such as [stones exist] and there is no minded subject in w_1. In the latter case, it claims that, if there is in w_1 a proposition such as [stones exist] and there is no minded subject in w_1, the proposition [stones exist] does not depend on any minded subject in w_1. This seems to work.

Yet, why do we have to use such a complicate machinery? According to this account, three elements need to be maintained. It seems that one has to maintain that there is a proposition such as [stones exist] in w_1 only in order to maintain that it is true that stones exist in

w_1 – even if there is no minded subject in that world. Furthermore, it is required that there is something that makes that proposition true in w_1, i.e., the fact that stones exist in w_1 – whatever this fact amounts to. Finally, there is a proposition such as the proposition [it is true in w_1 that stones exist], that is part of the actual$_3$ world. Yet, why cannot we claim that the only items that we should admit in order to maintain that stones exist in w_1 are the proposition [it is true in w_1 that stones exist] and the fact that stones exist in w_1 – whatever this fact amounts to? No further item, such as the proposition [stones exist], would be required. Let me explain this point by using a parallel case. At a time at which no minded subject existed (e.g., 67 million years ago), dinosaurs existed. The proposition [dinosaurs existed 67 million years ago] is now true and this proposition seems to be made true by the fact that dinosaurs existed 67 million years ago. Furthermore, we can claim that the logical constituents of that proposition refer to certain items – dinosaurs, for example. Finally, we can admit that it would have been the case that dinosaurs existed 67 million years ago (i.e., there would have been the fact that dinosaurs existed 67 million years ago), even if no one had acknowledged the truth of [dinosaurs existed 67 million years ago] and even if no one had thought of that proposition. No proposition such as [dinosaurs exist$_t$] – that was an item 67 million years ago – is requested in order to ground these theses.

In a similar vein, there is a possible world in which stones exist, even if no minded subject exists in that world and there is no proposition such as [stones exist] in that world, even though that proposition is part of that world, at least if possible worlds are sets of propositions. This is the end of the story about the truth of there being dinosaurs 67 million years ago and of there being stones in other possible worlds without minded subjects. Why should we admit that there was 67 million years ago or that there is in w_1 some third item – and defend this admission in a rather complicate way -, such as the proposition [dinosaurs exist$_t$] or the proposition [stones exist]? One could reply that the propositions [dinosaurs existed 67 million years ago] and [it is true in w_1 that stones exist] identity-depend on propositions such as [dinosaurs exist$_t$] and [stones exist], but this is not sufficient in order to admit that there are such propositions 67 million years ago or in w_1: such propositions could now (or actually$_2$) be mind-dependent, even if [dinosaurs exist$_t$] is now false – and even if the proposition [stones exist] would be actually$_2$ false, if stones did not actually$_2$ exist.

In sum, it does not seem to me necessary to admit that propositions are non-existent *and* non-mental objects. Yet, on the other hand, is it legitimate to claim that they are non-existent? Yes, they do not have any peculiar disposition to act, or so it seems to me.

Finally, what about facts? Facts do not exist, on the basis of my discussion, but they nevertheless seem not to be mental objects. It is a fact that Obama instantiates the property of

being human, regardless of there being any minded subject thinking of that fact. Facts are not constituted by minded subjects: they do not depend on them for their identity conditions. Thus, facts do not exist, even if they are not mental.

It seems reasonable to conclude, after this examination, that there are objects (such as mathematical objects and facts) that do not exist and that are nevertheless non-mental objects. In sum, not all the non-existent objects are mental objects. Should we introduce any further kind of being for such objects? For the reasons that I have already tried to explain, I do not think that we should: they simply do not exist.

II.3. Non-Existence: an Ascriptivistic Perspective

I shall present in this chapter an ascriptivistic theory of fictional objects, that is partly inspired by P. van Inwagen's notion of ascription and by Fine (1982), but that accepts that there are objects that do not exist (e.g., fictional objects). According to my theory, such objects have properties in two different ways: on the one hand, they instantiate properties as existent objects do (e.g., fictional objects instantiate the property of being fictional); on the other hand, some properties are ascribed to them by minded subjects thinking of them. However, this theory is not simply a version of instantiation-centered Meinongianism. It does not assume that there is a primitive distinction between two ways of having properties (e.g., Zalta's exemplification and encoding), but it claims that there are some relations (ascription relations) that hold (at least) between minded subjects, fictional objects and properties. Secondly, it does not introduce existing objects' blueprints in order to make it true, for example, that Lord Gladstone had a tea with Sherlock Holmes. Thirdly, it provides us with a unified account of thinking of objects' having properties, since such ascription relations may involve existent objects too. Fourthly, it deals with fictional contexts defined by stories, by thinking of them as fictional worlds that are involved within ascription relations.

After having presented the basis of the theory (II.3.1) and after having introduced some elements of a theory of fiction (II.3.2), I shall define the identity conditions of fictional objects (II.3.3), thus trying to reply (at least in part) to Quine's objection about the lack of identity conditions for non-existents. Finally, I shall deal with some kinds of seemingly true statements concerning fictional objects (the ones presented in chapters I.2 and I.3), in order to ground their truth-conditions from an ascriptivistic perspective (II.3.4).

II.3.1. How to Ascribe Whatever You Want to Whatever You Like.

Let me recall my aforementioned example of a true statement involving a fictional object:

(12) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

It has already been remarked that there is no detective named "Sherlock Holmes", since the property of being a detective seems to be an existence-entailing one: for every object, that object is a detective only if it exists. However, many Meinongians have argued that there are detectives who do not exist (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), that the instantiation of the property of being a detective does not imply anything about the ontological status of objects that instantiate it. In other terms, the *Sosein* of an object (that comprehends, in Sherlock Holmes' case, his being a detective) is independent of its *Sein*. However, things are not so easy. In fact, our commonsense might reply that, if there were a murder in our town, Sherlock Holmes would not be able to

investigate on it and that, since every detective is able to investigate on a murder (at least, since every detective has the disposition to investigate on a murder), Sherlock Holmes is not a detective. Meinongians might then distinguish between real and fictional murders and they might claim that, even if Sherlock Holmes is not able to investigate on any real murder, since he is only a fictional detective, he is able to investigate on some fictional murder. Thus, he is a detective, since he is able to investigate on a murder (at least, on a fictional one). There are real murders and fictional ones, real detectives and fictional ones but, in order for something to be a murder, it does not have to be real and in order for someone to be a detective, s/he does not have to be real. However, there are features of real murders that are not features of fictional ones; there are features of real detectives that are not features of fictional ones. For example, it seems that real detectives are complete, while fictional ones are somehow incomplete: it seems to be neither true, nor false that Sherlock Holmes had a grandfather named Daniel, while, for every real detective, it is true or false that s/he had a grandfather named Daniel. Furthermore, as we have already remarked, some fictional objects are inconsistent: round squares or, better, round and non-round circles, for example.

In order to avoid complications introduced by the inconsistency and incompleteness of fictional objects and in order to maintain that they are objects, one might choose different solutions. For example, as it is claimed by ascriptivism, s/he might accept that there are some relations (some ascription relations) between those objects and those properties that they have according to stories. Since, as I have already argued, fictional objects are mental objects, such relations should include minded subjects too. The basis of an ascriptivistic theory of fictional objects is thus represented by the introduction of a family of ascription relations, that hold *at least* between some object, some property and some minded subject (even if I shall introduce an ascription relation that will not hold for objects). Furthermore, since fictional objects do not have within the actual world (but within some other fictional world) some properties that are ascribed to them, there are ascription relations that involve fictional contexts too (i.e., fictional worlds defined by stories, as we shall see in the next section). Here are some examples of ascription relations: A_1 (a 3-place relation that holds between some object, some property and some minded subject); A_2 (a 4-place relation that holds between some object, some property, some minded subject and some fictional context); A_3 (a 4-place relation that holds between two objects, some two-place relation and some minded subject); A_4 (a 5-place relation that hold between two objects, some two-place relation, some minded subject and some fictional context); and so on. It is worth remarking that: ascription relations do not only involve fictional objects, but existing objects too, as we will see; not every property had by a fictional object is an ascribed property, but

there are properties that they simply instantiate (e.g., the property of being fictional). Finally, it is a corollary of my theory of existence that minded subjects have to exist in order to ascribe properties to fictional objects, since they have the unique active disposition to ascribe properties to fictional objects (and nothing else has that unique disposition).

Let me consider Sherlock Holmes' example. Even if it is not true that Sherlock Holmes instantiates the property of being a detective, i.e., it is not true that

(12ins.) $\sim D_E h$

(where "*h*" stands for Sherlock Holmes and "D_E" for the property of being a detective), it is nevertheless true that there is some minded subject that ascribes to him the fictional property of being a detective within some fictional context, i.e., it is true that

(12ascr.) $\exists m \exists c A_2 D_E hmc$

If it is true that (12), it seems that (12ascr.) expresses its proper logical reading and the logical form of its truth-conditions: if there is some minded subject that ascribes to Sherlock Holmes the property of being a detective within some fictional context, then it is true that (12). It is not necessary that Sherlock Holmes' author (Conan Doyle) ascribes to him that property within some fictional context (some fictional context defined by Conan Doyle's stories) in order for (12) to be true: one and the same Sherlock Holmes might have that property within some other fictional context defined by some other author's stories or by the interpretation of some story about Sherlock Holmes that has not been written by Conan Doyle. For example, if I watched the movie directed by Guy Ritchie about Sherlock Holmes and if I did not know that Sherlock Holmes was constituted as a fictional object by Conan Doyle, I could nevertheless ascribe to Sherlock Holmes (to Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes) the property of being a detective within the fictional context defined by that movie. When I shall deal with the identity conditions of fictional objects, this point will become clearer.

Let me now see how ascription relations work when some minded subject ascribes to some (fictional or existent) object some property. In fact, ascription relations can involve both existent and non-existent objects. For example, when I think that Francesco Orilia is a Professor at the University of Macerata, I ascribe (by A_1) to Francesco Orilia (the existing Francesco Orilia) the property of being a professor at the University of Macerata. My ascription is veridical iff Francesco Orilia instantiates the property of being a Professor at the University of Macerata; otherwise, it is not veridical. A_1 does not involve any fictional context: it only involves me (a minded subject), the property of being a Professor at the University of Macerata and Francesco Orilia. The same happens with fictional objects: I ascribe (by A_1) to Sherlock Holmes the

property of being a fictional object, and my ascription is veridical, since Sherlock Holmes instantiates the property of being a fictional object.

Fictional objects are always incomplete and sometimes inconsistent, even if we do not have to deny that the laws of the excluded middle and of non-contradiction hold for them. In fact, it is legitimate to distinguish between two kinds of negation: property-negation (where the property-negation of some property P is the negative property non-P, or $\overline{P}$) and ascription-negation (where the ascription negation of some ascription relation A corresponds to its not holding between its *relata*). Fictional objects are always incomplete as a matter of fact:

(incompleteness) for every fictional object, that object is incomplete iff, for at least one *n*-adic property P, for every minded subject and for every fictional context, neither P is ascribed to that object by that minded subject within that fictional context (i.e., it is *not* true, by ascription-negation, that P is ascribed to that object by that minded subject within that fictional context), nor its negation $\overline{P}$ (i.e., it is *not* true, by ascription-negation, that $\overline{P}$, i.e., the property-negation of P, is ascribed to that object by that minded subject within that fictional context).

The axiom (incompleteness) neither implies the denial of the law of excluded middle, nor of the law of bivalence. In fact, for every *n*-adic property (ascription-relations included) and for every fictional object, it is always either true or false that that property is instantiated by that object. Every fictional object is incomplete as a matter of fact, since there is no (finite) minded subject that can think of it as being thus determined with regard to every (ascribed) property – even if, as we shall see in the next chapter, God can somehow complete fictional contexts and fictional objects too.

With regard to inconsistency, it seems to me legitimate to claim that there are different kinds (and different degrees) of it. For example:

(inconsistency-1) for every fictional object, that object is inconsistent-1 iff, for *every* minded subject, for *every* fictional context, for *some* (but *not every*) property P, it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object P within that context and it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object $\overline{P}$ within that context;

(inconsistency-2) for every fictional object, that object is inconsistent-2 iff, for *some* (but not *every*) minded subject, for *every* fictional context, for *some* (but not *every*) property P, it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object P within that context and it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object $\overline{P}$ within that context;

(inconsistency-3) for every fictional object, that object is inconsistent-3 iff, for *every* minded

subject, for *some* (but not *every*) fictional context, for *some* (but not *every*) property P, it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object P within that context and it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object $\overline{\text{P}}$ within that context;

(inconsistency-4) for every fictional object, that object is inconsistent-4 iff, for *some* (but not *every*) minded subject, for *some* (but not *every*) fictional context, for *some* (but not *every*) property P, it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object P within that context and it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object $\overline{\text{P}}$ within that context.

The round non-round circle is inconsistent-1, since both the properties of being round and of non-being round are ascribed to it within every fictional context by every minded subject. On the other hand, the round square can be inconsistent-2, inconsistent-3 or inconsistent-4, since there can be minded subjects that do not know the rules of geometry and that do not ascribe to it the property of non-being round in virtue of its being a square (inconsistency-2), or there can be fictional contexts where such rules do not hold, so that it is not legitimate to ascribe to it the property of non-being round in virtue of its being a square (inconsistency-3), or both (inconsistency-4). Inconsistent fictional objects do not "explode", since no kind of inconsistency implies

(inconsistency-0) for every fictional object, that object is inconsistent-0 iff, for *every* minded subject, for *every* fictional context, for *every* property P, it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object P within that context and it is true that that minded subject ascribes to that object $\overline{\text{P}}$ within that context.

Furthermore, it is not necessary to deny the law of non-contradiction in order to admit inconsistent-0 objects, since it is *not* the case that, with regard to one and the same *n*-adic property, that property is both instantiated and not instantiated by an object. Thus, even inconsistent-0 fictional objects are not contradictory: it is neither necessary to admit impossible worlds, nor true contradictions within the actual world in order to deal with them[316].

II.3.2. Stories and Authors.

It has already been argued that fictional objects are mental objects and that they are constituted as objects by minded subjects' thinking about them. Thus, it seems to me fair to accept

(constitution) $\forall x(\text{F}x \rightarrow \exists m\text{C}_{\text{ONST}}mx)$

[316] Thus, Everett (2005)'s complaints about the indeterminacy of every *fictum* and the inconsistency of some *ficta* are not justified within my theory: ascriptivism neither introduces true contradictions, nor indeterminacy (for every object – and for every *fictum* too – and for every *n*-adic property, that object instantiates or (*aut*) does not instantiate that property).

(where "F" stands for the property of being a fictional object and "C_{ONST}" stands for the relation of constituting, that holds between some minded subject and that object)[317]. The axiom (constitution) does not exclude that there are objects that are constituted by minded subjects and that are not fictional objects. Intuitively, something is a fictional object iff it is a non-existent character of a story. Yet, in order to grasp what is for an object to be a fictional object and what is for it to be constituted by some minded subject, it is necessary to introduce further notions. First, I shall take stories as sets of propositions that have logical relationships with one another (e.g., logical implication, conjunction, and so on). Secondly, I shall assume that, for every object and every minded subject, that minded subject thinks of that object iff it ascribes to that object by A_1 some property, i.e.,

(thinks of) $\forall x \forall m (T_H m x \leftrightarrow \exists P A_1 P x m)$

(where "T_H" stands for the relation of thinking of). If Conan Doyle thinks of Sherlock Holmes, then he ascribes by A_1 to him, for example, the property of being a detective according to some story. If I think of Francesco Orilia, then I ascribe by A_1 to him, for example, the property of being a professor at the University of Macerata, and so on.

Thirdly, for every proposition and every story, that proposition is true within that story iff it is part of that story, i.e.,

(true in story) $\forall p (T_S p s \leftrightarrow P_A p s)$

(where "p" is a variable ranging over propositions, "T_S" and "P_A" respectively stand for the relations of being true within a story and of being part of).

The identity of stories depends on propositions that are part of them, i.e., two stories are identical iff all and only the same propositions are part of them:

(story-id.) $\forall s_1 \forall s_2 ((s_1 = s_2) \leftrightarrow \forall p (P_A p s_1 \leftrightarrow P_A p s_2))$

(where "s_1" and "s_2" are variables ranging over stories).

The original author of a story is the minded subject that grounds, by its activities, the identity of that story.

Let me now introduce the notion of context and the relation that holds between stories and fictional contexts:

(def.story-context) $\forall s \forall c (D s c \leftrightarrow \forall p (T_S p s \rightarrow T_C p c))$

(where "c", "s" and "p" are variables respectively ranging over fictional contexts, stories and

[317] For a list of symbols, see the Appendix (pp. 281-284).

propositions, "D" stands for the relation of defining, that holds between stories and fictional contexts, "T_C" stands for the relation of being true within a context). Intuitively, the idea behind (def.story-context) is that fictional contexts are fictional worlds that are different from stories: minded subjects, in fact, tend to distinguish between stories and contexts in which what is asserted by those stories is true. It is not necessary that, for any proposition that is true or false in the actual$_2$ world, it is true or false within stories too: there are (true or false) propositions in the actual$_2$ world that are not part of any story and, for every story, it is not necessary that it comprehends any proposition of the actual$_2$ world and that it claims that it is true or false within the fictional context defined by that story. On the other hand, there are propositions that are true within fictional contexts defined by stories and that are not part of those stories: a good interpreter of the story *A Study in Scarlet*, for example, might claim that it is true in the fictional context defined by *A Study in Scarlet* that London is in England, even if the proposition [London is in England] is not part of *A Study in Scarlet*.

For every object, that object is a character of a story iff the original author of the story ascribes to it some property within the fictional context defined by that story:

(character) $\forall x \forall s(C_H xs \leftrightarrow \exists P \exists m \exists c(A_{UOS} ms \ \& \ Dsc \ \& \ A_2 Pxmc))$

(where "C_H" stands for the relation of being a character within a story and "A_{UOS}" stands for the relation of being the original author of a story). Thus, a *fictum* is a non-existent object that is a character of some story:

(fictum) $\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow (\sim Ex \ \& \ \exists s C_H xs))$

Furthermore, I shall define the context of origin of a *fictum* as follows:

(cont.or.) $\forall x \forall c(C_O cx \leftrightarrow (Fx \ \& \ \exists s_1(C_H xs_1 \ \& \ Ds_1 c \ \& \ \sim \exists s_2(\sim(s_1 = s_2) \ \& \ C_H xs_2 \ \& \ P_R s_2 s_1))))$

(where "C_O" and "P_R" respectively stand for the relations of being the context of origin and of preceding). The relation of preceding holds between two stories s_1 and s_2 iff s_1 is constituted as a story at a time t_1 that precedes the time t_2 at which s_2 is constituted as a story.

The original author of a *fictum* is the original author of the story that defines the context of origin of that *fictum*, i.e.,

(or.author obj.) $\forall x \forall m(A_{UOO} xm \leftrightarrow \exists s(A_{UOS} ms \ \& \ \exists c(Dsc \ \& \ C_O cx)))$

(where "A_{UOO}" stands for the relation of being the original author of a fictional object). The original author of a *fictum* is the minded subject that constitutes that *fictum* as an object.

Furthermore, by using the relation of being the original author of a story, it is legitimate

to introduce the relation of being the original author of a fictional context:

(or.author con.) $\forall x \forall m(A_{UOC}xm \leftrightarrow \exists s(A_{UOS}ms \ \& \ Dsc))$

(where "A_{UOC}" stands for the relation of being the original author of a fictional context). The author *simpliciter* of a fictional object is some minded subject that is the author of a story that defines a fictional context within which some property is ascribed to that fictional object, i.e.,

(sim.author ob.) $\forall x \forall m(A_{UO}mx \leftrightarrow (Fx \ \& \ \exists P \exists s \exists c(A_{UOS}ms \ \& \ Dsc \ \& \ A_2Pxmc)))$

(where "A_{UO}" stands for the relation of being the author *simpliciter* of an object).

After having defined contexts of origins, it is possible to introduce original story-boundedness and story-boundedness *simpliciter*. Some fictional object is originally story-bound to some story iff that story defines its context of origin:

(or.story-bound.) $\forall x \forall s(B_Oxs \leftrightarrow (Fx \ \& \ \exists c(C_Occx \ \& \ Dsc)))$

(where "B_O" stands for the relation of being originally story-bound to), while it is story-bound *simpliciter* to some story iff there is some property that is ascribed to it by the original author of that story within the fictional context defined by that story:

(sim.story-bound.) $\forall x \forall s(Bxs \leftrightarrow (Fx \ \& \ \exists P \exists m \exists c(A_{UOS}ms \ \& \ Dsc \ \& \ A_2Pxmc)))$

(where "B" stands for the relation of being story-bound *simpliciter* to).

Finally, it is acceptable that someone is a good interpreter of some story iff, for every proposition and every fictional context, that story defines that fictional context and that proposition is true within the story and is part of that story and s/he ascribes to that proposition the relation of being part of that story iff s/he ascribes to that proposition the relation of being true within the fictional context defined by that story, i.e.,

(good inter.) $\forall m \forall s(I_Sms \leftrightarrow \forall p \forall c((Dsc \ \& \ T_Sps \ \& \ P_Aps \ \& \ A_3P_Apsm \ \& \ A_3T_Spsm) \leftrightarrow A_3T_Cpcm)$

(where "I_S" stands for the relation of being a good interpreter of some story). All these notions will turn out to be useful for outlining the truth-conditions of our initial data[318].

II.3.3. It Has Always Been the Same, the Same Fat Man: Identity Conditions for Ficta.

In this section, I shall outline four different criteria of identity for fictional objects: given any two

[318] Thus, ascriptivism can reply to some objections addressed against abstract artifactualism and, more generally, realism about *ficta*. *Ficta* are not abstract objects that necessarily exist and that cannot be caused to exist – as it seems to be claimed by abstract artifactualists (see Deutsch (1991)). Furthermore, they are not properly caused to exist: they are simply constituted as objects by their original authors at the time at which they are thought of by them, who somehow govern their identity with other objects (see below) (see Brock (2010)). There is no ambiguity concerning *ficta*'s non-existence: they simply do not exist, since they do not instantiate the property of existing (see Deutsch (1991) and Yagisawa (2001)).

fictional objects thought of by someone, it seems to me that they are identical iff at least one of such criteria hold for them. I do not think that I will be exhaustive about this topic (further criteria of identity for *ficta* might be found out) and I acknowledge that such criteria cannot be established *a priori*. I have only looked for the truth-conditions of our statements about the identity of fictional objects and I have restricted my investigation to those cases in which it seems certain (or almost certain) that two fictional objects are identical.

Given two mental-fictional objects that are thought of by someone, they are identical if they have the same original author that establishes their identity (ficta-identity-1). It follows that anyone who acknowledges that original author's authority over those fictional objects should recognize their identity.

Yet, some fictional objects' identities are not only established by their original authors. Let me suppose that we both think of some fictional object (i.e., that the mental-fictional object I am thinking of should be identical with the mental and fictional object you are thinking of): how can we establish that it is one and the same fictional object, even if we ascribe to that object different properties? It seems to me legitimate to introduce one further situation in which those fictional objects can be identified. According to the criterion (ficta-identity-2), two fictional objects can be identified if, for any two minded subjects, both subjects think of them *and* they ascribe to one another the relation of thinking of those objects *and* they both ascribe to the fictional object they think of the relation of being identical with the fictional object thought of by the other subject. I have to remark that (ficta-identity-2) works from an intrasubjective perspective too. In fact, I can ascribe to some fictional object I am thinking of the relation of being identical with some other fictional object I am thinking of.

Thirdly, there are some identities of *ficta* that are grounded on univocally identifying fictional properties. Let me assume that the variable "*x*" ranges here *only* over fictional objects thought of by someone (so that I shall assume a version of (character) that is implicitly restricted to fictional objects).

For every *fictum x* and for every property, I shall define as follows the property of being a univocally identifying fictional property of that *fictum*:

(un.fic.property-1) $\forall x \forall \mathrm{P}(\mathrm{P}_{\mathrm{UF}}\mathrm{P}x \leftrightarrow \forall m \forall c \forall \mathrm{s}((\mathrm{C}_{\mathrm{H}}xs \ \& \ \mathrm{I}_{\mathrm{S}}ms \ \& \ \mathrm{D}sc) \rightarrow (\mathrm{A}_2\mathrm{P}xmc \rightarrow \forall y(\mathrm{T}_{\mathrm{H}}my \rightarrow ((\mathrm{A}_3\mathrm{I}xym \ \mathrm{V} \ \mathrm{A}_3\bar{\mathrm{I}}xym) \ \& \sim(\mathrm{A}_3\mathrm{I}xym \ \& \ \mathrm{A}_3\bar{\mathrm{I}}xym))))))$

(where "P_{UF}" stands for the relation of being a univocally identifying fictional property and the variable "*x*" ranges *only* over fictional objects, while "*y*" ranges over every object).

Thus, two *ficta* can be identified if they have the same univocally identifying fictional property (ficta-identity-3).

In this situation, there should be sufficiently elastic properties in order to deal with difficult cases of identity between *ficta*. Yet, one *caveat* is: do not introduce disjunctive properties. In fact, if minded subjects introduced disjunctive properties, by the rule of introduction of disjunction applied to ascribed properties, every fictional object would turn out to be identical with any other. Thus, I shall reform (un.fic.property-1) as follows:

(un.fic.property-2) $\forall x \forall P(P_{UF}Px \leftrightarrow (\sim D_I P \ \& \ \forall m \forall c \forall s((C_H xs \ \& \ I_S ms \ \& \ Dsc) \rightarrow (A_2 Pxmc \rightarrow \forall y(T_H my \rightarrow ((A_3 Ixym \ V \ A_3 \bar{I} xym) \ \& \sim (A_3 Ixym \ \& \ A_3 \bar{I} xym)))))))$

(where "D_I" stands for the property of being a disjunctive property). The criterion (ficta-identity-3) holds in virtue of (un.fic.property-2), i.e., in virtue of the possession of the same univocally identifying fictional property.

We can deal with other cases of identity by introducing one further situation that is grounded on story-boundedness. In this situation, the identity between two fictional objects thought of by some minded subject(s) holds if one of those objects is story-bound to some story *and* some minded subject, thinking of the other object, ascribes to it some property within some fictional context that has that subject as its original author *and* that is different from the fictional context defined by that story *and* that subject ascribes to those objects the relation of being identical with one another (ficta-identity-4). For example, writing a story, I might define a fictional context (i.e., I might be its original author) where the same Sherlock Holmes who is a character in Conan Doyle's stories does something. Thus, my Sherlock Holmes would be identical with Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.

Put together, these four criteria can establish the identity between two fictional objects iff *at least* one of such criteria holds for those objects, namely (by taking the variables "x" and "y" as ranging over every object)

(ficta-identity) $\forall x \forall y((Fx \ \& \ Fy \ \& \ x = y) \leftrightarrow \exists m(A_{UOO} mx \ \& \ A_{UOO} my \ \& \ A_3 Ixym) \ V \ \exists m_1 \exists m_2 (T_H m_1 x \ \& \ T_H m_2 y \ \& \ A_3 T_H m_2 y m_1 \ \& \ A_3 T_H m_1 x m_2 \ \& \ A_3 Ixym_1 \ \& \ A_3 Iyxm_2) \ V \ \exists P(P_{UF} Px \ \& \ P_{UF} Py) \ V \ \exists s(Bxs \ \& \ \exists P \exists m \exists c(A_3 Bxsm \ \& \sim Dsc \ \& \ A_{UOC} mc \ \& \ A_2 Pymc \ \& \ A_3 Iyxm)))$

There is no degree of identity between fictional objects (perhaps, there is only some degree of similarity without identity between them). Yet, if one wished to preserve the intuition according to which there *seemingly* is some degree of identity between them, s/he could claim that there *seemingly* is some increasing degree of identity whenever more than one criterion holds.

One could object against such an account that many minded subjects are not conscious of ascribing properties and identity in such ways. Sure! Yet, I have not claimed that they have to ascribe to themselves the ascription-relations of ascribing properties in such ways, i.e., I have not

introduced self-consciousness about ascription. I have only claimed that, as a matter of fact, such criteria of identity ground identity between fictional objects from an ontological viewpoint.

Furthermore, one should ask whether some character in some fiction is identical with or different from some existing object. I shall first introduce the criterion (ex.fic.identity-1), according to which, roughly, some character within a story is identical with some existing object if the original author of that story ascribes to that character the property of being identical with that existing object (ex.fic.identity-1).

Secondly, one could introduce univocally identifying properties, i.e., properties that are instantiated only by one definite existing object (and that are not disjunctive):

(un.property) $\forall x \forall P(P_U Px \leftrightarrow (Px \ \& \sim D_I P \ \& \sim \exists y(\sim(x = y) \ \& \ Py)))$

(where "P_U" stands for the relation of being a univocally identifying property). It is worth remarking that such properties are univocally identifying as a matter of fact, not necessarily, since there might be possible worlds in which an object's univocally identifying properties are different. Thus, the second criterion I shall introduce (ex.fic.identity-2) asserts that some character within a story that has some minded subject as its original author is identical with some existing object if that existing object has some univocally identifying property that is ascribed by the original author of that story to that character within the fictional context defined by that story.

Finally, the third criterion is based on good interpreters: some character within a story is identical within some existing object if every good interpreter of that story ascribes to that character the property of being identical with that existing object (ex.fic.identity-3).

Such an identity is not simply grounded on some (but not all) or most (but not all) good interpreters' ascriptions, since there would remain in such a case a shadow of doubt about the truth of some identity statements. On the other hand, different degrees of similarity without identity can be grounded in these latter situations.

Put together (and assuming that our variables "x" and "y" range over every object), the criterion of identity between some existing object and some character within a story asserts that:

(ex.fic.identity) $\forall x \forall y \forall s(Ex \ \& \ C_H ys \ \& \ x = y) \leftrightarrow \exists m(A_{UOS} ms \ \& \ A_3 Ixym) \ V \ \exists P \exists m \exists c(A_{UOS} ms \ \& \ P_U Px \ \& \ Dsc \ \& \ A_2 Pxmc) \ V \ \forall m(I_S ms \leftrightarrow A_3 Ixym))$

Yet, accepting (ficta-identity) and (ex.fic.identity), some problems arise concerning the transitivity of identity. In fact, let me consider a case in which, by (ficta-identity-4), Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes turns out to be identical with some character of some fictional context that has me as its original author. Furthermore, that character, by (ficta-identity-4) and still in virtue of my power of identifying fictional objects, is identical with Flaubert's Emma Bovary. It turns out, by

the transitivity of identity, that Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is identical with Flaubert's Emma Bovary. A different case: by (ficta-identity-4), Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes turns out to be identical with some character of some fictional context that has me as its original author. Furthermore, that character, by (ficta-identity-4), is identical with Conan Doyle's Watson. It turns out, by the transitivity of identity, that Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is identical with Conan Doyle's Watson. Still another case: besides my character that is identical with Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, let me assume that another minded subject identifies, by (ficta-identity-4), some character of some fictional context that has that subject as its original author with Flaubert's Emma Bovary. Furthermore, by (ficta-identity-2), we establish that my character and that subject's character are identical. It turns out, by the transitivity of identity, that Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Flaubert's Emma Bovary are identical. Finally, considering a case involving (ex.fic.identity-1), I identify, by (ex.fic.identity-1), some character of some story that has me as its original author with the existing Lord Gladstone. Later on, I identify that character, by (ex.fic.identity-1), with the existing Obama. It turns out, by the transitivity of identity, that Lord Gladstone is identical with Obama. Thus, one should amend (ficta-identity-2), (ficta-identity-4), (ex.fic.identity-1), (ficta-identity) and (ex.fic.identity) in order to avoid such problems.

I shall introduce the notion of a legitimate identifier as follows: for any minded subject, for any two objects, that subject is a legitimate identifier of those objects (I shall use "I_L" as standing for the relation of being a legitimate identifier) iff it is legitimate that, if that subject ascribes to those objects the relation of being identical, then those objects are identical.

Furthermore, it seems to me that, for any minded subject and for any two objects *x* and *y*, that minded subject is a legitimate identifier of *x* and *y* iff at least one of the following conditions holds:

- that minded subject is the original author of both *x* and *y*, or (*vel*)
- there is no other object *z*, such that there is a criterion of identity *not* for *ficta* (e.g., a criterion of identity between existing things), such that *x* is identical with *z* iff that criterion holds between them and, as a matter of fact, that criterion does not hold between them and that minded subject nevertheless ascribes the identity between *x* and *z* (or the same for *y*), or (*vel*)
- intuitively, there is no other object *z*, that is originally authored by another minded subject or that has a fictional context not originally authored by the former minded subject as its context of origin, such that the former minded subject ascribes the identity between *z* and *x*, even though the original author of *z* does not ascribe the identity (or s/he ascribes the non-identity) between *y* and *z*, or even though the contexts of origin of *y* and *z* – not originally authored by the former minded subject – are different (or the same for *y*).

Put formally:

(leg.) $\forall m_1 \forall x \forall y (I_L mxy \leftrightarrow ((A_{UOO} m_1 x \ \& \ A_{UOO} m_1 y) \ \mathbf{V} \sim \exists z \exists w (C_{INF} w \ \& \ (\sim H_O wxz \ \& \ ((z = x) \leftrightarrow (H_O wxz)) \ \& \ A_3 I yzm_1) \ V \ (\sim H_O wyz \ \& \ ((z = y) \leftrightarrow (H_O wyz)) \ \& \ A_3 I xzm_1))) \ \mathbf{V} \sim \exists z ((A_3 I xzm_1 \ \& \ \exists m_2 (A_{UOO} m_2 z \ \& \sim (m_2 = m_1) \ \& \ (A_3 \bar{I} yzm_2 \ V \sim A_3 I yzm_2))) \ V \ (A_3 I yzm_1 \ \& \ \exists m_2 (A_{UOO} m_2 z \ \& \sim (m_2 = m_1) \ \& \ (A_3 \bar{I} xzm_2 \ V \sim A_3 I xzm_2))) \ V \ (\sim A_{UOO} m_1 z \ \& \ A_3 I xzm_1 \ \& \ \exists c_1 \exists c_2 (C_O c_1 z \ \& \ C_O c_2 y \ \& \sim (c_1 = c_2) \ \& \sim A_{UOC} m_1 c_1 \ \& \sim A_{UOC} m_1 c_2)) \ V \ (\sim A_{UOO} m_1 z \ \& \ A_3 I yzm_1 \ \& \ \exists c_1 \exists c_2 (C_O c_1 z \ \& \ C_O c_2 x \ \& \sim (c_1 = c_2) \ \& \sim A_{UOC} m_1 c_1 \ \& \sim A_{UOC} m_1 c_2)))))$

(where "C_{INF}" stands for the property of being a criterion of identity that is not for fictional objects and "H_O" stands for the relation of holding, that holds between a criterion of identity and two objects. I have put the major disjunctions in **bold** font).

Thus, (ficta-identity-2), (ficta-identity-4) and (ex.fic.identity-1) should be amended, by adding that the two minded subjects are legitimate identifiers of those objects (ficta-identity-2a), that the minded subject that establishes the identities is a legitimate identifier of the objects involved in those identities, so that we obtain (ficta-identity-4a) and (ex.fic.identity-1a). Accordingly, (ficta-identity) and (ex.fic.identity) should be amended as follows:

(ficta-identity-a) $\forall x \forall y ((Fx \ \& \ Fy \ \& \ x = y) \leftrightarrow \exists m (A_{UOO} mx \ \& \ A_{UOO} my \ \& \ A_3 I xym) \ V \ \exists m_1 \exists m_2 (T_H m_1 x \ \& \ T_H m_2 y \ \& \ A_3 T_H m_2 y m_1 \ \& \ A_3 T_H m_1 x m_2 \ \& \ I_L m_1 xy \ \& \ I_L m_2 xy \ \& \ A_3 I xym_1 \ \& \ A_3 I yxm_2) \ V \ \exists P (P_{UF} Px \ \& \ P_{UF} Py) \ V \ \exists s (B xs \ \& \ \exists P \exists m \exists c (I_L mxy \ \& \ A_3 B xsm \ \& \sim D sc \ \& \ A_{UOC} mc \ \& \ A_2 P ymc \ \& \ A_3 I yxm)))$

(ex.fic.identity-a) $\forall x \forall y \forall s (Ex \ \& \ C_H ys \ \& \ x = y) \leftrightarrow \exists m (I_L mxy \ \& \ A_{UOS} ms \ \& \ A_3 I xym) \ V \ \exists P \exists m \exists c (A_{UOS} ms \ \& \ P_U Px \ \& \ D sc \ \& \ A_2 P xmc) \ V \ \forall m (I_S ms \leftrightarrow A_3 I xym))$

The fact that the third major disjunct of (leg.) is negated and no other disjunct is true excludes the first, the second and the third case (e.g., I cannot identify my strange Sherlock Holmes-Watson (*x*) with Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes (*y*), since there is an object *z* (Conan Doyle's Watson) that I identify with *x*, such that both *y* and *z* are not originally authored by me and their author ascribes to them the property of non-being identical). The fourth case is excluded by the fact that (leg.)'s second major disjunct is negated, since it is established by a criterion of identity that is not for fictional objects that Obama is distinct from Lord Gladstone, and no other disjunct is true. The criterion (leg.) is not an *ad hoc* criterion: it preserves the idea that one *cannot* identify in *every* case two objects by simply establishing that they are identical.

What about Quine's merely possible fat man in that doorway? Following (at least in part) Routley, I shall distinguish between different questions concerning his being countable and his identity with or distinctness from the merely possible bald man in that doorway:

(I) is the fictional fat man in that doorway identical with the fictional bald man in that doorway?
(II) How many fictional fat men are there in that doorway?
(III) Is the merely possible fat man in that doorway identical with the merely possible bald man in that doorway?
(IV) How many merely possible fat men are there in that doorway?
(V) How many fat men is it possible that are placed in that doorway?

In this chapter, I shall give an answer to questions (I) and (II). This does not exclude that, after having dealt with modal problems, I shall reply to questions (III)-(V) in a similar way, since it might be legitimate to think of merely possible objects as (peculiar) fictional objects. My answer to question (I) is: it depends. First, one might have to introduce properties such as the property of being in the doorway in front of him/her (i.e., in front of the minded subject that is thinking of the fictional fat man) or such as the property of being in the doorway of room 401 at the fourth floor of the building of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Macerata. Such properties are ascribed to those objects within fictional contexts defined by stories (for example, by Quine's story or by my story about the fictional object). Secondly, we should provide some contextual information: am I the author of some really short story about the fictional fat man (and the fictional bald man) in the doorway, that are originally authored by me (first case)? Am I talking with my friend and colleague Ernesto about those objects (provided that I am their original author or Ernesto is their original author) (second case)? Is Ernesto thinking of an object that I have introduced within some story as its original author (third case)? Are we both talking of Quine's story's bald and fat characters in Quine's doorway (fourth case)? Am I thinking of a story that contains Quine's bald and fat characters (fifth case)? In the first case, we should claim that I can establish the identity of these two fictional objects by (ficta-identity-1): if I think of both objects as identical and I am the author of those objects, then they are identical. In the second case, Ernesto and I can assert their identity by following (ficta-identity-2a). In the third case, Ernesto can assert their identity with one another by thinking of my assertions as being made by their original author (following (ficta-identity-1)) or, if he is a legitimate identifier of his fictional character and my fictional character, by thinking of a new story where the same fictional object has other properties (e.g., he might claim that Michele's fat man in that doorway has the property of being bald within some different fictional context that has Ernesto as its original author) (following ficta-identity-4a).

It seems to me that, in the fourth case and in the fifth one, it is legitimate to claim that those objects are distinct. In the fourth case, Ernesto and I could use (ficta-identity-2a) or (ficta-identity-4a) to establish Quine's fictional objects' identity, at least if we were legitimate identifiers

of those fictional objects. Yet, I am not a legitimate identifier of Quine's merely possible fat man in the doorway and Quine's merely possible bald man in the doorway. In fact, in order to establish their identity, I would have to claim that there are two fictional objects thought of by me (my merely possible fat man in the doorway and my merely possible bald man in the doorway) that are respectively identical with Quine's merely possible fat man in the doorway and Quine's merely possible bald man in the doorway and that those fictional objects of mine are identical (e.g., according to some story that has me as its original author or by stipulation when I talk with Ernesto and Ernesto agrees). Yet, if I claim that those objects of mine are identical, they turn out to be non-identical with Quine's corresponding fictional objects. Let me consider the third major disjunct of (leg.) and its first subdisjunct: my merely possible fat man in the doorway (*x*) should be identical with Quine's merely possible fat man (*y*). Yet, there is another object (*z*) (i.e., Quine's merely possible bald man) that I identify with *x* and that is such that it has Quine as its original author and Quine does not ascribe to it the relation of being identical with *y*, i.e., with Quine's merely possible fat man in the doorway. The same happens when we start with my merely possible bald man in the doorway. In these cases, the first major disjunct of (leg.) is negated and all the other major disjuncts of (leg.) are negated. It turns out that, if I identify my merely possible fat man in the doorway with my merely possible bald man in the doorway, I am not a legitimate identifier of those objects with Quine's objects, so that I cannot establish Quine's objects' identity by simply asserting that my objects are identical with one another. The same seems to happen with Ernesto. Thus, Quine's merely possible fat man and Quine's merely possible bald man in the doorway are distinct fictional objects. For similar reasons, we should give to the fifth case the same answer.

The answers to question (II) depend on the answers to question (I). In fact, by distinguishing the aforementioned cases, we could obtain different answers to the same question.

There are other problematic cases of identities between fictional objects that I have already introduced or that I shall introduce now. Two problematic cases have been presented in chapter I.3. According to the first case, the original author of some story is competently acquainted with some fictional object that is constituted within some other story, but s/he attributes to that fictional object properties that are completely different from the ones that are ascribed to it according to the latter story: there might be a literary work where a fictional character named "Sherlock Holmes" is a rapper who lives in New York. Following our criteria of identity, the first fictional object is identical with the second one not in virtue of (ficta-identity-3) but (if the original author of the first story ascribes such an identity) in virtue of (ficta-identity-1) (if both stories have the same original author) or in virtue of (ficta-identity-4a) (if they have

different authors and if one of such authors – the rapper's author – is a legitimate identifier of those objects). According to the second case, two different authors (without respectively knowing their works) constitute two fictional objects that are qualitatively really similar. Are they the same fictional object? Yes, if (ficta-identity-3) holds for them, given some unique fictional property. If they are qualitatively identical (a really implausible, yet not impossible case), (ficta-identity-3) certainly holds. On the other hand, if some author thought of a story about some fictional object qualitatively identical with (or very similar to) some other fictional object already constituted by another author and if the former author thought of both objects as identical with one another, then their identity could hold in virtue of (ficta-identity-3) and (ficta-identity-4a). It follows from these solutions that it is *not* necessary that, for every fictional object, that object has one and only one original author: there might be cases (implausible, I should repeat, but not impossible ones) in which one and the same fictional object has two or more different original authors. If two different authors ground the identity of one and the same story, that story has two different original authors. Furthermore, (ficta-identity-3) makes it possible to think that some *fictum* could have had a different author. If there is a possible world in which Conan Doyle does not exist and there is some fictional object that is qualitatively identical with (or at least very similar to) Sherlock Holmes, but that is authored by some other minded subject (let me call such an object Sherlock Holmes-2), Sherlock Holmes-2 is identical with our Sherlock Holmes in virtue of (ficta-identity-3), so that one and the same object has – in some other possible world – some other author.

A further case is the one introduced about three (fictional) characters: within different fictional contexts or within the same context, their original author(s) ascribe(s) to the first one the properties of being a detective and of living in Baker Street 221B, London, and of not having a friend named Watson; to the second one the properties of being a detective and of having a friend named Watson and of not living in Baker Street 221B, London; to the third one the properties of having a friend named Watson and of living in Baker Street 221B, London, and of not being a detective. Are such objects identical with one another? Are they all identical with Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes? Concerning the first question, the answer depends on further contextual information (e.g., about their authors), which provides different answers following our criteria. Concerning the second question, it seems difficult to establish whether they are identical with Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, at least according to (ficta-identity-3), since we cannot use disjunctive properties. However, one might use other criteria to establish their identity or difference, provided further contextual information. It is worth remarking once again that the identifiers should be legitimate identifiers.

Finally, let me analyze a case inspired by one of K. Fine's objections against Meinongianism[319]. Let me assume that there are two qualitatively identical, yet numerically distinct fictional objects within the same story. How can we ground their being different from one another? First, one should think that this story is incomplete: if we do not give a name to such objects, if we do not have any property in virtue of whose ascription we can understand that the author talks of the former and not of the latter object, then it is hard to distinguish them. Yet, let me assume that the original author does not give any name to such objects and that s/he does not ascribe any individualizing property to them.. Do they turn out to be identical? It seems to me that they do not. In fact, following (un.fic.property-2), it is legitimate that a good interpreter of the story, in order to preserve their distinction, introduces some unique fictional property that is ascribed to one of them and whose negation is ascribed to the other, so that, considering that the negation of (ficta-identity-3) is true and that no other criterion holds (since the original author does not identify them and since no one could identify them without turning out to be an illegitimate identifier), they turn out to be different fictional objects.

II.3.4. Saving the Data.

It is now possible to provide the truth-conditions for our data, i.e. for the plausibly true statements that I have mentioned in chapter I.3. It is worth remarking that my interpretation is a reformative one: it aims at showing what propositions are expressed by those statements and at defining their truth-conditions.

Ascriptivism can preserve both the intuition that it is not necessary to refer to some author or to some definite story in order to claim that

(12) Sherlock Holmes is a detective

is true (since I could think of Sherlock Holmes as a detective, even if I did not know anything about Conan Doyle or about Conan Doyle's stories) and the intuition that there is some reading of such statements, according to which the propositions that are expressed by them are made true by something involving Conan Doyle and his stories.

Let me call the truth-conditions that follow the first intuition "minimal" truth-conditions and the truth-conditions that follow the second one "qualified" truth-conditions. In order for (12) to express a true proposition, it is sufficient that there are minimal truth-conditions, so that (12) expresses (as we have already seen) a proposition that has such a logical form (that implies its having such-and-such truth-conditions):

(12ascr.) $\exists m \exists c A_2 D_E h m c$

[319] See Fine (1984): 103-104.

However, one might be dissatisfied with such a result: s/he might claim that, for example, by stating that it is true that (12), s/he aims at showing that, according to Conan Doyle or according to his stories or according to some story about Sherlock Holmes, Sherlock Holmes is a detective. Thus, there should be some qualified readings of (12) that express such interpretations. I propose the following readings:

(12ascr.qual.-1) $\exists m \exists c(A_{UOO} mh \,\&\, A_2D_E hmc)$

(12ascr.qual.-2) $\exists c(A_{UOO} dh \,\&\, A_2D_E hdc)$

(12ascr.qual.-3) $\exists c \exists s(C_H hs \,\&\, Dsc \,\&\, \forall m(I_S ms \rightarrow A_2D_E hmc))$

(12ascr.qual.-4) $\exists c \exists s(A_{UOS} ds \,\&\, C_H hs \,\&\, Dsc \,\&\, \forall m_2(I_S m_2 s \rightarrow A_2D_E hm_2 c))$

(where the constant "*d*" stands for Conan Doyle). By (12ascr.qual.-1), it is claimed that there is some original author of Sherlock Holmes that ascribes to him the property of being a detective within some fictional context, while, by (12ascr.qual.-2), it is added that such an author is Conan Doyle. By (12ascr.qual.-3), it is explained that Sherlock Holmes is a character in some story and that every good interpreter of that story ascribes to him the property of being a detective within the fictional context defined by that story, while, by (12ascr.qual.-4), it is added that Conan Doyle is the original author of that story (or of those stories), according to which Sherlock Holmes is such-and-such. What reading should we choose? It depends on the contextual information. However, every qualified reading simply seems to specify, to add further information (e.g., to select some fictional context and/or some minded subject) to the minimal reading.

I shall simply recall the reading of

(8) Sherlock Holmes does not exist

as

(8ascr.) $\sim E h$

and of

(13) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character

as

(13ascr.-1) $F h$

With regard to

(33) Conan Doyle is Sherlock Holmes' creator,

it is legitimate to claim that it simply asserts that Conan Doyle is Sherlock Holmes' original author, i.e., that

(33ascr.) $A_{UOO}dh$

Statements

(34) Conan Doyle killed Sherlock Holmes

and

(35) Conan Doyle resurrected Sherlock Holmes

are a little bit more difficult to deal with. However, the idea behind them is that, according to some story written by Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes dies, while, according to some other story written by Conan Doyle after the first one, Sherlock Holmes lives. Yet, by (35), it is also possible to express the fact that, within the fictional context(s) defined by two stories, Conan Doyle first ascribes the property of dying to Sherlock Holmes and, then, he ascribes the property of living to him.

Thus, the reading of (34) turns out to be

(34ascr.) $\exists c \exists s(A_{UOS}ds \,\&\, Dsc \,\&\, A_2D_Yhdc)$

(where "D_Y" stands for the property of dying). The reading of (35) is

(35ascr.) $\exists c_1 \exists c_2 \exists s_1 \exists s_2 \exists t_1 \exists t_2 (A_{UOS}ds_1 \,\&\, A_{UOS}ds_2 \,\&\, \sim(s_1 = s_2) \,\&\, Wds_1t_1 \,\&\, Wds_2t_2 \,\&\, P_Rt_1t_2 \,\&\, Ds_1c_1 \,\&\, Ds_2c_2 \,\&\, A_2D_Yhdc_1 \,\&\, A_2Lhdc_2)$

(where "c_1" and "c_2" are variables ranging over fictional contexts, "L" stands for the property of living and "W" stands for the relation of writing some story at some time, even if one might use different relations for unwritten stories). While it is claimed by (35ascr.) that these two stories are different, it is not claimed that the fictional contexts defined by them are different. They might define the same fictional context, in which Sherlock Holmes dies (at first) and then he lives.

The statement

(36) Conan Doyle is the author of Sherlock Holmes' stories

expresses the idea that Conan Doyle is the only original author of Holmes' native stories (i.e., those stories that define Sherlock Holmes' context of origin) and it seems to imply that he is the original author of Holmes too. Thus, it might be rendered as

(22ascr.) $A_{UOO}dh \,\&\, \forall s \exists c((C_Hhs \,\&\, Dsc \,\&\, C_Och) \rightarrow (A_{UOS}ds \,\&\, \sim\exists m(\sim(m = d) \,\&\, A_{UOS}ms))))$

It is worth remarking that, according to this reading, every story about Holmes defines

some context that is Holmes' original context, but this context can be common (and should be common) for all those stories. Otherwise, it could not be *the* common fictional context of origin of Holmes.

There can be both minimal and qualified readings of

(37) Sherlock Holmes exists,

(38) Sherlock Holmes lives in London,

(39) Sherlock Holmes had a tea with Gladstone,

(40) in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

Restricting our interpretation to minimal readings, we will have:

(37ascr.) $\exists m \exists c A_2 E hmc$ (even if he does not instantiate existence)

(38ascr.) $\exists m \exists c A_4 L_I hlmc$

(39ascr.) $\exists m \exists c A_4 H_T h g_L mc \ \& \ E g_L$

(40ascr.) $\exists m \exists c (D s_H c \ \& \ A_2 D_E hmc)$

(where the constants "g_L", "l" and "s_H" respectively stand for Lord Gladstone, London and the story *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, while "L_I" and "H_T" respectively stand for the relations of living in and of having a tea with). Concerning (39), we do not have to introduce any fictional duplicate of Gladstone and we do not have to block the inference from (39) to

(25') Gladstone had a tea with Sherlock Holmes,

since it is true that the relation of having a tea with is ascribed by some minded subject both to Sherlock Holmes and to Gladstone within some fictional context, even if it is not true that they instantiate such a relation. Furthermore, the theory does not have to introduce any distinction between fictional objects and their Meinongian existing correlates (e.g., between the fictional Gladstone and the real one).

The interpretation of

(41) in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sherlock Holmes is English,

even if such a statement is not present in Conan Doyle's story, can go as follows. First, I shall assume that there is a relation R, i.e., the relation of being reasonable that some minded subject ascribes some property to some object within some fictional context. The instantiation of this relation is governed by this equivalence:

(reasonable) $\forall x \forall P_1 \forall m_1 \forall c(RA_2P_1xm_1c \leftrightarrow \exists m_2(A_{UOC}m_2c \ \& \ \sim AP_1xm_2c \ \& \ \sim \exists P_2(\sim(P_2 = P_1) \ \& \ AP_2xm_2c \ \& \ (AP_2xm_2c \rightarrow AP_1xm_2c)) \ \& \ \exists P_3(\sim(P_3 = P_1) \ \& \ AP_3xm_2c \ \& \ (AP_3xm_2c \rightarrow AP_1xm_2c))))$

(where "P_1", "P_2" and "P_3" are variables ranging over properties). This equivalence is grounded on three ideas: a property that it is reasonable for some minded subject to ascribe to some object within some fictional context is a property (a) whose negation is not ascribed to that object within that context by its original author, (b) whose negation is not implied by the ascription of any other property, (c) whose ascription is implied by the ascription of some other property. It is difficult to interpret stories and their authors' intentions, so that it turns out to be difficult to interpret their ascriptions too. Yet, it is difficult *from our viewpoint*, i.e., from interpreters' viewpoint, *not* from authors' viewpoint, and this latter viewpoint is what grounds the truth of (41). Thus, (41) can be minimally read as

(41ascr.) $\exists m \exists c(Ds_Hc \ \& \ RA_2E_Nhmc)$

(where "E_N" stands for the property of being English).

Furthermore, it is easy to deal with

(42) although Sherlock Holmes is a detective, he is a fictional character,

as

(42ascr.) $Fh \ \& \ \exists s C_H hs \ \& \ \exists m \exists c A_2 D_E hmc$

Among our data, there are also statements that involve intentional properties, such as the properties of being more beloved than, of being more famous than, and so on:

(44) Sherlock Holmes is more beloved than Darth Vader,

(45) John admires Sherlock Holmes.

Since such properties are not existence-entailing (in order for something or for someone to be loved or admired, it or s/he does not have to exist), one might simply introduce relations such as the relation of being more beloved than and of admiring:

(44) $B_E hd_V$

(45) $A_D jh$

(where "B_E" and "A_D" respectively stand for the relations of being more beloved than and of admiring, while the constants "d_V" and "j" respectively stand for Darth Vader and John). I shall leave to the reader the task of determining the equivalences that rule the instantiation of such relations (e.g., someone is more beloved than someone else iff it is the case that...).

Things become quite different with

(43) Sherlock Holmes is more intelligent than Emma Bovary,

since the *n*-adic properties of being intelligent and of being more intelligent than someone else seem to be existence-entailing: in order for every object to instantiate those *n*-adic properties, it has to exist. Yet, one might think of degrees of intelligence too and minimally read (43) as follows:

(43ascr.) $\exists m(\exists c_1(A_2I_{NT}{}^1 hmc_1) \& \exists c_2(A_2I_{NT}{}^2 bmc_2) \& G_RI_{NT}{}^1I_{NT}{}^2 \& A_7G_RI_{NT}{}^1I_{NT}{}^2 m)$

(where "$I_{NT}{}^1$" and "$I_{NT}{}^2$" respectively stand for Sherlock Holmes' and Emma Bovary's degrees of intelligence, "G_R" stands for the relation of being greater than, A_7 is some special ascription relation that holds for relations between properties outside fictional contexts, even without involving objects, and the constant "*b*" stands for Emma Bovary). It is not necessary that Sherlock Holmes and Emma Bovary "live" in the same fictional context in order to compare their intelligence: it is only sufficient that some minded subject ascribes to them some degrees of intelligence, that s/he compares such degrees and that such a comparison actually holds.

The statement

(47) Sherlock Holmes is more famous than any real detective

can be interpreted with regard to degrees of fame. Thus, we shall have

(47ascr.) $\exists m \exists c \exists s(C_H hs \& Dsc \& A_2D_E hmc) \& F_{AM}{}^1 h \& \sim\exists x(Dx \& F_{AM}{}^2 x \& (G_RF_{AM}{}^2F_{AM}{}^1 \text{ V } (F_{AM}{}^2 = F_{AM}{}^1)))$

(where "$F_{AM}{}^1$" and "$F_{AM}{}^2$" respectively stand for different degrees of fame).

On the other hand

(46) Conan Doyle died some years after Sherlock Holmes

seems to metaphorically express the fact that Conan Doyle stopped writing about Sherlock Holmes some years before dying or that Conan Doyle died in some year and that he ascribed to Sherlock Holmes the property of dying in some other year, that precedes Doyle's year of death.

In the former case, we will have

(46'ascr.) $A_{UOO} dh \& \exists t_{y1} \exists t_{y2}(S_W dht_{y1} \& D_{YT} dt_{y2} \& P_R t_{y1} t_{y2})$

(where "t_{y1}" and "t_{y2}" are variables that range over years, while "S_W" and "D_{YT}" respectively stand for the relations of stopping writing at some year and of dying at some year).

In the latter case, we will have

(46"ascr.) $A_{UOO}dh \,\&\, \exists c \exists t_{y1} \exists t_{y2}(A_4 bt_{y1}dc \,\&\, D_{YT}dt_{y2} \,\&\, P_R t_{y1}t_{y2})$

With regard to

(48) Sherlock Holmes is still the paradigmatic detective character,

I shall set "still" apart for now (since I have not dealt with the relationship between ascriptions and times) and I shall rewrite it as

(48') Sherlock Holmes is the paradigmatic detective character.

How can we deal with the property of being a paradigmatic character with regard to some property (e.g., with regard to the property of being a detective)? First, I shall recall univocally identifying fictional properties, in order to claim that they can be conjunctive. Secondly, I shall introduce the relation of inspiring as follows:

(inspiring) $\forall x \forall m(I_{NS}xm \leftrightarrow (Fx \,\&\, \exists P_1 \exists P_2 \exists P_3 ... \exists P_N(P_{UF}P_1 x \,\&\, C_{ON}P_1 \,\&\, P_{RC}P_2P_1 \,\&\, P_{RC}P_3P_1 \,\&\, \ldots \,\&\, P_{RC}P_NP_1 \,\&\, \exists y \exists c(A_{UOC}mc \,\&\, (A_2P_2ymc \vee A_2P_3ymc \vee \ldots \vee A_2P_Nymc)))))$

(where "I_{NS}" stands for the relation of inspiring some minded subject, "C_{ON}" stands for the property of being a conjunctive property and "P_{RC}" stands for the relation of being a conjunct of, that holds between properties). An original author of a fictional context is maximally inspired by some fictional object when s/he "copies" it, i.e. when s/he puts the same fictional object within his/her originally authored context. Furthermore, it follows from (inspiring) that there are degrees of inspiration, connected with the number of properties that are conjuncts of the univocally identifying fictional property[320].

In order for something to be the most paradigmatic detective character, one has to think that it is a fictional character and that the majority of those that are the original authors of fictional contexts that involve detective characters are inspired by Sherlock Holmes *or* that the number of such authors that are inspired by Sherlock Holmes is greater than the number of those that are inspired by any other detective character. Yet, the same point can be made with regard to readers or interpreters or (more generally) minded subjects thinking of fictional characters: whenever they think of fictional detectives (i.e., whenever they ascribe to some object the property of being a detective within some fictional context and that object is a fictional character), the absolute majority of them think of Sherlock Holmes or the number of those who think of Sherlock Holmes is greater than the number of those who think of any other fictional

[320] Yet, literally, it is not true that fictional objects inspire minded subject, so that they would have the disposition to inspire some minded subject. In fact, it seems to me that authors of fictional objects primarily have such a disposition. Thus, it is preferable to read this relation as the relation of *x*'s being a fictional object such that its author has the disposition to inspire some *m*.

detective. I shall not formalize here (48'), since I would have to introduce some further technical devices such as plural quantification, but I think that the ascriptivistic interpretation of this statement is now clear.

On the other hand, one might simply formalize

(49) Ulysses inspired both Dante and Joyce

as follows:

(49ascr.) $I_{NS}ud_A$ & $I_{NS}uj_J$

(where the constants "u", "d_A" and "j_J" respectively stand for Ulysse, Dante and Joyce). Furthermore, it seems to be acceptable that Ulysses inspired Dante more than Joyce, since Dante's Ulysses (i.e., Ulysses within the context defined by Dante's *Divina Commedia*) has more properties that are part of the conjunctive univocally identifying fictional property of Ulysses (I would rather say that they are identical, following (ficta-identity-3) and/or (ficta-identity-4a)), while Joyce's Ulysses is not identical with Ulysses (I do not see how he might be identical with him).

With regard to

(50) the Faust of Goethe's *Faust* is an aspect of Faust itself,

one does not have to introduce any general Faust-character (that has no ascribed properties within any fictional context, since it is a fictional character in no context) in order to deal with this statement. It seems to me plausible to state that

(50ascr.) Ff_A & $C_Hf_As_F$ & $A_{UOS}g_Os_F$ & $\exists P_1\exists P_2...\exists P_N\exists P_{N+1}\exists s\exists m\exists c_1\exists c_2(Ds_Fc_1$ & $A_2P_1f_Ag_Oc_1$ & $A_2P_2f_Ag_Oc_1$ & … & $A_2P_Nf_Ag_Oc_1$ & $\sim A_2P_{N+1}f_Ag_Oc_1$ & $\sim(m = g_O)$ & $\sim(s = s_F)$ & $\sim(c_2 = c_1)$ & $A_{UOS}ms$ & $A_2P_{N+1}f_Amc_2)$

(where the constants "f_A", "g_O" and "s_F" respectively stand for Faust, Goethe and Goethe's *Faust*). In sum, the truth of (50ascr.) implies that there are some properties that are ascribed by Goethe to Faust within the fictional context defined by his *Faust* but that there are other properties (at least one) that are not ascribed by Goethe to Faust within that fictional context (properties that are thus different from the former ones, if the L.N.C. is true) and that are ascribed to Faust within some other fictional context defined by some other story, authored by some other author.

On the other hand, if there were some general Faust-character, one would have to introduce some arbitrary fictional context (not defined by any story) where that Faust would have his properties, and s/he would have to define some relation between that general Faust-character and Goethe's (and other authors') Faust-characters.

The statements

(51) Sherlock Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is the same as Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*

and

(52) Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle's stories is the same as Sherlock Holmes of a recent movie directed by Guy Ritchie

are two different identity-statements. From an ascriptivistic perspective, the former can be minimally interpreted as follows:

(51ascr.) $\exists x \exists y \exists c_1 \exists c_2 (D s_H c_1 \,\&\, D s_S c_2 \,\&\, C_H x s_H \,\&\, C_H y s_S \,\&\, \exists m (A_2 N_H x m c_1 \,\&\, A_2 N_H y m c_2) \,\&\, x = y)$

(where the constants "s_S" and "N_H" respectively stand for the story *A Study in Scarlet* and for some property such as the property of being named "Sherlock Holmes"). The identity between the first Sherlock Holmes and the second one is made true by (ficta-identity-1).

On the other hand, (52) might be minimally interpreted as

(52ascr.) $\exists x \exists y \exists z \exists c_1 \exists c_2 \exists s_1 \exists s_2 (M_O x \,\&\, D_R x g_R \,\&\, M_A x s_1 \,\&\, C_H y s_1 \,\&\, A_{UOS} ds2 \,\&\, C_H z s_2 \,\&\, D s_1 c_1 \,\&\, D s_2 c_2 \,\&\, \exists m (A_2 N_H x m c_1 \,\&\, A_2 N_H y m c_2) \,\&\, y = z)$

(where "M_O", "D_R" and "M_A" respectively stand for the property of being a movie, for the relation of being directed by and for the relation of being the material support of some story, while the constant "g_R" stands for Guy Ritchie).

Our last datum concerns fiction within fiction, namely the statement

(53) in *Hamlet*, Gonzago is a fictional character,

which can be minimally interpreted as

(53ascr.) $\exists m \exists c (D s_{HA} c \,\&\, A_2 F g_{ON} m c)$

(where the constant "s_{HA}" and "g_{ON}" respectively stand for the story *Hamlet* and for Gonzago).

Yet, with regard to (53), one might object: there are minded subjects that ascribe to Gonzago the property of non-being fictional within the fictional context defined by *Hamlet*. Perhaps, they have misunderstood the story, but if it is minimally sufficient that there is a minded subject that ascribes such a property to Gonzago in order for (53) to be true, it might be nevertheless sufficient to claim that there is some minded subject that ascribes its negation to him in order for (53) to be false, so that it is not the case that it is true that (53). Yet, this objection is a *non-sequitur*. In fact, if we consider minded subjects that ascribe to Gonzago the property of non-

being fictional within the fictional context defined by *Hamlet*, this situation seems to be expressed by

(53ascr.neg.1) $\exists m \exists c(\mathrm{D}s_{\mathrm{HA}}c \,\&\, \mathrm{A}_2\bar{\mathrm{F}}g_{\mathrm{ON}}mc)$

which does *not* contradict (53ascr.), and *not* by

(53ascr.neg.2) $\exists m \exists c(\mathrm{D}s_{\mathrm{HA}}c \,\&\, \sim\mathrm{A}_2\mathrm{F}g_{\mathrm{ON}}mc)$

nor by

(53ascr.neg.3) $\sim\exists m \exists c(\mathrm{D}s_{\mathrm{HA}}c \,\&\, \mathrm{A}_2\mathrm{F}g_{\mathrm{ON}}mc)$

which would contradict (53ascr.), while (53ascr.neg.1) and (53ascr.neg.2) do not/would not contradict it. It is not true that (53ascr.neg.3), since there is, at least under some qualified reading, some minded subject (e.g., Shakespeare) that ascribes that property to Gonzago within the fictional context defined by *Hamlet*. Furthermore, given that that qualified reading is true of (53), (53ascr.neg.1) expresses a bad interpretation of *Hamlet* (i.e., the minded subject that makes it true that (53ascr.neg.1) is a bad interpreter of *Hamlet*) and (53ascr.neg.2) expresses an incomplete one.

One problem remains if we accept both the ascriptivistic theory and (ex.causal powers-2c). Let me consider the following statements:

(71) London exists;

(72) Hobbiville does not exist.

Intuitively, they both seem to be true. Yet, if, following (ex.causal powers-2c), London turns out not to exist (since it does not possess the relevant dispositions to act requested by that criterion), it is false that (71). Thus, it turns out that every minded subject that ascribes by A_1 to London the property of existing makes a non-veridical ascription. Both London and Hobbiville do not exist. Yet, how can we express the ontological difference between them – i.e., that London is a town in the world and Hobbiville is a fictional or imaginary one?

First, one might accept that (71) and (72) can be paraphrased by

(71') London is a real town;

(72') Hobbiville is not a real town.

Such paraphrases are not arbitrary: they are guided by the conception of existence that is expressed by (ex.causal powers-2c) and that I have already tried to defend. Yet, what is for something to be a real town? If we accept that towns do not exist provided that they do not have dispositions to act, given (ex.causal powers-2c), it is not for that thing to instantiate the properties

of being a town and of existing. However, one might introduce some property of being a real town (that is different from the property of existing) in order to deal with such cases. In order for a town to be real, it simply has to instantiate the property of being a town. Thus, London is a town and Hobbiville is not a town. For any minded subject, that subject makes a veridical A_1-ascription of the property of being a real town with regard to some object iff that object is a town. Furthermore, that object is a town iff there is some property that is relevant for the instantiation of the property of being a town (e.g., the property of having some geographical coordinates). Thus, it is true that (71'), while it is false that (71), and it is true both that (72) and (72').

Finally, given the ascriptivistic theory, it is possible to redefine existence in terms of completeness. Let me imagine that there is a story s_A that is constituted by all and only the propositions that are true in the actual world. Such a story defines a context c_A that is not a fictional context that is identity-dependent on our minds. Yet, this context is a fictional one iff there is some minded subject m_A that is its original author. That minded subject (e.g., God) knows, for every property or relation and for any object(s), if that/those object(s) has/have that property or relation or not, i.e., that minded subject veridically ascribes to every object (or to all objects) that property (or that relation) or its negation. This context is a fictional one *before* creation, so that it does not exist before creation (and, as we will see in the next chapter, it does not exist after creation too, at least according to my perspective).

Thus, by A_2 ascriptions (or by reductions to them), it turns out that

(ex.completeness-ascr.) $\forall x(\mathrm{E}x \leftrightarrow \exists m \exists c(\mathrm{C_O}x \,\&\, \mathrm{A_{UOC}}mc \,\&\, \forall \mathrm{P}(\mathrm{A_2P}xmc \,\underline{\vee}\, \mathrm{A_2}\overline{\mathrm{P}}xmc)))$

On the other hand, no author of any fictional object ascribes, for every property, that property or its negation to that object within no context. Yet, (ex.completeness-ascr.) has two problems: it works only for beings that are different from God (so that, if God exists, there should be some other property of existing that is instantiated by Him) and it implies (together with the assumption that minded subjects exist in order to define the identity conditions of objects and fictional contexts) that God exists, so that many philosophers could not accept it.

II.4. I Might Have Not Existed, I Shall Not Exist (Maybe)

In this chapter, I shall deal with some problems that I have already discussed in the first part of this work and that concern the relationship between existence, modality and time. In particular, I shall propose an approach to possible worlds that is inspired by the ascriptivistic theory developed in the chapter II.3 and I shall introduce the qualifying theses of my Meinongian presentism. It seems to me that such solutions can preserve the truth of our initial data and that they can deal with more difficult data too. Roughly, my idea is that possible worlds are nothing more than peculiar fictional contexts and that they can be considered mental objects, while a non-actualistic form of presentism can accept that there are now non-existing objects and that objects can instantiate present-/past-/future-tensed properties with respect to times.

II.4.1. A Mentalistic Approach to Possible Worlds.

A mentalistic approach to possible worlds that is grounded on ascriptivism first aims at defending two theses:

(a) every fictional context is a mental object;

(b) since every possible world is a fictional context, it is a mental object.

I shall try to argue for (a) as follows:

(arg.I.1) every fictional context depends for its identity conditions on some story/stories;

(arg.I.2) every story depends for its identity conditions on propositions that constitute it;

(arg. I.3) identity dependence is transitive;

(arg.I.4) thus: every fictional context depends for its identity conditions on some propositions (i.e., on those propositions that are true in it).

Given

(def.story-context) $\forall s \forall c(\mathrm{D}sc \leftrightarrow \forall p(\mathrm{T}_S ps \rightarrow \mathrm{T}_C pc))$

it seems true that (arg.I.1). Intuitively, two different stories define two different fictional contexts, even if I do not exclude the case that two stories define the same fictional context. However, in this latter case, it seems to happen that those stories are unified in order to constitute only one story and that that story defines that unified context (e.g., if we unify the stories *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, we obtain one fictional context that is defined by them and if we unify all the stories about Sherlock Holmes we obtain one fictional context that can be considered Sherlock Holmes' fictional context). With regard to (arg.I.2), if stories are sets of

propositions that have logical relationships with one another (e.g., logical implication, conjunction, and so on), then they seem to depend on their constituting propositions for their identity conditions, so that two stories are different iff they are constituted by different propositions (in fact, even different relations between propositions, such as entailment, can define further constituting propositions that make stories different or identical). Finally, it seems true that (arg.I.3): for any three objects (e.g., a body, a molecule and an atom), if the first object (the body) identity-depends on the second one (the molecule) and the second object identity-depends on the third one (the atom), then the first object identity-depends on the third one too (i.e., the body identity-depends on the atom). One could reject this example, by claiming that the body has some kind of unity that makes it identity-dependent not only on its constituting molecules, but also on something else (e.g., its structure). However, this would ground a case of partial identity-dependence, while, in the case of fictional contexts, stories and propositions, there seems to be nothing more than stories or propositions (and, in turn, as we will notice, minded subjects) that ground the identity of fictional contexts.

The second part of the argument for (a) works as follows:

(arg.II.1) for every proposition, that proposition depends for its identity conditions on some minded subject(s);

(arg.II.2) every fictional context depends for its identity conditions on some proposition(s) (i.e., those propositions that are true in it);

(arg.II.3) for every object, that object depends for its identity conditions on some minded subject(s) iff it is a mental object;

(arg.II.4) identity dependence is transitive;

(arg.II.5) thus: every fictional context is a mental object.

While I have already tried to defend (arg.II.4) and (arg.II.2) and while (arg.II.3) only represents the equivalence that governs the instantiation of the property of being a mental object, it is not intuitively true that (arg.II.1). In fact, as I have already claimed in the chapter II.2, one could think that some possible world in which no minded subjects exist would still contain some truth-bearers, i.e., propositions. Thus, propositions seem to exist (or, better, to be identified) independently of minded subjects. Yet, I do not accept this argument. In fact, those propositions that seem to be true in possible worlds without any minded subject are true from our viewpoint, i.e., from the viewpoint of the actual world. For example, one could claim [in some possible world without any minded subject, dinosaurs exist] is a true proposition (provided

that there is such a possible world) in virtue of the fact that that possible world, roughly, is constituted by a state of affairs such as the state of affairs that dinosaurs exist. In order to make [in some possible world without any minded subject, dinosaurs exist] true, we only need two items: that proposition (that is part of the actual$_1$ and of the actual$_3$ world and that is thought of by minded subject(s) that live in the actual$_1$ world) and the state of affairs that dinosaurs exist. Why do we have to introduce one further entity in that possible world, such as the proposition [dinosaurs exist]? Thus, it seems to me that propositions could be only considered mental objects. It thus turns out that (a) is true.

Before dealing with the argument for (b), I shall introduce some theses of my mentalistic-ascriptivistic theory of modality, under the hypothesis that possible worlds are nothing more than peculiar fictional contexts.

First, after having reduced all fictional ascriptions (i.e., all ascriptions that involve at least one fictional context) to fictional ascriptions of monadic properties (a reduction that is legitimate within an abundant conception of properties), we can define the relation of being part of a fictional context:

(part-fc) $\forall x \forall c(\mathrm{P}_{\mathrm{AC}} xc \leftrightarrow \exists \mathrm{P} \exists m \mathrm{A}_2 \mathrm{P} xmc)$

(where "P_{AC}" stands for the relation of being part of a fictional context)[321]. Secondly, one could claim that a possible world is a fictional context that is consistent and complete, i.e. a fictional context in which, for every object and every property, if that object is part of that context, then that property or (*aut*) its complementary property is ascribed to it. Thus, we shall obtain:

(p.w.) $\forall c(\mathrm{P}_{\mathrm{W}} c \leftrightarrow \forall x \forall \mathrm{P} \exists m(\mathrm{P}_{\mathrm{AC}} xc \rightarrow (\mathrm{A}_2 \mathrm{P} xmc \underline{\vee} \mathrm{A}_2 \overline{\mathrm{P}} xmc)))$

(where "P_{W}" stands for the property of being a possible world).

Reducing all ascribed properties to monadic properties instantiated by them, two possible worlds are identical iff they are qualitatively identical, i.e., iff they have the same properties (and, in particular, the same monadic ascribed properties, such as the property of being such that some property P is ascribed by A_2 to some object *x* by some minded subject *m* within it). Thus, we shall have:

(id.p.w.) $\forall c_1 \forall c_2((\mathrm{P}_{\mathrm{W}} c_1 \,\&\, \mathrm{P}_{\mathrm{W}} c_2) \rightarrow ((c_1 = c_2) \leftrightarrow \forall \mathrm{P}(\mathrm{P} c_1 \leftrightarrow \mathrm{P} c_2)))$

It seems to me that there are no qualitatively identical and numerically distinct possible worlds: I do not know how to make sense of such an idea. Among possible worlds, there is one world that is actual$_2$, i.e., (by reducing both ascribed and instantiated properties to monadic ones)

[321] For a list of symbols, see the Appendix (pp. 281-284).

(actual$_2$ p.w.) $\forall c(A_C c \leftrightarrow (P_W c \,\&\, \forall x \forall P \exists m((A_2 P x m c \leftrightarrow Px) \,\&\, (A_2 \overline{P} x m c \leftrightarrow \sim Px))))$

(where "A_C" stands for the property of being actual$_2$).

It is easy to show that there is only one actual$_2$ possible world. In fact, if there were two different actual$_2$ possible worlds, then they would be different for at least one property and, in particular, for a monadic ascribed property. They would be such that the first world would have that property and the second world would not have it. Yet, given (actual$_2$ p.w.), it would turn out that one and the same object would both instantiate and not instantiate that property. Yet, given the validity of the law of non-contradiction, it is not the case that one and the same object both instantiates and does not instantiate the same property. Thus, it is not the case that there is more than one actual$_2$ possible world. Furthermore, the actual$_2$ possible world can be now considered identical with the actual$_3$ possible world, since every other possible world is an object that has properties in the actual$_2$ possible world, so that there is no need to distinguish between the actual$_2$ and the actual$_3$ world.

In addition, one could ask: what minded subjects are requested in order to think of possible worlds? It seems that there should be some omniscient minded subject, i.e., some minded subject that ascribes to every object (even comprehending possible worlds) all and only the properties (both positive and negative) that it has. Thus, an omniscient minded subject is such that

(om.mind) $\forall m(O_M m \leftrightarrow \forall P \forall x((A_1 P x m \leftrightarrow Px) \,\&\, (A_1 \overline{P} x m \leftrightarrow \sim Px)))$

(where "O_M" stands for the property of being an omniscient minded subject). It is worth noticing that modal properties (such as the property of being thus-and-thus in some definite possible world) are monadic properties instantiated by an object x too. An omniscient minded subject is simply invoked for one reason: if possible worlds are fictional contexts (i.e., mental objects) and if they must be distinguished from one another, then non-omniscient minded subjects (such as human beings) cannot ground their identity, since they cannot know all the properties that are instantiated (and not instantiated) by every object. Thus, non-omniscient minded subjects could not grasp individual possible worlds and they could not ground their identity conditions: they could (at best) be able to distinguish sets of possible worlds for which some condition holds.

Given (id.p.w.), it is easy to introduce possible worlds' individuating properties, i.e., properties that ground the identity and distinction between possible worlds. The instantiation of a possible world's individuating property is governed by the following equivalence:

(p.w.ind.properties) $\forall P \forall c_1(P_{INDPW} P \leftrightarrow (P_W c_1 \,\&\, \exists c_2(\sim(c_2 = c_1) \leftrightarrow (Pc_1 \,\&\, \sim Pc_2))))$

(where "P_{INDPW}" stands for the property of being an individuating possible world's property). Among possible worlds' individuating properties, there are properties that are propositional, such as the property of being such that the proposition [p] (even a complex conjunctive one) is true in it. Furthermore, many (but not all) possible world's individuating properties seem to be propositional. However, if there were two possible worlds qualitatively identical with regard to all and only their propositional properties, what other properties would ground their distinctness? For example, the property of being thought of by some omniscient minded subject as distinct from some other qualitatively identical possible world *w* or of not being possibly coactualized with some other qualitatively identical possible world *w*. Yet, such properties would not be possible worlds' individuating properties: given two qualitatively identical yet numerically distinct possible worlds, they would both have them. If we maintain that possible worlds are mental objects and that there is an omniscient minded subject that thinks of them, then it seems to me that such an omniscient minded subject would ground their numerical distinction by primitively and arbitrarily thinking that there are two qualitatively identical possible worlds. That subject would *arbitrarily* think of those worlds as distinct, since there would be no reason for maintaining that they are identical or distinct, so that the former world (world-1) would have a relational property such as the property of being distinct from the latter world (world-2) and the latter world (world-2) would have a relational property such as the property of being distinct from the former world (world-1) and (id.p.w.) would still hold for them. However, it seems to me that every non-arbitrary identity or distinction between possible worlds is grounded on possible worlds' propositional individuating properties and that every non-arbitrary possible world's individuating property (i.e., every property distinct from the aforementioned relational property) is a propositional one.

In order for a proposition to be true in a possible world, it is the case that

(true-in) $\forall c \forall p(T_{PW}pc \leftrightarrow (P_W c \,\&\, \exists m(O_M m \,\&\, A_2 T p m c)))$

(where "T_{PW}" stands for the relation of being true within a possible world), i.e., a proposition bears the relation of being true in a possible world within a fictional context iff that fictional context is a possible world and there is an omniscient minded subject that ascribes to that proposition by A_2 the property of being true within that context.

The last two notions that I shall introduce in order to deal with our data are proximity to the actual$_2$ world except for some proposition and conventional essence. A fictional context that is a possible world is proximate to the actual$_2$ world except for some proposition in this case:

(proximity) $\forall c \forall p_1(P_{ROX}cc_A p_1 \leftrightarrow (P_W c \,\&\, P_W c_A \,\&\, T_{PW}p_1 c_A \,\&\, \sim T_{PW}p_1 c \,\&\, \forall p_2(T_{PW}p_2 c \leftrightarrow (T_{PW}p_2 c_A \,\&\, \sim(p_2$

$= p_1$) & ~($T_{PW}p_1c_A \rightarrow T_{PW}p_2c_A$)))))

(where "P_{ROX}" stands for the relation of being proximate to the actual$_2$ world except for some proposition and "c_A" is a constant that stands for the actual$_2$ world). For example, let me take the proposition [Michele exists], that is true in the actual$_2$ world and that is not true in some other fictional context that is a possible world. By (proximity), that fictional context is proximate to the actual$_2$ world except for that proposition iff both that context and the actual$_2$ world are possible worlds and [Michele exists] is true in the actual$_2$ world and it is not true in the other possible world and, for every proposition, that proposition is true in the other possible world iff it is true in the actual$_2$ world and it is obviously different from [Michele exists] and it is not the case that its truth in the actual$_2$ world is implied by the truth in the actual$_2$ world of [Michele exists].

Finally, I shall introduce conventional essences of objects as follows:

(mod.ess.) $\forall x \forall P(E_{CM}Px \leftrightarrow (Px \ \& \ \forall m(O_M m \rightarrow \sim \exists c(P_W c \ \& \ A_2\overline{P}xmc))))$

(where "E_{CM}" stands for the relation of being a conventional essence of something).

If we now turn to the ontological status of possible worlds, it seems to be possible to demonstrate that they are mental objects:

(arg.III.1) every possible world depends for its identity conditions (whenever such identity conditions are non-arbitrarily defined) on possible worlds' individuating properties;

(arg.III.2) every non-arbitrary possible worlds' individuating property depends for its identity conditions on some proposition;

(arg.III.3) identity dependence is transitive;

(arg.III.4) thus, every possible world depends for its identity conditions (whenever such identity conditions are non-arbitrarily defined) on some proposition.

In turn,

(arg.IV.1) for every proposition, that proposition depends for its identity condition on some minded subject(s);

(arg.IV.2) for every object, that object depends for its identity conditions on some minded subject iff it is a mental object;

(arg.IV.3) every possible world depends for its identity conditions (whenever such identity conditions are non-arbitrarily defined) on some proposition;

(arg.IV.4) identity dependence is transitive;

(arg.IV.5) thus, every possible world depends, for its identity condition (whenever such identity conditions are non-arbitrarily defined) on some minded subject(s);

(arg.IV.6) thus, every non-arbitrarily defined in its identity conditions possible world is a mental object.

I have already defended all the premises. One important point of these arguments concerns the ontological economy of their assumptions. Provided that it is possible to consider possible worlds mental objects, it is neither necessary to admit that they somehow are or exist, nor that they have some more ontologically committing ontological status (e.g., the status of being complex states of affairs), so that they would be identifiable independently of minded subjects. On the other hand, it seems that my account commits to the existence of at least one omniscient minded subject, provided that minded subjects must exist in order to constitute the identity conditions of mental objects. Yet, this theory can have a fictionalist reading too: given a fictional context defined by the ascriptivistic-mentalistic theory of possible worlds, finite minded subjects ascribe such-and-such properties to objects, possible worlds and omniscient minded subject(s), even if they do not believe that (those) that minded subject(s) exist(s).

It is now time to introduce some properties concerning the possible existence or non-existence of objects:

(cont.ex.) $\forall x(E_{CONT}x \leftrightarrow (Ex \,\&\, \exists m \exists c(O_M m \,\&\, P_W c \,\&\, \sim(c = c_A) \,\&\, A_2\overline{E}xmc)))$

(cont.non-ex.) $\forall x(E_{CONT\text{-}NON}x \leftrightarrow (\sim Ex \,\&\, \exists m \exists c(O_M m \,\&\, P_W c \,\&\, \sim(c = c_A) \,\&\, A_2 Exmc)))$

(nec.ex.) $\forall x(E_{NEC}x \leftrightarrow \forall m \forall c((O_M m \,\&\, P_W c) \rightarrow A_2 Exmc))$

(non-nec.poss.ex.) $\forall x(E_{NON\text{-}NEC\text{-}POSS}x \leftrightarrow \exists m(O_M m \,\&\, \exists c_1 \exists c_2(P_W c_1 \,\&\, P_W c_2 \,\&\, \sim(c_1 = c_2) \,\&\, A_2 Exmc_1 \,\&\, A_2\overline{E}xmc_2)))$

(imp.ex.) $\forall x(E_{IMP}x \leftrightarrow \forall m \forall c((O_M m \,\&\, P_W c) \rightarrow A_2\overline{E}xmc))$

(where "E_{CONT}", "$E_{CONT\text{-}NON}$", "E_{NEC}", "$E_{NON\text{-}NEC\text{-}POSS}$" and "$E_{IMP}$" respectively stand for the properties of contingently existing, contingently non-existing, necessarily existing, non-necessarily yet possibly existing and non-possibly existing).

Yet, as I have already noticed, it is not sufficient, in order to grasp the truth-conditions of our data about my merely possible non-existence and Noman's (and Sherlock Holmes') merely possible existence, that there is some possible world in which I do not exist or Noman (or Sherlock Holmes) exists. In fact, what seems to be asserted by statements such as

(54) Noman might have existed,

(55) I might have not existed,

(56) Sherlock Holmes might have existed,

is *at least* ambiguous between what seems to happen in some possible world or another and what *might* happen in the actual$_2$ world (provided that the actual$_2$ world is identical with the actual$_3$ world), so that each statement has at least two different interpretations:

(54a) Noman exists in some possible world or another,

(54b) Noman might have existed in the actual$_2$ world,

(55a) I do not exist in some possible world or another,

(55b) I might have not existed in the actual$_2$ world,

(56a) Sherlock Holmes exists in some possible world or another,

(56b) Sherlock Holmes might have existed in the actual$_2$ world.

I shall start with Noman. It is possible to read the truth-conditions of (54a) as follows:

(54a-ascr.) $E_{CONT\text{-}NON}n$

(where "n" is a constant standing for Noman). On the other hand, what is requested for the truth of (54b) is that there is a possible world that is proximate to the actual$_2$ world except for the proposition [Noman does not exist]:

(54b-ascr.) $E_{CONT\text{-}NON}n \,\&\, \exists m \exists c(O_M m \,\&\, P_{ROX} cc_A p_N \,\&\, A_2 E n m c)$

(where "p_N" is a constant standing for the proposition [Noman does not exist]). Since there are possible worlds in which Noman exists that differ from the actual$_2$ world with respect to many other propositions, not every possible world is proximate to the actual$_2$ world except for [Noman does not exist].

From an impersonal perspective, (55a) and (55b) can be interpreted as follows:

(55a-ascr.) $E_{CONT} m_M$

(55b-ascr.) $E_{CONT} m_M \,\&\, \exists m \exists c(O_M m \,\&\, P_{ROX} cc_A p_M \,\&\, A_2 E m_M m c)$

(where the constants "m_M" and "p_M" respectively stand for me, i.e., Michele, and the proposition [Michele exists]).

Yet, since a first-person perspective is introduced in (55), it is worth considering the veridicity of the self-ascription (by A_1) of properties such as the ones of contingently existing and of contingently existing with regard to the actual$_2$ world. This latter property seems to be

governed by the following equivalence:

(cont.ex.act.) $\forall x(E_{\text{CONT-ACT}}x \leftrightarrow (Ex \,\&\, \exists m \exists c(O_M m \,\&\, P_W c \,\&\, \sim(c = c_A) \,\&\, P_{ROX} c c_A p_X \,\&\, A_2 E x m c)))$

(where "$E_{\text{CONT-ACT}}$" stands for the property of being contingently existent with regard to the actual$_2$ world and the constant "p_X" stands for the proposition [x exists]), so that (55b-ascr.) is equivalent to

(55b-ascr.') $E_{\text{CONT-ACT}} m_M$

Thus, from the first-person perspective, (55a) and (55b) should be read as

(55a-first.pers.-ascr.) $A_1 E_{\text{CONT}} m_M m_M$

(55b-first.pers.ascr.) $A_1 E_{\text{CONT-ACT}} m_M m_M$

and their truth-conditions (i.e., those conditions in virtue of which they are veridical A_1-ascriptions) are respectively expressed by (55a-ascr.) and (55b-ascr.) and (55b-ascr.').

I remain agnostic about the truth of (56a) and (56b). On the one hand, if the property of being fictional is a conventional essence of Sherlock Holmes, then Sherlock Holmes is a non-possibly existent object, so that (56a) and (56b) are false. Nevertheless, provided that there seems to be no inconsistency between Sherlock Holmes' ascribed properties and that no inconsistency is implied by the truth of all the propositions that constitute Conan Doyle's stories (if we assume that in such stories Sherlock Holmes did not really die), why cannot we claim that some omniscient minded subject thinks of a possible world in which Sherlock Holmes exists? It is true that Conan Doyle's and finite minded subjects' fictional contexts are not possible worlds, since they are at least incomplete. Yet, they can be somehow completed by some omniscient minded subject and they can be completed in different ways, so that there could be many Sherlock Holmes' possible worlds following Conan Doyle's stories, i.e., many possible worlds obtained by completing that/those fictional context(s) defined by Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes' stories.

Following this latter solution, let me imagine that there is a possible world in which there is an existent Sherlock Holmes and that this possibly existent Sherlock Holmes does not actually exist (i.e., he does not exist in the actual$_2$ world). This Sherlock Holmes would be a contingently non-existent object. Since he is constituted by some minded subject in his identity conditions, he actually is a mental object. Furthermore, he is a fictional object too. Is he identical with or different from the *fictum* Sherlock Holmes that we all know? Provided my criteria of identity for *ficta*, he seems to be identical with him. In fact, by (ficta-identity-4a), by completing that story, that omniscient minded subject thinks of a story in which *that* Sherlock Holmes defined in his identity conditions by Conan Doyle exists. Thus, it seems to be true that (56a). What about (56b)?

Well, perhaps there is a possible world that is proximate to the actual world except for the proposition [Sherlock Holmes does not exist]. Yet, this possible world is not one of those worlds obtained by completing Conan Doyle's stories. In fact, such possible worlds would contain many propositions that are not true in the actual$_2$ world and that are not connected in their truth-values with the truth-values of [Sherlock Holmes does not exist] or [Sherlock Holmes exists]. Thus, (56b) might be true, but it might not be made true simply by completing Conan Doyle's stories in order to obtain some possible world(s) in which Sherlock Holmes exists.

The difficulties in accepting the truth of (56a) and (56b) lie in at least three points. First, one might think that seemingly inconsistent objects (such as the man that is not a man) would turn out to be only contingently non-existent. Yet, the man that is not a man has both the properties of being a man and of non-being a man, so that he does not exist in any possible world. Secondly, it might seem arbitrary to ground the identity of those two Sherlock Holmes (Conan Doyle's one and the one obtained by completing Conan Doyle's fictional context) on (ficta-identity-4a). True. Yet, if that omniscient minded subject is truly omniscient, why cannot he constitute a possible world in which Sherlock Holmes (*our* Sherlock Holmes) exists? Nothing seems to rule out such a possibility. Thirdly, many philosophers argue that it is part of the essence of Sherlock Holmes that he is a fictional object. However, as long as we do not accept any peculiar theory of essences (i.e., as long as we remain agnostic about essences) and essences can be defined in non-modal terms too, it is not demonstrated that Sherlock Holmes essentially is fictional, i.e., that he necessarily is fictional. Perhaps, it is true that Sherlock Holmes essentially is a fictional object, so that he is a necessarily non-existent object too. Yet, I do not now see any strong reason for the falsity of (56a) and (56b), at least from the viewpoint of a mentalistic theory of possible worlds. Thus, even if I maintain that there *might* be such a reason, it seems to me that (56a) and (56b) might be true. More precisely, I am only an agnostic *quasi*-believer about Sherlock Holmes' possible existence.

Three questions remain concerning Quine's merely possible fat man in the doorway, if we accept that he is a merely possible object:

(III) Is the merely possible fat man in that doorway identical with the merely possible bald man in that doorway?

(IV) How many merely possible fat men are there in that doorway?

(V) How many fat men is it possible that are placed in that doorway?

Concerning question (III), the answer is: it depends. There are possible worlds in which there is a fat man in that doorway who is bald too and possible worlds in which he is not bald. Furthermore, considering possibilities about the actual$_2$ world, there are possible worlds

proximate to it in which they are identical and possible worlds proximate to it in which they are distinct, i.e., in which there is a fat man in that doorway who is not bald. Further contextual information is required in order to give a definite answer to the question. Yet, it is possible to give a definite answer to the question, so that Quine's complaint is not justified.

Concerning question (V), the answer is: it depends on the size of the fat man and on the size of that doorway – if we consider the actual$_2$ doorway, i.e., if we investigate the possibility of there being *n* fat men in that doorway in a possible world that is proximate to the actual$_2$ one. On the other hand, if that doorway were larger or narrower (i.e., if there are possible worlds in which it is larger or narrower than it actually$_2$ is), the answer would obviously vary.

Finally, concerning question (IV), the answer is: zero. Since the property of being in that doorway is an existence-entailing one and since merely possible fat men do not exist, no merely possible fat man instantiates the former property.

II.4.2. A Sketch of Meinongian Presentism.

In this section, I shall give a brief sketch of a Meinongian Presentism, i.e., a non-actualistic version of Presentism, which seems to have some advantages over its presentist rivals and over many forms of non-presentism.

I cannot defend here all the assumptions incorporated in the version of Meinongian Presentism that I wish to defend. In particular, I cannot defend a substantialist view of times (according to which, roughly, there are times that are different from one another independently of the things that occupy those times) and a peculiar view of tenses (according to which tenses should be primarily considered property-modifiers, i.e., they primarily introduce new properties by modifying untensed properties).

My version of Meinongian Presentism uses some strategies that are typically accepted by non-presentists and that are rejected by many (actualist) presentists. In particular, it mixes times and tenses *qua* property-modifiers in order to provide the truth-conditions for tensed propositions. First, I shall spend some words about times and tenses and give a preliminary view of tensed properties. Secondly, I shall make my approach more formal and introduce some basic notions, in order to contrast eternalism and non-eternalism and in order to define, among non-eternalist positions, presentism and, among presentist positions, Meinongian Presentism. Thirdly, I shall try to demonstrate the superiority of Meinongian Presentism over other positions in dealing with the problems of substantial change and of the truth-conditions of propositions seemingly about merely past objects. Fourthly, I shall deal with the nature of propositions and the difference between truth at times and truth *simpliciter*. Finally, I shall analyze the data presented in chapter I.4.

From my perspective, times are non-existent and non-mental objects that are identified along the B-series in virtue of the relation of simultaneity. Given two times, they are identical iff they are simultaneous with one another. On the other hand, they are different iff they are not simultaneous with one another, i.e., iff one of them precedes or (*aut*) follows the other. As I have already said, this conception of times is committed to a substantialist view of times. Nevertheless, there might be fundamental physical facts that determine the difference between times. It is worth noticing that, if there are such facts, they are not in time, they do not obtain at any time, since they ground the identity of times and such an identity cannot be presupposed by claiming that such facts *presently* obtain with regard to some time or another.

Tenses are primarily considered property-modifiers. A tensed property is a property obtained by modifying non-tensed properties (using temporal adverbs, such as "presently", "pastly" and "futurely") and by adding a temporal index. In fact, tensed properties are always instantiated with regard to times[322]: there is no object that instantiates the property of *presently* being a man *simpliciter*, since every object that *presently* is a man has that feature with regard to some time. It is not the case that Socrate *presently* is a man with regard to *this* time (the present time), while it is the case that he *pastly* is a man (i.e., that he was a man) with regard to *this* time. On the other hand, there is a time that precedes the present time and with regard to which Socrates presently is a man. The property of *presently* being such-and-such with regard to some *t* may add nothing new to objects already instantiating tensed properties: for example, Socrates *presently* is *pastly* a man with regard to *t* iff he *pastly* is a man with regard to *t*. By now, I shall name facts such as the fact that Socrates *presently* is *pastly* a man with regard to *t* "redundant facts"[323]. Thus, given the property of being a man, it can be modified in order to obtain the tensed properties of *presently* being a man with regard to some time, of *pastly* being a man with regard to some time, of *futurely* being a man with regard to some time.

Past-tensed, present-tensed and future-tensed properties with regard to times are different from one another. For example, provided that t_1 is the present time, the extension of the property of *pastly* being a man with regard to t_1 differs from the extension of the property of *presently* being a man with regard to t_1: if we accept that Socrates still is an object at t_1, even if he does not exist at t_1 (i.e., he does not *presently* exist with regard to t_1), then Socrates *pastly* is a man

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322 For a presentist (though non-Meinongian) approach similarly based on a substantialist view of times and on irreducibly tensed properties involving times, see Orilia (2012a), (2012b) and (forthcoming). See also Hinchliff (1988) and (1996).

323 Given the view of facts presented in chapter II.2, I do not consider facts true propositions. Furthermore, I distinguish between facts and states of affairs, since it seems to me that facts are occurring states of affairs. Thus, the expression "redundant facts" is not synonymous with the expression "redundant propositions". Facts such as the fact that Socrates *presently* is *pastly* a man with regard to *t* are redundant as long as there is another fact (i.e., the fact that Socrates *pastly* is man with regard to *t*) that does the same ontological work and that is somehow more fundamental than the former fact.

with regard to t_1 and it is not the case that he *presently* is a man with regard to t_1. Yet, how can we define *the* present and *the* present time?

Let me first introduce the notion of temporal fact. A temporal fact is a fact that consists of the instantiation of some *n*-adic tensed property (e.g., the property of *presently* being a man) with regard to some time by some object(s), i.e., a temporal fact is an event (given J. Kim's definitions of events, according to which events consist of the instantiation of some *n*-adic property by some object(s) at some time). I assume that not every fact is a temporal fact. For example, as we have already seen, if there are fundamental physical facts that determine the identity of times, then they are not temporal facts. Furthermore, times' instantiating relations such as the ones of being simultaneous, preceding, and so on, are not temporal facts. *The present* with regard to some time *t* is the sum of all the temporal facts that involve *t*: that Michele *presently* is a man with regard to *t*, that Socrates *pastly* is a man with regard to *t*, and so on. *The strict present* with regard to *t* is the sum of all the non-redundant temporal facts that involve *t* and that are constituted by present-tensed properties. For example, *the strict present* with regard to *t* comprehends Michele's *presently* being a man with regard to *t*, but it does not comprehend Socrates' *pastly* being a man with regard to *t*. *The present time* is, roughly, the time involved in facts that occur *now*, i.e., in present events (I shall give an analysis of "now" in a few pages). There are (i.e., given my reading of quantifiers, are identified) times across times: we can now identify the time of the Battle of Hastings and we can claim that it is different from the present time. Furthermore, there are different (strict and non-strict) presents with regard to different times, even if there is *now* only one present.

In order to define some basic notions of Meinongian presentism, I shall use tensed properties, i.e., properties such as the property of *presently* being a philosopher (with regard to some *t*): given a property P, it is possible to characterize a present-tensed property P_{PRES} (and a past-tensed P_{PAST} and a future-tensed P_{FUT}). A property is temporal iff, for every object, it is instantiated by that object only if it is *presently* or *pastly* or *futurely* instantiated with regard to some time, namely

(temp.prop.) $\forall P(P_{TEMP}P \leftrightarrow \forall x(Px \rightarrow \exists t(P_{PAST}xt \vee P_{PRES}xt \vee P_{FUT}xt)))$

(where "P_{TEMP}" stands for the property of being a temporal property). There are properties that are not temporal: for example, if we accept that there are non-temporally existing objects, the property of existing is not temporal.

On the other hand, an object is a temporal existent iff there is a time with regard to which it *presently* exists:

(temp.ex.) $\forall x(E_{TEMP}x \leftrightarrow \exists t E_{PRES}xt)$

(where "E_{TEMP}" stands for the property of being a temporal existent). An object is a sempiternal existent iff it *presently* exists with regard to *every* time:

(semp.ex.) $\forall x(E_{SEMP}x \leftrightarrow \forall t E_{PRES}xt)$

(where "E_{SEMP}" stands for the property of being a temporal existent). It follows that, if there are sempiternally existing objects, they are temporally existing objects too, while it is not intuitively clear whether every temporally existing object is a sempiternally existent too: if there is something like substantial change, then it seems that not every temporally existing object sempiternally exists.

Finally, I shall use "E_{ENT}" as standing for the property of being an existence-entailing property, i.e., a property for which it is necessarily true that, for every object, that object instantiates that property only if it exists.

According to this perspective, eternalism should be better named "sempiternalism", since it seems to imply that every temporal object is a sempiternal object too, namely

(sempiternalism) $\forall x(E_{TEMP}x \rightarrow E_{SEMP}x)$

It is true that many eternalists might not intuitively accept (sempiternalism), but this thesis simply expresses the fact that there exists no object that does not exist anymore or that does not yet exist, i.e., that every (past, present and future) object *presently* exists. On the other hand, the denial of (sempiternalism) is

(non-sempiternalism) $\sim\forall x(E_{TEMP}x \rightarrow E_{SEMP}x)$

There are many versions of non-sempiternalism. Pastists, for example, argue that objects start to exist, but they do not cease to exist. Presentism is a version of non-sempiternalism according to which

(presentism) $\sim\forall x(E_{TEMP}x \rightarrow E_{SEMP}x) \,\&\, \forall P\forall y\forall t((E_{ENT}P \,\&\, P_{PRES}yt) \rightarrow E_{PRES}yt)$

This formulation of presentism is neutral with regard to actualism and non-actualism: it only claims that, for every existence-entailing property *presently* instantiated by an object with regard to some time, that object *presently* exists with regard to that time. For actualists, every property is an existence-entailing one, i.e., there are no objects at no time that do not presently exist at that time, while, for non-actualists, there is at least one time at which there is at least one object that does not presently exist at that time and that nevertheless presently instantiates some property at that time:

(presentism-actualist) $\sim\forall x(E_{TEMP}x \rightarrow E_{SEMP}x) \ \& \ \forall P\forall y\forall t(P_{PRES}yt \rightarrow E_{PRES}yt)$

(presentism-non-actualist) $\sim\forall x(E_{TEMP}x \rightarrow E_{SEMP}x) \ \& \ \forall P_1\forall y\forall t_1((E_{ENT}P_1 \ \& \ P_{1PRES}yt_1) \rightarrow E_{PRES}yt_1)$ $\& \ \exists z\exists P_2\exists t_2((P_{2PRES}zt_2 \ V \ P_{2PAST}zt_2 \ V \ P_{2FUT}zt_2) \ \& \sim E_{PRES}zt_2)$

My version of Meinongian Presentism accepts (presentism-non-actualist). It is worth noticing that merely past objects (such as Socrates) do not only *presently* (with regard to some time) instantiate properties (i.e., intentional ones), but also past-tensed and future-tensed ones: if we consider t_2 the present time, we might say that Socrates *pastly* is a philosopher with regard to t_2 and that he *futurely* is dead with regard to t_2 (since he is now dead and there is no reason for supposing that he will resurrect) or that he *futurely* is a philosopher or a non-philosopher with regard to t_2 (i.e., a disjunctive property). Accepting an abundant conception of properties, I do not see any reason for which a Meinongian presentism should deny that objects instantiate now future-tensed properties (even if one might put a constraint on them, depending on other views, such as the acceptance or denial of determinism).

Both the actualist and the non-actualist versions of presentism can deal with the first horn of the triviality dilemma introduced in section I.4.4 (i.e., the horn according to which presentism is trivially true) in a satisfying way. In fact, they exclude that there are temporal existents that sempiternally exist and this assertion is not trivially true. On the other hand, concerning the second horn of the objection (the obvious falsity of presentism, given that there are no objects that do not *presently* exist), non-actualist presentism could seem more convincing than the actualist one: the former admits that there are objects that do not *presently* exist, but it denies that they *presently* have existence-entailing properties, even if they could have had them, and it affirms that *non-presently* existing objects have properties.

Furthermore, non-actualist presentism might admit that there are *now* causal relations between merely past objects and present ones (or between temporal facts involving them), even if such relations do not entail the present existence of the former objects and their *presently* having causal powers.

With regard to absolute change (i.e., things' starting and stopping existing, things' having an absolute beginning and an absolute end), both actualist and non-actualist presentism can give an exhaustive interpretation of it, while sempiternalism obviously denies that there is such a phenomenon. An object has an absolute beginning at some time t in the following case:

(ab.ben.) $\forall x\forall t_1(A_{BB}xt_1 \leftrightarrow (E_{PRES}xt_1 \ \& \ \forall t_2(P_Rt_2t_1 \rightarrow \sim E_{PRES}xt_2)))$

(where "A_{BB}" stands for the relation of absolutely beginning at some time and "P_R" stands for the relation of preceding, that obtains among times). On the other hand, an object has an absolute

end at some time *t* in the following case:

(ab.end) $\forall x \forall t_1(A_{BE}xt_1 \leftrightarrow (E_{PRES}xt_1 \,\&\, \forall t_2(F_{OLL}t_2t_1 \rightarrow \sim E_{PRES}xt_2)))$

(where "A_{BE}" stands for the relation of having an absolute end at some time and "F_{OLL}" stands for the relation of following, that obtains among times).

Before dealing with the nature of propositions, it is worth examining the relationship between tensed instantiation at times and instantiation *simpliciter* of properties. In other terms, why is it justified to assert that Socrates is a man *simpliciter* and that Sherlock Holmes is not a man *simpliciter*, given that the property of being a man is always *presently/pastly/futurely* instantiated with regard to times (i.e., it is a temporal property)? Given a temporal property, it could be argued that that property is instantiated *simpliciter* by an object iff there is some time with regard to which it is *presently* instantiated by that object. On the other hand, that property is *not* instantiated *simpliciter* by an object iff there is no time with regard to which it is *presently* instantiated by that object. In fact, if there is no time with regard to which it is *presently* instantiated by that object, there is no preceding time with regard to which it is *futurely* instantiated by that object and no following time with regard to which it is *pastly* instantiated by that object. Yet, this implies that, if an object *presently* has two incompatible temporal properties with regard to two different times, then that object instantiates *simpliciter* two incompatible properties. Thus, I think that there are temporal properties that cannot be instantiated *simpliciter*, but that can only be *presently/pastly/futurely* instantiated with regard to times (e.g., I *cannot* instantiate *simpliciter* the properties of staying at home and the negative property of not staying at home – or the incompatible property of staying outside – for the fact that I *presently* instantiate the property of staying at home with regard to some time t_1 and I *presently* instantiate the negative property of not staying at home with regard to some different time t_2, *but* I can only *presently/pastly/futurely* instantiate those properties with regard to times). On the other hand, there are temporal properties that I *presently* instantiate at every time at which I exist: for example, the kind-property of being human. There are also non-temporal properties – such as the property of existing – that I *presently* instantiate at every time at which I exist. In this respect, I can claim that those properties are instantiated *simpliciter*. Yet, it is necessary to introduce a clause. In fact, given that I instantiate *simpliciter* the properties of being human and of existing, at a time at which I do not exist, I *presently* instantiate the negative properties of non-being human and of non-existing with regard to those times. Thus, in order to avoid contradictions, it is worth adding that such negative properties are not instantiated *simpliciter* by me.

What about propositions? Propositions are mental objects that do not exist, as I have already claimed. Thus, they cannot be temporal existents. However, many mental objects seem to

have identity conditions (i.e., they seem to be constituted as objects) only after some time: Sherlock Holmes is not identified (i.e., he is not an object) before his author's thinking of him as having such-and-such properties. It is only in virtue of the fact that Sherlock Holmes (with regard to the present time) *presently* has identity conditions, that we can claim that he does not *presently* have any identity condition with regard to any time preceding Conan Doyle's birth and that he does not *pastly* have any identity condition with regard to the time at which he has been constituted as an object by Conan Doyle.

Nevertheless, if there is some omniscient minded subject that lives outside the time and that thinks of propositions' being true or false, propositions do not strictly have temporal identity conditions. This does not imply that they cannot have tensed properties relative to times, provided that, by analogy, even non-temporal properties can be (*presently*, *pastly*, *futurely*) instantiated with regard to times. Thus, we have to distinguish between truth *at* times and truth *simpliciter*. I shall only examine tensed propositions that are$_t$ true at times, i.e., that *presently* are true with regard to those times, even if they could also be *pastly* or *futurely* true with regard to other times.

For example, if we claim that the proposition [Socrates is$_t$ a philosopher] is$_t$ true at t_1, we claim that that proposition *presently* is true with regard to t_1 and what makes it true is the fact that Socrates *presently* is a philosopher with regard to t_1. On the other hand, [Socrates was a philosopher] is$_t$ true at t_1, i.e., that proposition *presently* is true with regard to t_1, iff Socrates *pastly* is a philosopher with regard to t_1 (and, if Socrates is$_t$ no more a philosopher, he is *not presently* a philosopher with regard to t_1), namely (since Socrates is defined in his identity conditions before t_1) there is some t with regard to which Socrates *presently* is a philosopher and t precedes t_1.

[Socrates will be a philosopher] is$_t$ true at t_1, i.e., that proposition *presently* is true with regard to t_1, iff Socrates *futurely* is a philosopher with regard to t_1, i.e., there is some t with regard to which Socrates *presently* is a philosopher and such that t_1 precedes t. However, I am not inclined to think that such truth-conditions obtain, since I am not inclined to accept that determinism is true. Finally, in order to deal with difficult cases such as [Socrates is$_t$ a philosopher] is *now* true, it is worth introducing further ascription relations that involve properties, propositions, minded subjects and times. Thus, that proposition is *now* true iff there are some minded subject and some time, such that that subject *presently* thinks of that proposition with regard to that time and s/he ascribes to it at that time the property of *presently* being true and Socrates *presently* is a philosopher with regard to that time (I shall clarify this analysis in few pages). This does not imply that the minded subject should ascribe to that proposition the property of *presently* being true with regard to that time: the subject might not know the time and s/he might nevertheless claim that that

proposition *presently* is true.

A temporal proposition is a proposition that involves within its truth-conditions temporally existing objects and (more generally) objects that are temporally defined in their identity-conditions. Furthermore, temporal propositions attribute to those objects tensed properties with regard to times. Such propositions are true *simpliciter* iff there is some time with regard to which they are *presently* true, while they are *not* true *simpliciter* iff there is no time with regard to which they are *presently* true. On the other hand, this account does not exclude that there are non-temporal propositions that are *not presently* true at any time, even though they are true *simpliciter*. Such propositions could involve within their truth-conditions objects that do not temporally exist (e.g., God) or, more generally, that are defined in their identity conditions independently of time. I do not wish to dwell on the problem of propositions' identity conditions here (in particular, on their being dependent on objects involved in their truth-conditions), since this section only presents a sketch of a Meinongian presentist theory.

What about propositions claiming that an object instantiates *simpliciter* a property? Are$_t$ they only true with regard to times or are they true *simpliciter* too? I think that there is a sense in which they can be considered true *simpliciter* too, at least if we introduce the aforementioned restrictive clause on properties that can be instantiated *simpliciter* and on negative properties.

Finally, let me consider the truth-conditions of our initial data at some definite time t_1. First, I shall analyze

(57) Socrates existed

and

(58) Socrates does not exist anymore,

that are respectively true at t_1 iff

(57mein-pres.) $E_{PAST}s_O t_1$

and

(58mein-pres.) $E_{PAST}s_O t_1$ & $\sim E_{PRES}s_O t_1$

(where "s_O" is a constant standing for Socrates).

With regard to

(59) Socrates has ceased to exist,

(60) Michele exists now,

(61) Michele did not exist,

(62) Michele has started to exist,

it is possible to give the following truth-conditions at t_1:

(59mein-pres.) $\sim E_{PRES} s_O t_1 \ \& \ \exists t_0 (P_R t_0 t_1 \ \& \ E_{PRES} s_O t_0)$

(60mein-pres.) $\exists m (A_{9PRES} T_{PRES} p_I m t_1 \ \& \ E_{PRES} m_M t_1)$

(61mein-pres.) $\exists t_0 (P_R t_0 t_1 \ \& \sim E_{PRES} m_M t_0)$

(62mein-pres.) $\exists t A_{BB} m_M t$

(where A_{9PRES} is an ascription relation *presently* (with regard to t_1) holding between properties, objects, minded subjects and times, "m_M" is a constant standing for Michele, "T_{PRES}" stands for the property of presently being true, "p_I" is a constant standing for the proposition [Michele presently exists]). It is worth noticing that (60) can be reinterpreted in order to make [I exist now] true by simply claiming that Michele is that minded subject that ascribes to that proposition the property of *presently* being true at t_1. The reference of "now" to times turns out to be relative to ascription relations involving the present truth of propositions, times, minded subjects and propositions themselves. It is true that my account concedes to non-presentists that there is more than one strict present (since strict presents are relative to times), so that it offers a relativized analysis of "now". Yet, it safeguards presentism as long as it admits substantial change and it affirms the primacy of present existence over non-present existence.

With regard to

(63) Nothan will exist (and he does not exist now),

whose truth-conditions at t_1 can be interpreted as

(63mein-pres.) $\sim E_{PRES} n_{OT} t_1 \ \& \ E_{FUT} n_{OT} t_1$

(where "n_{OT}" is a constant standing for Nothan), I cannot but notice two problems. First, we have to provide *now* identity conditions for that future individual. Secondly, nothing seems to guarantee now that that individual will exist (i.e., that he presently exist with regard to some future time). Thus, it seems to me that, even if the first task can be performed (by claiming, for example, that Nothan is the first kid who will be born in 2014 in Macerata's Central Hospital), the second difficulty is insurmountable. It is perhaps false with regard to t_1 that (63).

Finally, what about non-existent objects that have identity conditions? Let me briefly consider the truth at t_1 of

(71) there was no Sherlock Holmes (i.e., Sherlock Holmes was not an object).

From my perspective, the truth-conditions of the proposition expressed by (71) are the following ones:

(71mein-pres.) $O_{PRES}ht_1$ & $\exists t_0(P_R t_0 t_1$ & $\sim O_{PRES}ht_0)$

Since Sherlock Holmes *presently* is not (with regard to t_0) an object, then he *futurely* is not an object (with regard to t_0) too. There is no Sherlock Holmes at all at t_0 and this is the end of the story. Yet, we can claim that it is true that (71ascr.) only because Sherlock Holmes *presently* is an object with regard to t_1[324].

[324] My Meinongian presentism can deal with other problems that typically affect presentist theories and, more specifically, those presentist theories that are grounded on tensed properties. For example, Sanson, Caplan (2010) argue that the fact that Socrates once had the property of being a philosopher is more fundamental than the fact that Socrates now has the property of having been a philosopher, so that one could not primarily invoke this latter past-tensed property in order to ground the truth of [Socrates was a philosopher] without recognizing that there are now objects that are not present. I could simply reply that it is precisely in virtue of the fact that Socrates – the same Socrates who does not now exist – *presently* is a philosopher with regard to some time *t* that precedes the present time that Socrates *pastly* is a philosopher with regard to the present time, so that their intuition is respected without abandoning presentism. Furthermore, Baron (2013) roughly claims that presentism does not respect an intuition according to which true past propositions such as [Socrates was a philosopher] are about the past. Yet, in my theory, they are precisely about Socrates!

II.5. Epilogue in Heaven: the Existence of God

In this final chapter, I shall briefly defend two arguments for the existence of God. According to the first argument (a reading of Anselm's ontological argument based on my theory of existence as possessing dispositions to act and on some elements of the ascriptivistic theory), it is contradictory to assert that God is the greatest conceivable being and that He does not exist. Following the second argument, it is contradictory to imagine that there are possible worlds and that there exists no omniscient minded subject that can individuate them.

II.5.1. The Greatest Conceivable Being.

My reading of Anselm's ontological argument goes as follows:

(oa1)	$G_{REATEST}g$	A
(oa2)	$\forall x(G_{REATEST}x \leftrightarrow \sim\exists y G_{REATER}yg)$	A
(oa3)	$\forall x(\sim Ex \rightarrow \sim\exists P(D_M P \,\&\, Px))$	A
(oa4)	$\forall x(\sim\exists P(D_M P \,\&\, Px) \rightarrow \exists y G_{REATER}yx)$	A
(oa5)	$G_{REATEST}g \leftrightarrow \sim\exists y G_{REATER}yg$	(oa2)∀E
(oa6)	$G_{REATEST}g \rightarrow \sim\exists y G_{REATER}yg$	(oa5) ↔E
(oa7)	$\sim\exists y G_{REATER}yg$	(oa1),(oa6) →E
(oa8)	$\sim\exists P(D_M P \,\&\, Pg) \rightarrow \exists y G_{REATER}yg$	(oa4)∀E
(oa9)	$\sim\sim\exists P(D_M P \,\&\, Pg)$	(oa7),(oa8) MT
(oa10)	$\exists P(D_M P \,\&\, Pg)$	(oa9) ~E
(oa11)	$\sim Eg \rightarrow \sim\exists P(D_M P \,\&\, Pg)$	(oa3)∀E
(oa12)	$\sim\sim Eg$	(oa10),(oa11) MT
(oa13)	Eg	(oa12) ~E

"$G_{REATEST}$", "G_{REATER}" and "D_M" respectively stand for the *n*-adic properties of being the greatest conceivable being, of being conceivable as greater than, of being a moral disposition; "*g*" is a constant standing for God[325].

The premises assert that: God is the greatest conceivable being (oa1); for everything, that thing is the greatest conceivable being iff there is nothing that is conceivable as greater than it (oa2); for every object, if it does not exist, then there is no property, such that that property is a moral disposition and it is instantiated by that object (oa3); for every object, if there is no moral disposition that is instantiated by that object, then there is some other object, such that it is conceivable as greater than the first one (oa4).

The first premise (oa1) can be accepted by definition: regardless of His existence, God is the greatest conceivable being. The third premise (oa3) simply asserts something that is justified

[325] For a list of symbols, see the Appendix (pp. 281-284).

by the theory of existence developed in the chapter II.2: non-existent objects do not have any disposition to act and, since moral dispositions (i.e., dispositions to make some good action) are dispositions to act, they do not have any moral disposition.

However, Anselm's fool might not accept (oa2) and/or (oa4). With regard to (oa2), he might reply that conceivability is ambiguous. Something can be conceived of as the greatest being, even if this does not imply anything about the actual world: I can conceive of God as the greatest being within the fictional context defined by some story (e.g., the Bible), even if this does not imply that God is the greatest possible being within the actual world and/or within some possible world accessible or not accessible from the actual world. I accept this objection. Yet, I think that someone who takes (oa2) as true might in turn reply that this notion of conceivability is too weak: in order for something to be conceivable as being such-and-such, it is not simply requested that it can be thought of by some minded subject as having some properties, but that it is *legitimate* to conceive of that being as being such-and-such, i.e., for example, that there is some logically possible world in which that being is such-and-such. Furthermore, it is also requested that, by asserting that God is the greatest conceivable being, we imply that there is no logically possible world in which there is some being that is greater than God. In sum, God is the greatest conceivable being iff He has the (negative) modal property of non-possibly being such that there is some being different from Him that is greater than Him (not simply the property of possibly being such that there is no being different from Him that is greater than Him).

These remarks imply that, if God does not exist, then it is conceivable that there is some being within the actual world that is possibly greater than God, i.e., that there is some being (e.g., my friend Sam) that has the modal property of possibly being greater than God. Yet, this implies a contradiction.

It is true that the fool might reply that God, according to him, is only a fictional object that can have properties only within fictional contexts that are not possible worlds and/or that He does not have the property of being the greatest possible being (a *de re* possibility) or, equivalently, of non-possibly being such that there is some being different from Him that is greater than Him (a *de re* impossibility) in worlds in which He does not exist. Yet, with regard to the first objection, nothing seems to forbid that there is at least one logically possible world in which God exists: God is not a logically impossible object and, as we have already seen with regard to Sherlock Holmes, the fictional contexts defined by some stories about God can be completed in order to obtain logically possible worlds. In sum, there seems to be nothing contradictory in the idea of God: God seems not to be an inconsistent object.

Concerning the second objection, the non-actualist believer might reply that God

instantiates the property of being the greatest possible being (a *de re* possibility) even in possible worlds in which it seems that He does not exist: in principle, at least for non-actualists, in order for something to have some property, it is not requested that that thing exists. Thus, my argument seems not to beg the question, since I might imagine that there is some possible world in which God instantiates some *de re* possibility, even without asserting that He exists in that world *simply in virtue of* the fact that He has some property in that world.

What about (oa4)? If God does not exist, my friend Sam can be conceived of as greater than God for two reasons. First, he can do some good action, while God, if He does not exist, cannot do any good action. Yet, this seems not to be sufficient in order for something to be greater than some other thing: even if an evil person exists and has moral dispositions, if that person only makes evil actions, then that person does not seem to be greater than a non-existent object that can make neither good, nor bad actions. However, it is not requested that Sam does in fact more good than bad actions in order for him to be conceivable as greater than God: it is only requested that he is possibly greater than God, since God does not exist, while Sam exists and can do good actions – since he has moral dispositions.

Finally, there is no distinction, within my theory, between mental existence and real existence: if God does not exist, He does not exist at all, even if He can be considered an object and He instantiates some properties.

II.5.2. The Omniscient Minded Subject.

My second proof for the existence of God aims at demonstrating that there exists an omniscient minded subject that constitutes possible worlds *qua* mental objects. The proof goes as follows:

(om1)	$T\mathcal{p}_1 \,\&\, M_{OD}\mathcal{p}_1$	A
(om2)	$\forall \mathcal{p}((T\mathcal{p} \,\&\, M_{OD}\mathcal{p}) \rightarrow \exists x(S_{ETPW}x \,\&\, T_{SET}\mathcal{p}x))$	A
(om3)	$\forall x(S_{ETPW}x \rightarrow \exists y(P_{W}y \,\&\, I_{DENT}y \,\&\, P_{ART}yx))$	A
(om4)	$\forall x(P_{W}x \rightarrow M_{ENT}x)$	A
(om5)	$\forall x(M_{ENT}x \leftrightarrow \exists m I_{DDEP}xm)$	A
(om6)	$\forall x \forall m((I_{DENT}x \,\&\, I_{DDEP}xm) \rightarrow Em)$	A
(om7)	$\forall x(P_{W}x \rightarrow \sim\exists m(\sim O_{M}m \,\&\, I_{DDEP}xm))$	A
(om8)	$(T\mathcal{p}_1 \,\&\, M_{OD}\mathcal{p}_1) \rightarrow \exists x(S_{ETPW}x \,\&\, T_{SET}\mathcal{p}_1x)$	(om2) ∀E
(om9)	$\exists x(S_{ETPW}x \,\&\, T_{SET}\mathcal{p}_1x)$	(om1),(om8) →E
(om10)	$S_{ETPW}\mathcal{s}_1 \,\&\, T_{SET}\mathcal{p}_1\mathcal{s}_1$	H(∃E)
(om11)	$S_{ETPW}\mathcal{s}_1$	(om10) &E
(om12)	$S_{ETPW}\mathcal{s}_1 \rightarrow \exists y(P_{W}y \,\&\, I_{DENT}y \,\&\, P_{ART}y\mathcal{s}_1)$	(om3) ∀E
(om13)	$\exists y(P_{W}y \,\&\, I_{DENT}y \,\&\, P_{ART}y\mathcal{s}_1)$	(om10),(om11) →E
(om14)	$P_{W}w_1 \,\&\, I_{DENT}w_1 \,\&\, P_{ART}w_1\mathcal{s}_1$	H(∃E)

(om15)	$P_W w_1$	(om14) &E
(om16)	$P_W w_1 \rightarrow M_{ENT} w_1$	(om4) ∀E
(om17)	$M_{ENT} w_1$	(om15),(om16) →E
(om18)	$M_{ENT} w_1 \leftrightarrow \exists m I_{DDEP} w_1 m$	(om5) ∀E
(om19)	$M_{ENT} w_1 \rightarrow \exists m I_{DDEP} w_1 m$	(om18) ↔E
(om20)	$\exists m I_{DDEP} w_1 m$	(om17),(om19) ↔E
(om21)	$I_{DDEP} w_1 m_1$	H(∃E)
(om22)	$I_{DENT} w_1$	(om14) &E
(om23)	$I_{DENT} w_1$ & $I_{DDEP} w_1 m_1$	(om21),(om22) &I
(om24)	$\forall m((I_{DENT} w_1$ & $I_{DDEP} w_1 m) \rightarrow E m)$	(om6) ∀E
(om25)	$(I_{DENT} w_1$ & $I_{DDEP} w_1 m_1) \rightarrow E m_1$	(om24) ∀E
(om26)	$E m_1$	(om23),(om25) →E
(om27)	$P_W w_1 \rightarrow \sim\exists m(\sim O_M m$ & $I_{DDEP} w_1 m)$	(om7) ∀E
(om28)	$\sim\exists m(\sim O_M m$ & $I_{DDEP} w_1 m)$	(om15),(om27) →E
(om29)	$\forall m\sim(\sim O_M m$ & $I_{DDEP} w_1 m)$	(om28) QE
(om30)	$\sim(\sim O_M m_1$ & $I_{DDEP} w_1 m_1)$	(om29) ∀E
(om31)	$\sim\sim O_M m_1$ V $\sim I_{DDEP} w_1 m_1$	(om30) DM
(om32)	$\sim\sim O_M m_1$	(om21),(om31) DS
(om33)	$O_M m_1$	(om32) ~E
(om34)	$E m_1$ & $O_M m_1$	(om26),(om33) &I
(om35)	$\exists m(E m$ & $O_M m)$	(om34) ∃I
(om36)	$\exists m(E m$ & $O_M m)$	(om20), (om21)-(om35)(∃E)
(om37)	$\exists m(E m$ & $O_M m)$	(om13), (om14)-(om36)(∃E)
(om38)	$\exists m(E m$ & $O_M m)$	(om9), (om10)-(om37)(∃E)

"T", "M_{OD}", "S_{ETPW}", "T_{SET}", "P_W", "I_{DENT}", "P_{ART}", "M_{ENT}", "I_{DDEP}", "O_M" stand for the *n*-adic properties of: being true, being a modal proposition, being a set of possible worlds, being true within a set of possible worlds, being a possible world, being identified, being part of, being a mental object, identity-depending on, being an omniscient minded subject. The constants "p_1", "w_1", "s_1", "m_1" respectively stand for: some definite true modal proposition (e.g., the proposition [Michele might have not existed]), some definite possible worlds, some definite set of possible worlds and some definite minded subject.

The premises assert that: the proposition [Michele might have not existed] is a true modal proposition (om1); for every proposition, if that proposition is a true modal one, then there is a set of possible worlds in which it is true (om2); for every object, if that object is a set of possible worlds, then there is some object that is an identified possible world and that is part of it (om3); for every object, if that object is a possible world, then it is a mental object (om4); for every object, that object is mental iff there is some minded subject on which it identity-depends (om5);

for every object and every minded subject, if that object is identified and if it identity-depends on that minded subject, then that minded subject exists (om6); for every object, if that object is a possible world, then there is no minded subject, such that that subject is not an omniscient minded subject and that object identity-depends on it (om7).

I have already defended some of these premises in other parts of this work. In particular, (om1) and (om2) concern my position about modal propositions and my interpretation of their truth-conditions. With regard to (om3), it simply asserts that, if it is true that there is a set of possible worlds in which some proposition (e.g., the proposition [Michele does not exist]) is true, then each possible world that is part of that set is identified. It is worth noticing that, according to my perspective, [Michele does not exist] is a proposition that contributes to the identity of possible worlds in which Michele does not exist too. In fact, I do not think that some proposition is true in a world iff the referent of the logical subject of that proposition exists in that world. Otherwise, [Sherlock Holmes is a fictional object] would not be true in the actual world. Within my theory, [Sherlock Holmes] actually_2 refers to Sherlock Holmes, that is a fictional object that is part of the actual_2 world, even if he does not exist.

Possible worlds are mental objects (om4), as I have already tried to argue. In fact, they identity-depend on propositions, that are in turn mental objects. On the other hand, it seems to me false that propositions depend for their identity and for their truth-values on possible worlds in which they are true or false. Possible worlds are constructed out of propositions. By weakening the ontological status of possible worlds (that are neither unactualized states of affairs, nor properties, nor worlds just like the actual world), it seems that we can deal with many data and problems. Thus, why do we have to admit that possible worlds are something more than mental objects?

The premises (om5) and (om6) assert something that is part of my theory of existence and non-existence. Mental objects are defined in their identity-conditions by minded subjects that think of them and these minded subjects need to exist in order to think of such objects. If they did not exist, there would be no such mental objects. However, no non-omniscient minded subject can constitute possible worlds *qua* mental objects (om7). Non-omniscient minded subjects cannot establish, for every property (even included modal properties) and every object, whether that property is instantiated or is not instantiated by that object. Thus, if there are possible worlds and if such worlds are mental objects, then there exists some omniscient minded subject (that can be identified with God, even if we should demonstrate that that subject has other properties typically attributed to God and that He can create the actual world) that thinks of them.

Conclusive Remarks

In this work, I have tried to argue for several theses. I shall now summarize the results of my inquiry into the notions of existence and non-existence. I have criticized the thesis (actualism), according to which everything whatsoever exists (and the cognate thesis (actualism-a), according to which existence is not a first-order and informative property), by noticing that there are internal and (at least from my viewpoint) insurmountable difficulties within each actualist strategy for dealing with true existential statements (and propositions) and with seemingly true statements (and propositions) concerning non-existent items. Furthermore, I do not see any reason either for accepting (actualism) and (actualism-a) as first principles or, if we do not aim at accepting them as first principles, as well-grounded theses.

Further problems for actualists have emerged from my investigation on the ontology of fiction and the ontology of modality and time. In particular, such problems concern the truth-makers for true (internal and external) statements (or propositions) about *ficta*, the ontological status of mere *possibilia*, the ontological grounds of contingent existence, the justification of substantial change and the conjunction of (actualism) (and (actualism-a)) and presentism.

After these first, critical remarks, it is worth summarizing the positive theses defended in the second part of this work. First, after having accepted a two-category ontology according to which there are both objects (in a wide sense) and properties and after having justified the irreducibility of negative properties to positive ones and an abundant conception of properties, I have tried to defend a conception of existence *only* as a first-order and informative property. It seems to me legitimate to quantify over both existing and non-existing items, provided that such items have definite identity conditions, so that what is requested in order to quantify over something simply is the fact that that thing is *something*, i.e., that it is identical with itself and it has definite identity conditions.

My justification of the thesis that existence is *only* a first-order and informative property has been (at least in part) dialectical: I have tried to reject alternative possibilities. In particular, I have explicitly argued against the view that existence is a multi-level, non-informative property, i.e., the view according to which everything whatsoever instantiates existence. Even if there were a property such as a non-informative and multi-level property of existing, that property would not be involved within the truth-conditions of our true ordinary existential claims. Thus, it is either legitimate to claim that there are (at least) two different meanings of the predicate "exist" and that "exist" is used with its informative meaning in our true ordinary existential claims or that the only acceptable meaning of "exist" is the one that is involved within our true ordinary existential claim, i.e. the informative meaning. So far, so good.

If existence is *only* a first-order and informative property, what about true general existential statements? I accept that, for everything, that thing is a lion, only if it exists, so that there is no object that is a non-existent lion, i.e., I accept that there are existence-entailing properties. On the other hand, there are non-existence entailing properties too, e.g., the property of being fictional, so that there is no existing fictional object. Finally, there are properties that are neither existence-, nor non-existence-entailing, e.g., the property of being an object. What about the idea that it is true that unicorns do not exist (i.e., that there is no object that exists and that is unicorn)? Is the property of being a unicorn a non-existence-entailing one? Yes, it is, even if it is also possible that there is a world in which something exists and is a unicorn. If you prefer, we can claim that there are *weakly* non-existence-entailing properties, such as the property of being a unicorn, that are not instantiated within the actual world by objects (they are only ascribed to them) but that are instantiated by merely possible objects within other possible worlds, and *strongly* non-existence-entailing properties, such as the property of being fictional, that are not instantiated by existing objects within any possible world (i.e., by objects existing in that world). However, given my ontology of possible worlds, weakly non-existence-entailing properties are not instantiated by any (possible) object at all: they are only ascribed to them within possible worlds, that are thought of as peculiar fictional contexts.

I have defended a modal, non-foundational and non-relational account of existence, according to which it is necessary that, for everything, that thing exists iff it has at least one causal power. However, in order to solve some problems deriving from the fact that the same causal powers are often attributed to different objects (or to different kinds of objects) and from the examination of the paradox of fiction, I have elaborated a more refined formulation of that account of existence.

Furthermore, within my perspective, many non-existent objects (e.g., *ficta* and propositions) are mental objects – i.e. objects whose identity-conditions depend on the activity of some minded subject(s) -, even though not every non-existent object is a mental one: facts, towns, and so on, are non-existent and non-mental objects. Thus, it seems to me legitimate to claim that there are existent objects, non-existent mental objects and non-existent and non-mental ones.

I have presented an account of *ficta* according to which *ficta* both instantiate properties and have properties ascribed to them. My ascriptivistic theory of *ficta* is grounded on the introduction of some peculiar relations (ascription relations) that hold at least between some monadic property, some object (or, in some cases, some other property) and some minded subject. Furthermore, some ascription relations that hold for *ficta* involve fictional contexts too.

This account has some advantages over concurrent accounts. For example, it is part of a unified theory of mental activities; it clearly defines some relations between stories, propositions, fictional contexts, *ficta*, and so on; it does not imply that there are true contradictions (neither in the actual world, nor in any world); it does not introduce *ad hoc* surrogates of *ficta*, e.g., the fictional London in Sherlock Holmes' stories; it is a creationist account of *ficta*, even if it is different from artifactualism (since *ficta* do not exist).

Furthermore, I have extended this account to problems concerning modality, by distinguishing a peculiar kind of fictional contexts (possible worlds) and by introducing the idea of an omniscient minded subject, so that I have sketched a mentalistic approach to *possibilia*. I have presented a Half-Meinongian version of Presentism, that is grounded on the acceptance of non-presently-existing objects and of tensed properties instantiated with regard to times. Finally, I have defended two arguments for the existence of the greatest conceivable being (in this respect, I have reformulated the first version of Anselm's ontological argument) and of an omniscient minded subject.

The account that I have presented is only a Half-Meinongian one. It is Meinongian, as long as it rejects (actualism) and (actualism-a), by accepting that there are items that do not exist and that the relevant property of existing that is involved within the truth-conditions of true existential propositions is only a first-order and informative property. Furthermore, the catalogue of items that do not exist comprehend: mental objects (e.g., *ficta* and propositions), non-mental, yet non-existing objects (e.g., facts, objects that are merely possible and, as regards present existence, merely past and merely future objects), properties. This is only a sketch of an ontological system. In addition, quantification is something different from existence: as I have already claimed, even if there were a property of existence instantiated by every item (i.e., everything over which it is legitimate to quantify, everything that has identity conditions), *that* existence would nevertheless be something different from the existence involved in our true existential propositions.

However, even if my account is partly Meinongian, it is only *Half*-Meinongian. First, I do not think that every non-existent item is non-mental too. On the other hand, Meinongians usually accept that Sherlock Holmes would be a non-existent item, even if there were no minded subject defining its identity conditions. Furthermore, according to them, it is true that Sherlock Holmes is an item and that he does not exist even before his creation (i.e., in my own terms, his having been defined as an item by some minded subject, that provides his identity conditions). Here is an argument against such theses: if w is a possible world where no minded subject exists, the proposition [Sherlock Holmes does not exist] is true in that world. Thus, according to

Meinongians, it is true in that world that there is an item such as Sherlock Holmes. However, the proposition [Sherlock Holmes does not exist] is true in that world iff the proposition [in *w*, the proposition [Sherlock Holmes does not exist] is true] is a true proposition, i.e., provided that it is legitimate within a non-actualist perspective to transform every *de dicto* modal assertion into a corresponding *de re* one, [Sherlock Holmes is such that he does not exist in *w*] is a true proposition. Such latter propositions are part of whatever there is – i.e., of our actual$_1$ world. If we do not wish to accept that propositions are abstract, necessarily existing (or necessarily identified) entities – and I have tried to demonstrate that there is no reason for accepting this thesis –, then those propositions' identity conditions are defined within the actual$_1$ world, where, as a matter of fact, they identity-depend on Sherlock Holmes, who identity-depends, in turn, on the activity of some minded subject (and such propositions are part of the actual$_3$ world). A similar argument could be used against the second Meinongian remark, in order to demonstrate that it is legitimate to claim that Sherlock Holmes does not exist before the time of his creation *only after* the time of his creation. Provided that t_1 is the time of Sherlock Holmes' creation, it is legitimate to claim *only after* t_1 that Sherlock Holmes does not presently exist before t_1.

Meinongians could present two objections. First, they could remark that, within my perspective, it is *never and in no possible world* legitimate to claim that it is true that Sherlock Holmes has no identity conditions. True! In order to assert that Sherlock Holmes has no identity conditions, we would have to assume that Sherlock Holmes is an object, i.e., that he has identity conditions, so that a contradiction would follow. Second, I have claimed that it is not unreasonable to think that Sherlock Holmes could have existed, i.e. that there is a possible world in which Sherlock Holmes exists. Thus, in that world, Sherlock Holmes does not exist and is not a mental object even before the time of his birth, so that Sherlock Holmes is not a mental object. Yet, I reply, this does not prove that Sherlock Holmes is not a non-mental object, but that there are mental objects (such as Sherlock Holmes) that are not necessarily mental. Furthermore, provided that possible worlds (*qua* peculiar fictional contexts) are mental objects defined in their identity conditions by the activity of some omniscient minded subject, Sherlock Holmes, as a matter of fact, remains a mental object. In sum, the solution goes as follows: Sherlock Holmes is a fictional and mental object; an omniscient minded subject can think (and, in fact, it actually thinks) of some possible world where that object exists, so that that object is neither necessarily non-existing, nor necessarily mental. Yet, even though that minded subject thinks of Sherlock Holmes as existing within some possible world, it nevertheless thinks that Sherlock Holmes is a mental object, so that it is true that Sherlock Holmes is a mental object.

Yet, here is another Meinongian objection: if that omniscient minded subject thinks of

Sherlock Holmes as being such-and-such and if that subject exists before the existence of Sherlock Holmes' original author, then that omniscient minded subject is the original author of Sherlock Holmes'[326]. Thus, Sherlock Holmes' original author (Conan Doyle) simply finds out what that omniscient minded subject has already identity-defined, so that Conan Doyle is *not* Sherlock Holmes' original author. Yet, first, it is not so obvious that that omniscient minded subject exists *before* Conan Doyle: it could be a non-temporally existing object, so that it would not be legitimate to make temporal comparisons between that subject and Conan Doyle. Second, that non-temporally existing omniscient minded subject still believes that Conan Doyle is Sherlock Holmes' original author: is it wrong about this? Yet, as it has already been established, it cannot be wrong about this fact: it is omniscient. Third, this problem is part of the general problem of secondary causes: if God – a non-temporally existing object - creates the world, does He cause every event that happens in the world? Or is it legitimate to claim that there are secondary causes (agents and/or other events) that are able to cause events and that actually cause them? One could reply that God is the primary cause of those events, while other agents and/or events, that are caused by God himself or by other agents and/or events caused by God, are their secondary causes. Without such secondary causes, those events simply do not happen, i.e. they simply do not have any cause. A similar solution could be adopted with regard to Sherlock Holmes: Sherlock Holmes identity-depends on Conan Doyle only if Conan Doyle himself identity-depends (and depends for his existence, if the omniscient minded subject creates him) on the omniscient minded subject *or* on other agents and/or events identity-depending (and, in the case of agents, provided that they are created by the omniscient minded subject, existentially-depending) on the omniscient minded subject itself. Thus, if the antecedent is true, Sherlock Holmes identity-depends on Conan Doyle. This reply seems to be in favor of a theistic interpretation of the ontological status of the omniscient minded subject. Fourth, even if it were true that Conan Doyle is not Sherlock Holmes' original author, accepting the Meinongian-theistic suggestion, how does he find out that character that is already identity-dependent on the omniscient minded subject? Does he establish some special connection with that subject, when he thinks of Sherlock Holmes' stories? It seems to be difficult to defend such an interpretation of the authorial process on purely rational grounds.

The second difference between my account and typical Meinongian accounts lies in the fact that I think that there are existence-entailing properties and that such properties are neither instantiated by non-existent items, nor encoded by them. Furthermore, I do not think that they have such properties provided that they have them in other possible (or impossible) worlds. It is

[326] I am grateful to Francesco Orilia for this objection.

neither true that Sherlock Holmes instantiates the property of being a detective, nor that he encodes it, nor that he is a detective provided that there is a possible (or impossible) world in which he instantiates that property. The relation between Sherlock Holmes and the property of being a detective is a relation of ascription, that involves Sherlock Holmes, that property, one minded subject and one fictional context. Finally, I have rejected the thesis that there are truly impossible objects.

Let me now briefly consider some issues in metaontology. I have assumed in the introduction that there are substantive existential questions in ontology. However, I can now justify this assumption. I have introduced in chapter II.2 an argument against existence as a property of everything whatsoever. Following that argument, if existence is a multi-level, non-informative property (since it is a property instantiated by every property too), then there is still a sense in which it is legitimate to ask whether things exist or do not exist. Considering objects, it is legitimate to ask whether Sherlock Holmes exists or does not exist, even if many philosophers could not agree that existence is only a first-order, informative property. In fact, a Russell-inspired metaphysician could reply: Sherlock Holmes does not exist, since the properties that are used to define Sherlock Holmes are not jointly instantiated. A Quine-inspired metaphysician could reply: Sherlock Holmes does not exist, since he is not part of the ontological commitment of our best theory of the world. Thomasson could reply: it is true that Sherlock Holmes exists *qua fictum*, even though, when we ask whether Sherlock Holmes exists or does not exist, we can give an answer to such question by pointing out that Sherlock Holmes is not a man. I have already criticized such replies. Yet, all these replies would not be legitimate and they would be useless, if there were no substantive existential question, at least concerning objects.

What about properties? I have claimed that no property exists, even if every property has definite identity conditions, so that it is legitimate to quantify over properties. Thus, on the one hand, it is trivially true that there are strange properties such as Goodman's property of being glue (green or blue). Yet, an ontologist could investigate whether such properties are fundamental or not – whether they are instantiated by fundamental objects or not, whether other properties are part of their identity conditions or not. Furthermore, ontologists could investigate whether there is a category such as the category of properties or whether properties are nothing more than mental objects (e.g., concepts or predicates, provided that linguistic objects could be considered mental ones) or sets. In this latter respect, they could ask, for example, if the identity conditions for properties are identical with the identity conditions for other categories or kinds of items, if they play the same explanatory role, if they depend on such items for their identity conditions, and so on. In order to develop such investigations, it is neither necessary to ask

whether properties exist or do not exist, nor to assume that they trivially exist, as Thomasson (2008) and Schaffer (2009) do.

These are only intuitions about the methodology of ontology. Yet, it seems to me that one could do ontology, even without presupposing the existence of the items investigated – at least given my peculiar notion of existence.

At the end of this investigation, there are still some points that are left open. For example, one could investigate some further applications of the ascriptivistic theory of fictional objects. In particular, provided that it aims at being a general account of intentionality, it is worth examining whether (and how) it can be applied to some typical problems concerning perception (e.g., whether we directly perceive objects or we perceive them through sense-data). Furthermore, one could better justify and defend (or criticize) my argument against the mind-independent existence of propositions by investigating the ontological status of propositions themselves. Finally, my Half-Meinongian Presentism and my mentalistic account of modality are only presented in a provisional form. Thus, it is worth investigating their plausibility with regard to the problem of the nature of time itself, the other problems that are typically related to Presentism and that I could not deal with here (e.g., the problem of causation), the grounding of the truth-value of counterfactuals, and so on. These are only examples of further investigations.

I only wish to conclude that an inquiry into the notions of existence and non-existence is one of the most difficult tasks in metaphysics and that it can only be dealt with by aiming at presenting (at least) some general and plausible solutions for many metaphysical problems. On the one hand, one has to consider a wide variety of data, questions, arguments and positions, adopting rigorous analytical methods. Yet, on the other hand, one has to pay attention to the overall structure of her/his own ontological system – at least in order not to be contradicted by herself/himself! I think that this latter task has been often neglected in analytic tradition, even though it is at least as important as the former one. Putting it in E. J. Lowe's terms:

> I have always thought that metaphysics needs to be tackled systematically, rather than piecemeal. I liken the task to that of putting together the pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle: it's no use just trying to perfect many small but disconnected parts of the puzzle in the hope that these will eventually fit together, since it's likely there are several different ways in which any small number of pieces will fit together, no more than one of which will be ***correct***. Rather, you need to work simultaneously on the 'big picture' and on its many parts[327].

I hope that my contribution will be useful in the construction of the "big picture" of other metaphysicians too.

[327] See Lowe (2013c).

Appendix. What do the Symbols stand for?

Object Constants

[p1], [p2], …	(proposition constants outside formulas)
a	the actual world (in some contexts)
b	Emma Bovary
c_A	the actual world (in some contexts)
d	Conan Doyle
d_A	Dante
d_V	Darth Vader
f	Anselm's fool
f_A	Faust
g	God
g_L	Lord Gladstone
g_O	Goethe
g_{ON}	Gonzago
h	Sherlock Holmes
i	I
j	John
*j*j	Joyce
l	London
m_1, m_2, …	(in some contexts, used as minded subject constants)
m_M	Michele
n	Noman
n_{OT}	Nothan
o	Obama
p, p_1, p_2, …	(in some contexts, used as proposition constants)
p_I	the proposition [Michele presently exists]
p_M	the proposition [Michele exists]
p_N	the proposition [Noman does not exist]
p_X	the proposition [*x* exists]
s_1, s_2, …	(in some contexts, used as story constants)
s_F	Goethe's *Faust*
s_H	the story *The Hound of the Baskervilles*
s_{HA}	the story *Hamlet*
s_O	Socrates
s_S	the story *A Study in Scarlet*
t_1, t_2, …	(in some contexts, used as time constants)
u	Ulysses
w_1, w_2, …	(in some contexts, used as possible world constants)

Variables ranging over …

c, c_1, c_2, …	fictional contexts
m, m_1, m_2, …	minded subjects
P, P_1, P_2, …	*n*-adic properties
$\overline{P}$	negative property non-P
p, p_1, p_2, …	propositions
R, R_1, R_2, …	relations
s, s_1, s_2, …	stories
t, t_0, t_1, t_2, …	times
t_{Y1}, t_{Y2}, …	years
x, y, z, …	objects
w, w_1, w_2, …	worlds (possible, impossible, fictional)
φ, ψ, …	first-order properties

Other Symbols

[…]	(isolate a proposition)
c(…)	in the context c, … (operator)
C*	Castañeda's consubstantiation
C^{**}_i	Castañeda's consociation (at context i)
F	it will be the case that … (Prior's operator)
is_t, are_t	is (tensed), are (tensed)
P	it was the case that … (Prior's operator)
$\mathbf{P}_n$	at some *n*-degree in the past, it was the case that … (Prior's operator)
P_{PAST}, P_{PRES}, P_{FUT} …	is pastly/presently/futurely P (with regard to some time)

Property and Relation Constants (and items that instantiate them)

A_1	… is ascribed to … by … (property, object, minded subject)
A_2	… is ascribed to … by … within … (property, object, minded subject, fictional context)
A_3	… is ascribed to … and … by … (2-place relation, object, object, minded subject)
A_4	… is ascribed to … and … by … within … (2-place relation, object, object, minded subject, fictional context)
A_7	… is ascribed to … and … by … (2-place relation, property, property, minded subject)
A_{9PRES}	… is presently ascribed to … by … with regard to … (property, object, minded subject, time)
A_{BB}	… has an absolute beginning at … (object, time)
A_{BE}	… has an absolute end at … (object, time)
A_C	is an actual$_2$ world (fictional context – if the theory presented in chapter II.4 is true)
A_D	… admires … (object, object)
A_{UO}	… is the author *simpliciter* of … (minded subject, object – fictional)
A_{UOC}	… is the original author of … (minded subject, fictional context)
A_{UOO}	… is the original author of … (minded subject, object – fictional)
A_{UOS}	… is the original author of … (minded subject, story)
B	… is story-bound *simpliciter* to … (object – fictional, story)
B_E	… is more beloved than … (object, object)
B_O	… is originally story-bound to … (object – fictional, story)
C	it is distinctly conceivable that … has … (object, property)
C_1	it is conceivable that … has … (object, property)
C_2	it is conceivable that … is more … than (object, property, object)
C_3	… conceives … as … (object, object, property)
C_{INF}	… is a criterion of identity that is not for fictional objects (object)
C_O	… is the context of origin of … (fictional context, object – fictional)
C_{ON}	… is a conjunctive property (property)
C_{ONST}	… constitutes … as an object (minded subject, object)
D	… defines … (story, fictional context)
D_E	… is a detective (object)
D_{EM}	it is demonstrable that … has … (object, property)
D_I	… is a disjunctive property (property)
D_M	… is a moral disposition (property)
D_R	… is directed by … (object – movie, object)
D_Y	… dies (object)
D_{YT}	… died in … (object, year)
E	… exists (object – if the theory presented in II.2 is true)
E_{CM}	… is a conventional essence of (property, object)
E_{CONT}	… contingently exists (object)
$E_{CONT\text{-}ACT}$	… contingently exists with regard to the actual$_2$ world (object)
$E_{CONT\text{-}NON}$	… contingently does not exist (object)
E_{ENT}	… is an existence-entailing property (property)
E_{FUT}	… futurely exists (with regard to some time) (object, time)
E_{IMP}	… does not possibly exist (object)
E_M	… has mental existence (object)
E_N	… is English (object)
E_{NEC}	… necessarily exists (object)
$E_{NON\text{-}NEC\text{-}POSS}$	… does not necessarily exist, yet possibly exists (object)
E_{PAST}	… pastly exists (with regard to some time) (object, time)
E_{PRES}	… presently exists (with regard to some time) (object, time)
E_R	… has real existence (object)
$\overline{E}_R$	… does not have real existence (object)

E_{SEMP}	… sempiternally exists (object)
E_{SSENCE}	… is an essence of … (property, object)
E_{TEMP}	… temporally exists (object)
E*	… is a referring definite denoting concept (Orilia's definite denoting concept)
F	… is a fictional object (object)
F_{AM}^1, F_{AM}^2	(different degrees of fame)
F_{OLL}	… follows … (time, time)
G	… is the greatest being (object)
G_{OD}	… is God-like (object)
G_R	… is greater than … (object, object) (different properties as degrees)
G_{REATER}	… is conceivable as greater than … (object, object)
$G_{REATEST}$	… is the greatest conceivable being (object)
H_O	… holds between … and … (object – criterion of identity, object, object)
H_T	… has a tea with … (object, object)
I_{DDEP}	… identity-depends on … (object, object) (object, minded subject)
I_{DENT}	… is identified (object)
I_L	… is a legitimate identifier of … and … (minded subject, object, object)
I_{MPERF}	… is imperfect (object)
I_{NS}	… inspires … (object, minded subject)
I_{NT}^1, I_{NT}^2	(different degrees of intelligence)
I_S	… is a good interpreter of … (minded subject, story)
L	… lives (object)
L_I	… lives in … (object, object)
M	… is identical with Michele (object)
M_A	… is the material support of … (object, story)
M_{ARK}	(some property that is a mark of existence) (object)
M_{ENT}	… is a mental object (object)
M_O	… is a movie (object)
M_{OD}	… is a modal proposition (proposition)
N	it is necessary that … has … (object, property)
N_H	… is named "Sherlock Holmes" (object)
N_{OTHAN}	… is identical with Nothan (object)
O_{BAM}	… is identical with Obama (object)
O_M	… is an omniscient minded subject (minded subject)
O_{PRES}	… presently is an object (with regard to some time) (object, time)
P_A	… is part of … (proposition, story)
P_{AC}	… is part of … (object, fictional context)
P_{ART}	… is part of … (object, story)
P_E	… is a perfection (property)
P_{INDPW}	… is an individuating possible world's property (property)
P_{OL}	… is a politician (object)
P_{OS}	… is positive (first-order property)
P_R	… precedes … (story, story) (year, year) (time, time)
P_{RC}	… is a conjunct of … (property, property – conjunctive)
P_{ROX}	… is proximate to … except for … (fictional context – possible world, fictional context – possible world, proposition)
P_S	… is the most perfect being (object)
P_{TEMP}	… is a temporal property (property)
P_U	… is a univocally identifying property of … (property, object)
P_{UF}	… is a univocally identifying fictional property of … (property, object – fictional)
P_W	… is a possible world (possible world) (fictional context – if the theory presented in II.4 is true)
S	… is identical with Socrates (object)
S_{ETPW}	… is a set of possible worlds (object)

S_W	… stopped writing in … (object, year)
T	… is true (proposition)
T_C	… is true in … (proposition, fictional context)
T_H	… thinks of … (minded subject, object)
T_{PRES}	… is presently true (with regard to some time) (proposition, time)
T_{PW}	… is true in … (proposition, fictional context – possible world)
T_S	… is true in … (proposition, story)
T_{SET}	… is true within … (proposition, object – set of possible worlds)
U	… is understood (object)
W	… writes … at … (minded subject, story, time)

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