
Contemporary philosophy is in a rut, according to Parsons, and it is one which stems from the (post-1905) work of Bertrand Russell. The main characteristic of this "Russellian rut" (p. 1) is strict adherence to the thesis that *being, or being something*, amounts to *being something which exists* — or equivalently that 'there are' is to be equated with 'there exists' (p. 6). This view is now so well entrenched, according to Parsons, that it is a main-stay of what he also calls the orthodox tradition.

The orthodox view is in a rut, Parsons graphically maintains, "because it's a view in which most of us are so entrenched that it's hard to see over the edges" (p. 1). Naturally, if we want "to look over the edge and see how things might be different" (p. 8), as any objective seeker of truth would, then "we need to encounter an actual theory about nonexistent objects" (*ibid.*). It is precisely the construction and presentation of such a theory which is Parsons' concern in his recent book *Nonexistent Objects*.

1. MEINONGIAN OBJECTS VERSUS RUSSELLIAN INDIVIDUALS

Parsons' approach to the topic of nonexistence is through Meinong's theory and notion of a "concrete" object, i.e., the notion of a non-ideal or non-abstract Meinongian object. (Concreteness in this context, it should be noted, does not imply existence — or even possible existence, according to Parsons and Meinong.) Curiously, Parsons gives no recognition or other mention to Russell's own earlier (pre-1905) theory in [7], which is also committed to nonexistent concrete objects — though not at all in the same sense of 'object' as intended by Meinong, and now by Parsons as well. This is surprising because one of Parsons' goals in this text is to make the topic of non-existence understandable to those who approach it from within the orthodox tradition, i.e., the tradition which stems from Russell after 1905.
With that goal in mind, however, would not the best approach be to develop Russell's own earlier theory rather than Meinong's — i.e., the theory from which the orthodox tradition arose once non-existing concrete individuals were excluded? And in fact has not the development of several variants of such a Russellian theory already been carried out (even if not intentionally as a reconstruction of Russell's early views) in the form of higher order intensional or modal logics based on Russellian individuals which need not exist in the actual world but which do exist in some possible world or other? Indeed, in this regard might not the essential difference between a pre-1905 and a post-1905 Russellian theory be described in terms of the current actualism-possibilism debate, i.e., the debate whether quantification over concrete individuals should be with respect to all possible concrete individuals or only with respect to those existing in the world in question? (Russell himself eschewed talk about possible worlds, to be sure; but he would have allowed, at least in [7], some such equivalent talk about maximal classes of propositions having possible individuals as constituents, i.e., propositions which, though not all true, could have all been true.)

Now we do not object to Parsons' choice of Meinong's theory here, nor for that matter to his elegant reconstruction and presentation of that theory. We do think, however, that a more balanced recognition of Russell's overall view is called for and that perhaps the best way to make the Meinongian notion of a concrete object understandable to the orthodox tradition is to compare it with the general Russellian notion of a concrete individual, i.e., the Russellian notion of an individual which can exist but which might in fact not exist. Indeed, on the basis of the analysis and comparison we shall give here, it is our position that the Meinongian notion of a concrete object, at least as reconstructed by Parsons, is parasitic upon, though in a beneficent way, the Russellian notion of a concrete individual, existent or otherwise.

In the way of a succinct summary and brief reminder of Russell's early view, the following quote is probably the most appropriate: “there is only one kind of being, namely being simpliciter, and only one kind of existence, namely existence simpliciter” ([7], p. 449). Explained more fully, “being is that which belongs to every conceivable term, to every possible object of thought — in short to every thing that can possibly occur in any proposition, true or false, and to all such propositions themselves” (ibid.) (Russell, it