The Language Revolution
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Class #3
Meinong and Mill
## The Last of the Pre-Revolutionaries

Truth, Language, and Ideas

The Moderns' Problem

- Truth is a connection between words and the world.
  - ‣ saying of what is that it is; saying of what is not that it is not
- Language, to be meaningful, must be about our ideas rather than the world itself.
  - ‣ We know only our own experiences.
  - ‣ We are cut off from the world as it is in itself.
  - ‣ the veil of ideas
- Even Kant's empirical realism is also a transcendental idealism.
  - ‣ Kant's world may be objective, but it is no less psychological than Locke's world.
- Given standard theories of truth, we are unable to say anything true except of our own psychology.
- Frege rejects psychologism about language, as do Meinong and Mill.

But

The golden mountain is golden.
Unicorns have one horn.
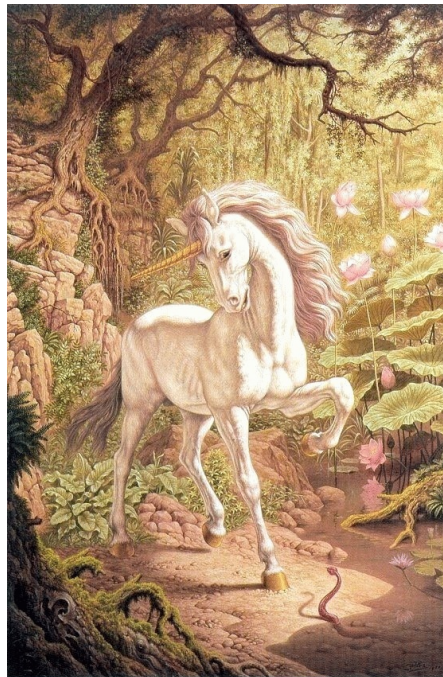
Meinong and Parmenides

we can not say anything about nothing

- "That knowing is impossible without something being known, and more generally, that judgments and ideas or presentations...are impossible without being judgments about and presentations of something, is revealed to be self-evident by a quite elementary examination of these experiences" (Meinong)
- Some subjects appear to be in the external world
  ‣ present concrete objects
- Some subjects do not appear to us in the external world yet we utter true sentences about them.
  ‣ atoms
  ‣ Sherlock Holmes
  ‣ The square root of two
- We can say true things about unicorns and golden mountains too.
- They must exist in some sense.

Truthmakers

- Every truth must have a truthmaker.

- Truthmakers are things which make the sentence true.

- Such things may exist or may subsist.
  - We want no "Prejudice in favor of the actual."

Expanding the Universe

- Meinong does not make Locke's mistake of taking the subjects of our sentences to be mental objects

- Instead, Meinong expands the univese of extra-mental objects.

- Two distinct kinds of existences
  - ‣ Real existence
    - – the desk
  - ‣ Subsistence
    - – properties, like blueness
    - – mathematical objects
    - – the golden mountain.

Truthmakers

1. I have a blue bicycle.

2. The square root of pi is greater than one.

3. The golden mountain is golden.

4. There are no Na'vi people.

- ‣ The truthmaker for 1 seems to be my blue bicycle.
- ‣ For 2, we need (non-sensible) real numbers.
- ‣ 3 is true even though there are no golden mountains.
  - – subsistent, but non-existent
- ‣ For 4, Meinong invokes the affirmative non-being of the Na'vi.
- ‣ Returning to 1, Meinong concludes that the truthmaker is not the blue bicycle itself, but the being of the bicycle.

The bicycle, mathematical objects, golden mountains, and the Na'vi all subsist.

- ‣ Only my bicycle really exists.

π

3.14159
265358979
32384626433
83279502884197
1693993751058209974
944592307816406286208 99
862803482534211706798214 80865
1328230664709384460955058223172535940
81284811174502841027019385211055596446229489549 30...

Subsistence and Reality

- We can speak truthfully about the bicycle, mathematical objects, golden mountains, and the Na'vi.

- They must have some sort of reality.

- "That there are black swans, but that there is no *perpetuum mobile* [perpetual motion machine], are both true judgments; but the first concerns an existent object, the second a non-existent object. In the one case, the being of the Object in question subsists; in the other case, its non-being subsists" (Meinong 90).

Sosein (essence), *Sein* (existence), and *Nichtsein* (non-being)

- Everything we can consider has *Sosein*.

- The bicycle has *Sein* in addition to its *Sosein*, which includes blueness.

- The golden mountain has *Sosein*, in that it is golden and a mountain.
  - ‣ It has *Nichtsein*, and it does not have *Sein*.

- We know about James' Brown's *Sosein*.
  - ‣ We can argue about whether he has *sein* or *nichtsein*.
  - ‣ And if it's *nichtsein*, then it has to have some *sein*, so we can call it *quasisein*.

- Meinong is treating *Sein* and *Nichtsein* as predicates of subsisting objects.

Reifying Properties

If I say, "Blue does not exist," I am thinking just of blue, and not at all of a presentation and the capacities it may have. It is as if the blue must have being in the first place before we can raise the question of its being (*Sein*) or non-being (*Nichtsein*). But in order not to fall into new paradoxes or actual absurdities, perhaps the following turn of expression may be appropriate: Blue, or any other Object whatsoever, is somehow given prior to our determination of its being or non-being. We could also describe the situation from its psychological side in this way: if I should be able to judge that a certain Object is not, then I appear to have had to grasp the Object in some way beforehand, in order to say anything about its non-being, or more precisely, in order to affirm or to deny the ascription of non-being to the Object (Meinong 83-4).

Meinong Summary

The problem of non-being in pre-Fregean (or at least pre-Quinean) philosophy of language

- Our language contains certain terms, like 'golden mountain', 'square root of π', 'blueness', and 'round square' whose meaning seems problematic.
  - ▸ We know perfectly well what we're talking about when we use such terms.
  - ▸ We can not point to anything in particular to determine our meaning.

- Locke chose an idealistic theory of language to deal with the puzzle: such terms, like all words, really just refer to my ideas.
  - ▸ Locke's theory of language conflicts with our best theory of truth, and leads to an implausible idealism.

- Meinong avoids Locke's idealism by refining the notion of existence (and treating it as a predicate).
  - ▸ The objects corresponding to the puzzling terms subsist without existing.
  - ▸ The puzzle persists regardless of the status of the representational theory of ideas.

- Meinong avoids Locke's problem of idealism only by positing a much more populated universe.

On Meinong's Universe

- Quine: "bloated"

- Further, what do we do about impossible objects, e.g. a round square?
  - "[Meinong's] overpopulated universe is in many ways unlovely. It offends the aesthetic sense of us who have a taste for desert landscapes, but this is not the worst of it. Wyman's slum of possibles is a breeding ground for disorderly elements" (Quine, "On What There Is," 5)

- The round square does not even possess subsistence.

- It would be nice if we could have a philosophy of language which gives some sort of meaning to such terms without bloating our universe and without, like Locke, taking words to refer to my own ideas.

Mill, Locke, and Meinong

- One last important pre-Fregean view about language: Mill's

- Like Meinong, Mill provides a non-idealist theory of language.

- Unlike Meinong, he does not engage the problem of non-being.

- Mill's theory of names, the semantic value of proper nouns, is an important predecessor to the most important contemporary view.

Connotative and Non-Connotative Names

- Non-connotative names are merely denotative.
  - ‣ They merely pick out an object.
  - ‣ Proper names are non-connotative, according to Mill.
  - ‣ They refer directly to individuals.
  - ‣ 'John' doesn't mean anything.
  - ‣ "Whenever the names given to objects convey any information - that is, whenever they have properly any meaning - the meaning resides not in what they *denote* but in what they *connote*. The only names of objects which connote nothing are *proper* names, and these have, strictly speaking, no signification" (Mill 40).
- Connotative names have meaning as well as pick out an object.
  - ‣ 'The professor of this class' picks me out, but it also means something.
- 'Dartmouth'.
  - ‣ It seems to mean something about being near the mouth of the Dart River.
  - ‣ But, a city could be named Dartmouth without being near the mouth of the Dart.
- Proper names, Mill says, are purely non-connotative.

Proper Names

- Such terms do not refer to ideas of individuals or even to subsistent Objectives.
  - "Proper names are not connotative; they denote the individuals who are called by them, but they do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to those individuals" (Mill).

- Rejecting the idealism of Locke and the Moderns
  - Proper names latch directly onto an object in the world.

- Mill thus returns to the view that Wittgenstein ascribes to Augustine (4th-5th century CE) at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*.
  - "When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires."

Against Mill's View That Names Have No Meaning

Humpty Dumpty

- "Don't stand there chattering to yourself like that," Humpty Dumpty said, looking at her for the first time, "but tell me your name and your business."

- "My *name* is Alice, but - "

- "It's a stupid name enough!" Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently. "What does it mean?"

- "*Must* a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.

- "Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a sort laugh: "*my* name means the shape I am - and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost" (Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* 1).

- Also: What do you call a drunken person in a pile of leaves?

The Problem of Non-Being Again

- Frege, like Humpty Dumpty, rejects Mill's view of names.
- Some names have no bearers.
- If proper names are non-connotative and thus to refer directly to something in the world, those which lack an object are completely puzzling.
- How can Mill deal with 'the Easter Bunny'?

Wittgenstein's Pluralism

- The Mill/Augustine view describes only one kind of use of language, only one among many language games.

- "Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system. And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises "Is this an appropriate description or not? The answer is "Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe. It is as if someone were to say: "A game consists in moving objects about on a surface according to certain rules..." - and we replied: You seem to be thinking of board games, but there are others" (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §3).

- Wittgenstein is describing his later view.

- Wittgenstein's later view is a response to an earlier view which he developed in the *Tractatus* directly within the framework of Frege's logic.

For Tuesday

- Two short pieces from Frege
  - From the preface to *Begriffsschrift*
    - For annotation
  - From the introduction to *Grundlagen*

- Introduction to a philosophy of language reader
  - Read the first five sections.
  - Skip Section VI.
  - Look at the descriptions of formal languages in Sections VII-IX.
  - There's some interesting stuff in Section X.
  - Skip Section XI.