Towards a Neo-Brentanian Theory of Existence

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1. Approaches to Existence

In analytic philosophy the concept of existence has been approached by investigating the logical grammar of 'exists' and its synonyms. Grammatically, 'exists' seems to be a *first-order* predicate that is true of objects. It occurs in predicate position in subject-predicate sentences such as 'Pluto (the planet) exists' and in quantified sentences such as 'No tame tigers exist.'[1]

Frege and, following him, Russell argued that these grammatical appearances are misleading. If 'exists' ('is') is a universal first-order predicate, nothing we can assert it of can lack it. Hence, sentences such as 'Pluto exists (is)' are obviously true. So why should language, asked Frege, "invent a word for a property which could not be of the slightest use for [determining an object] further?" (Frege 1884a, 40).[2] This puzzle is resolved if we take 'exists' to be a misleading expression: it looks like a first-order predicate, but expresses a *second-order* concept that subsumes first-order concepts. In asserting a sentence such as 'A moon of Jupiter exists', one denies that 0 is the number of the concept [moon of Jupiter].[3] So construed, existence statements are not obviously true: it is a non-trivial question whether a concept is satisfied or not. (I will return to this argument in section 7.)

Russell articulated the same idea in terms of propositional functions.[4] To say that a moon of Jupiter exists is to say that the propositional function *x is a moon of Jupiter* has a value that makes it true. If we want to make existence claims in a non-misleading way, we need to

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1. On subject-predicate sentences, see McNally 2011, 1830. She goes on to reserve the term 'existence sentences' for sentences that don't have subject-predicate structure. See Moore 1936, 177f. On quantifier sentences, see, for example, Evans 1982, 346–7.

2. I have changed the translation; page numbers of the German text are in square brackets. See also Frege 1884b, 63–4 [70–1] and Berto 2013, 13. Frege 1884b, 63–4 [71] outlines an account of how and why such a "contentless" word could be introduced into natural language.

3. Frege 1884a, 65.

4. See Russell 1918, 242. Kant is sometimes taken to be a precursor of the Frege–Russell view; see Wiggins 1995. See Rosenkoetter 2009 for a critique; he argues that Kant and Brentano pursue a similar approach.

use sentences of the form 'There is (are) …' regimented in first-order logic by the use of the existential quantifier '(∃x) (Fx)'.

The Frege−Russell view requires that all existence statements have words referring to concepts as their grammatical subjects or that they can be translated into 'There is …' sentences. But in existence statements such as 'Pluto exists', the grammatical predicate 'exist(s)' is completed by a singular term referring to a planet to an atomic sentence, and not by a concept designator. Yet we have the strong intuition that such sentences are truth-evaluable and some are in fact true. However, their translations into the quantifier idiom — for example, 'There is Pluto' — don't sound like proper English sentences. If 'There is …' expresses a concept that subsumes concepts and not objects, this is to be expected. Frege himself took such sentences to be senseless.[5] Hence, the Frege−Russell view turns true existential statements into false ones or, even worse, senseless ones.

The standard answer on behalf of the Frege−Russell view is to define a first-order predicate 'exists' in terms of the existential quantifier and identity:[6]

$$(\forall x) \ (x \ \text{exists} = \text{df.} \ (\exists y) \ (y = x))$$

If one utters 'Pluto exists' with assertoric force, one asserts that there is something that has the property of *being identical with Pluto*.[7]

This revised Frege−Russell view of existence has been highly influential. However, there are a growing number of dissenters who take 'exists' to be a first-order predicate.[8] Some of the dissenters take

there to be objects that don't exist. Hence, just as asserting 'round' of x distinguishes x from non-round things, asserting 'exists' of x distinguishes it from non-existents.[9] Others hold that everything exists and that talk of non-existence is, strictly speaking, meaningless.[10] In this paper I will not try to adjudicate between these two parties, but rather illuminate what they have in common: the view that 'exists' is a first-order and not a second-order predicate.

To start, let us consider two good reasons for rejecting the revised Frege−Russell view:

First, quantifier expressions range over domains of objects. It is a characteristic feature of quantifiers that their domain can be restricted. When I say "I have put everything in the suitcase", 'everything' does not range unrestrictedly over everything — the moon is not in the suitcase, etc. — but only about a restricted domain. It is easy to find similar cases for other quantifiers. However, as Walton (2003, 240f) has pointed out, sentences with the existence predicate have no restricted readings. When I exclaim, after searching through the cupboard, "There are no beans", the quantifier ranges only over a restricted domain. The truth of my utterance is perfectly compatible with an abundance of beans somewhere. Yet, when I utter, with assertoric force, 'Beans don't exist' in the same circumstances, I state that the universe is bean-free. My utterance cannot be true if there are any beans, whether in Italy or anywhere else. A straightforward explanation for this observation is that 'exists' does not range over a domain that could be restricted.

Second, the modified Frege−Russell view gives embedded or tensed existence statements a counterintuitive sense. An embedded existence statement might be:

John believes that Pluto exists.

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5. See Frege 1892b, 175; original pagination 200.

6. See Berto 2013, sect. 3.1; Mackie 1976, 253; Salmon 1987, 64; Wiggins 1995 and 2003, 486−7.

7. If one wants to make room for plural existence statements, one needs to define a similar predicate: $(\forall X) \ (X \ \text{exist} = \text{df.} \ (\exists Y) \ (Y = X))$.

8. The dissenters include (in chronological order) Moore 1936; Mackie 1976; Anscombe 1987/8, 8−12; Vallicella 2002, Chapter IV; Fine 2009; Kripke 2013, 34−6. Miller 1986, 249ff, argues that 'exists' is sometimes a first-order, sometimes a second-order predicate. I will not take a stand on this ambiguity thesis. For my purposes it is sufficient that there is a first-order use of 'exists'.

9. Berto 2013, Chapter 4; Crane 2013, set. 2.3.

10. See Evans 1982, 369ff. While 'Vulcan does not exist' contains the first-level existence predicate, it cannot be understood; but it can be quasi-understood: we can pretend that it has truth-conditions.

But does John really believe that there is something that *is identical with Pluto* when he believes that Pluto exists?[11]

With regard to tensed existence statements, proponents of the revised second-order view need to find a place for tense in their account.[12] In the final analysis, a statement like 'Napoleon exists' is supposed to say that the number of the concept *identical with Napoleon* is not 0. But *today* we can truly say, "Napoleon existed, but he no longer exists." *Prima facie*, this requires us to see the concept *identical with Napoleon* as having different numbers at different times. But the concept *identical with Napoleon* does not subsume different things at different times, or one thing at one time and none at another time. Adding a temporal adverb to 'identical with Napoleon' does not make sense: something is not identical with Napoleon *in March, for one week*, etc. So the second-order view makes tensed existence statements difficult to understand. In contrast, 'exists' can be combined with temporal adverbs — 'exists today', 'exists on the on the 15th of June, 1999' — and the extension of 'exists', like that of many other first-order predicates, can vary with time.[13]

These objections suggest that the revised Frege–Russell view

11. See Mackie 1976, 253. Williams tried to finesse these problems by arguing that sentences such as 'John believes that Pluto exists' are true if, and only if, there is a concept under which only Pluto falls and John believes that it is instantiated. (See his 1981, Chapter 4, and 1987, 131f.) However, it is controversial that 'John believes that Pluto exists' *says* that there is a concept under which only Pluto falls, which John believes is instantiated. See Flint 1984, 134. He [who? Flint?] also gives counter-examples to the proposed analysis.

12. See Mackie 1976, 254; Miller 1986, 246; Anscombe 1987/8, 8–9.

13. See Evans 1982, 346. Does the first-order view of 'exists', combined with the observation that the predicate's extension varies over time, settle us with non-existing objects? Miller (1986, 249 and 256) showed that this question can be answered negatively. While 'exists' signifies a first-order concept, there is no predicate 'does not exist' that is 'on all fours' with it and signifies a negative property. The sentence 'Socrates does not exist (anymore)' should be regimented as 'It is not the case anymore that (Socrates exists)', such that, in the regimented form, the negation-operator applies to the whole sentence. If we use a negative free logic, the atomic sentence 'Socrates exists' is false if the name is empty and the whole sentence is true. No non-existing Socrates is required by its truth.

is neither in harmony with the grammar of 'exists' nor in line with our ordinary conception of existence. Walton's observation gives us a positive reason to take grammatical appearances seriously. Saying "Beans don't exist" has no restricted reading, because 'exists' is true of everything.

If 'exists' is a first-order predicate, what is its sense, the concept expressed? Evans articulates the problem connected to this question nicely:

> Philosophical perplexity arises when an attempt is made to think of such a concept-expression as being just like other concept-expressions. We might then think we know its *Meaning* (a function which maps every object on to the True), but have no notion what its *sense* is. (Evans 1982, 348)

If 'exists' is a first-order universal predicate, its semantic value (referent) — Evans talks of "*Meaning*" — will be a function that maps every object on to the True. But what is the sense of this predicate, the concept expressed? In general, the sense of a first-order predicate 'F' is given by a true statement of the form:

$$(\forall x) \text{ ('F' is true of x if, and only if, x …)}$$

such that this statement is known by a speaker who masters 'F'. However, in the case of 'exists', there are no such statements, because there is no general and independently intelligible condition that an object satisfies if, and only if, it exists. In order to make this plausible, consider a weak condition like *nameability*. To exist is not to be nameable, because there can be objects that are so ephemeral that we can't bestow names on them. And so on for other conditions.

So while the second-order view defines the concept of existence, the first-order view seems to be forced to take this concept to be primitive. For example, Fine 2009 has given new arguments for the conclusion that we need a first-order predicate to articulate our ontological commitments (Fine uses 'real' instead of 'exists' to distinguish the

predicate from the quantifier).[14] He also sees no way to define this concept:

> I myself do not see any way to define the concept of reality in essentially different terms […]. (Fine 2009, 175)

An analytic definition in terms of marks will not be possible. For on the assumption that existence is a universal concept, there is no more general concept such that adding a mark to it will yield the concept of existence. On the assumption that there are things that don't exist, it is unclear what the general concept should be from which one can derive existence.

Evans took this problem to show that one ought to think of 'exists' differently from other universal first-order predicates. According to him, the sense of the universal first-order predicate 'exists' is 'shown' by the following satisfaction clause of an interpretative theory of truth:

> (x) (x satisfies 'exists') (Evans 1982, 348)

The sense of 'exists' is given by saying that it is true of everything, not that it is true of things that satisfy a condition that some things satisfy and others do not.[15] This is progress. However, the satisfaction clauses for 'existence' and 'self-identity' are the same:

> (x) (x satisfies 'is self-identical')

Only if we illegitimately assume that the sense of 'self-identical' has been independently fixed can we hold on to the view that the sense of 'self-identical' and 'exists' are different. According to the satisfaction clause, 'exists' and 'is self-identical' have the same sense. Hence, Evans can't distinguish between the sense of 'exists' and 'is self-identical'. This is a serious drawback. For intuitively the senses are different. I

14. See also Mackie 1976, 258.

15. When one asserts that everything satisfies 'exists', one does not need to specify further that one quantifies only over everything *that exists*. The domain of quantification is determined by the linguistic meaning of the words used, the principle of charity, and the context of utterance. See Rayo 2003. Hence, Evans's account is not circular.

can have reason to think that *A* might not have existed. I can have no reason to think that *A* might not have been identical with itself.

This leaves the proponent of the first-order view with the task of removing "philosophical perplexity" about the concept expressed by 'exists'. Its sense cannot be articulated in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Yet it is desirable to articulate it in some way in order distinguish the sense of 'exists' from the sense of other universal first-order predicates. I will tackle this task in this paper by drawing on Franz Brentano's work.[16] Brentano aims to shed light on the concept of existence by appealing to a non-propositional attitude and when it is right to have it. In this paper I will defend the core of Brentano's approach to existence, but criticise his implementation of it. The proposed Neo-Brentanian view agrees with Brentano that the attitude of acknowledgement grounds our mastery of the sense expressed by 'exists'. It disagrees with Brentano in that it does not give an analytic definition of existence in terms of correct acknowledgement.

The basic idea of Brentano's view becomes clear if we compare it with the rejectivist view of negation. Rejectivists about negation take denying that p to be a *sui generis* propositional attitude "on all fours" (Smiley) with judgement. When one answers "No" to the question whether p, one denies *that p*, but one does not judge *that p is not the case*.[17] Denying *that p* is a matter of thinking *that p* in a particular mode, not of applying a concept to the content *that p*. Since denial does not already involve the concept of negation, it can be used to shed light on

16. Schlick 1925, 39–41, and Stumpf 1939, 81–2, are early critical discussions of Brentano's theory of existential judgement. However, Schlick seems to throw out the baby with the bathwater: while Brentano's theory may not be a general theory of judgement, it may nonetheless be a promising theory of a particular kind of judgement. Schlick's criticism, it seems to me, has informed the reception and rejection of Brentano's ideas in analytic philosophy. The analytic literature on Brentano on existence is therefore sparse. An exception is Prior 1976, 111ff. Vallicella 2001 focuses on Brentano's treatment of existence, and Kriegel 2015 on the attitude of acknowledgement. Brandl 2002, section 5, gives a helpful overview of Brentano's view of judgement and its connection with existence. I will discuss Vallicella and Kriegel's contributions briefly in section 4.

17. See Smiley 1996, 1ff. See also Restall 2005, 190.

it. Rejectivists argue that one knows what the sentence operator 'not' means if one knows that it is correct to assert *that not p* if, and only if, *that p* is correctly denied.

According to Brentano, there is an attitude that stands to 'exists' as rejection does to 'not': *acknowledgement*.[18] Similar to the case of negation, ontological commitment to *A* does not consist in concept application but in thinking of *A in a particular mode*. Brentano argues that the attitudes of acknowledging and rejecting are prior to the concept of existence in the order of explanation. I will explore and defend this approach to existence.

I will first outline the basic notions of Brentano's approach (section 2), then motivate his account of existence (section 3) and discuss objections to it (section 4). In sections 5, 6 and 7, I will develop the Neo-Brentanian view.

2. Acknowledging, Positing, and Believing-In

Let us start at the beginning, namely with the primitives of Brentano's philosophy of mind. Every mental act, Brentano argues, is either

a presentation,

a loving or hating of something,

or

an acknowledgement or a rejection,

or it is definable in terms of these acts.[19] None of these acts has a propositional content; all of them are, in an intuitive sense, directed upon objects, yet they may fail to "latch on to" any object.

For the purposes of this paper, it is mainly acknowledgement and cognate attitudes that are of interest.[20] Let's start, therefore, by having

18. Brentano found the germs of this idea in Hume and Kant. See the chapter on Hume's criticism of the ontological argument in Brentano 1868–91.

19. See, for example, Brentano 1995, 125/1924 II, 125.

20. Brentano often called the non-propositional acknowledging attitude simply

a look at how Brentano introduces acknowledgement. According to him, awareness is knowledge of our current perceiving, etc. In what kind of knowledge does awareness consist? He argues that awareness of present perceiving is knowledge, but not knowledge *that something is a certain way*:

> No one who pays attention to what goes on within himself when he hears or sees and perceives his act of hearing or seeing could be mistaken about the fact that this judgement of inner perception does not consist in the connection of a mental act as subject with existence as a predicate, but *consists rather in the simple acknowledgement [Anerkennung] of the mental phenomenon that is present in inner consciousness*. (Brentano 1995a, 110/1924 I, 201; in part my translation, my emphasis)[21]

Brentano's negative point is that awareness of perceiving is a form of mental commitment to ongoing perceiving, but this mental commitment cannot consist in endorsing a proposition or making a predication. An infant is not able to judge *that his current experiences are such-and-such*. The negative point suggests a positive point: there is one form of awareness of one's mental activities, which is non-propositional and does not involve predication.[22] No property is predicated, yet if we are aware of these activities, we acknowledge them.

judgement. The reader is encouraged to heed the advice of Brentano's student Stumpf: "[O]ne must always bear in mind that he used the term 'judgement' in a much more general way than do most people in ordinary usage" (Stumpf 1919, 36; my translation).

21. The English translation has 'simple affirmation' for *'einfache Anerkennung'*, but what one affirms in the literal sense are sentences or propositions, not mental phenomena. I translate *'anerkennen'* as 'acknowledge'.

22. If one can acknowledge an object without predicating something of it, Brentano argues, predication is not essential for judgement. Brentano goes one step further: all mental acts we call 'judgement' are acknowledgements. In this paper I will not take a stand on the plausibility of Brentano's general theory of judgement. The general theory may well be false, yet the part of it concerned with what one may term "existence judgements" may still be true.

Brentano is right to articulate his observations about awareness by using 'acknowledge' (*anerkennen*). One cannot be aware of an activity when this activity is not ongoing. This is registered by the factivity of 'acknowledge'. But in general we can, to put it neutrally, commit ourselves to an object and be wrong: our commitment can be correct or incorrect. Brentano needs, therefore, a non-factive mental act that stands to acknowledgment as judgement does to recognition. There is no intensional transitive verb in German and English that refers precisely to such a mental act. Brentano sometimes used the non-factive term 'posit' (*setzen*) to refer to the mental act he has in mind:

> There is an *A*, *A* is. Not the connection of *A* with something else, but *A* considered by itself and acknowledged by itself (no combination but position) [*keine Zusammensetzung, sondern eine Setzung*]. (1880ff, 30; my translation)

'Positing' has an established use in philosophy before Brentano. In his discussion of the Ontological Argument, Kant used 'positing' to make clear what existential judgement consists in: such a 'judgement' is a positing (A 598).[23] Moreover, while we lack a philosophical analysis of the term, talk of positing is well established and intelligible independent of such an analysis. I will therefore use it as a non-factive alternative to Brentano's 'acknowledge'.

The verb 'to posit' signifies a mental *act*. Is there a mental *state* that is initiated or manifested by positing something? English has the intensional transitive construction '*S believes in A*' as well as the propositional one '*S believes that p*'. 'Believes in' takes as complements singular terms ('Santa Claus'), plural terms ('dwarves'), and mass terms ('dark matter'). The same distinction can be found in German ('*glauben an*' versus '*glauben, daß*'). Sometimes 'believe in' is used to express a positive evaluative attitude ('I believe in love'), but often we use it to

convey our ontological commitments.[24] Here is a literary example that illustrates the ontological use of 'believe in':

> Holding on to the world is mostly an act of faith: you see a little bit in front of you and you believe in the rest of it both in time and space. If you're scheduled for a jump to Hubble on Tuesday, you believe in you, in Hubble, in the jump, and in Tuesday. (Russell Hoban, *Fremder)*

Belief-in, however, lacks a natural opposite. We have, then, the following attitudes to consider:

- factive/episodic: acknowledging versus rejecting

- non-factive/episodic: positing versus discarding

- non-factive/non-episodic: belief-in

None of the listed mental acts and mental states is supposed to be propositional. Why? Gendler Szabó (2003, 591f) argues that believing that *A*(s) exists is not the same mental state as believing in *A*(s). NN may have good reason to believe that there are more things than the things NN himself believes in. In this situation, (i) is true, while (ii) is false:

> (i) NN believes that things that NN does not believe in exist.

> (ii) NN believes in things that NN does not believe in.

The difference in truth-value between (i) and (ii) suggests that believing that *A* exists and believing in *A* are not the same thing. But does (ii) not have a reading in which it is true? For instance, one could give 'things that NN does not believe in' wider scope than 'NN believes in':

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23. Rosenkoetter 2009, 545, expands on this.

24. See Gendler Szabó 2003, 585, who uses 'believing in' as a term of art, but in a way that "roughly corresponds to one of its natural English uses — that which places it into the loose class of ontologically committal terms such as 'accept' or 'acknowledge'".

> Things that NN does not believe in are such that NN believes in them.

Now this seems to be just a grammatical change, not a change in the logical form of the sentence. Gendler Szabó (2003, 593–4) makes a good case that while quantifier phrases exhibit scope ambiguities, bare plurals don't. A sentence like 'John looks for unicorns' has only one reading, in which 'unicorns' is in the scope of 'John looks for', because on no understanding does the sentence commit us to the existence of unicorns. The same goes for 'NN believes in' and 'things that NN does not believe in'. The sentence does not commit us to the existence of things that NN does not believe in. Gendler Szabó (2003, 592) generalizes this conclusion: If believing in *A* is not believing that *A* exists, acknowledging *A* is not acknowledging that *A* exists, admitting *A* is not admitting that *A* exists, etc.

The idea that belief-in is a non-propositional attitude is also made plausible by considerations about other non-propositional attitudes. *Liking* is a plausible candidate for another non-propositional attitude.[25] It seems plausible that liking something is not a propositional attitude, but that one can like an object *A* only if one "takes it to be". If we hold that "taking to be" is a belief that something exists, we make the non-propositional attitude *liking something* dependent on a propositional attitude. Again this seems implausible. Dogs like bones, but don't have the propositional belief that bones exist. They can like bones without having such beliefs, because they believe in bones.

Belief-in is a non-propositional attitude. There are two ways to understand the metaphysics of this attitude. Either the non-propositional attitude is a two-place relation between a thinker and an object, or it is a two-place relation between a thinker and a mode of presentation. In some cases in which the latter relation holds, there is a further relation between the mode of presentation and an object. Brentano does not explicitly argue for one of these options. But with respect to the non-factive attitude of belief-in and the non-factive act of positing, the

second option is preferable. For instance, I may believe in phlogiston, although there is no such substance. This suggests that belief-in and positing are attitudes that have modes of presentation as their contents. These modes of presentation can be understood on the model of the sense of plural and singular terms. But while the attitudes have modes of presentation as their contents, they are not relations to these modes of presentation: in the good case, they are mediated relations to things.[26] Hence, one can falsely and truly believe in something, and one can come to posit an object (believe in it) after being doubtful or neutral with respect to its existence.

This claim about the nature of belief-in and related attitudes is independent of the semantics of names that may be used to express them. The name 'Pluto' may be directly referential: its meaning or semantic content is exhausted by its referent. Yet, the attitude one presents oneself as having by asserting 'Pluto exists' is a relation between a thinker and a thought that involves a mode of presentation. However, this thought is the *semantic* content neither of 'Pluto exists' nor of attitude ascriptions like 'John believes that Pluto is a planet'. The semantic content of our assertions underspecifies how the mental state expressed represents the world. Consider an independent example: I utter, with assertoric force, 'Pluto is a planet'. I am bound to think of Pluto in a particular way, and you will do so too, when you accept what I say. But we may not think of it in the same way. The view that names and other singular terms are directly referential, or the weaker thesis that they are non-descriptive, is compatible with a metaphysics of the attitudes we ascribe that takes them to involve modes of presentation.[27] Some theorists of direct reference, for example, take these modes of presentation to be pragmatically conveyed.

According to Brentano, a thinker can acknowledge an object and

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25. For good arguments for this conclusion, see Grzankowski 2015, 381f.

26. This point is argued for in detail in Grzankowski 2014, 10.

27. For a view that combines the outlined metaphysics of attitudes with the semantics of direct reference, see Salmon 1986, 105–14. For discussion, see Braun 1998, 565ff.

believe in it without being able to entertain propositions about it.[28] How can one get a theoretical understanding of such basic non-propositional attitudes? The general functionalist strategy is to characterise an attitude by outlining its place in a web of other attitudes. If we employ this strategy, we can characterize positing and belief-in by outlining their place in a web of non-propositional attitudes and feelings.[29] Knowledge of the place of belief-in in the web of these attitudes is knowledge of what belief-in is. The 'input side' of the web is, in part, given by statements such as:

> *Ceteris paribus*, if S attention is drawn to x, S will posit x.

> *Ceteris paribus*, if S acts upon x, S believes in x.

> *Ceteris paribus*, if S perceives x, S believes in x.

In addition, there are statements that specify which attitudes require belief-in for their rationality:

> It is rational to fear x and act accordingly only if one believes in it.

> It is rational to admire x and act accordingly only if one believes in it.

The functional characterisation makes intelligible how thinkers who have no propositional attitudes can believe in objects.

3. The Motivation of Brentano's Theory of Existence

If believing in A (acknowledging/positing A) is not believing that A exists (acknowledging/positing that A exists), yet we take these attitudes to be ontologically committing, this commitment is independent of the propositional content of the act or state. This makes it plausible that the commitment is due to the psychological mode in which one thinks of A when one acknowledges or believes in it. As Kriegel puts it:

> [On Brentano's view], to think that Obama exists is to represent-as-existent Obama. The content of the thought is thus exhausted by Obama. Existence does not come into the thought at the level of content, but at the level of attitude. (Kriegel 2015, 87)

An independent example of commitment in virtue of attitude mode is propositional judgement. On pain of vicious regress, not all commitments to the truth of a proposition p can be a matter of content — that is, represent p as being true or as falling under the concept of truth. For representing p as true in this way is just thinking a more complex thought, namely the thought that p is true. Hence, the question of whether we have committed ourselves to the truth of this distinct thought arises again.[30] Consequently, there must be a way to commit oneself to p's being true that does not bring p under the concept of truth. It must be a matter of attitude mode and not of attitude content. Similarly, there is a basic form of ontological commitment that is a matter of attitude mode and not of attitude content.

Now the assumption that there is a mental act of ontological commitment is suggestive. But, in addition to the mental act, we need a concept of existence that can be part of propositions and is expressed by 'exists' or 'is'. For example, we are able to speculate whether something might not have existed or whether there could exist an object of a certain kind. These are not speculations about whether someone might acknowledge an object or not. Without a concept of existence

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28. We can ascribe such attitudes only by using propositional constructions. But ascribing an attitude is one thing, the attitude itself another.

29. The basic idea can be found in Textor 2007, section 4. The details are changed below. Kriegel 2015, 98, characterizes the attitude in consideration by locating it in Brentano's classification scheme for mental phenomena. But this will be helpful to and/or convince only those who are inclined to accept Brentano's classification scheme.

30. This point is made in Frege 1892a, 35–6 [164].

that can be part of predicational thoughts, one would be deprived of the possibility of such speculations.

Brentano argued that there is a concept of existence. We have seen that when we acknowledge objects, we don't exercise the concept of existence. This enables Brentano to give a rational reconstruction of how we arrive at the concept of existence that starts from considerations about acknowledgement.[31] He credited Aristotle with this idea:

> Aristotle had already recognized that [the concept of existence] is acquired by reflection on the affirming judgement. (Brentano 1889, 27 [45], my translation)[32]

In his unpublished Logic Lectures (EL 80), Brentano spells out the Aristotelian thesis. His starting point is the following consideration about judgement:

> What does someone *do* who makes a judgement, who acknowledges and rejects? Obviously he treats what he judges as something that is to be judged as he does judge it. If he acknowledges it, he treats it as something that is to be acknowledged; if he rejects it, he treats it as something to be rejected. (Brentano 1880ff, 89; my translation)[33]

When I acknowledge something *A*, I am committed to taking my acknowledgement as correct, fitting, or appropriate, as something I should do. Independently of Brentano, Ginsborg made a strong case that an awareness that what one does is "the appropriate thing to do" is distinctive of our thought and perception. A child who is sorting geometrical shapes will have this sense:

> When she puts a cube together with the other cubes rather than with the spheres, her action, even if unhesitating,

is not "blind": she does it with a sense that it is the appropriate thing to do, that this is where the cube belongs, that this is what she ought to be doing with the cube. (Ginsborg 2006, 361)

One does not need to possess the concepts of sorting or correctness to have the sense of correctness under consideration: the child can simply be aware that what she does right now should be done in *this* way.[34] It strikes her that the cube belongs there and that putting it anywhere else would be wrong.

Something similar goes for the thinker who acknowledges an object. When I acknowledge an object, I have a sense that this is the appropriate or right thing to do. In order to have this sense, I don't need to *judge* that my acknowledgement is right. My sense that my judgement is correct is manifest in my emotional responses: If you convince me that an object I have acknowledged does not exist, I will respond with the same emotions as when I do something incorrectly. I may be angry or blame myself, etc.

However, if I am able to reflect on my acknowledgement of *A*, I can only on pain of irrationality refuse to judge that *A* is to be acknowledged.[35] Brentano holds that if one is able to form a view about one's acknowledgements and one acknowledges *A*, one will, when one pays attention to it, acknowledge that *A* is to be acknowledged:

> [A]nyone who takes something to be true will not only acknowledge the object, but, when asked whether the object is to be acknowledged, will also acknowledge the object's to-be-acknowledgedness, *i.e.* its truth (which is all that is meant by this barbarous expression). The expression 'to take something to be true' may be connected

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31. Brentano 1995, 163/1924 II, 52.

32. Page numbers of the German text are given in brackets.

33. Thanks to Sarah Tropper for improving the translation.

34. Ibid., 362.

35. This is related to the view that outright belief that p commits one to the belief that one knows that p. On this, see Owens 2000, 37, and Huemer 2011, 2f. In Brentano's terminology, one would say that if someone believes that p, he is committed to believing correctly.

with this. The expression 'to take something to be false' will receive an analogous explication. (Brentano 1995, 187–8/1924 II, 48–9; in part my translation)

Let's first note that there is a *prima facie* objection to Brentano's claim.[36] In general, I might find myself unable to believe that p, while also thinking that there is strong evidence that favours that p. Belief is a multi-track disposition to feel, think, and behave in certain ways. Some of these dispositions are not easily changed even if one has evidence for or against the truth of what one believes. However, while it is therefore possible that someone may honestly and truly assert, 'Pluto is, but one ought not to believe in it', the person making the assertion thereby shows that she does not live up to the standards of correct judgement. Hence, one can acknowledge *A*, know that one does so, and yet refuse to acknowledge that *A* is to be acknowledged, but *only on pain of irrationality*.[37]

The thesis so revised is sufficient for Brentano's purposes: if one is able to form a view about one's acknowledgements and one acknowledges *A*, one will, when one pays attention to it, acknowledge that *A* is to be acknowledged or incur blame for being irrational. If one forms a rational view about one's acknowledgements, one can therefore discover a property of *A*: *it is to be acknowledged*. Brentano coined an, as he says, "barbaric" term for this property: the property of "to-be-acknowledged-ness" (*Anzuerkennensein*) (Brentano 1995, 187/1924 II, 89).

When we simply acknowledge an object, we don't predicate this property of it. But when we acknowledge something, we are committed to its to-be-acknowledged-ness in the sense explained above. In sum, acknowledgement itself is a non-predicational mental act: one simply acknowledges an object. But we can, by reflecting on acknowledgement and articulating its commitments, discover that there is a property of to-be-acknowledged-ness. This property, Brentano argues, is nothing but the property of existence.

36. Thanks to an anonymous referee for drawing me out here.

37. See Owens 2002, 383.

Kriegel disagrees with this reading of Brentano:

The view is not that existence is the property whose nature is being-fittingly-acceptable. In fact, for Brentano there is no such property as existence, though there are of course existents. This is precisely why existence-commitment cannot be part of the content of a mental state. There is not some aspect of the world, or of things in it, that we may call existence. (Kriegel 2015, 91)

As we have seen, it is right to say that existence is not predicated in acknowledgment, but this does not imply that there is no mental act or state in whose content a first-order predicational concept of existence figures. Brentano says, in a passage quoted by Kriegel (2015, 91, Fn), that 'exists' is not a *material* predicate:

In calling an object good we are not giving it a material (*sachliches*) predicate, as we do when we call something red or round or warm or thinking. In this respect the expressions good and bad are *like the expressions existent and nonexistent*. In using the latter ['existent' and 'non-existent'], we do not intend to add yet another to the determining characteristics of the thing in question; we wish rather to say that whoever acknowledges a certain thing and rejects another certain thing makes a true judgement. (Brentano 1973, 90 [144]; my emphasis)

At first sight it is baffling that Brentano classifies 'good' and 'exists' together. But expounding the analogy between 'good' and 'exists' helps us to understand Brentano's view. Let us start with Brentano's treatment of 'good'. When I utter, with assertoric force, 'Champagne is good', I don't intend my audience to come to a judgement about champagne to the effect that it is such-and-such: 'good' is not a *real* or determining predicate. I intend them to judge that one ought to like champagne. (See ibid.) While 'good' is not a real or determining predicate, it still expresses the normative concept ('is to be liked') under which objects

fall. The same goes for 'exists'. It expresses the normative concept ('to be believed in/acknowledged') under which objects fall. I will come back to this thesis in section 7.

Brentano's view, then, has two components:

A non-predicational component: the attitude of belief-in and the acts of positing and acknowledging

A predicational component: the concept expressed in existence-statements and thoughts

One discovers and understands the concept of existence if one (i) believes in (posits, acknowledges) objects and (ii) forms a view about one's attitude and its objects. The attitude is one that one ought to have — it is appropriate — and the object is one towards which one ought to have the attitude.

Brentano proposed his account of existence as a genealogy of the concept of existence. I am not sure which evidence could be found for the claim that humans acquire the concept of existence in this way. But we can set this aside and take Brentano to locate existence in our web of concepts. Existence is involved in the normative commitments of acknowledging and positing. This allows Brentano to shed light on this concept: existence is an evaluative first-level concept: 'x exists' means 'x is to be acknowledged'.

4. Brentano's Analysis of Existence

In this section I want to have a close look at Brentano's analysis of existence that is a by-product of his genealogy of existence.

Let us first get clear about what he is *not* saying. Brentano does not propose that *existence* is *being posited/acknowledged*: there are things we neither have nor will ever acknowledge. Neither did he hold that existence consists in correct positability or acknowledgeability.[38] Consider:

38. Meinong (1910, 62) takes Marty (1908, 314) to define existence as possible acknowledgement (*Anerkanntwerdenkönnen*) and goes on to criticize the definition as leading to the "dissolution of being into possibility". The criticism

x is correctly positable if, and only if,

every suitably equipped and placed thinker would, under suitable conditions, acknowledge x.

Husserl, who discussed Brentano's view in detail in his lectures, outlines the problems with this construal of Brentano's view:

Maybe there are objects that cannot be correctly acknowledged by any intellectual being. We are to understand the possibility not in the sense that it relates to the real capacities of beings that have the faculty of judgement, but as follows: An object exists, means nothing but this: if a judgement were to acknowledge the object, it would be correct. (Husserl 1896, 218; my translation)

It is possible that there are objects we will never acknowledge or that are such that if one tried to acknowledge them, they would deconstruct and can therefore not be correctly acknowledged.

Valicella (2001, 316) argues that weakening the modal reading of Brentano's view to

x is correctly positable if, and only if,

it is logically possible that there is a suitably equipped and placed thinker who, under suitable conditions, would acknowledge x

leads to new problems. For even if there is no x, it is surely possible that there are beings able to acknowledge x in the right conditions.

Fortunately Brentano does not construe his view of existence in terms of possibility. A beautiful object merits or deserves positive appreciation whether there is someone who can so appreciate it or not, and whether it is possible that there is someone who can so appreciate

is hard to fathom. But the main point is that neither Brentano nor Marty hold the view Meinong criticizes. Marty (1908, 314), for instance, argues that something exists if, and only if, it merits acknowledgement.

it or not. The object is to be appreciated whether one can do so or not. Similarly, an object exists if, and only if, it is to be posited or acknowledged; if acknowledging (positing) it is right or appropriate. Brentano expresses this idea in his lectures as follows:

> (BrentanoE1) x exists if, and only if, x is to be posited/ acknowledged and not rejected.[39]

Whether there is anyone who has or can have this attitude is a different question.[40]

Now (BrentanoE1) raises two main problems.

First, we need to ask when an acknowledgement is correct or appropriate.[41] The only answer that makes Brentano's definitions look like definitions of existence and not replacements is this: One posits x correctly if, and only if, x exists. Brentano himself suggests this answer:

> Whether I say that an affirmative judgement is true, or its object exists, or whether I say that a negative judgement is true, or its object does not exist, in both cases I say *one and the same thing*. (Brentano 1889, 28 Fn [45 Fn], my translation)

If this is right, one can understand correct acknowledgement by appeal to existence, but not the other way round. If one wants to turn the direction of explanation around, one needs an answer to the question 'When is positing T correct (incorrect)?' that does not rely on the notion of existence.

How do we solve this problem? Lewis points the way:

> It's easy to believe that some truths have truth-makers, for instance the existential truth that there are dogs. Dog

Harry suffices to make it true. (At least, provided he is essentially a dog, and so could not have existed without a dog existing. […]) Dog Milo also suffices to make it true; and so does any other dog. (Lewis 1992, 216)

A truth-maker for the sentence 'There are dogs' is Milo, another is Harry, etc. If existential judgements are true because of things, the same goes for Brentano's positings. If there were finitely many things, we could make do with a list like:

> Harry makes true positing Harry;
>
> Fred makes true positing Fred;
>
> That 2 = 2 is among the things that make true positing propositions;
>
> Oxygen makes true positing oxygen.

But how can one specify in a general manner when a positing is true? Using the universal quantifier, we can say:

> Every object x is such that one posits x truly if, and only if, one posits x.

No further specification of the domain of the quantifier is necessary or possible. The meaning of the words used, the principle of charity, and the context of utterance determine that the quantifiers range over everything there is.

Whether we need to revise or extend our account of truth for positing depends on further arguments. Are there things that are not objects? Are there pluralities, or are there only objects we refer to with singular and plural terms?[42] Here I will leave open whether such extensions are necessary, because my main aim is to articulate the basic framework that may need extension.

The second problem raised by (BrentanoE1) is that it seems

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39. See also Marty 1918, 201. In other work, he preferred to use a conditional: 'T is' means that if one acknowledges or posits *T*, one acknowledges or posits truly, while if one rejects or discards *T*, one rejects or discards falsely. (See Brentano 1904, 48 [79].)

40. Hence, Vallicella's criticisms in his 2001, 315–6, miss their target.

41. I take Husserl 1896, 218, to suggest this objection.

42. See Boolos 1984, 449.

implausible to hold that the concept of correct acknowledgement is a mark of the concept of existence. Husserl raises exactly this point:

> Should the concept of judgement be really contained in the concept of existence as a component? (Husserl 1896, 218, my translation)[43]

But, on the face of it, this is just a statement of Brentano's view, not a criticism of it. In his review of Brentano's *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, Moore (1903, 117) wielded the open-question argument against Brentano's definition and thereby supported Husserl's intuition.[44]

Moore argued as follows: In general, if the concept of being *F* is just the concept of being *G*, the question whether everything that is an *F* is a *G* and the other way round is not open. A question is not open if one cannot ask it on pain of manifesting one's failure to grasp the concepts involved. For example, if one seriously asks whether a vixen is a female fox, one thereby shows that one does not understand one of the words used in formulating the question. However, it is an open question whether it is indeed true that everything that exists is to be acknowledged and *vice versa*. It is not a sign of the failure to grasp the concepts of existence and correct acknowledgement if one wonders whether something exists if, and only if, it is to be acknowledged.

Moore's objection suggests that grasping the concept of existence does not consist in knowledge of a definition, *i.e.* knowledge of an analysis of the concept in its marks. It seems perfectly possible that one could use 'exists' correctly without having the concept of acknowledgement. I can utter 'Superman exists' with understanding, yet be puzzled by the question 'So you take him to be acknowledged?' In the next section, I will show how one can take this criticism on board without giving up the core of Brentano's view.[45]

5. The Neo-Brentanian View of Existence

Brentano made a good case for the thesis that non-propositional and ontologically committing attitudes are prior to the concept of existence. But it turned out to be implausible that the concept of existence can be analysed with recourse to correct acknowledgement. This first stab at revising Brentano's view will become clearer if we look at recent work on negation. Rejectivists hold that, equipped with the distinction between rejection and acceptance, we can understand negation:

> The leading idea of rejectivism is that a grasp of the distinction between [assent and dissent] is prior to our understanding of negation as a sentence operator, this operator then being explicable as applying to A to yield something assent to which is tantamount to dissent from A. (Humberstone 2000, 331)

The rejectivist will explain the sense of the sentence-forming operator 'not' ('$\neg$') by rules of introduction and elimination whose starting points are acts of rejecting and assenting. Let '$-$' be a force-indicator with rejective force and '$+$' its counterpart with affirmative force, which can be used to reject or accept propositions. With this in mind, Rumfitt proposes the following introduction and elimination rules for '$\neg$':[46]

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43. See also Meinong 1910, 62 Fn.

44. More precisely, Moore wielded it against Brentano's definition of truth as correct judgement. But since Brentano takes judgement to be acknowledgement of objects, truth and existence coincide.

45. Kriegel renders Brentano's view as follows: 'To be is to be a fitting object of a positive objectual existential state with world-to-mind direction' (Kriegel 2015, 99). If we take it to be an analytic definition of existence, it is too demanding. John can believe that Superman does not exist without knowing about the world–mind direction of fit, etc. Moreover, it is not necessary for the mental state to have the world–mind direction. My current visual sensation is a fitting object of an acknowledgement, but this acknowledgement need not have a world–mind direction of fit. My consciousness of my current visual sensation has no direction of fit, because it is factive.

46. See Rumfitt 2001, 802.

'¬' Introduction	'¬' Elimination
– P	– (¬ P)
+ (¬ P)	+ P
+ P	+ (¬ P)
– (¬ P)	– P

The point of these rules becomes clear when they are compared with the classical rules:

'¬' Introduction	'¬' Elimination
P, X	¬ ¬ P
:	P
⊥	
¬ P	

The classical rules for negation are not harmonious; roughly speaking, one can infer more via the elimination rules than one has put in via the introduction rules.[47] The rejectivist rules are harmonious: one gets out only what one has put in. While this is an important property of the rules that the rejectivist has provided, I won't take a stand on the plausibility of rejectivism here. For the rejective account of negation will only serve as a model for a Brentanian view of existence. The plausibility of the Brentanian view is independent of the rejective view of negation, since Brentano's primitives are different from the primitives of the rejectivist.

The rejectivist takes our understanding of 'not' to consist in the capacity to make or endorse inferences that follow the rules of 'not' introduction and elimination. There is no reason to take the capacity to

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47. See Rumfitt 2001, 791.

be based on or constituted by propositional knowledge whose content is given by these rules.

Let us now apply this model to 'exist'. I will use '!' for positing and '¬' for rejective force. The introduction and elimination rules are straightforward. Let 'T' be shorthand for an arbitrary singular, plural, or mass term. The rules for the predicate 'E' are:

'E' Introduction	'E' Elimination
! T	+ [E (T)]
+ [E (T)]	! T
/T	– [E (T)]
- [(E (T)]	/T

There is some flexibility here: Someone who is sceptical about denial can use '¬' instead of '–'. If we hold that acknowledgement has no opposite, we can make do with the rules that only use '!'. In either case, the rules for 'E' are harmonious. The rules given are those we should expect if we have a sense of rightness of acknowledgement: if we acknowledge *A* and are aware of what we are doing, we are disposed to assent to 'E(a)'.

This move solves the problem raised by Moore. We don't need the concept of positing, etc., to introduce the concept of existence. Our grasp of the concept of existence consists in the disposition to judge that *T* exists if one posits (acknowledges) *T* and to posit (acknowledge) *T* if one judges that *T* exists without any further premise. Someone who masters the concept of existence finds these transitions from positing to judgement primitively compelling and not in need of further justification.

The Neo-Brentanian view of existence consists of the following three core claims:

(NB1) 'exists' is a universal, non-determining first-order predicate.

(NB2) The introduction and elimination rules for 'exists' jointly determine its sense.

(NB2) One grasps the sense of 'exists' if, and only if, one has an inferential capacity that is governed by the introduction and elimination rules for 'exists'.

It is independently plausible that the sense of logical words like 'not' or 'and' is fixed by introduction and elimination rules. We know the sense of logical words if we know how they contribute to the logical potential of sentences that contain them. According to the Neo-Brentanian view, 'exists' is a logical word. This substantiates the frequently made observation that existence is a formal or logical concept.[48]

If 'exists' has the sense described, it is a predicate true of everything. It is therefore unsurprising that an utterance of 'Beans don't exist' has no reading under which it says something true even if there are beans (see section 1).

The Neo-Brentanian view does not explain the sense of 'exists' via the identity-predicate. This prevents the problems that arose for the modified Frege–Russell view. There is no longer any need to implausibly credit someone who believes that Pluto exists with a belief that there is some thing that is the same as Pluto.

6. Resolving Perplexities over the Sense of 'Exists' and its Acquisition

The main problem of the first-order view of existence was that it made it difficult to articulate the sense of 'exists'. There is no higher kind of which it can be a species, and to say that it is the highest kind seems rather unhelpful. Evans's proposal (see section 1) did not face this problem, but did not distinguish the sense of 'exists' from other universal first-order predicates.

48. See Evans 1982, 348.

Yet one needs to distinguish existence from other first-order concepts that subsume everything. How? The Neo-Brentanian view answers this question by characterising the sense of 'exists' in terms of introduction and elimination rules. If we think of knowledge of sense as proposed above, the difference between 'exists' and 'self-identical' immediately becomes clear. Read (2004) gives harmonious rules for the identity predicate:

= Introduction

Fa

.

.

$\underline{F\text{b}\qquad\qquad}$

a = b (Given that 'F' occurs as a predicate variable only in 'Fa')

= Elimination

$\underline{\text{a = b,}\ F\text{a}}$

Fb

The difference between the introduction and elimination rules for '=' and 'E' is obvious. In order to introduce and eliminate '=' and the derived 'x = x', one must be able to entertain predicative thoughts. On the level of sense, '=' and 'x = x' are different from 'E'.

The Neo-Brentanian view also provides a response to worries about the acquisition of the concept of existence. Kriegel asks:

[O]ne immediate worry is that it is unclear on this view how we might *acquire the concept* of existence. The most basic way to acquire the concept of F is by interacting sufficiently with Fs and non-Fs to develop a sensitivity to the difference between them. But if existence were a formal property of everything, this kind of differential interaction with existents and nonexistents would be ruled out. (Kriegel 2015, 84)

The concept of existence, Kriegel continues, cannot be acquired by coming to know an analysis. For being cannot be defined as a species of a more general kind. Saying that it is an innate concept just pushes the problem back. What is the phylogenetic mechanism of concept acquisition? So the universal concept of existence cannot be acquired.

The acquisition worry arises only if we assume that acquiring a concept requires us to be able to distinguish between those things that fall under the concept and those that don't. If this were right, no concept like identity could be acquired. The Neo-Brentanian view yields an immediate response: one acquires some concepts by acquiring the disposition to make certain inferential moves or to find these inferential moves primitively compelling.

7. The Conversational Point of Singular Existence Statements

According to Frege's argument, discussed in section 1, the predication of universal properties is conversationally pointless. Let us briefly rehearse the main points here. When a speaker utters, for example, the sentence 'Napoleon is short', she refers to Napoleon and says something about him that may or may not be the case independently of her act of reference. However, if 'exists' were a first-order predicate like 'is short', merely referring to Napoleon in 'Napoleon exists' would guarantee that 'exists' is true of Napoleon. Hence, predicating 'exists' would be redundant and could never impart new information.

This conclusion can be avoided if one either, like Russell, takes

'Napoleon' to be shorthand for a definite description or, like Meinong, distinguishes between existing and merely subsisting objects. According to Russell's solution, 'Napoleon' is not used to refer to a person; according to Meinong's solution, 'Napoleon' could either refer to an existing or a subsisting object, such that asserting that Napoleon exists would have a conversational point. I will take for granted here that neither proposal is plausible: Russell's view of ordinary proper names is open to serious objections, and while there may be independent reasons to introduce non-existents, the communicative point of 'Napoleon exists' is misdescribed by saying that it qualifies Napoleon as existent. For example, after reading Richard Whately's *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (Philadelphia 1819), Whately's contemporaries might end up in serious doubt regarding whether Napoleon exists and need reassurance in the form of an assertion by a reliable person.[49] When they doubt that Napoleon exists, they don't entertain the possibility that he might merely subsist. They entertain the possibility that there is no such person as Napoleon.

If one rejects Russell's and Meinong's assumptions, the first-order construal of 'exist' seems to make utterances of 'Napoleon exists' conversationally pointless and utterances of 'Napoleon does not exist' manifestly false.[50] But many assertions of existence have a conversational point, and negative existential statements are often true.[51] How can a first-order theorist account for this? Evans (1982, 362) argued that an utterance of a negative existential involves a hidden operator that marks the move from pretending to refer to 'serious' reference and predication. But while one may add 'really' for emphasis, it is implausible that in 'Napoleon exists' or 'Napoleon does not exist', 'Napoleon' is used in a special mode.[52]

49. Kripke 2013, 8, uses this example for a different purpose.

50. See Donnellan 1974, 7, about this problem for the assertion of negative existentials.

51. See Mackie 1976, 245; Sainsbury 2005, 90.

52. See Sainsbury 1999, 176, who responds to Wiggins 1995 on the "speculative mode".

Brentano has an answer to this conundrum that posits neither a hidden operator nor different modes of speaking. It is based on the thesis that 'exists' is not a *real* predicate (see section 4). Again we can expound this idea by relying on our intuitive understanding of 'good'. Katkov, a second-generation Brentanian, stresses that the judgement that *A* is good is not *about A*:

> If we take the standpoint that 'good' is not a real predicate, we immediately realise that this judgement is not about *A*, but about an emotional activity [*Gemütstätigkeit*] directed on *A*. (Katkov 1937, 18; my translation)

The judgement concerns, in the primary sense, an attitude directed on *A*; it is not about *A*. Similarly, uttering 'A exists' is not an assertion about *A* to the effect that it is such-and-such, but about believing in *A* to the effect that one ought to believe in A.[53] When one asserts that Napoleon exists, one does not expect and intend one's audience to arrive at a judgement about Napoleon to the effect that he has a property like being short, but comes to judge that *one ought to have the attitude of belief-in Napoleon*. The speaker primarily intends and expects that her audience will come to the view that one ought to have an attitude whose content can be specified by using 'Napoleon'. The audience is supposed to judge that believing in Napoleon is what one ought to do. The concept that figures in the judgement is a normative first-order concept. If the audience comes to have this attitude and are rational believers, they will come to believe in Napoleon. This is a further effect intended by the speaker. But since this further effect can be achieved without already taking 'Napoleon' to refer, Brentano's account allows assertions of 'Napoleon' to have a point.

Is Brentano's account of the communicative role of existence statements compatible with the view that 'Napoleon' is not an abbreviation for a definite description? For if the speaker's primary intention is achievable without presupposing that the audience already takes

Napoleon to exist, the audience must be able to judge that one ought to believe in Napoleon without already believing that Napoleon exists. This is possible if belief-in is a relation between a thinker and a mode of presentation that may or may not present an object. Belief-in Napoleon can be such an attitude even while the semantic content of 'Napoleon' is exhausted by its referent, if there is one. For, as Millians propose (see section 2), 'Napoleon' may be directly referential, but its use in conversation suggests particular modes of presentation. So, by saying 'Napoleon exists', a speaker can communicate that one ought to believe in Napoleon where the content of the belief-in is fully specified by the sense of a singular term. The relevant content can vary from speaker to speaker.

However, while Brentano's account of the communicative point of existence statements is compatible with the direct-reference view, combining the two will lead to unwanted results. According to the direct reference view, an utterance of 'Vulcan does not exist' literally says nothing, because it does not express a proposition.

Now descriptive views of proper names that take the semantic content of a proper name to be the sense of a definite description are implausible for well-known reasons. But one can reject such views without *eo ipso* accepting the direct reference view that leads to the problem above. For example, Sainsbury (2005, 73f) takes the sense of a proper name 'N' to be given by an axiom of an interpretative theory of truth:

$$(\forall x) \text{ ('N' refers to x if, and only if, } x = N)$$

The theory does not aim to specify the sense of a proper name, whether empty or not, in descriptive terms. Since the background logic of the theory is a free negative logic, the axiom is true even if 'N' is empty. This theory allows 'Vulcan does not exist' to say something that is literally true. Brentano's view can then be used to explain the communicative point of these utterances.[54]

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53. See Brentano 1973, 90 [144]; see also Brentano 1880ff, 90.

54. Sainsbury (2005, 201–2) is sympathetic to the second-order view of existence and suggests an utterance of 'N exists' to express a statement that can be

On the Neo-Brentanian view, the normative import of 'exists' is captured by the elimination rules for this expression. If one is disposed to assert 'A exists', one ought to believe in *A* on pain of irrationality. Hence, the Neo-Brentanian can help herself to Brentano's response to the communicative conundrum. Someone who asserts that Napoleon exists does not want to predicate a property of Napoleon, but intends his audience to arrive at belief-in Napoleon by applying the elimination rule for 'exists'.

To conclude: Brentano's view of the concept of existence is flawed. But it contains an insight that can be developed into the Neo-Brentanian view. This view is defensible and constitutes an alternative to the Frege–Russell view.[55]

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regimented as '¬ (∃x) (x = N)'. The semantics for names allows predicates like 'x = N' to be meaningful even if 'N' is empty. For reasons given in the introduction, I take this option to be implausible.

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