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*RES, ENS AND ALIQUID*

1. Introduction\*

There are conceptual distinctions that have been repeatedly introduced into philosophical reflection and that have been correspondingly disappeared into nothingness without leaving a visible trace of their presence. The systematic constant disappearance of these distinctions after short periods of presence means perhaps that it is a question of false distinctions. But the fact that they keep on appearing again in different philosophical contexts, theories and systems perhaps sends us back to the presence of a theoretical impasse or of a conceptual knot which is not solved yet.

The distinction which we are talking about in this article deals with the thesis that the realms of being are three and not, as we usually believe, two. That is to say that, according to the thesis we are going to discuss, it is not enough to distinguish between concrete and abstract, complete and incomplete, individual and general, but we must proceed to a tripartitioned consideration of the realms of ontology. The thesis we are presenting was suggested, among others, also by schools or scholars who are as different as the Stoics in ancient philosophy, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Gregory of Rimini (1300-1358) in the Medieval period, Meinong (1853-1920) in contemporary philosophy. Stoics talk of it as of the distinction among *soma*, *on* and *ti*; Thomas distinguishes the natures of things into singular, abstract and absolute natures; Gregory of Rimini distinguishes *res*, *ens* and *aliquid*; finally, Meinong distinguishes a

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realm of being in a strict sense, including real and ideal objects, from a realm of *Aussersein*, including pure objects.

Schematically:

(i) The three types of entity considered by the Stoics are the *soma* or the individual, effectively existing body, the *on* or entity, and the *ti* or something indeterminate. That which actually exists, the genuine object, is only the *soma*. An entity, by contrast, could well be *asomaton* or incorporeal. Thus while the *soma* is subject to the principle of individuation, the *on* admits at most some criterion of identity, and the *ti* admits neither identity nor individuation.<sup>1</sup> For them the *on* can be objective without having to be existent, a *soma*.

ii) For Thomas, singular nature is the primary, individual substance; abstract nature is due to intellect and concerns the conceptual consideration of individual substance; finally, nature that is absolutely considered deals with the essential constituents of individual nature, its definitory characteristics. The latter is considered, Thomas says, “in statu differentiae vel solitudinis”,<sup>2</sup> i.e. without considering its exemplifiability or insertibility into a structured theory or context.

(iii) The distinction introduced by Gregory originates from the questions ‘What do we know?’, ‘What is the object of knowledge?’; questions that are posed within a theory that states that (i) the object of knowledge is a complex (= a proposition) because only complexes can be true or false, and that (ii) we gain knowledge of it through analysis (= demonstration). In his early writings Gregory argued that the object of knowledge was neither (1) the conclusion of a demonstration, nor (2) the external thing, but (3) the *meaning* of the conclusion. One may object, however, that the meaning of the conclusion is either an object or it is nothing. If it is nothing, knowledge has no object. If it is an object, it is either a mental or a non-mental object. If it is non-mental, it is a thing external to the mind, and this confutes the thesis (2). If it is mental, it is either a term or a proposition. If it is a term, it cannot be true or false, and it is therefore not an object of knowledge. If it is a proposition, it is the conclusion of a demonstration, and this confutes thesis (1).<sup>3</sup> To save his theory from collapse, Gregory distinguished three kinds of object: the *aliquid*, which denotes every thing, simple or complex, true or false; the *ens*, which denotes only true things;

<sup>1</sup> Laerzio 1925, ch. VII. See Melandri 1989, 69-70.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, *Quod.* VIII, q.1 a. 1; *De ente et essentia*, ch. 4. Cited by Fausti 1947, 73-4.

<sup>3</sup> Elie 1936, 26.

and the *res*, which denotes only the existent.<sup>4</sup> The meaning of a proposition is therefore something in the first or the second sense, but not in the third. This is to say that a meaning could be an *ens* or an *aliquid*, but not a *res*.

(iv) Meinong's *Gegenstandstheorie* considers objects from the point of view of their nature. The distinction between complete and incomplete objects is consequent. Complete objects, in their turn, are classified into real, those that of their nature can exist, and ideal, those that of their nature cannot exist. The realm of complete objects is the realm of being, that of the incomplete objects is the realm of *Aussersein*, a realm that cannot be scientifically considered because of its extreme plentitude. And in a passage recalling the preceding quotation from Thomas's, Meinong affirms that it is a question of "a strange kind of desert where no mental progress is possible".<sup>5</sup>

There is an interpretation that allows us to sustain that, in spite of the differences which are clearly verifiable among the theories of such different authors, all of them use the same tripartite division. This is the interpretation according to which the above-mentioned distinctions deal with the classification of the furniture of universe into objects that by their nature are objectively describable and can exist (*soma*, singular nature, *res*, real), objects that by their nature are *objectively* describable even if they cannot exist (*on*, abstract nature, *ens*, ideal) and a third remaining category of objects that is so different from those of the first two categories that the community of philosophers has still not succeeded in finding a generally accepted name for them. As for the aforementioned partitions we speak of the class of what was called *ti*, nature in the absolute sense, *aliquid*, pure object. Meinong is probably the author who more than any other tried to characterize what belongs to this class, identifying their distinctive traits in comparison with real and ideal objects.

We should consider that all these authors accept the thesis according to which what exists or can exist is also objectively describable. That is to say that those objects present some form of (ontological) independence from their description. This means also that from the point of view of the study of being, real things are just a subset of objectively describable things that can be identified by having the property of existence (or, in its modal version, they are what can exist).

Setting real and ideal objects against pure ones, Meinong notices that the main distinctive characteristic is that the objects of the first two classes are

<sup>4</sup> Gregory refers his theory directly to Aristotle. Cf. Aristotle, *Categories*, 12b 6-15 and *Metaphysics*, 7, 1017 31-34. See Elie 1936, 27-8.

<sup>5</sup> See Findlay 1933, 57.

*complete*, while those of this third class are *incomplete*. This single distinction allows Meinong to maintain that incomplete objects, simply because of their partiality, are *ausserseiend*.<sup>6</sup> To this realm belong impossible, literary, fantastic, mythical objects, as well as concepts, ideals, imaginations. In an expression, all objects of imaginations and fantasy, with no limitation, belong to it. Husserl calls it the first level of logic, a level which is so rich that it may collapse precisely because of its richness.<sup>7</sup> We can characterize it by saying that in its broadest form the realm of *aliquid* is the realm of the imaginary.

In this paper we deal with two questions. On the one hand we try to describe the main distinctive traits of the operations connecting the different realms of being. In this sense we shall proceed to distinguish abstraction from idealization, where we mean that abstraction is the operation that (i) connects the realm of *res* with that of *ens*, and that (ii) it enters the realm of *ens* itself as a procedure of classification of the individuals composing it. Idealization is instead that kind of procedure connecting both *res* and *ens*, on the one hand, with *aliquid*, on the other. This second procedure, unlike the first one, has an ontological commitment.

Having delineated the connections joining the realms we have distinguished, we shall devote particular attention to *Aussersein*, facing the problem of how we can succeed in speaking of the objects pertaining to it in absolutely neutral terms, without surreptitiously introducing conceptual frameworks or theoretical constraints that belong to our way of speaking of things and do not belong to things in themselves. This problem is particularly dramatic for objects of *Aussersein*, because in their generality those objects are extremely weak and *sensitive to the way in which we speak of them*. We understand the reason for such a state of affairs if we come back to Meinong's description of that realm.

Objects possessing *Sein* are complete objects. That is to say, they are objects able to maintain their individuality and to 'resist' the descriptions concerning them. Concerning such a kind of object, we can see if their description is faithful or false, adequate or inadequate. *Aussersein* objects, on the contrary, just because of their incompleteness, are instead 'fragile' and sensitive to the descriptions involving them. In other words, when we speak of an *Aussersein* object, it is always possible to attribute to it aspects, dimensions or structures that do not pertain to it, without realizing that, *under the description*, the original object becomes a *different* object. That is why we face the problem of the directly depicting language, i.e the problem of the

<sup>6</sup> Meinong 1960, 83 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Husserl 1969.

characteristics that a neutral language must possess to be able to speak correctly of *Aussersein*.

## 2. Individual and General Presentations

The distinction between objects having being and *Aussersein* objects has been often brought back to the distinction between individual and general objects. This distinction in its turn turns one to the parallel distinction between individual and general presentations, i.e. between presentations of individual objects and presentations of general objects.

A useful reference for the distinction between individual and general presentations is Twardowski's book on the relationship between the act, content and object of presentation.<sup>8</sup> The main point of his argumentation is the recognition that there are no presentations to which more than one object corresponds. Each presentation has its own unique object. The usually adduced example of complex presentations in which it is affirmed that it is possible to list the different objects composing them contains in fact a subtle mistake. When the objects which should correspond to such presentation are listed, as a matter of fact we refer to the objects of new presentations and these are as many in number as the considered objects. Twardowski's example is clear: if we want to count the pictures hanging in a room, we must singularly represent the single pictures to ourselves.

Nevertheless we talk of general presentations, setting them against the individual ones. Twardowski defines the object of general presentations as the object of those presentations dealing with 'what is common as such' to different single presentations. The definition recalls the Aristotelian one of universal. We must anyway keep in mind that we are talking of objects, and neither of contents nor of concepts. Once it is recognized that the object of general presentation is common to different individual presentations, we have also recognized that the objects of the two kinds of presentations we have just consid-

<sup>8</sup> On Twardowski's thought see Ingarden 1939-40. Ingarden notes that the opinion that Twardowski was the first to introduce the distinction between act, content and object of presentations is not only historically inaccurate but neglects the fact that Twardowski 1894 gave the first articulated theory of the object since scholasticism and Carl Wolff's ontology. And this was well before Meinong's and Husserl's work; these being writers, moreover, who paid specific attention to Twardowski. The act, content, object distinction reaches back, in fact, to Zimmermann and Kerry: for the latter, see Kerry 1885-1891. According to Ingarden, Twardowski generalized Kerry's theory and equipped it with better arguments. It should also be pointed out that the difficulties, if not the aporia, present in Twardowski's theory provided a point of reference and a cue for Leśniewski and Kotarbiński's analyses, which, I would argue, are also an attempt to solve Twardowski's difficulties. On the connections between Wolff and Twardowski, see Poli 1992b.

ered are different. The object of the individual presentations is different from the object of the general ones. In order to exemplify this, Twardowski reminds us that the general presentation of a triangle is neither the presentation of an equilateral triangle nor the presentation of a triangle with a determined area. If we then affirm that a general triangle (as object of a general presentation of a triangle) is neither equilateral, nor isosceles, nor scalene, then we conclude that general objects are incomplete and that for them the principle of the excluded middle is not valid. Twardowski's general objects thus share one of the main characteristics of Meinong's *Aussersein* objects.<sup>9</sup>

Twardowski adds then a further characterization: general objects are wholes constituted by a group of parts which are common to several individual objects. That is to say, the object of general presentations is constituted by characteristics. And this is the keypoint of the whole dispute: general objects are exhausted by the characteristics explicitly composing them. Anticipating the analysis we will develop in § 10 ff., we therefore understand why an intrinsically elementary language must be extremely weak: it must deal only with what is *explicitly* given. Any inference allowing us to obtain new data inserts the object into a theoretical context that structures and transforms it. If we want to study the framework of *Aussersein*, we must pay close attention to any condition we impose to it. It is clear that some conditions, even if only local, must be introduced, otherwise we cannot do anything at all. It is not accidental that Thomas speaks of 'statu solitudinis' and Meinong of 'mental desert'. What is important is to study carefully the consequences of the different conditions that are introduced, starting from the simplest and weakest.

As distinct from individual presentation, the general one is always indirect and non-intuitive. In fact nobody is able to present a triangle that is neither equilateral, nor isosceles, nor scalene. But there are indirect presentations of such triangles, "as well as there are indirect presentations of a white black horse, of a steel cannon made of wood and of other similar things".<sup>10</sup>

Twardowski adds that the general object constitutes in a certain way a metaphysical constituent of the single objects subordinated to it. And it is particularly interesting to notice that in the languages which have maintained the definite article, the proper noun for a general object is normally the substantive

<sup>9</sup> For a modern formal analysis of the problem, see Fine 1985 and Santambrogio 1987. For a philosophical discussion see Santambrogio 1992, Albertazzi 1992, Poli 1992c, chs. 13, 14, 17 and 19. Consider that, in addition to the objects violating the excluded middle, also contradictory objects, i.e. those violating the principle of non contradiction, belong to the realm of *Aussersein*.

<sup>10</sup> Twardowski 1977, § 15.

connected to it. That is to say that general objects are denoted by terms which are prefixed by the definite article, such as in ‘*the* table’ or ‘*the* red’.

### 3. Parts and Properties

Twardowski talks also of the object of presentation and of content as the mode in which this object is presented.<sup>11</sup>

For Twardowski, the object is a whole which may be formed of material and formal parts. The material parts of the object can be divided into simple parts and complex parts. The former are those parts which cannot be broken down any further, the latter are those that can in turn be divided into parts. Complex material parts are either more immediate parts (1st order material parts) or more remote parts (2nd, 3rd, etc. order material parts). For example, we may say of a book that its pages are its 1st order material parts, while the shape, colour, etc. of the pages are the 2nd order material parts of the book and the 1st order material parts of the page.

Complex parts can be broken down further into what can be called transitive parts and intransitive parts according to whether the whole is completely or incompletely decomposable in such parts. An example of decomposition into transitive parts is the division of the hour into minutes and minutes into seconds. These are transitive parts because the hour is completely decomposable in minutes and the minute is completely decomposable in seconds. As a side effect of the repeated complete decomposability of the whole in its parts it is just as meaningful to say that the hour is composed of minutes as it is to say that the hour is composed of seconds. An example of intransitive parts is the decomposition of a city into the houses of which it is composed, and of these latter into their windows.<sup>12</sup>

A third typology concerns the independence and dependence of the parts with respect to the whole that contains them.

Formal constituents are constituted by the relations among the material constituents and the whole (primary formal constituents) or by the relations among the different constituents of the whole (secondary formal constituents). Primary formal constituents are then further subdivided into constituents in the strict sense, like those that connect the whole to its parts, and constituents in the non-strict sense, like those that enable us to state that the whole is greater

<sup>11</sup> This position could find support in some Aristotelian passages. See *Metaphysics Z*, 10, 1035 21-22: “the notion has the same relationships with respect to the thing as do its parts with respect to the parts of the thing”.

<sup>12</sup> Twardowski 1977, § 9. Traditional philosophy distinguishes here between parts homonymous with the whole and non-homonymous parts.

than its parts, that it is like its parts in certain respects and unlike them in others, that there is coexistence or succession between whole and parts. Further relations may hold between the various formal constituents of a whole. Because these have the primary relations as their objects, they are second-degree relations. Proceeding in this manner, we obtain relations of the third, fourth, etc. degree.<sup>13</sup> Twardowski uses the term ‘order’ for material constituents and ‘rank’ for formal ones.

Like the object, the content of presentation also has material and formal parts. In general, the content of the presentation of a complex object, which is presented as complex, is made up of three groups of 1st order material constituents: (i) presentations of the object’s 1st order material constituents; (ii) presentation of the property relations between object as a whole and its 1st order material constituents; (iii) presentation of the object’s secondary formal constituents.

The material constituents of the object determine the material constituents of its content.<sup>14</sup> The reverse does not hold, however, in the sense that *not all* material constituents of the content have the material constituents of the object as their object, given that there are material constituents of the content that correspond to the formal constituents of the object.

Twardowski’s analysis leads to the distinction between part and property. One may say, for example, that a soldier is part of an army but that he is not a property of the army, just as a minute is part of an hour but not a property of an hour. We may follow Twardowski in calling the properties of an object its metaphysical parts; that is, the parts that can be *distinguished* in a whole by abstraction but which cannot be materially *separated* from it. Metaphysical parts are therefore extension, colour, weight, identity, etc. In short, metaphysical parts are moments.<sup>15</sup> This definition enables us to articulate the concept of property into at least two distinct cases. In the first, a property is that relation which designates whatever part of the whole relative to the whole itself. In this sense, *having* minutes as parts is a property of the hour, just as *having* a colour is a property of the body. The second distinction regards metaphysical parts and concerns the designation of one only of the terms of the relation, leaving the whole of which they are parts out of consideration. Twardowski adds that “in this sense one speaks of things and their properties”.<sup>16</sup> The difference lies in the differing role of the auxiliaries used. One says of the metaphysical parts

<sup>13</sup> Twardowski 1977, § 10.

<sup>14</sup> Twardowski 1977, § 12.

<sup>15</sup> Twardowski 1977, § 13. See the essays in Smith 1982.

<sup>16</sup> Twardowski 1977, § 10.

that they *are* parts of an object, of non-metaphysical parts that an object *has* this or that part.

#### 4. The object

I shall use the term ‘object’ synonymously with the traditional ‘entity’. ‘Entity’ is the translation of the Aristotelean term ‘on’, which corresponds to the medieval Latin ‘ens’, participle of ‘esse’. These terms can be used in a variety of ways, and many philosophical misunderstandings have arisen from the overlapping of their various senses. One possible distinction is between the distributive meaning and the collective meaning of ‘object’. Used *distributively*, ‘object’ means ‘thing’. Every man, every thing, every fact is an object or entity in the distributive sense. Used *collectively*, ‘object’ means ‘whole’. The definition itself of metaphysics as the science of being states in effect that metaphysics does not occupy itself with the entities of this or that genus but with the whole, the totality, the entirety.<sup>17</sup>

A different distinction concerns analysis of objects either with respect to their *effective composition*, or with respect to the *concepts of which they are instances*, or with respect to the *form* of these instances. I shall say that the object as a *whole* admits its decomposition into parts, as a *thing* its classification into *genera* and *species*, after separation of form from matter, and that the object as *something* can be categorized.

Terms like ‘whole’, ‘individual’, ‘thing’, ‘something’ are often taken to be synonymous; a linguistic abundance that borders on wastefulness. There are, in fact, cogent reasons for framing these various terms within a systematic network of relations and dependences. One of the best of these is the series of distinctions we have mentioned at the beginning of the paper. Considering for instance Gregory’s distinction between *aliquid*, *ens* and *res*, we can update Gregory’s formulation to a more modern context saying that the *aliquid* is indifferent to the being or non-being of what it denotes, that it covers the possible and the non-possible, the actual and the non-actual; the *ens*, instead, is restricted to the realm of abstract being (comprising the abstract consideration of the real beings), while the *res* considers the concrete being, the existent. We may also say that the *res* is the whole, the *ens* is the thing, and the *aliquid* the form of instances. We will see that the *aliquid* as form of instances has an incredibly wide range of possible variations and depends on the way in which we define ‘form’.

<sup>17</sup> Czezowski 1948, 70.

## 5. The Whole and the Thing

The distinction between that which exists (as *res*) and the thing (as *ens*) stands in perfect parallel to that between collective and distributive. As early as the 12th century, Abelard drew a clear distinction between the two cases in his theory of the different kinds of whole: integral or collective (*res*) and distributive (*ens*).

For Abelard, the integral or collective whole: (i) is not predicated by its constitutive elements; (ii) is not a universal whole, (iii) is composed of parts even though it is not reducible to its parts; (iv) involves only a singular predication. The distributive whole on the other hand: (j) is predicated by its constitutive elements; (jj) falls within the doctrine of genera and species; (jjj) is a universal whole; (jv) involves a universal predication.<sup>18</sup>

Let us take the example of ‘horse’. The collective class of the things that form the horse – head, legs, etc. – do not constitute the horse (cf. (i)). The horse of which we speak is that particular horse, that specific and unrepeatable individual (cf. (ii)) formed of parts but which is not simply the sum of its parts, because it, the horse, is not the simple aggregate of such parts (cf. (iii)). The difference between *x*-part and part-of-*x*, to use Henry’s terminology,<sup>19</sup> comes into play here. The *x*-parts are the constituents of the horse insofar as they subsist independently of their conjunction. That is, they are the constituents in their autonomous ontological givenness. The parts-of-*x*, instead, owe their subsistence to the *x* itself and exist as parts-of-*x* only if *x* exists. The passage from *x*-part to part-of-*x* requires the imposition of a definition which transforms what might otherwise be simply a mass into a real and proper whole.<sup>20</sup> This whole, finally, entails a strictly individual predication (cf. (iv)); that is, it cannot be properly considered a universal.

Distributive wholes, on the other hand, can be predicated of their elements. Of every individual belonging to a class one may say that it is of that class; that is, it possesses the defining features of that class. Every single instance of a horse is a horse (cf. (j)), since it can be analysed by genus and by species (cf.

<sup>18</sup> Abelard 1969, 166, 193.

<sup>19</sup> Henry 1972, 124; Henry 1984, § 4.541, Henry 1991, §§ 1.4, 2.3 and 3.41.

<sup>20</sup> The point is a subtle one and relies on an accurate reading of Aristotle’s mereology. On this see Poli, Dappiano and Libardi 1993.

(jj): the individual belonging to the class ‘horses’ (species) is the same individual that belongs to the class ‘animals’ (genus). They can be properly considered to be universals (cf. (jjj)) and usual predicate theory applies to them.

One of the chief consequences arising from the distinction between collective (material) wholes and distributive (objectual) wholes is that the conceptual correlates of distributive wholes – i.e. those that have an abstract individuality – are governed by the principle of extensionality: two classes are identical if they have the same members. Put otherwise, the principle of individuation by classes coincides with their criterion of identity. This, however, does not apply to the conceptual correlates of material wholes.

## 6. Properties and Forms

Abstraction is the typical procedure by which properties are characterized. Abstraction takes us from the lowest species to the highest genera, like ‘material thing’, ‘living being’, etc. The relationship between species and genera, on the one hand, and the individuals that exemplify them on the other, is a relationship of instantiation or exemplification. I may say, therefore, that the table in front of me is an instance of ‘table’, just as the whiteness of its surface is an instance of ‘white’. Quite different from the process of abstraction or generalization is that of formalization or idealization. It is clear that the scheme ‘ $((p \rightarrow q) \wedge p) \rightarrow q$ ’ is not the *genus* of its instances but the *form* of all the instances of this kind. Idealization does not produce species and genera but what Husserl called conceptual essences. The objects obtained by idealizations are not classifiable into genera but are essences which give origin to specific regional ontologies. The concept ‘object in general’, for example, is not a genus under which the species ‘number’ and ‘material object’ are subsumable. The realm of essences is therefore mapped by the categories concerned: some of these are coextensive with the entire sphere of the essences, others are constitutive of particular regions internal to it.

The concept of essence or form is extremely complicated.<sup>21</sup> For instance if we intend it in the sense of logical form, we can say, using a doctrine ascribable to Quine<sup>22</sup> and Kaplan<sup>23</sup>, that the logical form is the way in which we evaluate the truth-value of an utterance. In this sense the concept of form is a

<sup>21</sup> For some references see Albertazzi’s article in this volume.

<sup>22</sup> Quine 1960.

<sup>23</sup> Kaplan 1970.

semantic notion, determined by the norms of evaluation of the language that tell us how to ‘build’ the semantic value of of an expression starting from the value of its logically simple constituents. But if we adopt a formal structure that is sensitive not only to the truth-values, but also to other constituents (for example, to the meaning connections between antecedent and consequent), then semantics incorporate other aspects of the propositions in addition to their truth-value and to the forms of composition.<sup>24</sup> But it is also possible to refuse the tradition inaugurated by Frege and Russell and to attest that it is not true that the truth-conditions of an utterance determine its syntax. The objection to this choice is that utterances with the same form can possess different conditions of truth. Consider for example the propositions ‘the horse captured by Bellerophon was white’ and ‘the horse that won the race is grey’. Pre-analytically, both are true, but the second only has an *existential* truth-condition, that is ‘the horse that won the race exists’. Traditional logic,<sup>25</sup> and with it modern *free logic*, do not require that utterances with the same logical structure have the same truth-conditions. How ample the possible choices are may be seen if we go on reading the recent reconstructions of Meinongian semantics. On the one hand, for instance, Parsons accepts that there are partial objects, but he does not consider the difference between existence and subsistence; on the other, Zalta distinguishes between abstract and concrete objects, but he considers that all objects are complete; from a still different point of view, Lambert and Routley base their own reconstructions starting from the rejection of the principle of abstraction.<sup>26</sup>

The acceptance of abstract objects or of pure objects (or of both) allows also to distinguish different kinds of predication. If Parsons recurs to the distinction between nuclear and extranuclear predication, Zalta distinguishes instead, more than the traditional form of predication as exemplification (that is clearly valid for real objects), also predication as encoding. In this case we shall not say that the object exemplifies this or that property, but that the object is composed of or (internally) determined by this or that property.<sup>27</sup> The same results are also obtainable by developing the theory of nominalization, according to the per-

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Epstein 1990.

<sup>25</sup> Sommers 1982, 107-8.

<sup>26</sup> Parsons 1980; Zalta 1983, 1988; Lambert 1983; Routley 1980.

<sup>27</sup> In traditional terms, this is the case that is usually considered as inherence. Both distinctions may be led back to some observations of Ernst Mally, who is probably Meinong’s main pupil. See Mally 1904, 1912. See also Poli 1990 and 1993b.

spective inaugurated by some observations of Frege (and of Twardowski, recall the last lines of § 1) and developed by Cocchiarella.<sup>28</sup>

## 7. The *Aliquid*

In terms of my present analysis, the *aliquid* is some form of (the instances of) things. In traditional terms, this is an area of analysis that belongs to metaphysics, in particular to the theory of transcendentals. An important aspect of traditional enquiry is that, since the *aliquid* is considered apart from the thing, it is based on the distributive meaning of object (= *ens*). Hence one may say with Albertus Magnus: *quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum*.<sup>29</sup>

The traditional meaning of ‘transcendental’ is historically and conceptually much more sophisticated than is generally believed, even though it seems that it was never given definitive treatment. Using a terminology derived from Kant and Husserl, we may say that transcendentals are those categories that constitute a sphere of enquiry.

Aristotle foresaw something of the kind when, by constructing his theory of categories, he gave them joint ontological, logical and linguistic value. In effect, every operation that seeks to give foundational priority to one only of these aspects is not only philologically mistaken but has devastating effects on the whole theoretical corpus of the Stagirite. Both the interpretations that from Valla onwards has reduced the categories to linguistic-grammatical categories, as well as those that have otherwise sought to demonstrate the pre-eminence of logical over ontological meaning, erroneously transmute what for Aristotle was an *enumeration* into a *deduction*. From an Aristotelian point of view, in fact, it is impossible to deduce the categories because they are irreducible genera. In other words, apart from their not being reducible one to the other, there is nothing from which they can be deduced.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Cocchiarella 1972, 1974, 1978, 1986a, 1986b, 1989a, 1989b, 1991 and the essay in this volume.

<sup>29</sup> Ueberweg 1915, 470. The entity is one in the case of presentation, it is true in judgement, it is good with respect to volitional acts. ‘True’ in this context means that it is the object of knowledge, and ‘good’ signifies that it functions as an object of will. See Aquinas, *De veritate* I, qu. 16, art. 1: *Sicut bonum nominat id, in quo tendit appetitus, ita verum nominat it, in quo tendit intellectus*. See also Twardowski 1977, § 7.

<sup>30</sup> Zanatta 1989, 82-3.

## 8. Abstraction and Idealization

‘Abstracting’ means ‘leaving aside’, ‘omitting’. According to the interpretation adopted in this paper, it does not mean ‘extracting’ something or ‘drawing something forth’. When one abstracts, one does *not* obtain a new object. Abstraction does not break the object down into its constitutive parts or constituents. If abstraction is taken to its fullest extent, what are we left with? If all aspect of material and content are abstracted from the object, what is ultimately left is its form. This cannot be abstracted because it is not something that the object has and which can be left aside or omitted. Form is instead something which the object exhibits or shows. The form under discussion here, as the nature of this something that is shown, can only be analysed by a science that is not the theory of objects (intended like *res* or like *ens*).

On the other hand, if forms (in the sense given to them here) are to be studied, they must be made into the objects of possible enquiry; a transformation made possible by idealization.

The main difference between abstraction and idealization is that idealization constructs new objects (by nominalization).<sup>31</sup> From what I have said, care must be taken to avoid confusion between idealization and abstraction. Although they are often confused, the conceptual and operative characteristics of abstraction and idealization are very different.

Abstraction is an operation that takes place within a particular universe of discourse. It involves the setting aside of a particular section of the universe with regard to the predicates being considered. Let us consider the universe *U* of individuals *I*. Each individual of the universe is defined with regard to the predicates of the theoretical language describing the universe. For the sake of abstraction, we shall select those individuals of the universe that possess one or more particular features in common (or which do not possess such features). In this sense, abstraction is an equivalence relation over the individuals of the universe of discourse. Abstractive theories therefore transform the structure of a theory’s universe of discourse without modifying the individuals of the universe. In this sense, abstraction allows us to classify the individuals of an universe. This is an epistemological and not an ontological type of procedure. For abstraction, individuals are given, like the characteristics of which they are composed. In this sense, abstraction may be understood as also connected with

<sup>31</sup> For Vaihinger, the first philosopher to have made systematic use of the concept of idealization was Wolff (Kant himself was perfectly aware of its value). See Poli 1992b.

the inductive moment of a theory. The procedure of concretization, compared with an abstractive theory, is a procedure of individuation brought about by imposing a relation of order. The path to abstraction requires the introduction of equivalences. The path to individuation requires the introduction of an order, possibly total and strict. Nothing else is necessary because individuals are already given.

The case of idealizational theories is rather different. We have to distinguish two different types of idealization: *a posteriori* (descriptive) idealization and *a priori* (constitutive) idealization. Let us look first at descriptive idealization.

### 9. Descriptive Idealization

With descriptive idealization we do not have a transformation of the structure of the universe but a modification of the individuals of the universe, and therefore the construction of an ontologically different universe. If abstraction involves the subdivision of the universe into the set of individuals in possession of property P and the set of individuals not possessing property P, idealization eliminates from the theory's language both the affirmation and the negation of a certain property. In other words, that particular property is eliminated. This has two possible consequences with regard to the universe: (i) the individuals of the universe are no longer determined in relation to that property, (ii) the disappearance from the universe of discourse of those individuals which (a) were determined by the eliminated property or (b) whose definition was determined, either individually or collectively, by the eliminated property. In the first case, we have an ontological transformation of the universe through the transformation of its individuals. In the second case, we have a transformation of the universe due to the elimination of a part of the same.

The complexity of idealization obliges us to proceed with care and to examine some exemplary cases in detail. The simplest case is (ii.b). Let us begin therefore with this. Let us suppose that our universe of discourse is the astronomical universe. We wish to study our solar system. To do so we construct a new theoretical universe composed of the sun and the nine planets that revolve round it. In this way, we eliminate from the start all the other stars and planets of the universe. We can thus easily construct a model of the working of the solar system, without taking the entire astronomical universe into consideration. Naturally, this model will not demonstrate exactly how the solar system works in reality because we have eliminated the rest of the astronomical universe, and therefore also a whole series of forces which affect the actual working of the real solar system. Idealization, in this case, is an example of how a reduction in the complexity of the universe may allow us to master a part of it. An operation of concretization in situations of this type consists in

introducing a suitable correction factor that balances the elimination of real forces due to the sought after reduction of complexity. The case of the individuals eliminated as a result of the elimination of that essential property by which they are determined is similar to the preceding case and does not offer particular difficulties once it is understood that the essential properties are those that constitute the object by defining it.

The remaining case is by far the most interesting. Idealization, in this case, is not limited to the redefinition of the boundaries of the universe, but *constructs a new universe with new individuals*. The real problem here concerns the relations between the primitive universe and the new universe. In other words, the problem is that of the relations between the individuals of the old universe and the individuals of the new one. Such individuals in fact are still genetically the same individuals. The problem therefore is that of genetic identity against ontological difference. Let us consider the following examples. Let us suppose that we wish to construct a theory of rational action. In this case, the individuals of the universe are the agents of the theory. These are defined independently of the physical or chemical properties of their bodies and by subjecting the expectations and motivations that influence their actions to particular restrictions. In the world, we never encounter agents, but rather persons endowed with bodies with a particular chemical and physical structure and an extremely varied set of motivations and expectations. In our passage from the universe of the theory of persons to the universe of the theory of agents, radical transformations have been imposed on the individuals of the first universe. The reasons are clear: persons are too complex for our scientific tools. Agents, on the other hand, possess a complexity that can be treated mathematically and therefore allow the construction of formal theories, thus enabling us to make previsions. It is obvious that, strictly speaking, only persons exist whilst agents have an existence of a theoretical nature: they are therefore fictional constructions that allow us to regulate and manipulate a certain set of data. They exist, therefore, only in the model. On the other hand, the individuals of the universe of persons must have particular relations to the individuals of the universe of agents. We are really still speaking, in a way, of the 'same' individuals, of the 'same' fragment of the world.

## 10. Constitutive Idealization

Constitutive idealization occurs when the possible forms of objects are determined. Unlike descriptive idealization, this is an *a priori* discipline. To

avoid misunderstandings, I should clarify the sense in which I employ the terms ‘*a priori*’ and ‘*a posteriori*’. Perhaps the best way to provide them with unequivocal meaning is to say that an *a posteriori* idealizing procedure is one that aims to construct a model of something. Evidently, in order to construct a model of an entity, one must first have an idea of how this entity is made or of how it acts. An *a priori* procedure, on the other hand, is a constitutive procedure, one that creates a particular context and the individuals of that context. It is therefore *a priori* with respect to the individuals that it constitutes. In this sense, all procedures have both an *a priori* and an *a posteriori* aspect. The procedure with which a model is constructed is *a posteriori* relative to the object that it seeks to model and *a priori* relative to the object that it has modelled.

Saying that constitutive idealization is *a priori* and therefore determines the possible forms of objects is to attribute to it the same role as that performed by the Husserlian concept of formal ontology.<sup>32</sup>

In formal terms, at issue here are the quantifiable variables of the theory. The traditional interpretation to the effect that being is univocal amounts to admitting only one single type of category, and therefore only one single type of quantifiable variable. Any other kind of variable present admits at most to a substitutive, that is, purely nominal, interpretation of quantification. The presence of only one type of quantifiable variable does not prevent it from being sub-divided into specific sub-classes, which are quantifiable even when taken separately.<sup>33</sup> From this point of view, being is a genus, and from what I have already said, it is clear that this is not a procedure of idealization but of abstraction.

Under the other traditional interpretation, being is analogous (multivalent). In formal terms, this amounts to saying that there are different categories of quantifiable variables which represent different modes or categories of being. What this position must explain, however, is how the different modes of being can be unified in a coherent whole. And the formal instrument used to clarify the structure of such unification is the theory of predication.<sup>34</sup>

Resorting to a typology of quantifiable variables, however, is not enough to distinguish between being as genus (= one only type of quantifiable variable) and multivalent being (= various types of quantifiable variable). Consider, for example, combinatory logic. This has neither variables nor quantifiers, and its structure seems less akin to a conventional predicative structure than to a

<sup>32</sup> On the concept of formal ontology see Cocchiarella 1991, Poli 1992c and 1993c.

<sup>33</sup> Cocchiarella 1991, 641.

<sup>34</sup> Cocchiarella 1991, 641-3.

philosophical position with its roots in Aristotle and reformulated by Brentano and Kotarbiński. The extreme form of nominalism developed by these thinkers, usually called reism, is based on the ‘determination of things through things’. Here we clearly have an ontology with only one type of entity, but if the logic corresponding to it were a combinatory logic, there would be no variables and no quantifiers. This means that nominalist metaphysics can be translated into logic within at least two different categorial frameworks; frameworks, these, which even if holistically equivalent are nevertheless categorially distinct.

Other fields of enquiry are opened up by the multivalent consideration of being. Here the distinction between abstraction and idealization comes into effect; a distinction that has no role to play in nominalist theory because it acknowledges only one kind of variable. If various kinds of variable are present then we must recognize various corresponding categories. It is also evident that the various categorizations of metaphysical reflection – that is, reflection on the category ‘object’ – may give rise to new insights, in particular as regards the concept of the possible form of the object.

The possibility that there may be different conceptual frameworks for the same situation (as exemplified previously) enables us to distinguish between *internal* semantics and *external* semantics. Semantics internal to the individual framework study the forms of reciprocal determination among the entities of a metaphysics in the case where there is one single type of variable, or they address the various forms of unification among the entities corresponding to the diverse categorial variables when there are several types of variable. External semantics instead represent the various categorial frameworks within a single conceptual space, and this allows comparison among, and analysis of, the various accounts that have been made of them.<sup>35</sup> The most powerful instrument so far developed for this purpose is set theory, which therefore seems to take on the role of a metatheory of ontological theories. But it is also the case of remembering that what we need to know the world is theories, not metatheories. It follows that internal semantics, even if much more complicated, tangled and less inclined to a set-theoretic normalization of any external semantics, is by far the most important of any instrument, from an ontological point of view, which is structurely appointed to comparative investigations.

## 11. Directly Depicting Language

<sup>35</sup> Cocchiarella 1991.

Before concluding, it is now the time to come back to the question of which instruments can be used to describe the objects of the most mysterious realm, the *Aussersein*. We have already claimed that the objects of this realm are sensitive to their description. For this reason we need a language that is as neutral as possible.

The notion of a directly depicting language has been introduced by B. Smith in his “*Characteristica universalis*”.<sup>36</sup> His purpose is to construct a language “which will enable us to represent the most general structures of reality”. In order to realise his purpose, Smith turns to an old tradition of formal ontology and uses a diagrammatic language instead of a propositional language.<sup>37</sup> In what follows, we shall retain his idea of a directly depicting language, but we will opt for a propositional language. The reason for our choice is straightforward: our purpose is to represent (some fragments of) the realm of *Aussersein* and all the intuitions we have of the objects of such a realm are of a linguistic nature.<sup>38</sup>

## 12. Frege and Wittgenstein

For Frege there is some kind of connection between the categories of ontology and the categories of signs. The two primary ontological categories, namely object and function,<sup>39</sup> are in fact linked to the two principal categories of signs, namely saturated expressions and unsaturated expressions. All the different types of objects are linked to saturated expressions and all the types of functions are linked to unsaturated expressions. In what follows we will consider the two main kind of saturated expressions: names and propositions. As we all know, they have both sense and reference. The sense of the name is its *Sinn*, the *mode* in which reference is given to us, while reference itself, the *Bedeutung*, is the object denoted by the name. As regards propositions, their sense is the *Gedanke*, while their reference is their logical value. It is immediately apparent, therefore, that both categories of signs are articulated into an object (respectively the *Bedeutung* and the logical value) and into the *mode*

<sup>36</sup> Smith 1992.

<sup>37</sup> To put things in a nutshell, he uses Peirce instead of Frege.

<sup>38</sup> Because the objects of such a realms can be only indirectly intuited. Cf. § 13.

<sup>39</sup> Note that function make up a number of other categories (1st level concepts, 2nd level concepts, ..., 1st level dyadic relations, etc.).

whereby this object is presented to us (respectively the *Sinn* and the *Gedanke*).<sup>40</sup> The most debatable aspect of this position concerns propositions.

To understand Frege's account we have to distinguish between 'true' and 'false' as properties (that is as unsaturated expressions) from 'the True' and 'the False' as objects (that is as saturated expressions). When speaking of a logical value as the object referred to by a proposition, we are considering the True and the False as objects and not true and false as properties.

Using a suggestion coming from the last works by Suszko we can distinguish two different kinds of valuation: logical valuation and algebraic valuation. Logical valuations involve what are conventionally called the values of truth and falsity (as unsaturated expressions), while those that Suszko termed algebraic valuations assign a referent.<sup>41</sup> By admitting the existence of only two referents, Frege's position collapses logical and algebraic valuations together and thus renders them indistinguishable.<sup>42</sup>

Wittgenstein took up a completely different position, where he rejected – this being the difference whence most of his subsequent distinctions stemmed – what Perzanowski called the *principle of semantic homogeneity*. According to this principle, the problem of the reference of names and the problem of the reference of propositions are both resolved using similar structures. This is Frege's case, therefore. For Wittgenstein, however, the solution to the nominal reference problem is *different* from that of the propositional reference problem. For names, the semiotic triangle (name-sense-reference) is reduced by eliminating sense, so that names refer directly to objects and do not require the intermediation of sense. This gives rise to an extremely simple one-to-one correlation. It also means that both names and objects are simple, the one in language the other in reality. By contrast, the simplicity of the name-object semantic relation generates an extremely complex semantic representation for propositions that involves the concepts of 'proposition', 'propositional sign' (preceivable sign of the proposition), 'sense of the proposition' (situation in the

<sup>40</sup> I follow Perzanowski's 1993 exposition here. See also Perzanowski 1984 and 1990.

<sup>41</sup> See Suszko 1975.

<sup>42</sup> The principle according to which there are only two referents for propositions I shall call, following Suszko, *Frege's axiom*. It is interesting to note that the independence of Frege's axiom was demonstrated by Tarski in his doctoral dissertation (1923), where he explicitly compared it with Euclid's Vth postulate. For a brief treatment see Suszko 1977. If all true propositions denote exactly one and the same entity, this means that the real philosophical position underlying the theory is an absolute monism of facts. Suszko's rejection of Frege's axiom prompted him to elaborate his so-called non-Fregean logic. See Suszko 1975 and the paper by Omyła in this volume.

logical space connected to the proposition), ‘thought’ (logical picture of the fact related to the proposition) and ‘fact depicted by the proposition’.<sup>43</sup>

It seems, therefore, that there are at least two main different strategies to adopt: if we accept Frege’s position that names and propositions are semantically homogeneous entities, we can represent their structures by using the relative semiotic triangles. In this case the procedure is straightforward, and we encounter no major obstacles as long as we accept the idea that Truth and Falsity are in every respect objects of our ontology. If, instead, we follow Wittgenstein and reject the principle of semantic homogeneity, we are stressing that there is an univocal relationship between name and object. On the basis of this relationship each entity is an atom of its universe (the ontological universe in the case of objects, the universe of signs in the case of names). This absolute simplicity as regards names, however, generates major complexity among propositions.

The problem addressed by Wittgenstein was certainly not a new one. The basic issue was whether it was possible to construct an ontologically neutral language. Before Wittgenstein the problem had exercised several other thinkers: Brentano, for example, particularly during his so-called ‘reist’ phase.<sup>44</sup> The fundamental theoretical problem was how to use language without being trapped by the symbolic features of language itself.

### 13. Signs and Symbols

From an ontological point of view, the question condenses into whether a directly depicting language is possible, that is, whether we can construct a language that depicts reality directly without the mediation of symbols.<sup>45</sup>

Such a language plays a particularly relevant role in the case of *Aussersein*’s objects, because – as far as we can see – language is the main tool we have in order to be acquainted with them. We are acquainted with complete objects through presentation, that is, they are intuitively given to us. But there are not presentations of incomplete objects. They are indirectly presented to us only through the presentation of other (complete) objects. This is an observation that, as a psychological law, was already stated by Aristotle: nobody can

<sup>43</sup> For details see Perzanowski 1993.

<sup>44</sup> See Poli 1993a and Albertazzi 1991a, 1991b and 1992.

<sup>45</sup> See Smith 1992.

possess a non-intuitive presentation if it is not accompanied by one (or more) intuitive presentations.

A language depicting objects of this kind has very different features from a natural language or a normal formal language. As far as regards the categorematic constituents of the language, it has signs only for the ‘objects’ of the two main ontological categories. That is it has names (signs for things) and propositions (signs for states of affairs). But it has no sign for properties, qualities, relations and so on. Seen in this way, it should be apparent that a directly depicting language is closer to a Wittgensteinian viewpoint than to a Fregean viewpoint.

A directly depicting language in our sense is, for example, intrinsically elementary. The concept of ‘intrinsic elementariness’ is difficult to pin down. In preliminary terms we may say that an intrinsically elementary language is extremely poor. As far as I can see, it is closed only under conjunction and it contains very unusual conditions of identity, of the type analyzed by Suszko when he was able to distinguish propositional identity from double implication. That is, to distinguish the truth conditions of ‘ $\alpha \wedge \beta \leftrightarrow \beta \wedge \alpha$ ’ from the truth conditions of ‘ $\alpha \wedge \beta = \beta \wedge \alpha$ ’.<sup>46</sup> To give an other example, it means that, providing that ‘ $\neg$ ’ is part or the furniture of our language, we can also distinguish between ‘ $\alpha \leftrightarrow \neg\neg\alpha$ ’ and ‘ $\alpha = \neg\neg\alpha$ ’.

Needless to say, from the point of view of an intrinsically elementary language, we should maintain ‘ $\alpha \wedge \beta \neq \beta \wedge \alpha$ ’ and ‘ $\alpha \neq \neg\neg\alpha$ ’.

Any condition which allows connectives to be interdefined, or new connectives to be derived, transforms an intrinsically elementary language into an intrinsically non-elementary one. An intrinsically elementary language contains ‘few’ connectives, those definable on the basis of apodeictically ‘evident’ operations.<sup>47</sup> An example can be found in Husserl’s *Philosophie der Arithmetik*, where the primitive connectives are negation and conjunction,<sup>48</sup> and in his *Formale und transzendente Logik*, where the primitive connectives are disjunction and negation.<sup>49</sup> From a formal point of view, the only unproblematic

<sup>46</sup> Suszko 1975. See also Omyła’s paper in this volume.

<sup>47</sup> The reference here is to Brentano’s distinction between ‘apodeictic evidence’ and ‘assertive evidence’. See Brentano 1966.

<sup>48</sup> From negation (= leaving aside) we obtain the simple something, and from the somethings, in the sense of ‘this something *and* that something *and* so on’, we obtain the multiplicities.

<sup>49</sup> For an analysis of Husserl’s latter proposal see Harvey and Hintikka 1991 and Albertazzi 1993. It would be interesting to know why Husserl changed from negation and conjunction to disjunction and negation. Note that in the first case negation is more

connective that can pertain to an intrinsically elementary language is conjunction.

Coming back to the problem of a directly depicting language, one of the most puzzling aspects of such a language is that it is a so-to-say intermediate language between the propositional and the predicative level. It is stronger than a pure propositional language because it does contain signs for things, but it is also weaker than a predicative language because it does not contain signs for predicates. As we said before, a directly depicting language contains categorical signs only for things and states of affairs.

The underlying intuition is that it is not possible to construct an intrinsically elementary language of a predicative nature, because some degree of measure of symbolization seems inevitable in the passage to the predicative level. To keep the measure of symbolization (or non-elementariness) of predicative language to a minimum, we could bear the difference between properties and predicates in mind. In this sense we can say that properties, for example, are all positive, that is that negative properties do not exist. Likewise, there are no disjunctive properties, whereas it is obvious that there are disjunctive predicates.<sup>50</sup> We shall use the term ‘conditions of closure’ for the assumptions that enable us to pass from the theory of properties to that of predicates. A language of this kind may be a significant step forward from a directly depicting language of the first type (intrinsically elementary), but we have still not arrived at a real and proper symbolic language. That is to say that from a formal point of view, the collection of properties is a weaker algebra than a Boolean algebra.

Provided that our description of a directly depicting language is correct, it follows that a language of such a nature will have some very peculiar characteristics. Consider, for instance, the fact that we cannot say which theory of predication is applied, for the very simple reason that there are not predicates. But consider also the transformation that should intervene in the theory of quantification or in the concept of existence. All these are very strange features for the standard or paradigmatic sense of logic. But all these are features that we can find in the now quite old proposal of a new logic advanced by Brentano and some of his pupils.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, their proposal arrived in the wrong moment, just as the Fregean paradigm was about to burst on the scene. But

fundamental than conjunction, while in the second disjunction is more fundamental than negation.

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Armstrong 1978 vol. 2 and Grossmann 1983; for a defense of the opposite view, cf. Meixner 1992. For some connected topics, see Forbes 1992, Hochberg 1992 and Simons 1992.

<sup>51</sup> Poli 1993a.

now that we know both the great power of the Fregean perspective and its strong limitations, it is perhaps time to go back to such a different proposal, armed with the tools and the results achieved over several decades of research.

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