Meinong’s Theory of Objects and Values, Second edition
J. N. FINDLAY

This work was originally published in 1933; the second edition, of which this is a reprint, in 1963. Its revival is perhaps due to a renewed interest in the events leading up to the dominance of analytic philosophy in Anglo-American schools, rather than a continuing interest in the ideas of Meinong, who until recently was seen more in terms of the caricature than in those of Meinong’s contributions to both the analytic and the phenomenological traditions.

The renewed interest in the foundations of analytic philosophy appears not to be a result of students and the other ordinary people’s complaints that this tradition affords too little reality to feelings and ideals but to an indeterminacy in its concept of truth. This is accompanied by attempts to reconstruct the identity theory, such as those of Jennifer Hornsby, who is especially concerned to avoid the idealism apparently implicit in the identity theory of truth. The value of Meinong’s work and Findlay’s study can thus be discerned in Meinong’s realism and his identity theory of truth. However, this work also answers a demand from students with an interest in Gadamer and the challenge to Gadamer’s aesthetics mounted by Roman Ingarden, as the latter’s aesthetics was clearly grounded in a value theory such as Meinong’s.

As Findlay remarked, the ground for, but also a source of the conflict, in the philosophy of Meinong is the realism he adopted from the work of Brentano, who argued for the fundamental distinction between mental states, or Vorstellung, and the judgements we make about our mental states. Our judgements allow us to distance ourselves and to establish the intentionality of these states, as well as giving them the status of acts of referring an ideal content to an object distinct from either the act of referring or the content. Meinong learned from Twardowski to think of the object as immanent in the mental state and to distinguish the object on grounds, for example, that in many cases the object is disqualified from existence owing to its self-contradictory nature, whereas mental acts exist (Balzano’s point); physical objects have nonmental properties; objects can be thought of in many more ways than a finite mind can encompass; and general ideas, such as the idea of a triangle, contain more in their nature than can be contained in a finite content of a mental state. According to Meinong, as opposed to Twardowski, the mental act and its content are the same, and the distinction of the mental act and its object is grounded in the fact that there are nonexistent objects, as in Balzano’s and Twardowski’s view; objects occur in time and are extended.
in space, whereas the content is outside of space and time; and the idea of the object is needed to individuate the content of ideas.

Only those ideas of objects ("objectives") subsist if they are facts, that is, if they correspond to existing objects (83). This distinguishes Meinong's objectives from Russell's or Moore's propositions and lays the ground for the identity theory of truth. Truth doesn't depend on correspondence, as facts are part of the truth of the Urteil (the conviction and the affirmation or denial in an idea), rather than something external, to which ideas correspond. Thus, the relation of a true idea to its object is in no way accidental. Far from its being an external relation, as in the correspondence theory of truth, it is one of identity (88–89). The conflict between the idealism implicit in this theory of truth and the realism of Meinong appears to be the source of Findlay's main criticism of Meinong's work, that "his researches really indicate ... a deep inseparability between our conscious approaches and the features we discern in the world, the senselessness of trying to deal with the one without bringing in the other" (340).

Objects and the apprehension of objects differ, according to Meinong, in that the latter exists independently of time and space and in its being universal. For example, an idea of a relation relates terms that are independent in the object but necessarily connected in the idea of the object. This is what Findlay meant by saying their relation is "ideal." Findlay observed that the object and the idea are nevertheless interdependent: the relational property on the side of the mental is generated through the relation, whereas the adequacy of the relation depends on the properties of the object (40–41). As a consequence of this Platonistic split between the idea and the object, Meinong was unable to allow the reality of the noesis noeseos, which cannot have even the quasi existence (Quasisein) of a contradictory object in the realm of the outer existence (Außersein) reserved for the nonexisting, merely subsisting objects of thought. But this enabled Meinong to respond to Russell's more important objection: not the argument that the theory countenances the existence of the round square but that if the object corresponding to the idea of the round square is really round then the object corresponding to the idea of the really existing round square really exists (105), an ontological proof of the round square. On Meinong's view, the round square fails to exist in that it fails to have the "modal moment" constituting the truth of the idea. Although this approach seems to imply a modal moment for each modal moment, Meinong could deny a modal moment requires a modal moment because "such an assumption would resemble that of some one who attempted to think of the very thought he was thinking; in both cases, according to Meinong, not even an impossible object would be presented but only a complete void" (107). This may also enable one to respond to Findlay's objection to Meinong's concept of negative facts, the problem that gave rise
to Russell’s theory of descriptions and the dominant preoccupation of analytic philosophy. Although Findlay seemed to be correct to remark that the idea of a complete knowledge would have to include the negative fact that there are no other truths (51–52), one can contend that this self-reflective idea is never formed in even an infinite understanding.

According to Meinong, one’s inner experience and judgement cannot be identified because the latter is diachronic, whereas the former is synchronic (233). Thus, on the one hand, Meinong appeared to reject the possibility of the idea of idea. On the other hand, Bradley’s infinite regress of relations to their terms, although unavoidable, really suggests no difficulty if Meinong succeeds in the argument that the regress is only vicious if the original relation fails to do its work (146). According to Meinong, “a continuum is ... an object of a higher order founded upon indeterminate constituents” (150), suggesting that the further development of ideas of idea is really to be expected because of the objectivity of their objects and is really just the mind’s further exploration of the object’s reality. And the epistemological problem of the infinite regress of ideas of idea is overcome according to Meinong, as in Aristotle’s thought, through immediate understanding (190).

However, if Findlay was correct, Meinong’s solution to the ontological problem neglects the determinate reality of the relation as a whole complex over and above its parts: “a relation is really nothing but a curious characteristic which cannot inhere in one object alone, but only in a number of objects, and in each only in so far as it inhere in the others as well” (150). On this score, it is interesting to note that Findlay suggested the idea currently developed in Falkenstein ‘s work on Kant’s aesthetic: such complex ideas as those of space and time are more likely to occur “by some purely physiological synthesis” (248) than as ideal complexes, as in Meinong’s understanding. Overall, Findlay was uncomfortable with Meinong’s indeterminate, or incomplete, objects, with their failure to conform to the law of the excluded middle (162), and the incomplete object’s being apprehended in ways suggestive of complete objects (183). Using Johnson’s determinable–determinate conception of the relation of the universal to particular objects, Findlay suggested the alternative view on which the concrete is discovered in the universal relation, rather than the relation discovered the unfolding of thought about the concrete: “there are indeterminate characteristics, relations and objectives, and there are indeterminate objects which, if they were fully determinate, would be concrete things” (165). A relation or universal is thus a primary reality, such that, for example, when we use blue, it refers to “a perfectly definite determinate of certain determinations, and has a being of its own” (83).

The idea of the incomplete object is nevertheless the ground, in Meinong’s work, for the concept of the “implexive” so-being of objects in
thought: for example, the idea of the isosceles triangle is contained in this way in that of the triangle (125, 169–170). The object, for Meinong, is only given to consciousness through the determinate content of the idea (173), that is, “auxiliary objects” (178), or objects considered partially complete. With the auxiliary object, there are nuclear and extranuclear properties (176). Whereas to be analytic, a property must be nuclear to the auxiliary object, “synthetic judgements can only be about incomplete objects” (181). All this is crucial to Meinong’s conception of the possible and probabilistic judgements.

These are about the relation of the idea of an object to its factuality, and the possible is always due to a certain tendency in the idea of an object, for Meinong; so, for example, a right-angled triangle is less probably actual than a scalene, as the right angled has “a narrower range of variation” (212). Counterfactuals require a possible-worlds semantics; however, only incomplete objects are shared between worlds (217). This understanding of the possible also pertains to sensory perception, memory and induction as sources of knowledge, according to Meinong, as the inner sense of assurance about perception, memory and induction and the impossibility of reasoning without ideas of memory (260, 262–263).

Although Findlay recognized that the drift of Meinong’s thought steered toward the view of existence as concreteness, which would help in answering many of Findlay’s objections, an objection to concreteness as existence is, as Findlay remarked, that the reality of a thing appears to involve its thisness; no matter the detail in which we conceive of the reality of a thing, it has to intuitively exist (245). A response to this objection might be that this criterion of existence is met for concepts in as much as objects have value, according to Meinong, as this appears to give the requisite meaning to objects. Value appears to consist in effects on the Urteil in confrontation with the structure of objects. The feeling arising from an object is its “dignitative,” and the desires arising from dignitatives are “desideratives” (312–313). One can argue that the thisness of the concept is supplied in the way the infinite regress of the more and more concrete conception of a thing is overcome from the epistemic viewpoint, through the intuition of the object, the ways the object impacts on one’s attitude of concern. One can also remark that Meinong correctly distinguished this phenomenon from desire, on grounds that desire is for the nonexistent object but the experience of value occurs in as much as the object is considered to exist (267). Only the fact of a thing — “existence for thought and belief” (268) — can explain value, and this involves judgement. Thus, one can also discover a value in knowing (271) and in imagining (291–293).

Against this view of the value of objects, Findlay raised the most important objections. A number of paradoxes, for example, result from Meinong’s insistence that self-sacrifice is a virtue, and these paradoxes reflect
the possibility of a person's making great self-sacrifice for the trivial benefit of another (280). These suggested to Findlay that Meinong failed to consider that merit has more to do with increasing good than decreasing evil (287). According to Findlay, we cannot balance the infinite good of absent evils against the infinite evil of absent good, and the problem is again that Meinong identifies the good with the mere absence of evil (297–299). A lot of value experience derives from finding things with a certain potential, but it is difficult to say what has to be realized of this potential to explain the value of these objects, that is, without reference to a "natural value concept" developed by an individual (300–301). One may argue that it stems from a failure to recognize the implications of Meinong's solution to the epistemological problem of the infinite regress, as the effects of auxiliary objects on our attitudes of concern do not have to follow a measurable or universal pattern. Sometimes, as Findlay remarked, "feeling seems to depend on prior desire," and the two, desire and feeling, appear to be two "ways of experiencing the same attitude" (291). We value the nonbeing of some things. One can also solve this problem supposing 1) the distinction of desire and the attitude of concern, and 2) allowing that desire is among the effects of auxiliary objects on our attitudes of concern.

The importance of Findlay's study derives from its criticism of the early rejection of Meinong among the English-speaking philosophers and the ways this rejection affected the course of the analytic tradition up to and including the later writings of Wittgenstein; its highlighting, especially for English-speaking readers, an important foundational influence on the phenomenological tradition; and its possible refertilization of both traditions with its critical remarks. Although Findlay criticized the empirical factor in linguistic philosophy and praised Meinong's "brave rejection of the 'prejudice in favour of the actual'" (321), a greater emphasis on the immediate reality of ideas was, according to Findlay, a necessary counterweight to Meinong's realism of objects. Findlay may have overlooked the possibility that the theory of values would help to provide this counterweight, but Meinong's realism undermines any understanding of the relation of objects and their values.

JAMES THOMAS, Ottawa, Canada