Expressivism about Reference and Quantification over the Non-Existent without Meinongian Metaphysics (Penultimate Draft)

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0. Introduction

Can we believe that there are non-existent entities without commitment to Meinongian metaphysics? This paper argues we can. Let's say we propose that, as appearances suggest, names like *Pegasus* refer to non-existent things. They are not, in other words, *empty names*, names without referents. Rather, they are terms that refer, and so have referents, but the referents do not exist. Moreover, at least prima facie, we can affirm claims like:

> *QN*: There is something, referred to by 'Pegasus', which is the flying horse of Greek legend, and it does not exist.

QN involves quantification over non-existent things. Does this leave us with a Meinongian metaphysics of non-existent entities? Will we be driven to develop metaphysical theories about what we are talking about, of the kind developed by Meinong, requiring what appear to be dubious metaphysical distinctions between existence and being, and a whole slough of metaphysical categories and distinctions that we would otherwise not postulate or even contemplate?[1] I will argue *no*. We can accept quantification over the non-existent without any such Meinongianism and all the headaches that it brings.

What I argue is this:

> *A*: What leads us from *QN* to Meinongianism is a general metaphysical assumption about reality at large, and not merely quantification over the non-existent. Broadly speaking, the assumption is that every being we talk about must have a *real definition*. Call this the *Real-Definition principle*. Contrary to this principle, I argue that some things can *be* or *exist*, but lack real definition. I clarify this idea below.

[1] For various versions of the metaphysics of the non-existent see Meinong (1905), Parsons (1980), Zalta (1988), Priest (2005) to name just a few.

B: Acceptance of the Real-Definition principle is linked to a specific conception of how thought relates to reality, called the *Mirror-conception*. The Mirror-conception is not the view that language is representational. That's not denied here. Rather it is an explanatory thesis: a speaker U's ability to use term 'N' to refer to *x* depends on U's mind grasping/latching onto *x* or things in terms of which *x* is defined.

C: We don't have to accept the Mirror-conception. I sketch out an alternative non-Mirror conception of language. Central to this alternative is an *expressivist* conception of talk about reference. If we adopt this non-Mirror conception, we are no longer compelled to accept the Mirror-conception, and thus don't have to accept the Real-Definition principle. We can accept that some things, say, non-existent entities, lack real definitions. They are empty of metaphysical nature.

D: With the non-Mirror conception, we can quantify over the non-existent without Meinongianism. In effect, the question of the real nature of what we are talking about will be void. The non-existent has no metaphysical nature.

Such are the basic contentions of the paper. The sequel follows the order of ideas indicated in *A*-*D* above.

1. Meinongianism and Real Definition

What drives us to to Meinongianism is puzzlement about the natures of things, in particular, the natures of the things we quantify over when we make claims about non-existent entities like *QN*. For example, if we distinguish, as it seems we must, between existence and being—between the commitments conveyed by *there exists* and *there is*—then it seems we have to ask: *what is the nature of this distinction?* It seems we have to think of being as some kind of something-or-other that is somehow different from existence, which is some other kind of something-or-other.

And if we admit, as it seems we must, that we really are talking about Pegasus when we use *Pegasus*, then it seems we have to say that Pegasis is being referred to, and so, is related to our texts, words and thoughts in some way. What then is the nature of that thing,

Pegasus, such that it is related to our words by *reference* but nevertheless doesn't exist? How can a non-existent thing have properties? What is the nature of its property possession? And what is the nature of that relation, reference, which links us to this non-existent thing?

And if we affirm, as seems correct, that Pegasus is not Zeus—the thing we talk about when we use *Pegasus* is not the thing we talk about when we use *Zeus*—in virtue of what are they distinct? What is the nature of this fact of non-identity?

The puzzlement that non-existing entities give rise to is not due to the mere recognition that we seem to be committed to *their being*—which flows from acceptance of claims like *QN*—but from trying to form a conception of what non-existent entities *really* are. We are bothered about quantifying over the non-existent because it seems we have to assign a real nature of these things, and work out a theory of how the natures involved fit together. This search for what things really are is the search for the *real definitions* of those things. If so, we can diagnose Meinongianism in these terms:

> Meinongianism is the result of pursuing the question of the real definition of what we quantify over when we talk of the non-existent, that is, Meinongianism seeks real definitions of non-existent entities, the distinction between existence and being, property possession by non-existent entities, and so on.

In short, it's one thing to affirm: *There are some things that don't exist*. It's another to investigate: *What's the real definition of something that does not exist and its relation to our language?*. All the trouble begins with this investigation into real definition. Still, we feel compelled to undertake the investigation.

Here then is the core assumption that drives us towards the metaphysics of non-existence:

> *Real-Definition principle*: If we quantify over entities, then they must have *real definitions*—there is an account of what they *really are*.

In other words, the *Real-Definition principle* is the root cause of the *ontological anxiety* that quantification over the non-existent gives rise to. If we are really going to escape this anxiety, we need to understand what real definition is.

Real Definition: Synthetic, Necessary, and Explanatory

Here's a brief account of *real definition*. If X is a thing O's real definition then there is a fact of identity, O's being X, which is necessary, synthetic, and explanatory. Let's take a look at each of these features in turn.

Consider the metaphysical hypothesis that natural numbers are certain sets. If, in accordance with that hypothesis, numbers are really certain sets, then, we must admit that numbers' being sets is a necessary, non-accidental matter. It's not that numbers are certain sets in this world, certain other sets in another.

Real definitions are not analytic. If O is really X, then *O is X* is not a mere analytic truth. It might seem that real definitions can be analytic. For example, isn't it analytic that 9 is the successor of 8? This truth may indeed be analytic. However, *being the successor of 8* is not a complete real definition of 9 since it leaves the question of the successor relation and 8 undefined. What are their real definitions? Let's suppose that 8 is really some particular set, and the successor relation is some set-theoretic relation, and sets are certain kinds of entities. Once we affirm such hypotheses, we move beyond the analytic to the synthetic identities of metaphysics. The complete, or ultimate, real definition of 9 will record information amounting to its being a successor of 8. But the real definition won't be analytic since it will go way beyond 9's being the successor of 8.

Thirdly, real definition is explanatory. Say one (really) defines numbers as certain sets X, and so identifies numbers with X. The ground for affirming that numbers are X is the explanatory power one derives from that identity. The identity hypothesis enables us to explain the manifest features of numbers. Numbers have successor relations, and so, we can explain these relations through the set-theoretic relations that hold between the sets that we identify numbers with. Indeed, one might say that it is features associated with *nominal definitions* that are explained by *real definitions*, along with other extraneous facts. Given

real definitions, and other facts, nominal definitions can be explained. Or to put the point in the material mode, the nominal identities of things flow from their *real identities*.

Explanation is often thought of as being based in real world, asymmetric relations of determination or grounding (see Rodriguez-Peyera 2005). If the explanation is causal, then the asymmetric determination is causation. If the explanation is non-causal, and typically metaphysics provides non-causal explanations, the determination is acausal, that is, involving *grounding* or *making*. It seems then we can say that where we give real definitions of objects we are seeking what *makes something what it is*, what *fixes its identity*, what *grounds its manifest nature*, or in other words, that from which its identity *flows*.

I note finally that real definitions can be intrinsic, relational, or structural. They may be realist—independent of any mental element—or idealist, involving mental or social facts. *Real definition* carries no implication of intrinsic nature or mind-independence.

To sum up, then, we can say the following:

> *Real-Definition*: X is the real definition of O iff the identity O = X is synthetic, necessary, and explanatory, that is, X explains the manifest features of O.

It's seeking real definitions in this sense that is one of the main activities of metaphysics. Metaphysics, as we know it, assumes that all things have real definitions. That's why ontological investigation is such a fraught enterprise, since, it's extremely difficult to provide a simple, coherent account of the real defintions of all things. And this is why metaphysics frequently eliminates objects—treats them as mere appearance—since providing real definitions for those objects proves too difficult.

Things without Real Definitions: The Emptiness View

My proposal is to deny this central assumption of metaphysics—the Real-Definition principle. Not everything has a real definition. That is, some things lack real definition, and so there is no fact of the matter about *what they really are*. If some entity, O, is without real definition, that does not mean that O doesn't exist. Things that exist can lack real definition. But things that don't exist always lack real definition. Moreover, things that lack real definition can still be different from other things that lack real definition. That is, there is

identity and difference amongst things that lack real definition. For example, I want to affirm that *existence* and *being* lack real definition, and their difference lacks it as well: they are distinct but there is no metaphysical ground to that distinctness. Nevertheless, they *are*; they are not fictions. I also want to affirm that non-existent entities, like Pegasus, are things completely without any real definition. As we shall see below this means there is simply no metaphysical nature to Pegasus.

If something lacks a real definition it does not mean that it's vague or a mere conceptual construction. To say it is vague or a mere conceptual construction is to offer a new real definition, one according to which something is really a vague thing, or a mere conceptual construction—despite not appearing to be so. Such ideas would simply amount to more real definitions. These would be real definitions, for example, that Pegasus is really a conceptual fiction, or an abstract construction, and so on. This is not the proposal I am making. I am denying there is any answer whatsoever about what Pegasus *really is*.

What would the consequences be if it turned out that non-existent things and *existence* and *being* lacked real definition? It would follow that the questions we need to start the enquiry called *metaphysics* would never get going. For example, let's suppose we admit that there are things that do not exist. Having admitted this fact, we then ask: *Yes, but what is the nature of being, that which is expressed by 'there is' and 'there are', such that non-existent things can be, in this sense, yet still not exist?* To affirm, *being has no real definition*, would be to cut this inquiry off right at its root. We would affirm: *The question, 'What is the real nature of what we are talking about?' has a false presupposition—that the things we are talking about have real definitions. They don't have real definitions*.

To say that an entity, O, or entities, Os, (in the most general sense of entity or entities) lack real definition is to say that there is no fact of the matter about what O is, or Os really are. Given our account of real definition, *Real-Definition*, this means that all necessary synthetic, explanatory identity claims of the form below, for any specification of real nature, X, are false:

O is X

Os are Xs

(I take there to be no interesting difference between singular and plural identity claims in this context.) So here is my contention about non-existent entities. Non-existent entities lack any real definition, which means:

> There is no necessary synthetic, explanatory identity claims concerning non-existent entities.

Let's call this an *emptiness view* about non-existent entities. They are empty of any real, metaphyical nature. For example, on that view, these identity claims are all false:

> Non-existent entities are primitive entities *having being*.
> Non-existent entities are entities that *encode* properties.
> Non-existent entities are entities in non-existent worlds.
> Non-existent entities are conceptual constructions.

This contention might lead you to ask: What necessary, synthetic identity claim about non-existence claims is true? The answer is: None is true. The emptiness view is that for all X, where X is a potential real definition, the claim *Non-existent entities are Xs* is false. Why are all such claims false? It's because all synthetic, necessary identity claims about non-existent entities are false. Of course, we have to explain why this is the case. That's a task for later. But for now we are establishing what the contents of the claims on the table are.

Note that one of the (candidate) real definitions of non-existent entities is that they are primitive beings. By *primitive* in this context we mean *metaphysically primitive*. That is, we mean they are simple, unstructured beings. It's important to see the difference between saying that non-existent entities are really simple, unstructured things, and saying that they lack all real definition. These claims are not the same. It's not analytic that non-existent entities are really primitive beings. That's a metaphysical theory that is argued for typically because all attempts at reduction—real definitions in terms of other things—have failed. The irreducibility in this case does not mean that there is a limit to human knowledge regarding the thing in question. It's rather a positive affirmation that non-existent entities are simple,

unstructured beings, and so consequently nothing can be said about what they are through invoking structures and constituents or relations to other things.

Although non-existent entities lack real definitions, there are still true claims about such entities. There are analytic claims and synthetic, non-necessary claims about them. Take:

(1) Pegasus is the flying horse of myth

(2) Pegasus is not Zeus.

I take (1) to be true. You might say that it's analytic. (2) is true, and indeed, necessarily. This is very puzzling for a metaphysical orientation attempting to escape Meinongianism. If you seek the truth-maker of (2), you want to say more than simply this: Pegasus is not Zeus. After all, you will feel compelled to ask what the nature of this fact is. This kind of question is an invitation to engage in inquiry bringing to the surface the real defintion of *this fact*. Primitivism about the fact that Pegasus is not Zeus is unattractive, and reduction is unlikely. Still, that's where metaphysics leads us.

What can the emptiness approach say about (1)-(2)? The emptiness view is that there is no real definition to uncover. The facts above are empty of any metaphysical nature. Again, the does not mean they don't exist. It just means there is no point in exploring what they really are—that is, doing metaphysics—and no rationality in being anxious about quantifying over them when we cannot find a satisfying real definition for them. Instead of doing metaphysics, we should look instead at the cognitive structures underlying speakers' use of terms that dispose them to make judgements like (1)-(2). That's the real explanatory work. (Note: that does not mean that the facts and objects we talk about in affirming (1)-(2) are mere mental constructions.)[2] We shall look at some of the proposals about cognitive structures below.

What holds for non-existent entities and their relations holds for *existence* and *being* themselves. Being and existence are without real definition. Lacking real definition does not

[2] See Barker 2012, for a brief discussion of metaphysical emptiness in relation to truth-makers, and the kind of cognitive, explanatory work that replaces metaphysical explanation, that is, the seeking out of real definitions. A much more ambitious project is attempted in Barker 2007.

mean being and existence are metaphysically primitive, metaphysical free lunches, or fictional. It means, as we suggested above, all candidate real definitions, including the hypothesis that *being* and *existence* are primitive, unstructured realities, are false. They are false because no synthetic necessary identities hold. What we have to do is appreciate why and how this may be so. The answer lies in a certain conception of language, which I now describe.

2. Mirror and Non-Mirror Conceptions

Paradigmatically, semantics is the story of words and their relation to reality. Truth-conditional semantics is a definition of truth-conditions for all sentences in a language in a compositional way. It has a three-stage form. First, in characterising the semantic nature of a language, we begin with the domain of entities. They are the entities that form the ultimate subject matter of the language. Having characterized this domain of beings, we then specify how entities in the domain are related to a syntactically defined system of symbols, for which categories and rules of formation of wffs have been defined. This means assigning objects from the domain, or sets or functions defined therefrom, to certain symbols in the system of word-strings that is the language. Finally, we recursively define truth-conditions given these assignments.

Now consider the notion of *assignment*. In formal contexts, theorists allow themselves the power to *stipulate* what is assigned to what symbol in the language. So, they just stipulate the relations of reference. But for natural languages this makes no sense. Instead of the outcome of some exercise of a capacity to stipulate, there must be some relation, prior to reference, in virtue of which there are referential relations holding between words and objects in the domain. Here we encounter the *metasemantical* question of what glues things onto words such that there can be referential relations between words and things. Let's call the relation (or family or relations) that is meant to do this job the *grasping-relation(s)*.

What I call the *Mirror-Conception* of language is just this metasemantical conception: your ability to refer to something is ultimately explained by your grasping that

thing, or things in terms of which it is defined. I say *things in terms of which it is defined* because we are not supposing that a speaker has to grasp each and every object they think about. If you quantify over all hydrogen atoms, your capacity to do so does not require grasping each and every such atom. Presumably that capacity to refer to the plurality of hydrogen atoms depends on the linguistic distribution of labour. I aim to refer to whatever the term *hydrogen* refers to, as used by texts, speakers, and so forth that I have come into contact with (in the relevant sense). In this case, other speakers are the ones who grasp what is necessary to define *hydrogen atom* and so secure reference to it. Summing up:

> ***Mirror-Conception***: Your ability to use *N* to refer to *x* depends on your mind (or the minds of other speakers you are in contact with) grasping/latching onto *x* or things in terms of which *x* is defined.

So, for example, sticking to simpler cases, that don't require linguistic distribution of labour, we can accept that on the standard semantic story:

> My ability to use *table* to refer to the kind table (the property of table-hood) depends on my mind grasping *x* = the kind table/tablehood.

So, in the case of *table*, my mind has to get linked up to table-hood, or the class of tables, or the universal table, so that I can then refer to tables, the property of being table, and so on.

What is the *grasping*-relation? The orthodox conception is that this relation a casual matter. That fits in with a naturalistic orientation towards the language-using agent. The so-called causal theory of reference proposes that the grasping-relation, which links users' cognitive systems to referents (or things in terms of which they can be defined), is causal in nature.[3] Naturally enough, the causal theory will impose an empty-name approach on names with non-existent referents. Anything entering into causal relations exists. If so, referring terms like *Pegasus* must be empty, that is, involve no reference at all. That's the causal argument for the empty-name conception of such names. For Meinongians, the grasping-relation cannot be causal. Meinongians have to suppose that tokenings of the name *Pegasus*

[3] For discussion of causal theories see Kripke 1980 and Devitt 1996.

referring to Pegasus depend on primitive, non-causal, grasping capacities that enable speakers to somewhat magically isolate a particular non-existent entity. We won't explore here how they might provide a plausible rendering of this idea here.

What I have just articulated is the Mirror-Conception of language that I alluded to in the introduction. I claim it's the conception of language whose acceptance has the implication that we should maintain that everything we talk about has a real definition. I will demonstrate how this is so by first looking at a non-Mirror conception of language.

Non-Mirror Conception

The non-Mirror-Conception of language is not the idea that languages are non-referential. That's an absurd view. It's not that reference is somehow merely internal or a metaphysically lightweight relation. Rather, it involves denying the core thesis of the Mirror-conception that referring depends on grasping the referent, that is:

> ***Non-Mirror***: Speakers' ability to use *N* to refer to *x* depends on their mental modules being involved in interaction with the world but not through grasping (latching-onto) *x* itself (or things in terms of which it can be defined.)

In other words, your ability to refer to something *x* with some term or predicate, *N* does not depend in your mind *grasping*, that is reaching out and sticking onto *x*, the referent of *N*. It involves interacting with the world—all language use must—but that interaction with the world does not constitute a securing of the objects of reference.

Let's begin by looking at a simple example of a non-Mirror treatment of vocabulary. Consider the situation of the speaker using the word *table*. The speaker, you might say, is able to use *table* because they have a mental system, call it a module, that through mainly visual information reacts in various ways—on, off, or undecided—in the presence of material things. Call it TAB-Module. TAB-module may involve a *proto-type* (which encodes features of paradigm tables.) A somewhat crudely simplified description of its function and connection with use of *table* in demonstrative uses goes as follows. TAB-module can react strongly to environmental stimuli, and in such cases, typically, we have paradigm cases of tables, though the module can get it wrong. When TAB is triggered strongly in this way, the

speaker feels capable of tokening *table* with great confidence. Other cases are where TAB-module is not activated—it's definitely off—in which case the speaker feels confident to token *not a table*. And there are cases in which TAB is neither strongly off nor strongly on. In which case the speaker is undecided.

According to the Mirror-conception, something like TAB-module would be the component of mental machinery through which a speaker, capable of recognizing tables, grasps the referent of *table*, which might be theorized as a set of objects. But the non-Mirror-conception denies this. TAB-module doesn't work by determining a set (or indeed a universal). Here's the core empirical claim informing the non-Mirror-conception, applied to TAB-module:

> ***Empirical Claim***: TAB-module cannot determine a set of entities that is the referent of *table* because *(i)* its on-states don't necessarily accurately indicate tables and *(ii)* it is undecided about a range of cases.

In short, it's neither accurate nor decided as a table *signalling* or *tracking* device. For this reason, it cannot determine an extension.[4]

What we have said about TAB-module underlying use of the predicate *table* in demonstrative cases applies to other predicates. What differs are the kinds of modules, underlying the predicates. For example, use of value-predicates is underpinned by modules linked to affective response to the world. Below, we shall look at a few other predicates: *refers*, *identical with*, and *exists*.

You may now ask how the operation of such predicate-modules relates to the reference of the corresponding predicates. After all, if the mental systems underlying demonstrative use of predicates do not fix an extension, in virtue of what then do predicates get to have reference? My response to this question is to deflect it. Let's not focus on the question about that in virtue of which predicates get their reference. Let's look at another question: what goes on when a speaker asserts that a predicate has a certain reference. This shift in questions is really part of a shift to an *expressivist* orientation to understanding

[4] The empirical claim is a conjecture inspired by the work of Kripke (1982).

language and particularly reference-attribution. The general kind of expressivism I favour is a *global expressivism*—call it *GE* for short. We cannot go into much detail about GE here—see Barker 2004, 2007, 2011—but we need to put in place a few leading ideas to guide us, which are integral to understanding the non-Mirror approach.

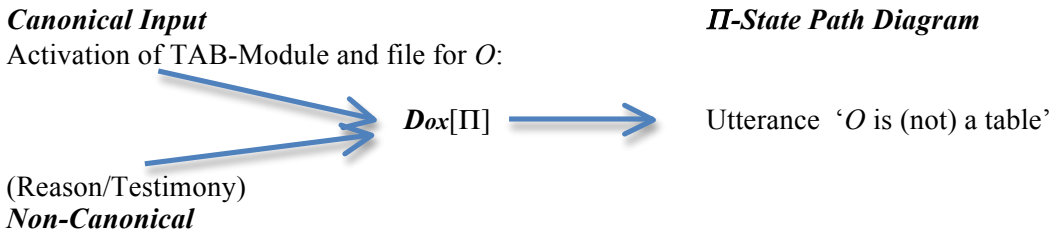
The core idea in GE is that in asserting a sentence *S* the speaker expresses a mental state of a non-representational kind. Here *express* means, in part, manifest an internal state. We are not proposing that speakers or audiences grasp in folk-psychological terms what the states are that they express, in this sense, through their speech-acts. We are not proposing, moreover, that the state expressed gives the content of the utterance. We are really concerned with the speech-act/cognitive state mechanisms that underlie production of utterances. As such, GE is an overarching empirical hypothesis about the general structure of speech-acts and immediate mental antecedents. GE is not a theory of meaning, since it will ultimately provide an expressivist treatment of meaning talk. It's no more a theory of meaning than a meta-ethical expressivism is a theory of values.

To get enough of the framework in place, we focus on the central commitment of GE, which is about the general form of the state expressed by clearheaded, sincere assertions. When a speaker U asserts *S*, sincerely, and clearheadedly, they express a state Π, where Π is tokened in a certain part of the functional cognitive system of their mind. I call this functional system the *Dox-box*. The latter has some similarities to Fodor's (1975) *belief box* sense, which is a system of representations in a network of relations that mirrors the network (or web) of belief. GE's Dox-box is a network of Π-states, but we cannot call the states involved belief states. What we are talking about are mental states that are properly speaking anterior to belief. They are pre-doxastic states. Belief comes later, when we get to the level of symbols, principally, sentences, whose production is caused by Π-states, and the human (intentionally directed) speech production system.

The Π-states of the Dox-box are ultimately linked up to output from modules of various kinds, like TAB-module. We look at that briefly now. Π-states are functional states that have input and output states. They can be tokened in the Dox-box in a canonical way, through activation of specific modules. So, in demonstrative assertions of *O is a table*, the Π-

state is tokened through activation of TAB along with whatever mental antecedents underpin use of the name referring term O. We shall comment on them below, but for now just think of them as mental files. There is another way in which Π for *O is a table* can be tokened. That's through a non-canonical path. Causal paths underlying testimony and reason is the main, non-canonical pathway leading to a Π-state being tokened in the Dox-box. I may assert that *The only object in the next room is a table* on the basis of testimony. The utterance is not the result of my TAB- and other modules having been jointly activated. Rather, my utterance is produced through a non-canonical path. I may later undergo certain experiences involving me going to the next room, activating the TAB-module, in concert with other perceptual modules. In which case a canonical path will reinforce the existing non-canonical path.

That means that for simple sentences, identified by the predicate *table*, there are two paths that generate their corresponding Π-states, as in the path diagram below:



This is a rather simplified account of cognitive structures that underlie use of a term, *table*. But it will do for our purposes here. We can sum up the non-Mirror view, for *table* thus:

> ***Non-Mirror-'Table'***: A speaker U's ability to use *table* to refer to the kind, TABLE, depends on U's mind interacting with reality through the TAB-module and through activation of non-canonical grounds associated with that module, but none of this machinery fixes an extension for the term *table* to which the term can then refer.

Other predicates will follow a similar pattern: what differs are the functional natures of the modules concerned. We shall look into a number of other cases shortly.

Before we get to that, let's revisit the question of how all this relates to the general question of reference. Consider the non-Mirror conception of *table*. This account of what underlies a speaker's capacity to refer to tables, never tells you how your mind hooks up to tables, since the referent never gets into the picture. So, how are tables linked to the word

table so that tables can be referred to by *table*? This objection assumes a Mirror-conception, namely, that if one attributes reference to *x* to a speaker U, then one must see U's mind as somehow, hooked up to *x*, or things in terms of which *x* can be defined. But this is precisely what we are denying in embracing a non-Mirror-conception. If we say U is referring to tables, we are not committing ourselves to U's mind latching into tables as the path through which reference is secured. So what are we doing when we say someone refers? At this point we need to consider what the non-Mirror conception says we do, which amounts to an expressivist treatment of reference.

3. Expressivism about Reference

We have proposed that production of speech that functions in a non-Mirror way depends on mental modules that react differentially to the world, but don't involve grasping referents (or things in terms of which they can be defined). So our task is to speculate about the modules that underlie attributions of reference. We don't have to look far to begin the speculation.

The basic uses of *refers* are those uses where we listen to people talk and understand their speech. If we speak the language fluently, our understanding will be automatic. You cannot stop it or help it happening, unless you plug up your ears. If you understand what people say, you can then say what they are referring to. Suppose you hear someone say: *Obama is President*. Then a module for language processing is activated in the cognitive system. In this case, the output is the activation of modules underpinning the speakers own speech-production system. Call these L-processing modules, the largely automatic, sub-doxastic system that underlies your spontaneous comprehension of speech (and writing) of known languages. Your assertion of *That guy is referring to Obama* involves an expression of a state that is ultimately the output of the L-processing module.

How does this module work? That's a question for cognitive science not of philosophy. But let's say basically this. The data your mind has to go on is word patterns, strings of noise and symbols that your cognitive system can classify into definite words, etc., and then, the syntactic arrangements between them, as in, 'Obama – is -- president', and

secondly, background conditions, which are diffuse and varied. These background conditions could be the fact that the speaker is in a certain physical context, and so on. I say more about this below in connection with names.

On the basis of input of word-streams and background context, your L-module produces output inside your mind. The output is that part of your language system *lights up*. That means, the mental components that underlie your speech are activated. So, if you hear, *table* in the right context, the mental module, that underlie your use of *table* are activated by the L-module.

Here then is the basic idea, of non-mirror conception:

> ***Non-Mirror-'Refer'***: Your ability to use *refers* to refer to reference depends on your mind's interacting with reality through the L-module (which processes patterns of speech etc.)

Now, if this is the story about how we use *refers*, then there is no problem with our saying that Jick is referring to tables when Jick says *table*. The fact that Jick's ability to use *table* is not dependent on their mind latching onto the referent of *table* is irrelevant. We have cast off the mirror idea which is constraining us into thinking that Jick cannot be referring to tablehood by *table*. What we have instead is Jick producing *table*, which is ultimately based on cognitive machinery (of the kind described above) involving her TAB-module, and you, as audience, listening, processing her speech, through the L-module, which then activates modules in you, and in particular your own TAB-module. (This is somethat crude, but gets the basic idea across.) That's the basis for your affirming that they are referring to the kind TABLE.

So, we can happily say, given the non-Mirror-Conception, that you are referring to things in the world even though the story about how you refer to those things does not involve the idea that you do so by your mind latching onto or grasping those things. Indeed, what is going on in your cognitive/functional system when you say *O is referring to table*? In terms of the GE (global expressivist) framework, what's going on is analogous to the operations we have described in the case of use of *table*. The speaker is expressing a Π-state,

as I have called it, whose canonical cause is output from the L-module, whose general characteristics I have just described. Their utterance of *O is referring to table* can be prompted by actual exercise of the L-module—the canonical path for the Π-state is activated—or it can be based on testimony—in which case the non-canonical path is activated. That's the basic components of the expressivist account.

Names, Files, and Reference Attribution to Names

I now want to apply this general expressivist (GE) conception of reference to interpretation of names, including names like *Pegasus*. The mental antecedents in the cognitive-system of names are *files*. So, the speech-act of referring is an act in which a speaker produces a term with the syntax of a name, whose principle characterising cause is a file. Files are bundles of mental states that are related to generic classificatory capacities—the functional elements in the cognitive-system that are expressed by predicates, which we have already examined. The association with the name means that if the your system is directed towards, producing a symbol that expresses the file, {δ, β, τ,..}, then it will, potentially, produce a name, say *Bongo*. Naturally, enough, the cognitive-system might have more than one name or referring term associated with the file. It might produce, for example, *That dog owned by Jilka*. Because the file is in the Dox-box, that means it can produce, sincere, clear-headed, simple assertions of the form: *Bongo is G*, for predicates *G* that have functional elements, γ, in the file, whose ultimate inputs are the processes underlying testimony. The file can be augmented with time, and activated by perceptual encounters. If you meet a certain dog, the file may be activated. (We would say the speaker finally sees Bongo, and recognizes that they do so.) In short, the file for *Bongo* is an ongoing functional unity with identity, determined by a set of causal factors in the cognitive-system.[5]

Files and corresponding names produced this way I call *doxastic*. These are cases in which the file appears as a constituent of the Dox-box. These are names that, on the folk-psychological level, we say, *refer to things that exist*. On the other hand, names can be non-doxastic. These are files whose files are non-doxastic. *Non-Doxastic* files are files set up in

[5] The idea of files as functional unities is found in Barker (2004), Sainsbury (2005), and recently Recanati (2012).

the cognitive-system without an *evidential* pathway, that is through processes underlying perception or testimony. The *non-doxastic file* has the same intrinsic structure as a doxastic file, that is, of the form {δ, β, τ,..}, it's just not located in the Dox-box. (In other words, the cognitive-system has a faculty for generating files, using predicate functional elements, *at will*.)

Non-doxastic files may be introduced in two ways. One way is that the cognitive-system just spontaneously sets up a file, as when, in folk-psychological terms, we would say that the speaker is *making something up*. A writer, thinking of characters with names, say *Zumba*, for a novel, is just doing that. Another way is that the name is introduced to you through prior use. So someone may talk using the name *Pegasus*, associated with certain predicates, like *flying*, *horse*, and so on and your cognitive-system L-processes that speaker's utterances and sets up a file.

The files in these cases are not in the Dox-box. Nevertheless, these files can be core causal factors in the production of names, as in, *Zumba* and *Pegasus*. So, the file {η, ϕ, ω,..} for *Pegasus* (assume there is only one file associated with that name) will be expressed by speech-acts using *Pegasus*. The file {η, ϕ, ω,..}, just like the doxastic file, will have an identity in time within the cognitive-system, so that its contents can be altered throughout its life in the system. You may be wondering where the file appears if not in the Dox-box. The cognitive-system has many sub-systems, and we can suppose there is a box, in which all files appear that are in the repertoire of the speaker, a sub-set of which appear in the Dox-box.

The linkage of a name to a file resides in a repertoire disposition like this: *If U is directed towards producing a symbol caused by Φ, she may produce 'N'*. Moreover we can say this: If U performs a referring act with a term *N* then U produces an utterance caused (in the right way) by a file (in either doxastic or non-doxastic position).

L-Processing and Names

The L-module lies behind attribution of reference to names. The core proposal is that the output of the L-module underpining H's attribution of reference to a name, produced by some other speaker U, is the activiation of a file Φ in H's cognitive system. If U produces *Pegasus* partially caused by U's file Φ_x, and H understands U, then H's system activates file

Φ_y. This does not mean H will produce a name herself, it just means that this part of her cognitive system is *activated*.

Does correct understanding by H of U require that the files, Φ_x in U is the same functional type as the file Φ_y in H? The global expressivism (GE) I propose, eschews any such reductionism. What GE proposes is: *(i)* a speculative theory about what kinds of inputs govern L-processing; *(ii)* a view that this automatic, modular processing of speech, with its internal outputs is grafted onto an *expressivist* theory of referring-attribution statements—assertions of *U is referring to Pegasus*, etc. This expressivist theory undercuts our theoretical metasemantic questions about rightness and the rightness of interpretations.

What constrains the outputs of the L-processing system? As already proposed, this is essentially a problem for cognitive science. But my armchair speculations about name processing are these. First, the L-processing system has no access to the files of other agents. It cannot look inside their heads, and cannot see meanings attached to words. It has to work with publically accessible (non-intentional) data. That data includes: *(i)* phonological-graphemic forms, for names and predicates produced in the stream of speech being processed; *(ii)* the syntactic structure of that speech, assigned by certain pattern recognition systems; *(iii)* the social context of production—whether the talk is produced by one utterer rather than another. (Determining which speaker produced *N* can effect which file, Φ, the L-processing system selects.); *(iv)* internal interaction with other modules, in particular, mind-reading modules. (This may involve an *M-processing* module—which underpins production of sentences about psychological states of others, such as their intentions, desires, and beliefs. Like the L-processing module, it goes on external data, including all sorts of input about bodily movement in environments. Moreover, it interacts with the L-processing module.)

Naturally, human L-processing systems—and M-processing systems—must exhibit a huge amount of trans-speaker similarity in function. One of the main questions about L-processing systems would be how do distinct agents manage to converge given the same data. (By convergence we mean producing, publically, similar phonological-graphemic types (as *interpretations*), that are stable, even given new environmental information.) The whole

metaphysical question, *What constitutes the fact that two speakers mean the same by their utterances?*, is utterly irrelevant to the question of convergence we are considering here, that is, it's irrelevant to the reverse engineering problem—how do a plurality of L-processing systems, produce outputs that converge and are stable. Now you may speculate that similarity of underlying functional states will lead to similar outputs. True. But speakers' *meaning-the-same* is not constituted by having the same, or similar, underlying functional states associated with the production of their sentences (*pace* Harman (1973). The functionalist identity hypothesis, meaning *P* = functional state *X*, is almost certainly false, and of no interest to GE.

How then do the descriptions issued by the *intentional stance*, in which we say, *'N' refers to O*, and so on, relate to the descriptions issued by the functional stance—of the GE cognitive scientist, who talks of underlying speech-act structures and environmental conditions? How do facts of meaning relate to functional facts about linguistic-cognitive systems interacting with each other and their environments? A straight answer is that the second, metaphysical question is void. The real question is how do the modules, L- and M-processing modules constrain by non-intentional facts. That's a question for cognitive science. That's the only real question.

Existential Indifference

The claim then is that in uttering *'N' refers to O*, where *N* is a name, a speaker U expresses the output of the L-processing module directed towards a given name. (If the attribution is based on testimony, then we have to bring in the more complicated story of non-canonical causes and Π-states, as sketched in §3 above.)[6] I contend that this treatment of reference attribution to names is existentially indifferent. That is because:

> ***Neutrality***: The L-processing system is utterly indifferent to whether or not terms refer to existing things or non-existing things.

If so, utterances of *'N' refers to O* are existentially indifferent as to whether O exists or not. There is simply no link between reference and existence. Hence one can say, *'Pegasus'*

[6] My approach assumes that files don't have reference as such—pace Sainsbury (2005) and Recanati (2012). Files are theoretical entities of cognitive science. Reference is not a relation that has any explanatory role in the account of how talk works. Therefore, it won't appear in the explanatory story featuring files.

refers to Pegasus, and so on. *Pegasus* is not an empty name. Or at least, the path has opened up for us to say this. What we really need to do now is supplement this account of names and reference attribution with GE's non-Mirror account of talk of existence and being. We look at that next.

4. Talking about Existing and Non-Existing Things

We have introduced the basic idea of a non-Mirror account of language production, as a form of Global Expressivism, GE—elements of which we have sketched. We have indicated what the basic account of the production of names and reception of names looks like. Let's turn now to what, in very broad terms, this non-Mirror account says about existence- and being-claims. Consider:

(4) There exists a horse that is pink.

(5) There is a flying horse.

Here standard analysis formalises these as:

$\exists x$ (Horse[x] & Pink [x]) $\exists x$ (Horse[x] & Flies [x])

In semantic analysis, these logical forms get a truth-conditional analysis in terms of a domain of entities and conditions of truth specified in terms of satisfaction conditions involving objects in the domain. To *grasp* these truth-conditions the speaker has to grasp the domain of entities. So, the Mirror-conception is present here.

The non-Mirror conception, in contrast, won't be an account of truth-conditions. Instead, it will be a story about what speakers express when they utter sentences like (4) and (5). Let's begin with being-claims like (5). I propose that the kinds of module that underlie production of such quantificational sentences are *metalinguistic* or *metacognitive*. They are modules to do with dispositions to employ phrases, names, definite descriptions, etc, expressing files. The files may be doxastic or non-doxastic. For example, being-statements have the form below:

> ***Being***: In asserting *There is N*, where *N* is a name, definite description, indefinite description, singular or plural, U expresses a disposition to use **N* in referring acts where it is open whether the file Φ is doxastic or non-doxastic.

The phrase **N* is either *N* itself or a slight grammatical modification of *N*. In asserting, (5), *There is a horse that flies*, U is expressing a disposition to use *(the) horse that flies* in referring acts. In short, *N* is an indefinite, and **N* a definite description. However its neutral whether the files concerned are doxastic or non-doxastic. It follows from this treatment that the quantification is existentially neutral.[7] In short, *there is/are* is a means of introducing something as a topic, but there is no commitment, either way, about whether what is being referred to exists or not.

Note very carefully that there is no implication at all from this account that *there is/are*-statements are metalinguistic statements, that is, equivalent to *We can use N in referrring acts* or some such claim. They are no more metalinguistic than claims about tables are about TAB-module outputs. In other words, we are not giving an account of truth-conditions with the present proposals. We are not doing semantics at all.

Somewhat crudely, I propose the following for existence-claims, where again the phrase **N* is either *N* itself or a slight grammatical modification of *N*:

> ***Existence***: In assertion of *There exists N*, where *N* is a name, definite description, indefinite description, singular or plural, U expresses a disposition to use **N* in referring acts where the file Φ is doxastic.

The Π-state expressed by an existence-claim is one that's an output of a metalinguistic disposition holding in the cognitive system. But the existential claim is not metalinguistic. It's just the underlying modules that are. Note that the difference in underlying cognitive states between claims about being and claims about existence resides in the distinction between referring terms with doxastic files and referring terms that are neutral, viz, that could be doxastic or not. We are giving no theory of what the difference is between being and

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[7] There is a treatment of indefinite descriptions linked to this account. I won't go into it here. See Barker (2004, 2007) for sketches of aspects of this account.

existence. We are giving a theory about the difference between the underlying cognititive states, which, by the way, do not funciton in a Mirror-way. There is no grasping of existence or being in the explanation of how we get to talk about existence and being.

We can now look very briefly at what goes on when the speaker asserts a negative existential:

(6) Pegasus does not exist.

Here we put our expressivist treatment of names, negation, and existential claims together. Such statements are expressions of *rejective states*. Rejective states are the mental states that negative sentences express. I am not going to put forward a theory of rejection here, as a kind of functional state. However, the basic idea is that a rejection of a mental state, Π, is an internal constraint not to token Π where what generates the constraint are the kinds of mental states that underlie what in folk terms we call evidential states. (See Barker 2004, 2007). The Π-state of *Pegasus exists* is a state whose canonical cause is a disposition to use *Pegasus* expressing a doxastic file, Φ. What the speaker is expessing in (6) is rejection of that state. That's the core speech-act structure of the negative existential.

In this account, there are no truth-conditions to give. There is no uncovering of what the semantic contribution of *Pegasus* is to the truth-conditions of the whole sentence. That orientation, which is characteristic of semantics, can only lead to Meinongianism. The non-Mirror orientation is not denying that sentences like (4) to (6) are truth-apt. It's not denying that the T-schema applies to them. It just denies that truth and T-sentence biconditionals have any explanatory role in the account of how the language works.

Consider now the conclusion of *QN*, from the introduction, which contained a sentence of the form:

(7) There are some things that don't exist.

In asserting (7), the speaker expresses a disposition to deploy the term *things that don't exist* expressing a file Φ which may be either doxastic or non-doxastic. Given the use of negation in (7) the speaker's file is going to be non-doxastic. The structure of the file for the term,

Things that don't exist is a bundle of predicates, {*things*, *don't exist*}. The disposition to use a term expressing this file is linked to dispositions to use a whole cluster of terms expressing singular files, like that for *Pegasus*, where the files involved are non-doxastic.

All of the treatments I have given of linguistic constructions are non-Mirror treatments. Claims about being and existence don't involve the speaker latching onto being or existence, or domains of entities, which have being or existence. Rather, the account is in terms of modules that involve various kinds of receptivity to the world, both internal and external, but no grasping of existence or being as such. The modules involved are linked to metacognitive dispositions pertaining to use of files to perform referring acts. Those files have, of course, various kinds of relations to the world in their own right, depending on the character of the file.

Identity claims

Consider the predicate *identical to*. Suppose you are puzzling about whether Hesperus is Phosphorus. You don't currently think they are the same thing. For you, the two names are not co-denoting. In your cognitive-system, the states that underpin your capacities to use the two names, involves two distinct files: Φ^1 and Φ^2. They overlap in terms of information—both may contain the predicate *star*, or its mental antecedent—but there is also information not shared. However, suppose you now get information about the planetary position of both, and you conclude that they are one. The cognitive substructure of concluding they *are one and the same* is nothing but a change in your functional system in which the files Φ^1 and Φ^2 *merge*. They may remain separable files—whatever this means in terms of the functional architecture of the cognitive-system—but let's say there is free information flow between then. Predicates in one can be carried over to the other and vice versa.[8] The output of that functional status of being merged can be expressed in an identity claim: *Hersperus is identical to Phosphorus*. In short, identity claims are expressions of states that are the output of file-merging statuses, for the files of the names used in the identity sentence. This does not mean that identity claims are claims about file-merging statuses. We are talking about

[8] See Sainsbury 2005 and Recanati 2012 for a discussion of file merging.

speech-act cognitive structure. We are not talking about content and truth-conditions of utterances.

Given this account we can explain what's going on with:

(8) Le Pere Noel is Father Christmas

(9) Pegasus is not Zeus

The speaker asserting (8), roughly, expresses the merged status in their cognitive system, of the file for *Le Pere Noel* and the file for *Father Christmas*. The second, (9), expresses the rejection of merging of the files, that for *Pegasus* and that for *Zeus*.

This account of the basic cognitive and speech-act structures underlying identity claims, and their negations, is a non-Mirror account. Your capacity to use *is* or *are* to refer to the relation of identity is not grounded in a capacity to grasp the relation of identity. Moreover, the treatment of the language activity that constitutes making identity claims does not presuppose that the terms linked by identity claims pick out things that exist. The referring terms above don't pick out existing things. But that's not a problem. In short, true identity claims can be made with utterly blithe indifference as to the existential standing of the referents of the terms involved.

5. Emptiness and Non-Existence without Meinongianism

That's the basic account of the speech-act structural forms underlying being- and existence-claims and referring-claims in terms of GE's non-Mirror acount of language activity. We can see that GE allows us to affirm claims like *QN*. This is, ultimately, because GE denies that there is any theoretical enterprise of semantics to be done. GE does not offer semantics because it offers no theoretical definition of what the meaning of a name is. It does not say it's a referent, a sense, a description, or even a speech-act.[9] Moreover, GE's account of speech-act structures for being- and existence-claims is not semantics either because it does

[9] The speech-act approach in Barker (2004) offers a semantics offers a semantics because identities the meaning of a name with a referring act type—one identitied by a referential tree.

not define truth-conditions for such sentences in terms of domains of entities, or anything else comparable. GE does not offer you a theory of content.

Once you accept this non-Mirror conception of how your talk works for some domain, then all questions about the real definitions (in the sense of §1) of things in that domain become void. That is, we accept:

> If we accept that talk about Os functions in a Non-Mirror way, then we are committed to denying that Os have real definitions, that is, we are committed to denying that there are any true, necessary, synthetic identity claims of the form *Os are Xs*.

This is the key thesis to the denial of Meinongian metaphysics. What we have to do is give some reason to think it's correct.

Let's take a case. Consider the identity claim:

(10) Pegasus is this primitive-subsister.

This metaphysical hypothesis about Pegasus cannot be true, as uttered by you, if your ability to refer to Pegasus does not involve grasping some *x* that is Pegasus or something in terms of which Pegasus can be defined (in other words, if you talk about Pegasus does not work by *mirroring*.) The reason you cannot affirm this identity is the following. If the sentence as used by you, (10), is a necessary synthetic truth, then all along, when you were using *Pegasus*, your mind must have been latching onto something, *x*, out there, and all along, that thing, unbeknownst to you, was this primitive subsister. Because you latched onto *x* with both these terms, *Pegasus* and *this primitive persister*, (10) is a necessary truth. In effect, both terms are functioning as rigid designators. However, given the non-mirror conception, we know that your words never worked this way. Your ability to use *Pegasus* to refer to Pegasus = *x* does not depend on your mind latching onto some *x*, out there, which is the referent or things in terms of which the referent is defined. There is no way of linking the two terms, *Pegasus* and *this primitive subsister* together, since the connection cannot be conceptual or a combination of mere empirical fact and nominal definition. If so, there can be no such necessary truths of the form of (10). But if there can be no such necessary truth, there

can be no discovery of what Pegasus REALLY is. Therefore, there can be no real definition of Pegasus.

If this is correct, then questions about the metaphysical nature of Pegasus, questions concerning what the referent of the name *Pegasus* really is, must be answered this way: *Pegasus is not really/ultimately anything*. Pegasus is empty of all metaphysical nature. In short, the Real-Definition principle must be false at least for Pegasus. Indeed, we can conclude exactly the same thing for every non-existing being. All such beings lack real definitions for exactly the same reason. If so, we have to say the emptiness view (§1) holds of non-existent beings. They lack metaphysical nature.

We also know that Pegasus has the property of being referred to by *Pegasus*. But we know, given the non-Mirror conception of reference, that reference is also without metaphysical nature, and so is being referred to. Therefore, Pegasus's entering the relation of reference is not open to any metaphysical investigation at all.

Given that our talk about being and existence—by hypothesis—works in terms of GE's non-Mirror conception, it follows that quantification over the non-existent carries no ontological commitment, in the sense that it incurs absolutely no obligation to give real definitions of what's being quantified over. Indeed the question of the metaphysical nature of the domain of non-existent entities is utterly void. The metaphysics of the non-existent, Meinogianism, is dissolved. Since the non-existent lacks any metaphysical nature, Meinongianism, as a form of inquiry, lacks a subject matter, despite the fact that we talk happily, and indeed unavoidably, of the non-existent.

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