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INDISPENSABILITY ARGUMENTS FOR NON-EXISTENTS.

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the Philosophy

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Spring 2018

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
Philosophy have been completed.

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Introduction

The following essay is chiefly concerned with two fields of philosophy in which non-existent objects appear in indispensability claims for their existence, namely philosophy of mind and truthmaker theory. In the former, indispensability claims are derived from the apparent data of intentionality, understood as the mind's direction upon objects. An intuitive survey of the apparent objects of thought will reveal an apparent array of non-existents, either coherent or incoherent. We may, for instance, apparently think of objects of fiction such as Sherlock Holmes or Pegasus, to name some famous examples from the literature. We may also apparently think of objects such as round squares or existent golden mountains, or sets of all sets that don't contain themselves, etc. In the latter, indispensability claims are made for non-existent objects as a means for providing the grounding of the truths of our statements about the world, particularly those that are apparently negative- such as, *this cat is not red*, to use an example I will draw on. Truthmaker theory is abound with difficult in grounding such statements in the world without violating widely accepted precepts of a realist metaphysics. Because of this difficulty some have posited the existence of things such as absences, lacks, or negative facts.

There is some small difference in the indispensability of theses of these respective research fields, however. In the former it is often taken to be the empirical data of our experience that precipitate acceptance of non-existent entities. The thought seems to be that the data provide by our intuitions and our experience as intentional beings must be taken at face value, and doing so requires that we allow some means for Pegasus and existent golden mountains to be a part of our ontology in order for there to be a coherent account of intentionality. The indispensability of these objects, then, is apparently derived empirically and so posited on empirical grounds.

In truthmaker theory, however, it does not seem to be precisely the same case, although there may be some empirical motivation. Rather, it seems that, much like sets or numbers in mathematics, these objects are thought to be indispensable because of their theoretical utility. Because of the apparent difficulty of giving a purely positive account of truthmakers for negative facts, some have sought to posit these entities as among genuine existents and then show that they are not only ontologically tenable, but that because their positing allows for much theoretical utility, they are indispensable with respect to a proper account of truthmaking. The argument seems to be that because positing these entities results in their being explanatorily useful, they ought to be accepted into our ontology.

In chapter one I give some background on intentionality and then formulate the problem before analyzing two of the prevailing views on non-existent objects. Firstly I discuss neo-Meinongian indispensability and then I briefly lay out Russell's means of avoiding the acceptance of non-existent objects into ontology, finally suggesting that in principle a theory of intentionality can do without countenancing non-existents as ontological entities. In chapter two I briefly set forth the problems for truthmakers for negative statements and then I analyze a paper by Barker and Jago that I take to be a paradigm case of an argument for the indispensability of non-existents as truthmakers for negative statements. I argue throughout that paper that Barker and Jago do not compel us to accept these entities into our ontology.

I

In this first chapter, I would like to consider the role that indispensability arguments for non-existents play in the philosophy of mind, particularly in discussions of intentionality. It may well be that the postulation of such objects finds its genesis in thought about the mind, which, as I will discuss below, seems to suggest that we do think about all manner of objects, including the non-existent. I will chiefly focus on two responses to the apparent thought of inexistence that seems to be an integral feature of mindedness. The first will be that of the so-called neo-Meinongians, who, following their progenitor Meinong, accept that an object's having properties is independent of its existence- our ontology, then, will include both existent and non-existent objects. The second will be the countervailing Russellian view that we needn't accept these entities at all, and that we can use a formal apparatus that disabuses us of countenancing them in our ontology. Of the former class I will be focusing primarily on the work of Edward Zalta, and of the latter, I will be making reference primarily to the work of Bertrand Russell and Gregory Landini. I hope to show, firstly, that the neo-Meinongian ontology is motivated by a complex question. Secondly, I will show that Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions can provide us a means of doing without an ontology that includes non-existent objects. But first a brief historical preamble.

Intentionality as a technical term is traditionally descended to us by Brentano, a philosopher and psychologist of the late 19th century. The term is scholastic in origin having its roots in the latin *intentio*, meaning to be directed towards something.¹ As a psychologist, Brentano was much interested in the mind. Apparently inspired by an Aristotelian understanding of the sciences, he sought to determine precisely what subject was under investigation in the

¹ SEP, Intentionality.

scientific pursuit of the understanding of the mind. This required determining the differentia that characterized the mind, that is to say, the feature which differentiated the mind from all else in nature. Presciently, Brentano posited that this peculiar feature, the “mark of the mental,” was *intentionality*- the mind’s ability to direct itself toward things is a feature not found in any other thing than nature. If a thing exhibits intentionality, it has a mind.

Our mental states present us with some apparently peculiar data, not least among which is our ostensible ability to think about things that are non-existent. This ineluctable feature of intentionality seems to have motivated Brentano’s characterization of intentional entities as having a property he called *intentional inexistence*. It is, however, not entirely clear what Brentano means by this phrase, and so I avoid the exegetical problem here. It will suffice, I suggest, to accept that the apparent ability of the mind to be direct itself toward non-existents is a problem, if not *the* problem of intentionality. It certainly puzzled Brentano, and it became a chief concern for his student Meinong.

Meinong, a psychologist himself, developed a complex theory of objects that was chiefly concerned with accounting for all the apparent objects of thought. Meinong attempted to develop a very rich psychological view by developing a theory of objects (*Gegenstandstheorie*) in order to account for the structural features of the *phenomenal field*² presented to us in intentionality. Meinong came to think that an account of intentionality required an account of non-existent objects. According to Meinong, an object’s having being (*Sein*) was independent of its having properties (*Sosein*). An object’s being (*sein*) is independent of its being-so (*sosein*). This has

² I use this term to capture whatever it is in virtue of which we experience phenomenon; there seems to be some feature of being minded whereby we experience a field of presentational content. I take it that this field and our relation to it is the subject of phenomenology.

come to be called Meinong's *Principle of Independence*.³ It allowed Meinong to make his infamous claim:

Those who like paradoxical modes of expression could very well say: "There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects." The fact, familiar the world over, which is meant by this statement throws such a bright light on the relation of objects to reality, or their relation to being, generally, that a somewhat closer examination of the matter, of fundamental importance in its own right, is entirely in place in our present study.⁴

While the above suggestion that "there are objects such that..." may seem to be an ontological claim, it is not clear that Meinong meant for his theory of objects to assert the objective existence of such entities as of which it is true to say that they don't exist. Meinong's view may have just been that ontological concerns are simply *Aussersein* (i.e., they just provide no impediment to our characterization of the way things seem to us). In other words, it may just have been Meinong's view that he was doing psychology, not ontology.⁵ Nevertheless, Meinong's *Gegenstandstheorie* has proven highly influential among a cadre of analytic philosophers that have attempted to rehabilitate the view by providing a coherent account of the apparent objects of thought both concrete and those of which it is true to say that they are not. While it may be true of Meinong that he was not interested in settling the ontological status of the objects of thought, quite the contrary is true of those that have worked to rehabilitate his view. For them, as we will see, these objects deserve every bit of ontological respect as any other objects.

³ See Lambert (1983) for a logical analysis of this principle.

⁴ Meinong, The Theory of Objects in ed. Roderick Chisholm, *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology* (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1960), p. 83.

⁵ This suggestion can be found in Landini 2012, "He aimed at a pure phenomenology, descriptive of the objects of thought while leaving their ontological status unsettled."

While Meinong may have been comfortable with the positing of non-existent objects, his contemporary, Bertrand Russell was not, considering such objects were “apt to infringe on a robust sense of reality”.⁶ Russell’s refutation of Meinong’s ontology appeared in his 1905 paper, *On Denoting*, wherein Russell presents his theory of definite descriptions, a formal apparatus capable of subsuming references under the use of quantified phrases and predicates. As with Meinong, Russell has his contemporary proponents, and the division between neo-Meinongians and Russellians remains a chasm. Having set the stage, I will now turn to characterizing the neo-Meinongian approach to ontology.

Edward Zalta begins his work of 1983, *Abstract Objects* by characterizing the data to be explained by his theory as coming from two sources: the history of philosophy and the philosophy of language. Of the first he has this to say, “If earlier philosophers who postulated theoretical entities were describing anything at all, they must have been describing entities which can be found in our background ontology.”⁷ Of the latter he says, “If the terms of a natural language denote anything at all, they must denote entities found in the background ontology.”⁸ His theory, then, will construe those objects spoken of by past philosophers as abstract or existing objects, properties or relations. Likewise, the theory will ensure that all and only those entities denoted by natural language are those found in the background ontology.⁹

Zalta is comparably quiet on how he proposes we understand this apparent data and why it is we should take it that the speech of theoretical entities should necessitate their ontological status, he merely says that these observations provide philosophically interesting data. He is not

⁶ Russell’s story is rather more complicated than suggested here, he at least toyed around with some non-existents, including negative facts, at various times in his career. Quote is from *On Denoting*.

⁷ 2

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

alone, however, in thinking that this kind of data is provocative and requires explanation. His teacher, Terence Parsons, considered dream objects and objects of fictional works worthy of explanation.¹⁰ Similarly, in a more recent work on intentionality, *The Objects of Thought*, Tim Crane suggests that “unless we understand non-existence we cannot understand intentionality”.¹¹ Below I would like to motivate the intuition involved in these observations.

That mental states appear to be about things elicits conjecture about what kinds of things it is that thoughts are or may be about. There is little mysterious about thinking about zebras or the array of books before us, insofar as those things appear concretely in the very world which we take ourselves also to occupy. Yet upon minor reflection there are apparently other kinds of things that we think about. We might think about characters from fiction for instance, or dwell on fantastic creatures wrought from whatever materials comprise our imaginations; stranger still we might think about round squares, barbers that shave only those who shave themselves. The zebra and the round square don't seem to be on a par. Not only are there no round squares in the world, there can't be; our barber, too, will be precluded from the set of things that occupy the world. Zebras, however, are commonplace. Zebras, round squares, and characters of fiction seem to have distinct natures of some kind. Based on these observations, our taxonomy of the objects of thought might be taken to have a provisionally basic membership: the existent, the non-existent and coherent, and the non-existent and incoherent.

So, there seems to be a triviality on the one hand in drawing our attention to these three kinds of objects, insofar as any minded thing can appreciate the prima facie character this provisional taxonomy. In Rapaport this becomes the Principle of the Freedom of Assumption.¹²

¹⁰ Parson's work, *Nonexistent Objects* (1980) consists in a formal theory of nonexistent objects.

¹¹ Crane 2013, ix.

¹² Can be found in Rapaport's dissertation.

In Gregory Landini's work on intentionality this referred to as *poetic license*.¹³ As poetic license is a more economical phrase, I'm going to adopt this term throughout the paper. Poetic license, as can readily be seen, is nothing more than the unrestricted acceptance of the apparent phenomenal data of intentionality that I have spoken about above, it just refers to the prima facie experience of being able to think about every manner of object in our provisional taxonomy. I take it that poetic license, the lack of restriction on what objects may fall under the purview of our intentional states, is the basic presumption that must be allowed for in any theory of intentionality. It's just not clear that from "the inside" as it were, we have good reasons to place restrictions on the potential objects of thought. While we may analogize from our experience with other creatures that don't share our cognitive ability that there must be something outside our own, it's not clear that we place this restriction on ourselves. To posit some object as beyond the purview of our intentional states is just in some sense to have already had it there. As such, I follow Landini in thinking that no theory of intentionality can violate this principle.

(PL) No restrictions can be placed on the ostensible objects of our intentional states.¹⁴

Given the data that Zalta takes to require explanation and my attempt to motivate the intuition that I take we all share with respect to the apparent objects of thought, it seems that the problem of intentionality becomes the question that concerns itself with how we think about those objects that are non-existent. This is just the question as Crane describes it in the quote above, and apparently motivated Meinong and Parsons as well. We state the non-existence question, also understood as the *problem of intentionality*:

¹³ This term may have been borrowed from Castañeda; professor Landini remembers borrowing it, but not from where it was borrowed. I have not as yet been able to track the provenance of the term.

¹⁴ It follows from this principle that the mind can apparently be directed toward an object that is a conjunction of our taxonomical kinds. The *existent and non-existent and possible, and the non-existent and incoherent* object can be thought about.

(NQ) How do we think that about what doesn't exist.?

NQ gives way to the indispensability thesis:

(IT) Non-existent objects are indispensable with respect to a proper characterization of the answer to NQ.

The relationship between NQ and IT seems to be Brentanian in spirit, if not in substance, insofar as the field of phenomenal experience has an act-object structure; that is to say that every intentional state is directed at some object and the being of the object toward which it is directed is an integral component of the intentional state. Whatever the intentional arrow, as it were, is aimed toward, it hits. As such, an account of non-existent objects is necessary for a complete theory of intentionality on the view that accepts (NQ) as the problem of intentionality.

Formulating a response to this question while utilizing the data apparently involved in our intentional states, such as those given by the history of philosophy and the philosophy of language in Zalta, or the fictional and dream objects of Parsons, involves distinguishing between the kinds of objects that our intentional states are directed at. Zalta, Parsons and Crane all draw on Meinong's principle of independence in order to do so. Recall that the principle of independence states that an objects having properties is not dependent on its being existent. This is just to say that Pegasus can have the properties of being winged and being a horse but not instantiate these properties in existence right alongside the horses take for granted as existing.

Zalta, in order to mark the distinction between these two kinds of objects uses two predicates in his formal language, one for abstract objects and one for existent objects.¹⁵ He then develops a theory around how each of these kinds of objects can be a property bearer. In the case of abstract objects, properties are *encoded*; in the case of existing objects, properties are

¹⁵ 1983, 18. Chapter 1 as a whole gives the elementary object theory.

exemplified. No object may both encode and exemplify some property or properties.¹⁶ An object is either abstract or existent. I take it that little more need be said about Zalta's theory. Suffice it to say that he has gone to pains to provide a coherent and consistent formal theory that adequately explains the requisite data, or so it might appear. There is, however, perhaps a deep problem with Zalta's theory, and it is to that problem that I now turn.

In fact there are two problems, and they are intimately related. Romane Clark discovered a paradox that every theory involving multiple predication must ultimately face on pain of inconsistency.¹⁷ In Zalta's theory (unqualified) one can formulate a paradox by introducing an object that encodes the property of *being an object that does not exemplify any property that it encodes*. In order to block this formulation Zalta has to introduce a 'principle of comprehension' into his logic whereby this paradox is blocked – this is a formal clarification of the theory (given in appendix A) that. The problem can be understood without appeal to the formal language itself, however. The idea is just that this is violation of the principle of poetic license, a principle apparently tacitly accepted by Zalta. Surely we can think of the an object that encodes this property: *being an object that does not exemplify any property that it encodes*. Yet Zalta's amended theory will preclude this object from being an object of thought, according to his system, and he thereby undermines, it seems, the spirit of his project. For as he himself has said, whatever objects are postulated will be found in the background ontology; moreover, any object denoted in natural language must denote some object found there.

Unfortunately any theory like Zalta's, given Clark's discovery, will have this very same trouble and will thusly be at pains to preserve its guiding intuition. The second problem, intimately related to this one can be stated briefly. (NQ) is just a complex question. It presumes

¹⁶ Zalta, 33. "NO-CODER" axiom 2.

¹⁷ Not Every Object of Thought has Being: A Paradox in Naïve Predication Theory, 1978.

that there are non-existent objects that we think about and it demands an answer that includes them as objects of thought. But if no consistent theory can be given that also retains poetic license then the question demands an inconsistent answer. The question before us now, then, is whether or not a better characterization of intentionality can be given. If it can, then we have even more reason to reject an indispensability thesis for ontological countenancing of non-existent objects.

Firstly we must dispense with the complex question and rephrase the problem of intentionality. The problem of intentionality rests on the *how* of (NQ), *how* do we direct our thought at ostensibly non-existent objects? Bertrand Russell provides a means for answering this question, according to Gregory Landini. Before turning to Landini's proposal, I will first take a brief look at Russell's *On Denoting*.

Russell's refutation of Meinong's concern that an adequate account of intentionality required that there be non-existent objects of thought lies in his discovery of a new logical form, one that might explain intentionality without an appeal to non-existents; namely, the theory of definite descriptions. The theory allows Russell to subsume references, both direct and indirect by the use of quantified phrases and predicates. Some terms refer and some do not. The ones that do not refer fail to "hit" what they apparently point at. Non-existents then will just fail to be referred to at all. Such a theory does not require non-existent objects, then, but offers a means of explaining the intentional directedness by means of quantificational mechanism that points but at times refers and other times fails to. Meinong's point of confusion according to this view is just this: logical and grammatical form can come apart, a separation which may be important to the settling of ontological questions. While the proper logical form may be hard to come by, the pursuit may be well worth it. The grammatical and the logical form in this case may depart from

one another considerably, but recognizing this may well be necessary in order to get the truth conditions, that is the ontology, correct.

According to Russell's theory of descriptions every denotation involves the use of quantification. In quantification theory these concepts are captured by the "some" and "all" quantifiers. Russell also allows the quantification over predicates (which indicate properties), which will allow for his theory to analyze away proper names as reference to existents. Consider Pegasus. I make the statement, *Pegasus exists*. According to Russell's theory the statement can be captured using quantification and predicates, so that the proper logical form of the statement is, "there is something such that it is a horse and is winged and that thing exists".¹⁸ The statement will fail to be true precisely because there is nothing that exists that is both a horse and is winged. Nothing at all is referred to, and, indeed, according Russell denoting phrases may fail to refer. His answer to Meinong is just to say that whenever we appear to denote some non-existent object it is little more than an appearance; rather, our intentional apparatus is involved in an apprehending of properties which it uses to direct thought, though the ostensible object toward which it is directed may fail to exist.¹⁹

This solution is quite powerful and has been used by Gregory Landini to solve a number of puzzles with respect to intentionality.²⁰ The thought in his work, and apparently Russell's, is that the apparatus of intentionality is quantificational, that is to say that it is that these quantificational notions are deeply implicated in our cognitive structure. This cognitive apparatus, then, uses properties as a kind of focusing lens in order to direct thought toward something or other. This notion can be captured formally without countenancing non-existent

¹⁸ I am here avoiding discussions of scope, though the reader should be aware that they are important with respect to this theory.

¹⁹ Russell

²⁰ See, for instance, *Meinong and Russell: Some Lessons on Quantification*.

objects by allowing quantification over predicate variables. Neither does it undermine poetic license, as it leaves open what particular objects of thought there may be by relying on properties alone for the direction of thought.

Some object to this view by suggesting that it replaces the objects of thought with properties, which is just to say that it makes properties the things that we think about and not things themselves.²¹ But this seems a straightforward misunderstanding of the view. It is not the view that we think *about* properties, but it is just properties that allow us to think about anything at all.

I hope to have shown above, by the all too brief characterization of the Russellian solution to the problem of intentionality provided above is hopefully suggestive enough to show that there is in principle some means whereby we can preserve our intuitions regarding intentionality (such as poetic license) without countenancing an ontology that includes non-existent objects. I also hope to have shown that Zalta's theory, and any theory like it, will result in undermining the very principle that motivates it, and further, that it is predicated upon the acceptance of a complex question. These results seem to suggest that we can, and should, do without a theory of intentionality that countenances non-existents as ontological entities.

II

In this chapter I would like to take a look at another field in philosophy that sometimes involves arguments for the indispensability of non-existents, truthmaker theory. Truthmaker

²¹ Crane 2013 makes this precise objection.

theory can be thought to be derived from intentionality insofar as truths require minds for apprehension. We make statements or have beliefs about the world that we take to be either true or false, and then we look to the world in order to understand which value our statements have. For the truthmaker theorists that want them, non-existents are characterized not as subsistent entities or as otherwise having being in some way different from that of concrete existents, but, rather, as being concrete entities themselves.²² Of course nothing non-existent could truly have this status, so it is argued that things formerly characterized as non-existent, such as absences, are in fact corporeal entities.

In the context of a realist metaphysics, truthmaker theory is concerned with grounding the relation between a truthmaker and a truthbearer in the world. A truthbearer can be characterized as anything that may be considered to make some claim about the world that can be characterized as true or false. Things such as sentences, judgments, and beliefs are examples of truthbearers. A truthmaker is that entity in virtue of which the truthbearer is made true.

Following Molnar, we can characterize a realist metaphysics with the following four theses:²³

- (i) The world is everything that exists.
- (ii) Everything that exists is positive.
- (iii) Some negative claims are true.
- (iv) Every true claim about the world is made true by something that exists.

These four theses jointly imply that all true negative claims must be made true by positive truthmakers. While each of these theses appears tenable, every theory of truthmaking that

²² This will be true only for those that are after a metaphysically realist account, the parameters of which are given below.

²³ Molnar, 72.

accepts them faces difficulty with respect to the formulation of a satisfactory theory.²⁴ Barker and Jago, whose theory the larger portion of this chapter will be concerned with, attempt to formulate a theory that accepts these four theses.²⁵ Before turning to their theory, however, I will first attempt to motivate the difficulties that it, and theories like it, face. My comments on each of these difficulties will be comparably brief due to the scope of this essay, for a fuller exposition on these concerns see Molnar (2000) from whom the following is largely paraphrase.

Our claims about the world intuitively fall into statements of the negative and positive type where something or other either *is* or *is not* the case. We understand statements of either type and accept that statements of either type can be true. Statements of the first type, that something or other *is* the case, are not terribly difficult to account for in truthmaker theory. When I say that the cat is in the window, the statement is made true just in case the worldly state of affairs is such that the cat is in the window.

Negative statements, however, are not so easily dealt with. Consider the claim that the cat is not in the window. What makes such a statement true? Our first thought is likely to infer from perception just as we did in the former case. We look to the window and we don't see a cat, so it is true that the cat is not in the window. We have to remember, however, that our theses jointly determine that our statement be made true by something that exists, some positive entity.²⁶ In the first case the statement is true because the worldly entity, *state of affairs*, is comprised of the existent window and the existent cat related in just the way represented by the truthbearer. But what state of affairs is represented by the statement that there is no cat in the window? Our inference from perception, while it may be true, presents a puzzle. What is it that we see when

²⁴ For an excellent, even indispensable introduction, see Molnar 2000.

²⁵ This is not quite true, as they seem to dismiss the notion that "positive" is an appropriate characterization of existents. Nevertheless, their theory is formulated such that everything that exists exists in the same manner.

²⁶ Molnar, 1.

we see that no cat is in the window? Is it the non-presence of the cat? Intuitively we may be inclined to say so, but then we are suggesting that we somehow *see* the absence of a cat, perceiving it directly, rather than inferring its absence from the given state of affairs. We may then wonder what it means for us to *see* an absence. Providing a positive truthmaker for the statement that there is no cat in the window proves troublesome for precisely the reason that it is difficult to say what worldly entity will ground the truth of it and negative statements like it.

Rather than provide an introduction to the various kinds of non-existents that have been proposed in truthmaker theory, such as lacks, absences, negative facts, etc., and the various objections to the acceptance of these entities, I will instead turn to what I take to be a paradigm case for the postulations of such entities. By working through the case, I hope to make clear what the various objections are, as well as assess whether or not the account can sufficiently respond to them.

In their “Being Positive About Negative Facts” (2012), Barker and Jago argue in favor of negative facts; they claim that negative facts have a role to play not only as truthmakers, but also as entities that physically constitute other things and stand in causal relations to other entities. A similar attempt has also been made by Kukso who argues in favor of ontological reality of absences on grounds very similar to Barker and Jago’s.²⁷ In both cases we are to take absences, or negative facts, as ontologically indispensable entities due in particular to their role as truthmakers for negative statements. In the following, I will be closely considering the Barker and Jago proposal, particularly their ontological account of negative facts. I will argue that firstly, Barker and Jago’s indispensability argument for these entities is motivated by the apparent theoretical utility of the postulation of negative facts, and secondly that they provide no

²⁷ See Kukso, *The Reality of Absences*.

compelling evidence of that utility and thusly fail to obligate us the acceptance of negative facts as proper entities.

Barker and Jago's proposal is Armstrongian in spirit insofar as states of affairs are taken to be the fundamental constituents of reality. States of affairs on this view are complexes of 'thin' particulars and the universals they instantiate. Thin particulars are non-repeatable entities, considered without their properties, though one won't find them out there alone – they will always be accompanied by the property universals they instantiate, or implicated in some relation. Universals, on the other hand, are multiply instantiable entities that, likewise, won't be found outside of states of affairs in which they are instantiated by particulars. Thus, *this cat being black* is a state of affairs constituted out of the particular cat and the universal *blackness*. The *blackness* that is instantiated by my cat, however, is not unique to it; the very same universal is also instantiated by the sharp and flat keys on the piano, by my computer, and by many other particulars.

Now, Armstrong worried that given that *blackness* is instantiated by many distinct particulars and given that this cat's hair could be dyed some other color, what makes true the statement "this cat is black" cannot merely be the particular cat and the universal *blackness*. The cat could exist without being black and *blackness* could exist without being instantiated by this particular cat. Due to the contingent nature of the cat's blackness, Armstrong thought that something else is needed to "tie" or "hold" together the cat and the universal *blackness* in the state of affairs of *this cat being black*. At times Armstrong thought that this "something else" that holds a particular and a universal together is a non-relational tie of instantiation; at other times he thought of a state of affairs itself "holding" the particular and the universal together, without any intermediaries.

Barker and Jago build on the version of Armstrong's view which includes instantiation as a non-relational tie. But, in addition to *instantiation* which ties particulars and universals into states of affairs, they postulate *anti-instantiation* which ties particulars and universals into negative states of affairs or negative facts. While "this cat is black" is made true by this cat's instantiation of blackness, "this cat is not red" is made true by this cat's anti-instantiation of redness. Both instantiation and anti-instantiation give rise to states of affairs; it's just that the former are positive while the latter are negative.

Just what the qualitative nature of this anti-instantiation tie is, however, remains deeply unclear. Barker and Jago self-admittedly abstain from providing any such characterization, opting instead to motivate its acceptance through an argument from theoretical utility, "We posit two kinds of facts as basic entities and do not try to explain those entities further: rather, we want to see what work they can do within our theory, and assess their worth on that basis." The work Barker and Jago have in mind for negative facts is fourfold: they will argue that negative facts are causally effective, physically constitutive of some objects, that they are perceivable, and finally, that they are explanatory. Yet, even if we find their arguments for each of these plausible, we are still left without a characterization of anti-instantiation, which we will inevitably need if we are to assent to their acceptance as theoretically practical entities. Before turning to their arguments for the their applicability, then, I will first attempt to disambiguate what anti-instantiation may amount to.

It seems that there are three possible disambiguations of anti-instantiation. Firstly, it may be a non-relational tie analogous to instantiation. Secondly, it may be a relational tie of some kind. Finally, it may be a non-relational non-tie.²⁸ Barker and Jago deny the second formulation,

²⁸ I owe this and the following insights to professor Katarina Perovic.

“...neither form of the ontological tie is a relation...”. In the first case, then, if anti-instantiation is analogous to instantiation, the thought must be that in negative states of affairs the particular is tied to a negative property. If this is the case, one is left with the requirement of characterizing a negative property. Consider this black cat. Does its not being red involve the instantiation of a negative property *non-redness*? It’s not terribly clear what this would amount to. On the one hand, it may be that instantiation in this case involves an opposite property. But what is the opposite of, for instance, red? An opposite property, in the case of color, can’t be merely the instantiation of some particular other color.²⁹ On the other hand, it could be that to instantiate *non-redness* is to instantiate any other color than red. This, too, seems problematic. Firstly, it would seem to follow from this that instantiations of any particular color would be anti-instantiations of every other color. Our cat would, then, anti-instantiate not only *non-redness*, but *non-greenness*, *non-blueness* and so on. If we take parsimony to be a theoretical virtue, then such an outcome is problematic.

It seems to me that neither characterization of anti-instantiation as analogous to instantiation is particularly satisfying. This leaves the notion that anti-instantiation is a non-relational non-tie. This suggests that anti-instantiation neither relates nor ties particulars and universals together. This cat’s anti-instantiation of redness would then be the result of some entity that successfully fails to tie this particular cat with the property of redness. Of the proposed characterizations this seems the most deeply unsatisfying. Why postulate an entity whose work can be accounted for quite readily without its postulation? This cat can

²⁹ We may be inclined to consider this view if we have some color theory in mind, such as the color wheel of the arts, but these theories are arbitrarily based on either practical concerns or the aesthetic concerns of human beings.

unproblematically fail to instantiate redness without the introduction of some entity that precipitates such a failure.

Given the possible metaphysical characterizations of negative facts above, none strike me as particularly satisfying. Apart from the latter, which seems ontologically superfluous, it is possible that either of the other two may be dealt with to some satisfaction if we are to accept negative facts based on their theoretical utility. It may be that some characterization of an opposite property can be conceived, or that we simply accept that the theory is as parsimonious as it can be given the postulation of entities that indispensable with respect to their theoretical utility. Wherever we land at this juncture, however, requires that we consider Barker and Jago's arguments for the theoretical utility of negative facts. It is to these I now turn after a short preamble on their theory.

Barker and Jago's theory, it should be kept in mind, involves positing negative facts as ontologically fundamental entities from which, along with their positive counterpart, all things in reality are abstracted. This has the perhaps peculiar result that everything abstracted from a negative fact is just as present or as existent as anything else. There is, in some sense, nothing mysterious about these entities insofar as they have some other kind of being, as is the case with the accounts of intentional entities spoken of in the previous chapter. The result of this view, then, is not the postulation of some extension to the ontological domain so that it encapsulates some other realm of being; rather, non-existents in this view are apparently rehabilitated because they are just as real as any other particular, relation, or property that obtains positively. This result allows Barker and Jago to attempt refutations of various kinds that are often levelled at negative facts, absences, lacks, and other entities that have been postulated to account for

negative facts, such as their being causally inert, physically non-constitutional, and imperceptible. I will now discuss their arguments against these now, starting with causality.

Barker and Jago respond to some common objections to negative facts with respect to causality. Firstly, they deny one formulation of the Eleatic principle whereby non-existents are debarred from entering into causal relations. Secondly, they argue that the causality of negative facts accords to our intuitions that seem to involve negative causation.

The apparent acausality of negative facts is derived from their common characterization as absences of some kind; if negative facts are absences, in the sense that they are non-existent, then they can have no causal powers.³⁰ This a form of the Eleatic principle, a principle that can be taken to assert that causal powers are necessary for something to be considered existent.

Barker and Jago's response to this characterization is just what we may expect given their characterization of negative facts as existent entities. Negative facts on their construal are not absences at all in the sense that they are non-existent, rather they are every bit as existent as anything else in the world is, therefore, in principle they can enter into causal relations just as any other existent entity can.³¹ Barker and Jago here simply deny that negative facts are non-existents. This response, however, is just to rest on the postulation that there are such entities; it straightforwardly begs the question. Without some qualitative characterization of a negative fact and *how* it may enter into causal relations, this response is a non-starter.

Barker and Jago do attempt to provide an example of negative facts involving causation which seems to conform to our "ordinary intuitions," which they characterize being captured by statements like, "Bob's not watering the plants caused them to die".³² An important feature of

³⁰ Barker and Jago, 128.

³¹ Ibid.

³² The following example is not directly taken from Barker and Jago's essay, but adapted from one they give in an argument against negative facts violating the theory of special relativity. I do not understand this argument of

negative facts for Barker and Jago is that they are comprised of their concrete constituents and so can be located at discontinuous regions of space and time. Bob, for instance, is supposed to be watering my plants, which are located in Iowa City. Bob is not in Iowa city, but rather he is in Paris, happily neglecting my plants' well-being. The fact that *Bob's not watering my plants*, then, is located at the discontinuous spatiotemporal region that is comprised of my plants' location in Iowa City and Bob's location in Paris. Baker and Jago's proposal appears to be just this: *Bob's not watering my plants* is, because it is comprised of concrete constituents appropriate to the causal account of my plants' death (bob, the plants, the lack of water, etc.), then we can in principle accept that this fact is the cause of the plants' death, and such an account conforms to our ordinary intuitions. Nothing is said about *how* this fact enters a causal relation.

As for explanations of our ordinary intuitions go, the above seems unduly bizarre. While we do use speech in this way to account for things such as Bob's not watering my plants, it is not clear to me that our intuitions involve some kind of causation with respect to such statements. Suppose I confront Bob about my plant's death. Bob is clever and insists that his not watering my didn't *cause* them to die, but dehydration did. I'm likely to assent that this is indeed the case. For it seems to me that our intuition in this case likely corresponds to something more like a moral, rather than causal, responsibility with respect to the death of the plants. There is a distinction here that is captured quite well in Molnar (2000). Molnar distinguishes between two kinds of causal relations: primary and explanatory. The first, he says, is a natural relation that obtains between particulars in nature. The second is what he calls a "rational" relation that holds between particulars we take to be relevant for explanation. A's causing B, as in our plant example above, is best paraphrased as 'A causally

theirs and admit that it seems deeply underdescribed. Nevertheless I take it that this argument is in the full spirit and substance of their work.

explains B'.³³ Our causal explanations are largely heuristic, on his view, as they are derived from our background knowledge and our pragmatic interests in explaining and predicting certain events. As such, they are too deeply implicated in human interests to be taken as descriptive of primary, mind-independent, causes.³⁴ As far as explanations of our ordinary intuitions go, this seems far more satisfying than that proposed by Barker and Jago. We don't need discontinuous regions of spacetime or mysterious causal relations to account for statements that seem to involve negative causation; it seems we lose nothing and gain much by accepting a paraphrase of negative causal statements as causally explanatory, not primarily causal relations between concrete particulars.

Barker and Jago cite an objection against negative facts as entities that can be physically constitutional of some other entities. The thought is that any entity that cannot have a constitutional role with respect to other material things cannot be an existing thing. There are, according to Barker and Jago, things that are constituted by negative facts- namely, holes. Their constitutional theory of negative facts as hole-makers can according to them be extrapolated to account for dents and gaps as well. Barker and Jago dismiss two theories of holes. First that they are composed of a mereological fusion of a positive and negative parts. They insist that this cannot be correct because it seems incorrect to suggest that a hole is in any sense partly composed of the material around it. They then dismiss David Lewis' suggestion that holes are really hole-linings, since this cannot account for a hole's ability to be filled in.³⁵ While the former dismissal seems reasonable, the latter seems to presuppose that holes are particulars of some kind. While I am not familiar with Lewis' theory, it's characterization by Barker and Jago seems to suggest that holes are ontologically reducible to their linings, and as such there are really no holes at all, only hole-linings. If that's the case then there is no hole to fill up. This is not the only problem with respect to their theory, however.

³³ Molnar, 77-79.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Barker and Jago, 131.

In Barker and Jago's analysis holes are conceived of as a particular in an occupying relation, where the particular occupies an area devoid of an appropriately related property. This amounts to a surrounding relation as well, so that the particular hole is a region where the negative property is surrounded by its positive corollary.³⁶ It's difficult not to concede on this view then that there are great many more holes than we would be inclined to report on in ordinary speech, it seems. We would not, I suspect, ordinarily report that an empty globe had a hole in it. Nor does it seem we would say that the insides of our houses were holes. Both of these seem reasonable assumptions on their theory, however. The inside of our homes could be considered holes that are constituted by having the *non-wall* property. The theory appears underdeveloped and far too permissive with respect to what might constitute a hole. They do not make clear in what sense we should understand either the surrounding or occupying relations. There seems another problem here as well. How do we know what the negative property constituted by the hole is, to borrow their paradigm case, of a donut? It seems that we would only be inclined to say the property of *non-donut dough* only because this seems the obvious negative corollary of the substance that comprises the object we observe to have a hole in it. But now we are returned to the problem of the metaphysical characterization of a negative property. If we are to follow Barker and Jago's characterization of a hole here it seems that they want to suggest that a negative property is somehow an opposite, otherwise it's not clear how they would spell out the appropriateness relation between the hole and its surrounding material. What in the world, we are left to wonder is the opposite of donut dough? Absent some fuller, coherent, characterization of negative properties we are left with little reason to accept this account of holes, and thereby any reason to accept the theory can be extrapolated in any way. Our reasons for accepting them as genuine existents are apparently even fewer.

³⁶ Ibid., 131.

Now I turn to the perception of negative facts. Existents, it is thought, must in principle be perceptible. If negative facts are not perceptible, then they are not existents.³⁷ Barker and Jago first dismiss an objection that involves the positive paraphrase of negative statements like, *this cat is not red*, which can simply be paraphrased by saying that one sees the blackness of the cat and infers that it is not red. Barker and Jago deny that this says anything about the existence of negative facts or their in principle perceptibility.³⁸ To the latter they question-beggingly invoke their ontological characterization in order to maintain that they are in principle perceivable. To the former, it seems to me, they misunderstand the argument entirely. The argument may be recast thusly: if every instance of a reported negative perception can be paraphrased by a positive one, then we have no good reasons to accept that negative facts, or absences, can be perceived. This is not an argument for the non-existence of negative facts, Barker and Jago are correct about that, but it is an argument against their indispensability, theoretical or otherwise. It seems that when it comes to negative reports of perception, negative facts are in fact dispensable.

Their final argument for the perceptibility of negative facts is twofold. Firstly, it involves an analogy of computer edge detection software to human perception of qualities; secondly, they invoke the previous constitution argument with respect to holes as accounting also for the constitution of edges, in part to explain their qualitative character in perception. Edge detection software, they suggest, involves not only the use of positive information, but the use of negative information as well. Information about the light intensity of every pixel is stored by the computer as a data-point such that each pixel is characterized by being as at least as bright but no brighter than some value. *But no brighter* is considered by Barker and Jago to be indicative of *negative* information.³⁹ There are, it seems to me, two confusions here. Firstly, computers do not use information, if we take that term to designate some

³⁷ Barker and Jago, 132.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

date interpreted as having some meaning, they only perform algorithmic operations on data. Secondly, that data, while it may be codified in a meaningful way for a human in some instruction language or other, is ultimately interpreted from some physical differential in the machine- such as the presence, or not, of charge in a capacitor, as in the case of random access memory. There is simply here no relevant analogy between the human perception of edges and the computational one. Computers do not (as yet, anyway) perceive anything in a manner that can be appropriately analogized to human perception.

As for the constitution of edges by the juxtaposition of a positive fact and a negative fact, I will appeal to the argument I made earlier. Unless some account can be given of anti-instantiation, we are in no wise obligated to accept this as an account of constitution. Yet Barker and Jago suggest that the qualitative character of absences given in perception is just the juxtaposition of a positive and negative fact, which seems to follow if we accept the story of constitution. It's not clear to me, however, that we should accept such a characterization. We might just as well be able to say that the qualitative character of an edge is just the juxtaposition of incongruities.

The last of the arguments for the existence of negative facts that Barker and Jago provide is one for their roles as chance-makers. They contend that an explanation for the chance of some isotope of decaying involves the ineliminable reference to a) the physical structure of the isotope and, b) the lack of *isotope destroyers* or heavy particles in its reverse light cone, that is to say as previously effective causes.⁴⁰ The problem here, however, is that we can invoke the same distinction that we made in the case of Bob's not watering my plants, that between explanatory and primary causes. While the explanation we give of chances may involve the invocation of negatives, it needn't follow that they are either necessary to the explanation, nor that they are thereby ontologically necessitated for the grounding of statements of chance.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 135.

In the preceding analysis of Barker and Jago's paper, I hope to have shown that despite their efforts, we are left with no reasons to accept negative facts into our ontology. Firstly, negative facts on this construal are qualitatively underdetermined. This is doubly problematic, it seems, if their characterization of hole-making requires that anti-instantiation involve the tying of a particular to an *opposite* property. Not only are negative facts metaphysically underdetermined on this view, they have provided no reason even to accept the theoretical utility of their putative negative facts. It is not clear that we ought be inclined to accept their causal efficacy, their roles as constitutors for physical objects, nor their in principle perception. If these arguments have been successful, Barker and Jago's negative facts, as interesting as they may be, are little more than specters of our intentional attitudes, right alongside Pegasus and the round square.

Conclusion

In the above essay I hope to have shown that two prevailing views on the indispensability for non-existent objects in the philosophy of mind and truthmaker theory do not compel us to accept these entities are ontologically acceptable. In chapter one I attempted to show that neo-Meinongian's not only undermine the very guiding principle of their theory, but that they indulge a complex question. Further, I attempted to show that in principle we can do without theories of intentionality that take non-existent objects as ontologically acceptable. In chapter two I, likewise, attempted to show that we are no better off accepting non-existent objects as genuine entities that ground the truth of negative statements.

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