

THE NON-EXISTING OBJECT REVISITED: MEINONG AS THE LINK BETWEEN HUSSERL AND RUSSELL?

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Summary

Husserl's involvement in the debate on intentionality by the School of Brentano raises the hope of establishing an indirect link between him and the early analytic philosophy, since Russell, in the course of formulating his theory of descriptions, extensively discussed Meinong's theory of objects. I examine whether Husserl could be connected to the position Russell criticized. I also study an unpublished manuscript of Husserl from 1907 which proves that he read Russell's critique of Meinong, and I try to connect it to Husserl's own critique of Meinong and to Husserl's earlier position. Although Husserl was finally reluctant to consider Russell's arguments, I believe that this analysis could still provide important insights into Husserl's unique transcendental phenomenological position.

1. Introduction: Russell's Debate with Meinong

By around 1920, Husserl successfully ruined the two most promising chances for an interaction between his phenomenology and the nascent analytic philosophy. As recent advances in Husserl scholarship show, both Bertrand Russell's planned review of the *Logical Investigations*¹ and the

¹ Since this episode is surrounded by various myths, it might be worth a closer look. "A new edition of your 'Logische Untersuchungen'", Russell wrote to Husserl in 1920, "was one of the books I had with me in prison" (Husserl 1994, vol. 6, 367; this fact is also confirmed by Russell's handwritten list of "Philosophical Books read in prison", Russell 1986, 316). Contrary to a widespread view, however, in this letter Russell makes no mention of his earlier intention to review Husserl's book in the *Mind*, which is mentioned only in a prison letter of

reception of Husserl's guest lectures in London² were jeopardized by what were almost conscious decisions on Husserl's part to prefer forays into his

Russell containing a message to G. F. Stout: "Please tell Professor Stout [...] that if he still wants review of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, I will do it in time for the October 'Mind'. I have only 1st volume & half of 2nd. If the other half of 2nd has appeared & he has it, will he please send it?" (Bertrand Russell's letter to Frank Russell et al., June 10, 1918 (unpublished), Ms. Russell, Class: 730 Document No.: 079973, unnumbered 3) This message seems to confirm that it was Husserl's questionable editing policy of his *Logische Untersuchungen* what impeded Russell's review: In 1913 Husserl decided to elevate his earlier work to the position of transcendental phenomenology by progressively revising its parts for a new edition. He published a partially edition in October, which was in Russell's hand, carrying a preface in which Husserl claimed that the closing part is "now in the press" (Husserl 1975, 15, (orig. XVI); quoted English translation (hereafter abbreviated as: ET): Husserl 2001, 8). This was, however, far from being the case, and already in December Husserl opted for a *tabula rasa* rewriting of the remaining part (see e.g. Husserl 1994, vol. 3, 531), which ended inconclusively in the summer. The closing volume appeared only in 1921. It is not only that the resulting situation must have rightly annoyed Russell, but Husserl's decision to elevate his work to a different philosophical position via piecemeal changes in the text (see his own declaration: Husserl 1975, 10 ff.) would have seriously confused Russell, had he written this review (of which no extant manuscript is known).

- 2 Already Herbert Spiegelberg, a post-war pioneer of the Anglo-Saxon reception of phenomenology, was convinced that Husserl's lectures (published almost 70 years later: Husserl 1999) were instrumental in jeopardizing the benevolent interest of early analytic philosophers towards phenomenology: "The first lesson from the London lectures one might be tempted to draw is simply: How not to do it. [...] [I]t is now perfectly clear that Husserl was not so much interested in helping a specifically British audience, but in working out a general introduction into his evolving 'system' of transcendental phenomenology, something he had not yet tried before on this scale." (Spiegelberg 1970, 12–13) What Spiegelberg was not yet aware, however, is that in the beginning of the manuscript preparation Husserl had asked a Canadian student of him, Winthrop Packard Bell, for advices on contemporary British philosophy (Husserl 1994, vol. 3, 36–38; Husserl's excerpts of Bell's advices were hidden in a manuscript file); but then he has apparently abandoned his intention of catering for the specific needs of his audience (cf. *ibid.*, 49). One of Bell's remarks even concerned Bertrand Russell, who "helped logical intuition gain recognition" in England (*ibid.*, 37). Husserl's drive for systematic philosophy and his proverbial perfectionism ("I cannot sell my soul for a pottage of lentils of 'famousness' in England", *ibid.*, 45) prevented him not only from preparing the text of his lecture for publication at the Cambridge University Press but also led him, when Gilbert Ryle, who was not present at the London Lectures, later visited Husserl to lecture to Ryle "twice for an

transcendental phenomenology rather than presenting it to foreign audiences. Given this regretful history of missed chances, it is compelling to look elsewhere for the signs of a relevant link between Husserl and the early analytic philosophy. As it is widely known, it suffices to open the issue of the journal *Mind* which published Bertrand Russell's celebrated paper "On Denoting" in 1905, and turn circa 40 pages in order to find Russell's appreciative review about Alexius Meinong.³

Meinong also figures in Russell's main paper as a proponent of the "simple" theory which "regards any grammatically correct denoting phrase as standing for an object. Thus 'the present King of France,' 'the round square,' etc., are supposed to be genuine objects. It is admitted that such objects do not subsist, but nevertheless they are supposed to be objects" (Russell 1905b, 482–483). Russell's paper is based on logical "puzzles" to test the logical theories against them, and the theory that is attributed to Meinong in Russell's main paper apparently fails even the most basic test, as it "infringes the law of contradiction. It is contended, for example, that [...] the round square is round, and also not round; etc." (ibid., 483). This is obviously claimed to be "intolerable" and any other theory must be preferred over Meinong's one.

However compelling this setting might be, it immediately raises suspicion, since Meinong appears to have been reduced here to the role of a mere representative of an inherently indefensible doctrine ("a well-worked out instance of how *not* to philosophize", as J. N. Findlay once put it).⁴ Interestingly, Russell was obviously aware of the merits of Meinong's philosophy, as, in the aforementioned review of Meinong in the same issue, Russell openly admitted that the "value of [Meinong's theory] appears to me to be very great" (Russell 1905c, 530). Meinong's philosophy, as it is widely recognized today, was indeed far from being reducible to the representation of a manifest absurdity.⁵ Meinong tried to

hour on 'Mein System'" (Schuhmann 1977, 340; this report is based on Ryle's post-war recollections).

³ Russell 1905c. – In order to facilitate the cross-checking of Husserl's references to Meinong and Russell (see Section 3), I prefer to cite the original editions of their works.

⁴ Findlay 1952, 16.

⁵ For a classical exposition of the debate that also takes Meinong's real position into account, see: Simons 1992.

grant full citizenship to non-existing objects like the ‘round square’ – i.e. to establish a third class of objects besides actually existing, real objects and subsisting, ideal objects – by strictly separating objects and sentences about objects (the so-called objectives). Every conceivable thing, even the ‘round square’, can validly be regarded as an object, but the objective “The round square does not exist” is true and, at the same time, a subsisting ideal entity.

It is also important to keep in mind that Meinong did *not* argue for the introduction of the third class of existence – *Außersein* – on the basis of the dubitable claim that since non-existing objects could be constituents of valid sentences, they must be admitted as existing objects⁶ (this form of argumentation was called by Russell in his debate with the Scottish logician Hugh MacColl “the existential import of propositions”⁷). Actually, it was Russell himself, who had taken this position some years earlier and later falsely attributed it to Meinong. This confusion is particularly visible in Russell’s book *My Philosophical Development*, in which he claims the following:

Meinong [...] pointed out that one can make statements in which the logical subject is ‘the golden mountain’ although no golden mountain exists. He argued, if you say that the golden mountain does not exist, it is obvious that there is something that you are saying does not exist – namely the golden mountain; therefore the golden mountain must subsist in some shadowy Platonic word of being, for otherwise your statement that the golden mountain does not exist would have no meaning. I confess that, until I hit upon the theory of descriptions, this argument seemed to me convincing. (Russell 1995, 64)

The latter part of Russell’s claim is undeniably true: he did find this argument convincing, as his writings preceding the “On Denoting” and his letter to Frege in 1904 demonstrate.⁸ But Meinong introduced the third class of existence *precisely in order to avoid fallacious* argument like this

⁶ This is clearly stated by Meinong already during the first presentation of the full-fledged *Gegenstandstheorie* in 1904: “the being of an objective does not depend at all on the being of its object” (Meinong 1904, 12). He considered this type of fallacious argument to be based on a false mereological analogy which misconceives the constituents of the objective as real parts.

⁷ See Russell 1905a, 400.

⁸ For a concise overview of Russell’s development between 1903 and 1905 see Hylton 2003.

and to properly account for the status of ‘golden mountain’ in the sentence ‘No golden mountain exists’: namely ‘golden mountains’ are non-existing and non-subsisting objects and nothing more.

Russell’s engagement with Meinong raises the idea to use it to construct an indirect, multistage link between early analytic philosophy and early phenomenology. It was remarked already at the dawn of the post-war Meinong renaissance – by John N. Findlay in the 1952 Meinong memorial volume – that Meinong’s “influence in Anglo-Saxon countries [...] has possibly been greater than that in the German-speaking world” (Findlay 1952, 11). Findlay had already pointed out Russell’s articles in the *Mind* (ibid., 12) and Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, “in which he [Husserl] comes nearest to the standpoint of Meinong” (ibid., 19). Gilbert Ryle similarly opened his keynote at the international Meinong conference in 1970 with the evaluation: “one important part of Meinong’s contribution to twentieth-century thought is precisely the *anti-Gegenstandstheorie* with which he vaccinated Brentano, Russell and Wittgenstein” (Ryle 1972, 2). Meinong’s philosophy could thus provide mediation between Russell and his continental counterparts. The enthusiasm for such a program surged after a text by Edmund Husserl was published in 1979 in which he discussed precisely the problem of non-existing objects confronting Kazimir Twardowski, who was closely associated with Meinong during his Vienna period. Even the editor of Husserl’s text drew attention to the possible links to Russell (see Husserl 1979, XXX), and since then there have been repeated attempts to establish a multistage link between Husserl and Russell using Russell’s critique of Meinong and Husserl’s critique of Twardowski.

In what follows, I first revisit this classical attempt in order to evaluate its chances in the light of the advances of Husserl and Brentano scholarship. Although Husserl’s confrontation with the Brentano-School’s debate on intentionality through Twardowski was indeed instrumental in the formation of his own notion of intentionality, I think that the chances of this program have been overestimated, and Husserl’s critique of Twardowski cannot serve as a direct link between early analytic philosophy and phenomenology. There is, however, a hitherto unknown text, written by Husserl on the occasion of his revisiting of Meinong’s philosophy after his breakthrough to transcendental phenomenology, which could be con-

sidered as Husserl's direct confrontation with Russell's debate with Meinong. I analyze this text in Section 3, and conclude that even if the immediate results of the analysis are negative, its lessons – together with some observations made during the investigation, including the remark of the contemporary editor of another version of Husserl's text – could be used to make an important aspect of Husserl's specific transcendental phenomenological position more understandable.

2. The Indirect Link Through Husserl's "Reaction Against Twardowski"

The focal point of Husserl's famous text is the problem raised by non-existing objects or, to phrase it in the terminology of this debate, by presentations lacking an object (the so-called objectless presentations, *gegenstand(s)lose Vorstellungen*).⁹ The case of objectless presentations – e.g. the round square, the green virtue, or even the golden mountain¹⁰ – was highlighted by Bernard Bolzano in his *Wissenschaftslehre* in 1837, although it should be noted that objectless presentations did not pose any problem in the objectivist ontology of Bolzano.¹¹ The other aspects of Bolzano's notion of objectless presentation are also worth a detailed look. Objectless presentations lack extension (*Umfang*), rather than having an empty extension. Bolzano formulates this as "a presentation having no object and [...] being a presentation of nothing [*nichts vorstellen*]" (Bolzano 1837, vol. 1, 304), which already anticipates why these presentations are going to occupy a central position in the debate on intentionality. Bolzano

⁹ As Wolfgang Künne has noted (Künne 2011, 84, n. 30), Husserl had actually misquoted Bolzano's term, because Bolzano did not use the linking element "s".

¹⁰ Bolzano 1837, vol. 1, 304 – I refrain from using an explicit notation for presentations, as Bolzano himself did not resort to it and the lack of it is not going to cause misunderstandings in uncomplicated contexts.

¹¹ This is already indicated by the fact that the corresponding section (§ 67) was not underexposed by Bolzano, as if it would represent an inner contradiction or an aporetic passage. Quite the contrary; this section was marked by an asterisk, indicating that it belonged to the core of the work. Bolzano also listed it among the essential sections in a letter in the penultimate year of his life (Bolzano 2008, 158).

explicitly introduced the notion of objectless presentations in order to clarify the relations between an object, the mental realization of a presentation – which he called a subjective or thought (*gedachte*) presentation –, and the objective presentation, which constitutes the matter (*Stoff*) of a subjective presentation. Even the presentation of nothing “has a matter, namely the objective concept [i.e. an objective conceptual presentation] of the nothing” (ibid.), but this presentation lacks any object.

It is not to imply, however, that Bolzano’s notion of objectless presentation was entirely unproblematic. In a diary note recorded after the publication of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Bolzano himself came to recognize that the property of objectlessness must be understood in an atemporal sense (otherwise objective presentations would undergo contingent temporal alterations, thereby endangering the objective propositions [*Sätze*] about them).¹² There is, however, a more sophisticated difficulty which Bolzano faced already in a subsequent paragraph of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. An important class of objectless presentations is formed by the so-called “imaginary presentations”, which are composite presentations consisting of contradicting partial presentations (e.g. the round square). While in the latter case the lack of object is immediately evident, Bolzano had to admit that there are presentations, like the regular pentahedron, which might require us to perform a complex chain of reasoning to be classified as objectless (Bolzano 1837, vol. 1, 318). Bolzano recognizes that this is an indication that the names of objectless presentations are not meaningless (*bedeutungslos*), unlike “abracadabra”, and that they could be thought of (even if we cannot always attach clear accompanying sensuous pictures (*sinnliche begleitende Bilder*) to them). While this seemed to have satisfied Bolzano, there is still an important aspect which remains unresolved here. The problem of objectless presentations is apparently not a static one, but there is a dynamic side as well: it might require us to perform a complex chain of reasoning in order to classify a presentation as objectless (which, again, introduces the question of temporality). This does not

¹² See Bolzano 1979, 65. In the *Wissenschaftslehre* he cites the “actually blossoming grapevine” as a presentation “that could be objectless” (Bolzano 1837, vol. 1, 305), even though it was in the previous section (§ 66,4) where he laid down that the extension of an objective presentation is temporally invariable (Bolzano 1837, vol. 1, 299).

endanger Bolzano's objectivist ontology, but it highlights the need to philosophically capture this "subjective" side as well.

It is compelling to conceive the intense discussion on the intentionality by the students of Brentano as a result of the collision between Brentano's principle of the universal validity of intentionality – i.e. that every presentation is the presentation of something (cf. Brentano 1874, 115–116) – and Bolzano's claim that objectless presentations have no object. The feasibility of this often invoked historical picture depends on the non-trivial question as to whether Brentano himself perceived objectless presentations as an anomaly calling for further explanation, or whether he regarded them as easily explicable, maybe because he was committed to the thesis that the intentionality of a presentation merely involves the presentation having an immanent mental object. In the latter case the problem would only emerge if intentionality is understood in the sense of aiming at the object itself, rather than at its mental substitute. This move is usually credited to the distinction between the content and object of a presentation, introduced in the early 1890s by Alois Höfler and Kazimierz Twardowski, the semi-orthodox disciples of Brentano. This historical view has been increasingly questioned in recent Brentano scholarship, as Brentano's specific notion of intentionality turns out to be richer than previously assumed.¹³ In any case, it could be safely said that there was a distinct debate about the notion of intentionality among Brentano's disciples, which could be temporally and geographically circumscribed. For example, Carl Stumpf's psychology and logic lectures in Halle in 1888–1887, which the young Husserl preparing for his habilitation examination attended, definitely antedate this debate (Schuhmann 2000, 65), which

¹³ See e.g. Rollinger 2012, who makes the point that the proper reconstruction of Brentano's notion of intentionality presupposes a reliable chronology and edition of his manuscript notes (262 ff.), especially that of the planned continuation of his epoch-making *Psychology*. This would explain why Chrudzimski deemed the "historical question" concerning Brentano's notion of intentionality "practically unanswerable" (Chrudzimski 2005, 18). The first philologically sound interpretations of Brentano's notion of intentionality which went beyond the immanentist thesis were offered around the millennium (Antonelli 2000, Chrudzimski 2001).

would explain why Husserl ascribed this debate to a wing of the school, rather than to his masters.¹⁴

It is also hard to precisely locate the origins of this debate, as it would involve answering the elusive question as to how Brentano's disciples came to recognize the significance of Bolzano's general theoretical philosophy. Brentano himself was, of course, aware of Bolzano's achievements and he referred to him extensively in his lectures, as Husserl's lecture notes from 1884–1885 demonstrate.¹⁵ However, Brentano's references had been mostly confined to Bolzano's *Paradoxes of the Infinite*, and he reacted in an extremely hostile way when he was later confronted with the growing preference towards Bolzano among his former students.¹⁶ The fateful rediscovery of Bolzano was probably made by several disciples of Brentano, especially by Benno Kerry and Alois Höfler (maybe independently of each other),¹⁷ and the debate on the definition of content and object is perceptibly marked by the presence of Bolzano and his idea of objectless presentations.

This historical overview of the origins of the debate already hints at the possibility of a subtle but significant displacement of Bolzano's original position, and it is indeed worth taking a closer look at Höfler logic handbook published in 1890 under the nominal co-authorship of Meinong, which is usually considered the first document of the content-object-distinction. Höfler's handbook, originally intended for secondary school use in the Habsburg Monarchy, explicitly contained the distinction between the content (*Inhalt*) of a presentation and its object (*Gegenstand*). The content is an immanent mental entity and the object, which is not a mental entity, is referred by the presentation in virtue of its object (Höfler 1890, 7). In a part of Höfler's handbook, which Husserl annotated

¹⁴ It is hard to decide which notion of intentionality Husserl has encountered during his studies at Brentano, since his student notes, which he had donated to the Brentano Archives in Prague in 1935, were destroyed during the Second World War.

¹⁵ See Ms. Husserl Y 3 / 10 ff. Cf. Kraus 1919, 157.

¹⁶ See Husserl 1994a, vol. 1, 31 and Brentano 1946, 125, where Brentano uses the same condemnation (Bolzano "als Lehrer und Führer"). Shortly after the second letter he assured Oskar Kraus, his loyal disciple, that he "has never ever experienced the slightest influence" from Bolzano (Brentano 1966, 202).

¹⁷ For an overview see Künne 1997, 31 ff.

in his own copy, we find a detailed classification of presentations including the distinction between intuitive and non-intuitive presentations. The latter presentations are the results of abstraction based on intuitive components, e.g. the temperature of the sun, a green dodecahedron or a tone that is ten octave higher than the highest tone ever heard (ibid., 26). This classification inevitably leads to the question of presentations like the round square, which Höfler termed incompatible (*unverträgliche*) presentations (ibid.). There is, however, a telling passage in the text when Höfler raises the question as to whether incompatible presentations “could be presented [*vorstellen*] at all?” (ibid.). He opts for an affirmative answer by using an argumentation that may sound familiar:

For how could I judge [...] that a round square cannot exist, if I were not able to present it somehow [*wenn das zu Beurtheilende nicht irgendwie vorgestellt werden könnte*]? (ibid.).

The stage is also set for the return of the existential import of propositions.

Before turning our attention to Husserl’s role in this debate, it is worth taking a quick look at Twardowski’s book which prompted Husserl’s response. Twardowski belonged to a later generation of Brentano disciples and had probably no personal contact with Husserl in Vienna.¹⁸

¹⁸ Even this basic fact was hitherto unclear in the Husserl and Brentano scholarship. Robin D. Rollinger once conjectured that “[d]uring the year 1885, when Husserl and Twardowski were both studying under Brentano, they must have had some contact with another” (Rollinger 1999, 139). This, however, could not have been the case, since Twardowski began his university studies at the Faculty of Law in WS 1885/86, and in this semester he did not attend any class by Brentano (see Brožek 2011, 99 ff.). Furthermore, Brožek believes that Twardowski did not actually attend his classes in this semester (ibid., 101). In any case, already in December 1885 Twardowski moved to the Galician settlement Yezupil (Polish: Jezupol). He only spent two months in Vienna in the SS 1886, when he officially enrolled for some courses (ibid., 113), which, however, do not coincide with Husserl’s courses in this semester. Twardowski returned to the University of Vienna only in WS 1886/87 (ibid., 114), but at that time Husserl was already in Halle in Germany. Although it would be theoretically possible that Twardowski attended Brentano’s unannounced advanced private seminar during his stay in the spring of 1886 (where he could have met Husserl), it seems to be highly improbable, since his first documented encounter with Brentano took place only in WS 1887/88 (ibid., 119). Had he attended Brentano’s advanced

However, he demonstrably sent his doctoral thesis to Husserl around December 1891¹⁹ maybe as a gesture to capture the benevolence of an older disciple of Brentano, who possessed a higher academic rank. Twardowski either similarly sent his habilitation thesis to Husserl in 1894, or Husserl himself became aware of it while preparing for a review of recent logical literature that Natorp had assigned him.²⁰ Twardowski himself admitted that his habilitation thesis was motivated not only by “the spirit of Brentano” but also by Bolzano, whom he had discovered through Benno Kerry (Twardowski 1991, 11). Twardowski’s declared goal was to develop the distinction between content and object, as proposed precisely by Höfler’s handbook. It must be taken into account, however, that Twardowski’s position was far from being invariable. It is not only that he left Vienna in the winter semester of 1895, but he was at that time continuously experimenting with new configurations of contemporaneous logical ideas.²¹ For the purposes of this paper, the most important aspect of Twardowski’s habilitation work is that he tried to solve these difficulties by advancing the bold claim that most of the objectless presentations actually *do have an object*. How is that possible? In case of some presentations, like the

seminar in SS 1886 without any previous studies at Brentano (which is improbable on its own), he surely should have registered himself for Brentano’s announced lectures in the subsequent WS 1886/87. So it seems that Husserl and Twardowski did not study together in Vienna, let alone at Brentano.

These conclusions are also reinforced by the results of my research in the archives of the University of Vienna (cf. Ms. UA Vienna Phil. Nationalen 1886–1887), which indicate that Twardowski did not officially register himself for a course by Brentano between SS 1886 and SS 1887 (but he attended several classes of Robert Zimmermann). None of the courses Twardowski registered for in SS 1886 were attended by Husserl (cf. Varga 2015).

¹⁹ This is proved by Husserl’s unpublished letter of thanks dated December 22, 1891, in which he acknowledged the receipt of Twardowski’s book. This letter was apparently hitherto unknown (cf. Schuhmann 1993, 41; Rollinger 1999, 139), so I quote it in full: “Sehr geehrter Herr[,] [i]ch sage Ihnen meinen besten Dank für die freundliche Zusendung Ihrer Abhandlung, die ich in diesen Ferientagen mit Interesse lesen werde. Hochachtungsvoll ergebenst[,] Dr. E[dmund] G[ustav] Husserl[,] Halle, a[n dem] T[ag] 22[.] XII. [18]91” (Ms. Twardowski 1771 (K-02-1-11 174r)). The tone of Husserl’s letter also points to the fact that there was little (if any) personal acquaintance between them.

²⁰ See Schuhmann 1993, 41–42.

²¹ In an 1897 letter to Meinong he announced his intention to “combine the Brentano-Meinong-Höfler theory with that of Sigwart” (Meinong 1965, 144).

presentation of ‘nothing’, Twardowski employed a transformation that is very similar to Russell’s theory of descriptions. Instead of the sentence ‘Nothing is forever’ one should mean, according to Twardowski, the sentence ‘There is not any thing which is forever’ (cf. Twardowski 1894, 23). He might have opted for this solution concerning every objectless presentation, which would have brought him close to Bertrand Russell’s transformation of the sentence ‘The present king of France is bald’ (apart from the logical apparatus used by Russell, of course). But Twardowski chose a different solution by claiming that other types of objectless presentations *do* have an object, *but only in a modified sense*.²² It is thus justified to consider Twardowski’s habilitation thesis a forerunner of Meinong’s full-fledged *Gegenstandstheorie*, which raises the question as to where Husserl is situated in this debate.

Until the middle of the 1890s, circa 6 years before the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl was not particularly concerned about the problem of intentionality. In fact, the word intentionality is barely mentioned in Husserl’s philosophical writings.²³ The first reported philosophical writing of Husserl addressed the “problem of continuum” (Brentano / Stumpf 2014, 260), a rather mathematical topic, which corresponds to the earliest known manuscript of Husserl, titled “Homogeneous and inhomogeneous continua” (Ms. Husserl K I 50 / 47a), which hardly goes beyond the domain of mathematics. Husserl’s first surviving work, a part of his habilitation thesis published under the title “On the Notion of the Number”, similarly to his *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, published in 1891, could be classified as a treatment of foundational problems of mathematics, including numbers, calcu-

²² Twardowski distinguished between *proper existence*, which the objects of objectless presentations lack, and *existence in a modified sense*, which is assigned to the objects of objectless presentations (Twardowski 1894, 24 ff.). He explained the modified sense by analogy to the modification of the word ‘friend’ in the noun phrase ‘false friend’ (a ‘false friend’ is not a friend proper, in contrast to e.g. a ‘true friend’, which preserves the proper sense of ‘friend’). This distinction belongs to the shared Brentanoian doctrines (see Brentano 1874, 288; although Husserl – and maybe even Twardowski encountered it through Brentano’s lectures, cf. Ms. Husserl Y Brentano 2 / 42). It must be added that this distinction was familiar to Bolzano as well, who, interestingly, also used it in one of his last letters to analyze the status of subjective presentations (Bolzano 2006, 229).

²³ See Schuhmann 2004, 119.

lus etc., by the devices of a general philosophical psychology. It is telling that his habilitation thesis was subtitled “psychological analyses” and his latter book “psychological and logical investigations”. In fact at the beginning of the 1890s, Husserl could have started a career in mathematical logic as he proposed an intensional translation of extensional logic in a journal called *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie* (Quarterly for Scientific Philosophy). Unfortunately for the young Husserl, but fortunately for the history of philosophy, his attempt proved to be a catastrophic failure, and he even became involved in a priority and plagiarism debate. In the following years, Husserl was writing a book on space, which, seen in retrospect from his mature genetic phenomenology, could be considered as the anticipation of the analysis of the constitution of space, but, at that time, it was still conceived as a contribution to the descriptive psychological foundation of mathematics. However, this project also came to a standstill around 1893–94, due to, as Husserl has noted, “difficulties with the notion of intuition, the intuitive presentation in contrast to conceptual ones” (Husserl 1979, 452). This led Husserl to address the problem of presentations in general, penning a series of essays, two of which were published under the title “Psychological Studies” at the turn of the year. But even these attempts ended inconclusively. Husserl had spent the early 1894 with reading William James, until Twardowski’s book was published in Vienna, which was explicitly dedicated to the structure and anomalies of intentional acts. Husserl was apparently so excited about this book that he immediately wrote down “a reaction against Twardowski”, as he described his text later (Husserl 1994a, vol. 1, 144). Husserl repeatedly revisited and reworked this text, so it could be safely considered one of the key texts of the genesis of Husserl’s philosophy.

The beginning of the surviving portion of the text clearly sets Husserl in the context of this debate:

If every presentation presents an object, then there is an object for every presentation, and therefore: Every presentation has a corresponding object. On the other hand, it is considered to be indubitably true that not every presentation has a corresponding object; there to speak with Bolzano, ‘objectless presentation’ [...] for instance [...] a ‘round square’.²⁴

²⁴ Husserl 1990, 142; ET: Rollinger 1999, 251. Note that the version published in

First of all, it is important to see, as mentioned above, that this is a relatively new development in Husserl's thinking. In fact, *before* his reading of Twardowski's book in the summer of 1894, Husserl did *not* share the basic principles that raise the problem of the intentionality of objectless presentations. This is nicely illustrated by a less-known passage, which Husserl wrote in 1891:

[There are] two very different things: namely (1) whether a signification [*Be-deutung* ...] belongs to a name, and (2) whether or not there exists an object corresponding to a name. 'Meaningless' names in the strict sense are names without a signification – pseudo names such as 'Abracadabra'. But 'round square' is a univocal common noun to which, however, nothing can in truth correspond. (Husserl 1979, 12; ET: Husserl 1994b, 60)

In other words, Husserl could have easily chosen the most simple solution: there is no problem at all, objectless presentations simply lack objects. The fact that he did choose this option in 1891 clearly indicates that he was not at all concerned about Brentano's thesis of intentionality after he had left Vienna. In 1894 Husserl's relation to Brentano's notion apparently underwent a complete change. Husserl himself explains this transition in the following passage:

[I]t seems that we may [...] ascribe to every presentation a meaning, but not a reference to something objective. This tendency is however counterbalanced by a new consideration, It is [...] correct for us to say '»a round square« presents an object which is at the same time round and square, but there is certainly no such object'.²⁵

The question we must answer, however, is how Husserl's own solution compares to the theories of other disciples of Brentano. What is relatively easy to see is which solutions were opposed by Husserl. There is a naive solution which would introduce a mental picture ("*geistiges Abbild*", Husserl 1990, 143) that it supposed to mediate the intentional relation. According to this popular view, the problem of objectless presentations is easy to solve since the mental pictures are immanent:

the critical edition (Husserl 1979, 303–348) is unreliable for our purposes, since it was based on the last developmental stage of the text.

²⁵ Husserl 1990, 142; ET: Rollinger 1999, 251.

[T]he phantasy picture is inside the presentation and the object is, or not is, outside. In either case the presentation is not at all affected by whether or not the object is, will be, or has been.²⁶

Besides that these mental pictures could neither be found in the consciousness nor would a picture alone explain the mechanism of intentional reference, the main problem with this compellingly easy solution is that it overlooks the real challenge of the paradox:

But does not the sense of the [...] statements discussed above imply that it is in each case the same object which is presented and exists or does not exist? The same Berlin that I present also exists, and the same would no longer exist if judgment were brought it down as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah.²⁷

In other words, the intentional object is the real object and there is no other object behind it. The proposed disjunctive solution only begs the question. Husserl's clear-cut rejection of the disjunctive solution already exemplifies the phenomenology's basic commitment, but what is at stake is how to implement it – especially with respect to anomalies like the case of objectless presentations.

Husserl explicitly rejects the solution Twardowski proposed which, he says, shares the same mistake:

Here I see again the false duplication which became fatal to the picture theory: The immanent object [...] cannot be anything but the true object wherever truth corresponds to the presentation. [...] Whether we merely present Berlin or judge it as existing, it is still Berlin itself.²⁸

Husserl is apparently unaware of the real nature of Twardowski's solution. His critique might apply at Brentano's notion of intentionality, which, according to usual interpretation, identifies the intentional object with an immanent object although, as discussed earlier, it is far from being certain that Brentano himself was committed to such a simplistic view. But Höfler and Twardowski were definitely not committed to this thesis. Quite the contrary, they have introduced the content-object distinction precisely in order to account for the difference between the real object and an immanent mental entity.

²⁶ Husserl 1990, 143; ET: Rollinger 1999, 252.

²⁷ Husserl 1990, 144; ET: Rollinger 1999, 252–253.

²⁸ Husserl 1990, 146; ET: Rollinger 1999, 255.

At the end of his argumentation, Husserl explicitly accuses Twardowski of committing a serious breach of the laws of logic:

If a round square is immanent in the presentation [...], then there would be a round square in the presentation. [...] Since the presentations really exist, then the existence of each and every absurdity also would have to be fully and completely admitted. The realm of the objects and states of affairs immanent in the presentations would not be subject to mathematical and logical laws.²⁹

In a remark written a decade later Husserl even added: “Precisely this is what Meinong has recently proposed in his book on *Gegenstandstheorie* in 1907.”³⁰ However, as discussed above, Husserl’s critique completely misses the point. Twardowski was far from advocating a disjunctivist solution. Quite the contrary, he tried to solve the problem of the intentionality of objectless presentation by assigning them an existence in a modified sense, which anticipates Meinong’s introduction of *Aussersein*, a mode of being beyond actual existence and ideal subsistence. This is particularly visible in Twardowski’s first university lecture course in Vienna, which he held in the winter semester of 1894/1895, after finishing his book in late 1893 and successfully passing his habilitation examination in July 1894 (Brožek 2011, 148f.). In this unpublished lecture, Twardowski first considered whether objectless presentations have an empty extension (Ms. Twardowski 54, 56). This position is reminiscent of Höfler’s handbook, according to which the objectless presentations have an empty “logical extension” (cf. Höfler 1890, 30), and it already diverges from Bolzano’s original definition of objectless presentations. Then he introduces an argument which reminds us of the existential import of proposition in order to reject Höfler’s position:

Cannot we say that as the round square is a geometric figure that cannot be drawn. Here I make a judgment – yet not on my presentation of the round square, but on the round square itself, the object of my presentation of the round square. [...] So an object corresponds to these presentations, but this object does not exist. Yes, not only *an* object but an infinite number of objects correspond to these presentations. I can imagine a round square with the area of about 2 square centimeters or 3, 4, 5 and so forth in infinitum.³¹

²⁹ Husserl 1990, 147; ET: Rollinger 1999, 256.

³⁰ Husserl’s marginal note in pencil (Ms. Husserl K I 56/10, not part of the editions quoted above, cf. Husserl 1979, 458).

³¹ Ms. Twardowski 54, 57 (italicization corresponds to underlining in original).

Twardowski also explicitly acknowledges that judgements (*Urteile*) require us to assume the object we are judging – it is just that this object *does not exist*. This is where Twardowski clearly anticipates a philosophical position that Meinong would take some years later (even if Meinong's stance on the existential import was more differentiated). Had Husserl directly confront the solution Twardowski proposed, his text could have been used for building a multistage link between his notion of intentionality and Meinong's position, which in turn could have been connected to Russell's criticism. But Husserl failed to do so. There is, however, an interesting claim in Twardowski's treatment of objectless presentations in his unpublished Vienna lectures. He rightly points out that the extension is actually infinite, rather than empty, as it is possible to imagine various round squares. This again highlights the significance of the aspect that was classified by Bolzano as being merely subjective.

3. The Direct Link: Husserl on Meinong and Russell in 1907

By the time of Russell's debate with Meinong, the relationship between Husserl and Meinong seriously deteriorated, burdened by conflicts over priority and, implicitly, even over plagiarism.³² These conflicts also pre-

“Kann ich nicht sagen: das runde Viereck ist eine geometrische Figur, die man nicht zeichnen kann. Hier fälle ich ein Urteil – aber nicht über meine Vorstellung des runden Vierecks, sondern über das runde Viereck selbst, den Gegenstand meiner Vorstellung des runden Vierecks. [...] Also auch diesen Vorstellungen entspricht ein Gegenstand, nur existiert er nicht. Ja, nicht nur *ein* Gegenstand, sondern unendlich viele entsprechen diesen Vorstellungen. Ich kann mir ein rundes Viereck vorstellen von etwa 2^{□cm} [Quadratcentimeter] Fläche, von 3, 4[,] 5^{□cm} u.s.w. in infinit[um].”

- ³² On this infamous episode of the history of the Brentano-School see Carlo Ierna's excellent recent study (Ierna 2009). Although Ierna opts for the charitable conclusion that “great minds think alike” (ibid., 8), i.e. the “similarities in their theories [...] seem to point rather in the direction of common sources than to suggest plagiarism in some sense or other” (ibid., 28), his discovery of Husserl's *lapsus calami* at a page reference to Mill in Husserl's habilitation thesis (ibid., 14) clearly indicates that Husserl took over a quote from Meinong without properly referencing him. Husserl's tendency to underexpose his indebtedness to Meinong, coupled with his sweeping claim that there is no “generally accepted

vented Meinong from reading the aforementioned 1894 text that Husserl offered him in 1902 (Husserl 1994a, vol. 1, 147). At the same time, the years after the turn of the century constituted a crucial period for the formation of Husserl's own philosophy. It was in his 1906/07 lecture on logic and epistemology that he first correctly formulated the phenomenological reduction, which concluded the transformation of his phenomenology from descriptive psychology into a full-fledged philosophy. This lecture course was preceded by a period of recollection, rereading and organizing his earlier manuscripts during the autumn of 1906. It was in the summer of 1906 that Husserl secured a stable academic position, as he was promoted to a university position comparable with full professorship and his salary was also raised. In the course of making an inventory of his philosophical tasks, Husserl also explicitly mentioned Meinong:

A discussion with Meinong will, for obvious reasons, be necessary and unavoidable – not to mention the fact that it must at some point be shown that in actuality the domains of investigation and the most essential points established are common to both sides. We are like two people traveling in one and the same dark continent. Naturally we frequently see and describe the same things, but often differently, corresponding to our different masses.³³

In academic circles it has been assumed so far that Husserl's planned confrontation with Meinong's philosophy did not eventually happen. There is, however, a critique of Meinong written by Husserl in the late summer of 1907 that is relatively or probably completely unknown, as it has previously not been transcribed from Husserl's idiosyncratic shorthand.³⁴

theory of relations" (Husserl 1970, 66, cf. 328), definitely suffices to justify Meinong's anger, which is mirrored in the letter he wrote in his first outrage but later apparently restrained himself from sending it (Meinong 1965, 94–96).

³³ Husserl 1984, 444; ET: Husserl 1994b, 492.

³⁴ The text is preserved in the manuscript convolute Ms. Husserl K III 33 / 25–27. While the preceding manuscript subdivision (28–31) was already recognized by K. Schuhmann as being Husserl's excerpt of his copy of Meinong 1907 (see Schuhmann 1977, 108), the preceding subdivision seems to be hitherto unknown. It was not even mentioned in Robin D. Rollinger's discussion of Husserl's reaction to Meinong's book (Rollinger 1999, 206–207). The subdivisions between 21 and 34 are missing from the early handwritten transcription of K III 33. There is a clear *terminus post quem* for Husserl's text on Meinong and Russell, since one of its page is written on the reverse side of an invitation to a faculty meeting, dated July 23, 1907 (26b).

What makes this short piece of text entitled “The confrontation between Meinong and Russell over the law of noncontradiction”³⁵ especially interesting is that Husserl directly reads, excerpts and comments upon Russell’s articles on Meinong. One might remark that Husserl’s reading of Russell’s reviews published in the July issue of *Mind* would probably be a quick reaction time even in our age.³⁶

Russell’s last two reviews of Meinong, published in 1905 and 1907, already mark the ascending phase of his interest in Meinong’s philosophy. Having arrived at his own theory of eliminating non-existing objects, Russell was no more interested in motivations he believed to have received from Meinong, and started to formulate serious objections against Meinong’s *Gegenstandstheorie*. Already in his 1905 review, published in the same issue as “On Denoting”, Russell formulated his own “master arguments” against Meinong’s admission of impossible objects:

[T]he difficulty is that impossible objects often subsist, and even exist. For if the round square is round and square, the existent round square is existent and round and square. Thus something round and square exists, although everything round and square is impossible. (Russell 1905c, 533)

A year later, Meinong wrote a programmatic summary of the merits of his full-fledged *Gegenstandstheorie* (Meinong 1907), first published between 1906 and 1907 in three installments, in which he tried to answer his critics, including Russell, whose objections, as he admitted, “were especially penetrating” (Meinong 1907, 16).

Meinong was defenseless against Russell’s master argument, and he could only resort to invoking the distinction between existence as a predicate and as a copula (*ibid.*, 17). Having received the first installment of Meinong’s treatise, Russell immediately wrote him a letter (Meinong 1965, 151–152) signaling that he finds this distinction unconvincing –

³⁵ “Auseinandersetzung zwischen Meinong und Russell über den Satz vom Widerspruch”, Ms. Husserl K III 33 / 25a.

³⁶ While Husserl owned copies of several books by Meinong and Russell, he did not subscribe to the *Mind* itself. He probably read it in the library of the University of Göttingen, where he had been teaching since October 1901 (a full historical series of the journal is present in the university library), which testifies the long-standing Anglophone orientation of this university. In contrast, Hugh MacColl, Russell’s other debate partner had problems with obtaining copies of *Mind* in Northern France.

something he already said in his 1905 review. It is indeed very hard to reply to Russell's master argument, since, as John Findlay has already pointed out in his pioneering book on Meinong (Findlay 1963), even if one replies by distinguishing between the predicate 'existence' and the property of being existent, Russell's argument could be iterated by predicating the latter property and so forth in infinitum. One might use formalized logical devices to construct a version of Meinong's theory that avoids this consequence, but the *Gegenstandstheorie* would certainly lose much of its intuitive appeal.³⁷ For Russell it was not necessary to have recourse to iterating his master arguments, as he was, justly, convinced that his theory of descriptions provides a superior solution to the original problem.

Husserl was reading Meinong's treatise in parallel with Russell's review of it (Husserl made German excerpts of them), and he was observing, with morose delectation, the increasing difficulties Meinong was running into and he called the controversy "truly entertaining".³⁸ Husserl apparently agreed with Russell's point that Meinong cannot elude the law of contradiction by claiming that it only applies to actual or possible objects – as Meinong argued in a text (1907, 16) which Husserl also excerpted at length (Ms. Husserl K III 33 / 25a) including Russell's earlier objection (Russell 1905c, 533) –, because "[t]his reply seems to overlook the fact that it is of *propositions* (i.e. of 'Objectives' in Meinong's terminology) [...] that the law [...] is asserted" (Russell 1907, 533). Husserl also noted this page number and excerpted the summary of Russell's argument, adding the marginal note "sehr richtig!" (Ms. Husserl K III 33 / 25a). What makes this especially interesting is that it is this particular text passage (Russell 1907, 533) in which Russell referred the readers to his main paper "On Denoting".

Husserl, however, apparently ignored this hint and returned to Meinong's argumentation against Russell in his 1907 book. He spoke ironically of Meinong's "profound" (*tiefsinnige*) attempt at avoiding Russell's master argument, and constructed an even more complex – though

³⁷ M. Thrush has recently considered a slightly amended version of Meinong's *Gegenstandstheorie* and concluded that there are indeed unavoidable, though artificially constructed examples which entail contradiction (Thrush 2001). See also note 39 below.

³⁸ "wirklich amüsant", Ms. Husserl K III 33/ 26a.

not necessarily decisive – counterexample: “a non-existing existing something”.³⁹ Husserl then turned to another attempt by Meinong to elude Russell’s critique. In a text excerpted by Husserl Meinong argued: “By the way, Russell’s whole argumentation is about impossibilia [*unmögliche Gegenstände*], thereby he himself provides the evidence that our thinking may very well engage in such objects.” (Meinong 1907, 18) This was, however, a particularly ill-fortuned argument by Meinong which clearly shows what a bad debater he was. In the review written by Russell in 1905, which Meinong was explicitly answering, Russell was still aware that Meinong was not committed to the existential import of proposition, though *Russell believed it would have spoken for Meinong’s case*:

There is, Meinong admits [...], one -strong argument in favour of [Meinong’s position ...]. But this argument, he says, depends upon regarding a proposition as a complex, and its subject as a constituent of it; and such a view, he thinks can only be taken figuratively. I should have thought the subject of a proposition was a constituent of a complex [...], and that therefore the argument would be sound.⁴⁰

In his book of 1907 Meinong then jumped at this “sound argument”, which was actually contrary to his position as he knew at best,⁴¹ thereby walking into the trap of Russell, since by that time Russell had already moved beyond the existential import of propositions. In 1907 he was able to answer Meinong triumphantly:

³⁹ “Ein nicht-existierendes Existierendes” (Ms. K III 33 / 26a). At first sight, it is not obvious whether Husserl’s challenge is harder than Russell’s master argument. Husserl might have tried to point at an object possessing contradicting properties, but this is not considered posing a special difficulty for Meinong’s theory (Thrush 2001, 162 ff.), which is only endangered by a special “exportation” construction that efficiently undermines Meinong’s distinction between an object and the objectives relating to it.

⁴⁰ Russell 1905c, 532–533. The passage to which Russell referred is quoted in note 6 above.

⁴¹ In his earlier book, to which Russell referred, Meinong was still clearly aware that such an argument would lead to an “existing object” (Meinong 1904, 12), but he must have also been alerted by the fact that in the above quote Russell rendered his position as “the subsistence of the [non-existing] objects” (Russell 1905c, 533). This was, of course, contrary to Meinong’s aim to ascribe only *Aussersein* to such objects (which Russell, actually, knew very well, since he immediately added a clause: “which he [Meinong] regards as non-subsistent”, *ibid.*).

To this I reply that I was careful to provide an interpretation of propositions in which such objects seem to occur and that therefore Meinong's argument was answered by anticipation. (Russell 1907, 439)

Husserl carefully noted down Meinong's attempt as well as Russell's answer.⁴² This is the very sentence where Russell inserted a footnote with a reference to his famous theory of descriptions (Russell 1905b, 490). Husserl wrote down this reference as well, but he, unfortunately, did not comment upon that.⁴³

The only remark Husserl made, at the very end of his text, is "Compare my letter to Meinong on May 22, 1891."⁴⁴ This is an interesting reference which closes the circle, since it leads back to Husserl's pre-phenomenological days. In the early 1890, as discussed in Section 2, Husserl was working on topics mainly concerning foundational problem of mathematics, which he addressed by descriptive psychological means. 1891 is precisely the year of Husserl's deepest foray into the philosophy of logic and mathematics, when he tried to join the ongoing German debate between intensional and extensional logic. Husserl sided with those who, like Wilhelm Wundt, tried to preclude the priority claims of English-style, i.e. pre-Russell, class logic by trying to show that it necessarily presupposes intentional concepts. Not only did Husserl review the book by the mathematician Ernst Schröder, a pioneer of the German reception of 19th century English logic, but he also published a logical treatise in the same year in which he attempted to provide a concrete transformation that reduces extensional class-relations between concepts into intensional relations, i.e. claims about the contents (*Inhalte*) of these concepts understood as a collection of features (*Merkmale*). Husserl's foray finally ended

⁴² "Ferner auf das letzte <Argument>, dass mit all dem Russell doch Aussagen über unmögliche Objekte mache und sie so *implicite* zugesteht, antwortet Russell: Er sei sorgfältig bekümmert gewesen, to provide eine <vor eine *gestr.* Rechenschaft zu geben für> Interpretation von Propositionen, in welchen solche Objekte aufzutreten scheinen, und dass somit Meinongs Argument nichts besage (Mind, Oktober 1905, 490)." (Ms. Husserl K III 33 / 27a)

⁴³ It is unclear whether Husserl also had the 1905 issue of *Mind* in his hands. His only reference to this volume (Russell 1905c, 533, cf. Ms. Husserl K III 33 / 25a) might have directly been copied from Meinong 1907, 16, n 3, especially since in the next sentence Husserl went on to excerpt precisely this passage of Meinong.

⁴⁴ "Vgl. dazu meinen Brief an Meinong vom 22. 5. 91." (Ms. Husserl K III 33 / 27a)

in a bitter priority and plagiarism debate with one of his German colleagues, but at that time he sent his treatises to Meinong, whose response prompted him to write a lengthy letter further developing the details of his proposed transformation. Apparently this is the letter he considered relevant 16 years later.

In the original treatise, one of the points Husserl clarified explicated was related precisely to the deductive properties of the empty set, which Husserl identified with the extension of the “concept of non-existence”. (Husserl 1979, 59; ET: Husserl 1994b, 107) Thereby he had to address the validity of sentences predicating a property about a non-existing object (e.g. ‘A round square is red’). In alignment with the existentially non-binding class-logical interpretation of such sentences, Husserl allowed for any feature to be predicated about such objects,

in fact, if n is non-existent, then that same n is a non-existent as a red, sweet, or non-red (etc.) thing; and to the non-existent as such, therefore, all properties actually belong. (Husserl 1979, 35; ET: Husserl 1994b, 83)

It is worth noting that, as Hugh MacColl’s paper testifies (see e.g. MacColl 1905, 78), this was a problem inherent in the Boolean systems which had general currency at that time, and Russell attacked MacColl precisely using a rudimental version of his theory of descriptions (cf. Russell 1905a, 399).

In his letter Husserl corrected this view, precisely because by then he thought that the predicative sentence ‘S is P’ is false in case of non-existing subjects, i.e. the predicative sentence implies that “something is presented as having the feature” (Husserl 1994a, vol. 1, 124). In the original treatise, he had an axiom, which allowed for any feature to be predicated about non-existing objects. He still believed that such a claim could be proved by substituting negative properties and using double negation, but it is far from being an axiom. It is rather a “paradox”, allowing for the deduction of contrary sentences, which, as Husserl says, highlights the absurdity resulting from “hypostatizing the existence of something non-existing, which directly violates the fundamental logical principles” (ibid.).

In this letter, which represents Husserl’s final opinion in this matter, Husserl thus committed himself to the view that non-existing objects could not be admitted as valid objects; and, 16 years later, in retrospect this seemed to be the adequate explanation for him for the absurd conse-

quences Meinong's theory was facing. One might say that Husserl was actually getting very close to Russell's solution, especially since he was using the formulation "if there is anything possessing the feature *A* ...". There was, indeed, a certain degree of similarity. Actually, there was an abundance of attempts by contemporaneous German and Austrian philosophers at eliminating non-existing objects by transforming sentences containing them into sentences about the properties of existing objects (including, as discussed earlier, one of the options partly utilized by Twardowski). So it could be safely assumed that such a transformation – of course, without the corresponding logical apparatus – would have been available to the members of the School of Brentano, including Husserl, had they wished to use it. This further underlines the strange fact that in 1907 Husserl was not paying any attention to Russell's solution. This is something he shared with Meinong, who did not say anything relevant about the solution proposed by Russell either, which probably led Russell to lose his interest in Meinong once and for all. Therefore, at least from the Russell's point of view, it was not regrettable that Husserl's conversation with Meinong and Russell in 1907 remained a soliloquy.

4. Concluding Remarks

It seems that the *prima facie* lesson of the above historical investigation is of negative nature. Given the missed chances of a real interaction between Husserl and the philosophers at the other side of the Channel, it is compelling to use the shared context of these philosophies around the turn of the previous century to establish a meaningful link between the philosophical movements that later gave rise to analytic and continental philosophy. A quick glance at the last pages of the issue of *Mind* in which Russell's celebrated "On Denoting" was published could suffice to dispel the myth of isolation and hostility between Russell and his Continental counterparts. What is less obvious, however, is how Russell's critique of Meinong could be used to construct a relevant connection to Husserl's phenomenology. My paper has considered the main path through Husserl's critique of Twardowski in 1894. While Twardowski's book criticized by Husserl is undeniably situated in the main debate on intentionali-

ty by the disciples of Brentano, and the most charitable reading of Twardowski's position points towards Meinong's later full-fledged *Gegenstandstheorie*, Husserl seriously misconstrued Twardowski's position, overlooking precisely the aspect which makes Meinong's theory worth considering. It is thus theoretically possible to trace the path between Russell's and Husserl's positions, but it would require a considerable broader – and less linear – chain of incremental position changes.

This is why Husserl's hitherto unknown direct confrontation with Russell's critique of Meinong in 1907 initially sounded promising. Husserl closely followed Meinong's struggle with Russell's critique indeed, which itself was burdened by unfortunate choices on Meinong's part. Husserl's stance toward this debate was again marked by a stubborn resistance against considering Russell's actual argument. He only referred himself to his earlier correspondence with Meinong on the interpretation of sentences about non-existing objects, in which he moved from an initial permissive position resembling the ones attacked by Russell in early 1905 to a more prohibitive one. Despite this reference, he refrained himself in 1907 from utilizing any of the techniques which would have brought him closer to Russell's theory of descriptions.

While such a negative conclusion could be regarded as an important addition to our historical understanding of the complex interrelation of the early phenomenology and the nascent analytic philosophy; it is still possible to highlight a philosophically relevant lesson. This, however, lies not in the ontology of the non-existing object, but rather in the *achievements required for the cognizance of such objects*. I have already highlighted occasions when such a requirement was formulated by Bolzano and Twardowski, but it is also worth looking at what Paul Natorp, the Neo-Kantian philosopher who edited another text of Husserl on Twardowski, said:

[...] the judgment 'There are no round squares' is not a judgment about the object corresponding to the concept 'round square' [...], but rather about the concept, namely that there is no object corresponding to it. But even this concept is an improper one. It is [...] actually the concept of something that would have been simultaneously round and square, had it been possible – rather than a concept of something that actually unites these two features. (Husserl 1994a, vol. 1, 46)

Natorp thus highlighted an aspect of the problem my paper has already encountered above: *the failed achievement to form such a concept*. This

letter was written in 1897, at the time when Husserl was already working on the *Logical Investigations*, and it was precisely Natorp to whom Husserl declared that the main aim of his work in progress was not only to combat psychologism, but also *to render the relation between pure logical laws and psychological acts comprehensible* (Husserl 1994a, 5, 52–53). The terminus of this journey is Husserl's mature position on the intentionality of non-existing objects, which is to be found in the *Ideas III*, marking the end of his development to the full-fledged transcendental phenomenology:

[...] we see now that what is thought as such (logical signification in the noematic sense) can be 'countersensical' that it – which, after all, 'exists' within the category of being 'logical signification', and more generally, 'noema' – has its actual being, as for example, the thought signification 'round rectangle'. [...] the *essence* of what is signified is also something other than the signification. There is no essence 'round rectangle'; but in order to be able to judge this, it is presupposed that 'round rectangle' is a signification existing in this unitariness.⁴⁵

A round square can be thought of (phenomenologically speaking, this process is described by the noetical correlates of the noema 'round square'), but there is no such object ideally taken (in phenomenological parlance: there is no essence 'round rectangle'). Even though there is no direct continuous path connecting Russell's critique of Meinong and the development of Husserl's mature, transcendental notion of intentionality, the problem of non-existing objects is not accidental to the latter either.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ Husserl 1952, 85–86; ET: Husserl 1980, 73.

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