NONEXISTENCE
A comparative-historical analysis of the problem of nonbeing

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Abstract

The philosophical issue of nonbeing has stayed alive down the centuries. Ancient Greek philosophers used to treat nonbeing as chimera. The chimera is philosophers' choice of example when they need a composite nonexistent mythological animal (Iliad 6.181). As a matter of fact, Aristotle prefers the goat-stag (tragelaphos) and the centaur. In the Hellenistic period, the centaur, the scylla and the chimera are the standard examples. In medieval texts the chimera is more popular than any of the other composite animals. For centuries philosophers have used nonbeing and chimera as experimental BEINGS, keeping them on a minimum of being. In a way nonbeing and chimera owe them their "life". Do Centaur, Goat-Stag and Pegasus, who are nonbeing's kin, exist? They do certainly have a place in man's memory. The first philosophical analysis of "nonbeing" found in the treatise On What is Not, was written by Gorgias the sophist in the 5th c. BC. Gorgias' treatise is the origin and the beginning of the philosophical debate upon nonbeing, which continues to take place up to the present day. Also, what is the analysis of the problem of nonbeing in contemporary philosophers, that is, Brentano, Meinong, Russell, and Quine? In this paper I analyse comparatively the ancient and contemporary treatment of (the problem of) nonbeing; the problem whether there are nonexistent objects. This paper in general belongs to the species of loosely ruminative and comparative-historical. My primary concern is to understand the (differences and similarities of the) ancient and contemporary analysis of nonbeing and nonexistence. The new argument I propound is that among other elements what connects the ancient analysis of nonbeing with the contemporary one is psychologism which forced Plato and Meinong as well to find a way out of it in their attempt to distinguish (non)being from (non)existence.

Keywords: nonexistence, nonbeing, nonexistent, chimera, Gorgias, Plato, Aristotle, Brentano, Meinong, Russell, Quine.

This research intends to show how ancient Greek psychologism made the sophists to conflate *being* and *existence*. If *nonexistent* objects are nothing but mental contents, how can we distinguish them from existent ones? There is no way to answer this question within a purely psychological framework. As will be shown in chapter 1 and 2, this psychologism made Gorgias the sophist to confuse *nonbeing* with *nonexistence* because both of them are nothing more but imagery. This psychologism forced Plato and Meinong to find a way out of it in their attempt to distinguish (*non*)*being* from (*non*)*existence.*

1. The ancient Greek controversy about nonbeing

Ancient Greek philosophers exhibit an interest in *nonbeing*. Parmenides from Elea (5th c B.C) insisted that *what-is-not* (me on) cannot be and thus cannot be investigated (Denyer, 1993, 24-26). He maintained that attempts to show that something is not would fail (Diels-Kranz, fr. 28B6.9; 2.7-8). His disciple, Melissus, asserted that *what-is-not* is nothing but empty or void. The Atomists reduced *nonbeing* to void. Calling void "nonbeing" is clearly provocative, as Parmenides had banned *what-is-not (me on)* and Melissus had used the notion of void (kenon). The Atomists, Leukippus and Democritus did not agree with the Eleatic claim that void does not exist. The philosophical debate of the Eleatics and the Atomists upon (the existence of) *nonbeing* is verified by Aristotle's *De Generatione* (324b32-325a12; 325a23-32) according to which the Eleatics and the Atomists had, if not contradictory, at least opposite arguments about being (on) and *nonbeing (me on)* (Bekker, 1969; Furley, 1993; Curd, 1998, 181-2; Pyle, 1997, 41-52).

According to Mourelatos (1970, 88), the eleatic problem of *nonbeing* has nothing to do with meaningfulness of references to *nonexistent* entities (chimeras, pegasus, hippogriffs). On Furley's account, "what is not - the void is still only the negation of whatever properties belong to what is" (Furley, 1987, 122). That is, void (kenon) is not *nonexistent*; but while it exists, it has no positive properties and can be known only indirectly, by negating the properties of what-is. According to Curd, there are difficulties in Furley's further account of void. In claiming that void is to be characterized completely negatively—as "the negation of whatever properties belong to what is", Furley saddles the Atomists with exactly what he says they want to avoid: the claim that *what-is-not* is neither knowable nor sayable. For if void is just the negation of everything that is, then we are immediately faced with the problem of how to know what is nothing at all. If no properties or nature can be attributed to void, it is difficult to grasp what it is about void that makes it knowable and sayable. Because it lacks a nature, it just is unknowable and unsayable (Curd, 1998, 194). On the contrary, Sedley's account of void treats it as a material element in the Atomist system (Sedley, 1982, 175-179; Curd, 1998, 203-4).

But the question is "who can prove to us that the ancient Greek philosophical debate about *nonbeing* was historically real?". Both Gorgias and Aristotle refer to the contradicting views of some presocratic philosophers who argue with each other about one and the same thing, i.e. the "being" (*on*). For Aristotle, "we cannot be right in holding the contradicting views [sc. of Heracleitus and Anaxagoras]. If we could, it would follow that contraries are predicable of the same subject [sc. which is not the case]" (Bekker=*Metaph.* K 1063b24-26). Plato, also, in the *Sophist* 245a4-6, refers to the presocratic controversy between the monists and the pluralists. In the same way, Gorgias says in his rhetorical work *Palamedes* that we should not believe those people who contradict themselves (*Pal.* 25). Similarly, Gorgias says in his rhetorical work *Helen* that the presocratic philosophers argue with each other (*Helen* 13-14). Obviously, the "quarrelling" philosophers at issue (in Gorgias' time) are the Atomists and the Eleatics. As far as we can tell from Gorgias' treatise *On What is Not*, the Gorgianic arguments and counter arguments refer to the monistic Eleatics who had engaged in a controversy with the pluralistic Atomists about being and *nonbeing* or void (Bakaoukas,1995 & 2001, 2012).

Presocratic philosophy is a philosophical controversy between the monists and the pluralists about *being* and *nonbeing*; a fact that is confirmed by the late presocratic philosophy in which the Atomists replied to the Eleatics (Furley, 1993). The Atomists' reply to the Eleatics is supported not only by Aristotle but by Gorgias' treatise *On What is not* as well. Aristotle confirms the Atomists' reply to the Eleatics in *De Gen. et Corr.* A8, 323a23-32. He emphasizes four characteristics of the philosophical controversy between the monists and the pluralists: void (kenon) or *nonbeing (me on)*, plurality, becoming and local movement. The same four characteristics of the controversy between the monists and the pluralists are confirmed by Gorgias, who in his treatise *On What is Not* refers to them as follows: a). Being versus *nonbeing,* b). Generated versus ungenerated being, c). One being versus many beings, and d). Not moving and indivisibe being versus moving and divisible being. For Plato as well, the Eleatics (242d5) say that being is one and indivisible and not moving (242e1, 245a8, 249d3). On the other hand, pluralists say that being is many, divisible and moving (242e1, 245a1, 249d3). Gorgias, Plato, Aristotle (and partly the extant presocratic fragments) agree that there was a presocratic philosophical controversy about *being* and *nonbeing* between the pluralists (Ionian philosophers, Pythagoreans, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Atomists) and the monists (Xenophanes, Eleatics) [Mourelatos, 1970; Furley, 1993; Barnes, 1993; Curd, 1998; Bakaoukas, 1995; 2001a-b ; 2002a-b-c, 2012].

In the 5th century B.C. Gorgias claims that "*nonbeing* exists". He seems to say that my claim to *nonbeing* is as good as anyone's because *nonbeing* may be thought about *(phroneisthai).* But, as Gorgias says, being thought about is no criterion of being. Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Malhetnaticos* 7.80 [henceforth DK], mentions the chimera in a paraphrase of Gorgias' treatise *On What is Not*. He also mentions the Scylla and

"chariots running over the sea". The flying chariots occur in another source for that work, *viz.* Ps.-Aristotle's *De Melisso, Xenophane, Gorgia* (979a-980b in Bekker's edition of Aristotle; Cassin, 1980, 610-643= Bekker 980a; henceforth MXG). According to Newiger (1973: 144 ff), the only genuine Gorgianic examples of "unrealities that can be thought" are 'the chariots running over the sea', for 'Scylla', 'Chimaera' and 'the flying man' are sceptical examples of Sextus who misunderstood the MXG Gorgianic text and treated it in a sceptical way. Nevertheless, as Guthrie points out (1975: 706), we should not take this assumption for granted.

Recent interpretations of Gorgias' texts treat Gorgianic arguments as serious and valid. For example Schiappa and Hoffman say that «we ought to treat the *On What is Not* as a work of careful argumentation and not of inconsiderable philosophical significance» (Schiappa and Hoffman, 1994: 160). According to them, Gorgias refutes successfully the Parmenidean premise «if (A) can mention (O) or can think of (O), then (O) exists». Along this line of reasoning, Gorgias refutes the claim that what is thought of is necessarily existent (DK B3 79); that is he argues «against the existence of thought-about-objects» using a *reductio ad absurdum*. Namely, the Parmenidean premise «if (A) can mention (O) or can think of (O), then (O) exists» is refuted, for we can think of *nonexistent* things like chimera or chariots running over the sea. Hence, there is no «identity relationship between things-thought-about and things-that-are» (Schiappa and Hoffman, 1994: 157-8). For Barnes as well (1993: 171-175) Parmenides' premise is fallacious, «for Scylla and Chimera, and many non-entities are, as the Sophist Gorgias says, thought upon» (Bakaoukas, 2002b-c, 2012).

Gorgias vs Plato : the Sophistic Theory Of Nonbeing as Imagery

As has already been said, the origin of the philosophical debate upon *nonbeing* is the first treatise on *nonbeing* written by Gorgias the Sophist in the 5th c. BC. As Guthrie (1975: 708), Newiger (1973: 177-8, 181-188) and Bakaoukas (2012) point out, Gorgias was the target of Plato's *Sophist* (Crivelli, 1996; Stumpo, 1931; Rensi, 1933; Rezzani, 1959; Sciacca,1967; Wesoly,1983). In this respect, the philosophical implications of Gorgias' views at issue are very important for future studies, for in order to compare Plato's and Gorgias' arguments we should first examine Gorgias' own views. This approach is corroborated by many parallels between Plato's *Sophist* and Gorgias' works (Leszl, 1985; Gigon, 1985; Kraus,1990; Calogero, 1972, 269 ff, 311ff; Mansfeld, 1985: 258, n. 48). That is, Gorgias' example of "thinking of a *nonexistent* entity" is "a flying man" (DK B3 79) which is reminiscent of Platos' example of "flying men" (*Theaetetus* 158b3-4; Sophist 263a8). Also Gorgias' treatment of the contradictory and contrary properties (DK B3 67, 80) is reminiscent of the sophistic argument in the *Sophist* (240b5, 240d6-8, 257b3-4, 258e6). Furthemore, Gorgias' arguments "had posed formidable challenges to Eleatic philosophy, and (...) [Plato's] quest for forms was

particularly vulnerable to the same arguments, because its ontological assumptions were similar to those of the Eleatics" (Hays, 1990: 336; Bakaoukas, 2002b-c, 2012).

Gorgias' theory of *nonbeing* is criticized by Plato in the *Sophist*. In order to prepare for this difficult task, Plato is searching for a definition of the sophist, i.e. for Gorgias himself, who is called by Plato "stranger" (xenos) [216a-221c]. In the first place, the sophist is an angler-like hunter of rich kids, a sham virtue salesman, and a professional athlete in contests of words (221c-226a). Secondly, he is shown to be a philosopher-like cleanser of souls, who refutes others with a view to removing opinions that impede learning (226a-231b). Also, the sophist is a debater. Debating turns out to be a kind of making: the art of making spoken images of all things. This art of imitation has two forms: likeness-making and apparition-making, the making of true and of distorted images (illusions) (231b-236d). The existence of distorted images presupposes that *nonbeing* is. But, as Parmenides says, *nonbeing* appears to be unutterable, indeed, unthinkable. If distorted images (illusions) are possible, then they represent *nonbeing* and thus *nonbeing* is (236d-242b). In this way, the search for *nonbeing* becomes the search of distorted images (*eikones*) [Benardete, 1984; Bakaoukas, 2002b-c, 2012].

Then Plato makes the stranger begin his inquiry into *nonbeing* with a critical examination of claims men have made about Being. The sophist as a debater is dealing with a presocratic debate upon Being. The stranger then turns his dialectical powers against the giants who claim that Being is body, many and in motion and the gods who support the Parmenidean claim that Being is one, invisible and in rest (242b-252c). The fact that Plato makes the sophist examine this presocratic debate affirms the assumption that Plato criticizes Gorgias' treatise *On What is Not*, since Gorgias in his treatise *On What is Not* examines this very philosophical debate as follows:

"he (sc Gorgias) collects the statements of others, who in speaking about what is seem to assert contrary opinions (some trying to prove that *what is* is one and not many, others that it is many and not one; and some that existents are ungenerated, others that they have come to be), and he argues against both sides"

Gorgias' *On What is not,* MXG Ps Aristotle 979a14-18) [2nd cent. BC paraphrase]

But how does Gorgias connect *nonbeing* with this philosophical debate? For Gorgias *nonbeing* is what is argued to be "one and many", "generated and ungenerated" at the same time by the contradicting philosophical theories. That is, Gorgias' statement "*nonbeing* exists" refers not only to a fictional entity like chimera, but also to an image or imagery created by contradictions, conflicting appearances, and theories. That is why he says that "even the man himself does not seem to perceive similar things at the same time, so that one man can hardly perceive the same things as another" ("me homoion phainesthai autois" MXG 980 b9-19; Bakaoukas, 1995; 2001; 2002b; 2008, 2012).

The stranger's critique of the aforementioned philosophical debate serves as the introduction to the Platonic solution to the problem of *nonbeing*. Plato does not agree with the sophist's view that *nonbeing* is an image. For Plato the Other is *nonbeing* by another name, and it turns out to be the case, not only that the Other is, but that Being and beings participate in it and hence in some sense are not (252c-259d). What remains to be shown is that these conditions obtain in the case of speech, the medium of sophistry. Plato examines the structure of sentences as well as the relation of speech to opinion, thought and appearance in order to determine how *nonbeing* makes its appearance within the realm of human speech and thinking (259d-264b). Then he reduces sophistry to the class of apparition-making, i.e., the making of images that do not preserve the true proportions of their originals. The sophist is shown, among other things, to be a knowing-imitator of what he does not know (264c-268d). He is among those who mime things or paint them, or who make images in words (Cobb, 1990; Brann, 1995, 2-3; Bakaoukas, 2002b-c).

But according to Parmenides, images have no place in the world. For they are curious hybrids. Being and *nonbeing* are intertwined in an image because in its very being an image is genuinely a likeness. It certainly is an image, but precisely as an image it is not the original. But there are images and images. Some preserve the proportions of the original and are truthful likenesses; others are distortions-phantasms and apparitions of the original. The sophist is naturally identified as a producer of such apparitions. He gives "phantastic" accounts and induces, for profit, deceptions and false opinions in the soul. To hold a false opinion is to think that *what is not*, is and *what is*, is not; to speak falsely is to say that what is not the case is the case and the reverse. The *Sophist* is a maker of false verbal images. He cunningly appeals to the great Parmenides himself, who had denied that exactly this was possible: to think and to say *what is not* (Brann, 1995, 2-3; White, 1993; Bakaoukas, 2002b-c, 2012). As has been shown, for Gorgias *nonbeing* is just a mental image. But if being and *nonbeing* are intertwined in an image, what, then, does not exist? There is no way to answer this question within a purely psychological framework, which made Gorgias the sophist to treat *nonbeing* and *nonexistence* as psychological imagery. In other words, it would be difficult for Gorgias to distinguish the "inexistence" from the "being" of "round squares " and chimeras (see also ch.2 and conclusion; Lindenfeld, 1980: 55, 121).

The platonic theory of nonbeing as Otherness

Plato, in the *Sophist*, attempts to overcome the aforementioned Gorgias' psychologism. He wants *nonbeing* to be identified with an objective concept or idea not a subjective image (Bakaoukas, 2012). In order to do this, *nonbeing* is identified with falsehood, and thus he tries to explain how falsehood is possible. As Denyer says, we need not rely on Plato alone to prove that ancient Greeks felt inclined to bizarre views that ruled out all possibility of falsehood. For example Parmenides identifies "the thing

which is not" as the content of falsehood and error, with nothing or non-entity [frag. 8.10; cf. 6. 2] (Kahn, 1982, 13). Gorgias' disciple, Isocrates, *Helen* 1, says that: "some people have grown old maintaining that it is impossible to speak falsehoods, to speak in contradiction of someone, and to entertain two contradicting views about the same subject matters" (Denyer, 1993, 24). Not to mention Gorgias himself who claims that "a person who upholds one and the same thesis about the same things before the same audience does not deserve our trust if thereby he contradicts himself" (*Palamedes* 25)..

Plato admits that if stating a falsehood requires there to exist something which does not exist, then false statements could not be made. But Plato does not agree that we cannot state falsehood. Instead he proceeds to show that stating a falsehood requires no such thing (Denyer, 1993, 148). The sophist as a kind can be grasped only if falsity is possible. But the False in things and in words, that which makes them pseudo-things and pseudo-accounts (pseudos being the Greek word for "falsehood"), is shot through with *nonbeing*. Just as imitations are not what they seem to be, so false sentences say what is not the case. Now if *nonbeing* is unthinkable and unutterable, as Parmenides asserted, then we may conclude that all speech must be granted to be true for those who utter it. Perfect relativity reigns. This is exactly what Gorgias purports to be the case as follows: "All subjects of thought must exist and Nonbeing, since it does not exist, could not be thought of. But if this is so, no one, he says, could say anything false, not even if he said that chariots compete in the sea. For everything would be in the same category" (*On What is not* MXG 980a9-12; Bakaoukas, 2002b-c, 2012).

Nonbeing has to be given a meaning; it has to be placed among the articulable kinds. When *nonbeing* is specified by Plato as otherness, it becomes a powerful principle for regulating the slippery relativity that is the sophist's refuge. *Nonbeing* interpreted as the Other thus ceases to be mere nothingness and becomes instead the source of articulated diversity in things and in thought. However, an image or an imitation, because it has a share in *nonbeing*, is not merely other than its original but also less. It is less in genuineness and may even fall further into falsity. The sophist can no longer claim that there is no intelligibile discrimination between true and false (Brann, 1995, 10-12; Cornford, 1970). To conclude, according to Plato, the stranger, viz.Gorgias, treats *nonbeing* as imagery. But for Plato an image or an imitation, because it has a share in *nonbeing*, may be a distorted image and therefore being less than the original may even fall further into falsity (Bakaoukas, 2002b-c, 2012).

In the 4th. century B.C., philosophers, thanks to Plato and Parmenides, throw all *nonbeing* into the waste-bin with the remark that "it shall never be established that things which are not, are" (Diels-Kranz, Parmenides fr. 7). In the *Republic* 478b5 Plato says that when one has a belief, one thinks things, but different things from those that one thinks when one has knowledge. What one thinks when one has knowledge is "what is". That is to say, the things which one thinks when one has belief fall under

the heading "what is not". In his argument that "all judgements are true" and in the relevant argument "from knowing and not-knowing", Plato says that "judging a falsehood is the same as touching a unicorn; for judging what is false means judging what is not, which is not judging at all" (J. MacDowell=*Theaetetus* 187d1, 187d-189b; Denyer, 1993, 52-53, 110).

Aristotle stated as a simple matter of fact that people do say "the *nonbeing is nonbeing*" (*Metaphysics 4. 2* 1003b10). But contrary to Gorgias he would not accept an unqualified 'the *nonbeing* is'. Thus he said that it does not follow that the *nonbeing* is because it is an-object-of-belief (*doksaston*= 'opinable'), "for it is not the same to be something and to be *sitmpliciter* though the similarity of expression makes it seem so" (*Sophistici Elenchi* 5 167a1-6). He also explained that "there is belief about *the nonbeing* not because it is but because it is not" (*De interpretatione* 11 21a32-33). Whichever interpretation is correct, he wanted to say that the very point of saying 'the *nonbeing* is opinable' is to make it clear that one will never say 'the *nonbeing* is'. The fact that "the *nonbeing* is opinable" does not imply that "the *nonbeing* is" (*De interpretatione* 11 21a25 sqq). Other remarks of Aristotle's include, "Not-man is not a name (…) Let us call it an infinite name, since it holds indifferently of anything, whether being or *nonbeing*" (*De interpretatione 2* 16a30-33 and 3 16bl2-15). Also, he said that "of that which is not, no one knows what it is, only what the account or the name signifies when I say 'goat-stag', but it is impossible to know what a goat-stag is" (*Analytica Posteriora* 2.7 92b5-8; Ebbesen, 1986). Aristotle prefers to analyse *nonbeing* in physical terms. In his *Physics* (192a3-6, 194b9, 225a12-20) and *Metaphysics* (1036a8, 1050a7-15, 1017a5, 1044a18, 1049a2), Aristotle identifies *nonbeing* with the indefinable "matter" (hyle), which first lacks any specific characteristic and finally/potentially becomes a definable *being* by acquiring a specific form (eidos, species) [Scaltsas, 1994; Curd, 1998, 80n.39; Anton, 2001,150-2]. Only then "being" starts to acquire material "existence" (hyparxis). The lack of this distinction made Gorgias the Sophist in general to conflate *nonbeing* and *nonexistence* because both of them are nothing more but psychological imagery (see also conclusion). That is why for Aristotle "hyparchein" denotes not just "to be", but "to exist really" as opposed to "appears to be" (phainomai) (*Metaphys.* 8.2.,3), or "the subsistence of qualities in a subject" (*Metaphys.* 4.30.,1).

The post-aristotelian philosophy of *nonbeing* continue the same philosophical debate. The Epicurean Lucretius gives chimeras a physical existence, thinking that the atomic pictures thrown off by the animals of which chimeras are composed may get mixed up so as to produce monstrous pictures which men may perceive. But he will not give us physical existence as source of those pictures. The freedom of atoms to combine is not so great; he holds that beings consisting of parts belonging to different natural species can arise (Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.700-717, 4.722-748, 5.878-924). In case *nonbeings* do not have a physical or perceptual origin, they may have a conceptual

existence. That is, they are concepts which are formed either directly on the basis of things met with in nature, or through creative work (Ebbesen, 1986).

2. The contemporary philosophical debate upon nonbeing

As has been shown, *nonbeing* for the Greeks was strictly about metaphysics. *Nonbeing* for the contemporaries is more about speech act theory, ontological status, and epistemology. Brentano, Meinong, Russell, Wittgenstein, Chisholm, Parsons, Gale, Munit, Zalta, Evans, Lewis, Quine, Kripke, Williams and Crittenden are the most important contemporary philosophers who continue to consider the ancient and medieval problem of *nonbeing* from a phenomenological and analytical point of view.

Franz Brentano (1838-1917) and his pupils Alexius Meinong (1853-1921) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) used the phenomenological method to deal with the problem of *nonbeing*. This method which consists mainly in the analysis of the essence of the given, the phenomenon, became the most widespread philosophical analysis, along with the analytical mathematical method, after the Second World War. The most important difference between phenomenology and mathematical logic lies in the fact that the former dispenses with deduction altogether, is very litle concerned with language, and does not analyze empirical fact but essences. What is called "analysis" by G. E. Moore (b. 1873) is rather closely related to the phenomenological method. Meinong may also have influenced Bertrand Russell (b. 1873) in some ways, while the later mathematical logic owes a good deal to Husserl (Bochesnki, 1961: 17-18).

One fundamental feature of phenomenology needs to be underlined. It is a method of describing *phenomena*, that is, anything that is immediately given. Its object is essence (Wesen), that is, the ideal intelligible content of phenomena, which is seized immediately in an act of vision – in the intuition of essence. In this sense, *nonbeing* is a mental content (Bochesnki, 1961: 129-130). On this account Meinong's teacher Brentano did not accept the existence of unreal objects. For Brentano every mental phenomenon and every sentence about *nonexistent* objects are directed to a real thing (Brentano, 1874, 163). Meinong, on the other hand, holds that the fact that we think about both real and unreal things shows that "the totality of what exists is small in comparison with the totality of objects" (Meinong, 1960, 6). Therefore, according to Meinong, every grammatically acceptable definite or indefinite description (even the "round square") designates an object (Meinong, 1960, 82).

Given the peculiarities of the entities (as "round square") Meinong accepts Russell's reaction was forthcoming. Following Brentano, Russell proposed his deflationary theory of descriptions according to which for every assertion referring to a *nonexistent* entity a paraphrase can be found not containing such a reference (Parsons, 1980; Crittenden, 1991, 2-21). Russell formulated the theory of descriptions in order to avoid Meinong's assumption of the subsistence of "round squares", for on this interpretation

"the round square does not exist" means exactly the same as "there is no object which is both square and circle". This interpretation reminds us of Gorgias' statement "*nonbeing* exists", which, as has been shown in chapter 1, refers to an image or imagery created by contradictions, conflicting appearances, and theories. Existence is to be asserted only of descriptions. "The object which has the property x exists" implies that there is one and only one such object, and if we attribute to it a further property, it must exist. In other words, we should distinguish existence from being. While I can speak of "round squares" and know they are impossible objects, they have being but not existence (Russell, 1956; Bochenski, 1961, 257-8). Mutatis mutandis, the distinction of existence from being was anticipated by Aristotle who identifies *nonbeing* with the indefinable "matter" (hyle), which first lacks any specific characteristic and finally/potentially becomes a definable *being* by acquiring a specific form (eidos, species). Only then being starts to acquire existence (hyparxis) [Scaltsas, 1994; Curd, 1998, 80n.39; Anton, 2001,150-2; op.cit., ch.1].

Russell in one of his greatest works, a short article in Mind, entitled "On Denoting", argued that certain phrases which commonly occur in ordinary language such as the Present King of France [a *non-existent* object], have no counterparts in a well-constructed logical language, and that therefore we have no business inferring that there are objects analogous to them. He called them "denoting phrases" (Russell, 1956: 41). His Platonic argument for the being of *nonexistent* objects had been that as long as we can make true statements about them (for example, "The Present King of France does not exist"), the parts of our statements must correspond to something in the world. If the world was analogous to language, no other result seemed possible. Russel attacked Meinong for not going far enough in this direction, but later he retreated from a belief in *nonexistence* (Russell, 1973: 63).

Russell's polemic against Meinong needs closer examination. He claimed that Meinong's notion of *nonexistent* objects led to violations of the basic logical law of contradiction; that is, one must admit that there are objects which do not exist (Russell, 1956: 45). In the article "Uber Gegenstandstheorie" (1899: 490), Meinong raised the paradox that there are objects which do not exist. He resolved it, however, by claiming that the "so-being" of the *nonexistent* objects is independent of existence.; that is, any object may have definite qualities even if it does not exist, and that this common occurrence in our thinking and speaking is obscured only by our "prejudice in favor of reality". Thus to say that there are objects which do not exist is to use the terms "are" and "exist" in two different senses. This position was different from the one attributed to Meinong by analytic philosophers, which is simply that Meinong accepted the paradox and carelessly posited a whole impausible realm of fictitious objects (Lindenfeld, 1980: 201-2).

On this account what relates to our topic clearly and needs further analysis is Brentano's "reism" and his early career theory of intentionality, that is, his theory of mental contents having status; a theory that inspired most of his students such as Marty, Stumpf, Meinong, Twardowski, Husserl as well as Chisholm, and others. When arguing for reism Brentano was conscious of some related views of Leibniz. He even referred to Leibniz's statements (in *Nouevau essais*) about the dangers caused by using abstract words. Brentano's reism was an effect of his departure from Aristotelian ontology. Brentano's first metaphysics has a rich list of categories, including substances, modifications, circumstance, etc. (Brentano, 1933) Later, he divided being into things and *irrealia*, and the latter into immanent objects, contents, relations and so-called *collectiva*. All items belonging to *irrealia* had the status of *entia rationis* (beings in the mind or thought objects). Ultimately, Brentano rejected all *entia rationis*, that is, intentional objects, immanent objects, states of affairs, existence and non-existence, modalities, relations, probabilities, universals, Gestalten, time and space, Aristotelian forms, contents of judgements, etc.. His final ontological theory was based on the equality: being = *entia realia* = things (Brentano, 1930 & 1954). According to Brentano's later philosophy, things are concrete (particular) entities. They are fully determined in their properties and are extended in time. Brentano distinguished two kinds of things, namely bodies (temporal and spatially extended) and souls (only temporal) [Woleński, *2012*].

In this sense, objects which have intentional inexistence are neither physical bodies nor mental entities in the sense of being ideas contained inside the mind. Rather, they are another type of being, independednt of the mind but produced by it whenever an act was directed to it. Thus Pegasus would have intentional inexistence insofar anyone thought about it for a given stttetch of time (Chisholm, 1968: 8). In order to determine this, Meinong argued it is necessary to take into account the feelings aroused by the *nonexistence* of the object as well as its existence. In Meinong's own definition, "The amount of value depends not only on the intensity with which the existence of the object is valuated, but also on the intensity with which its nonexistence is held to be not valuable" (Meinong, 1895, 337). But if such *nonexistent* objects are nothing but mental contents, how can we distinguish them from existent ones? For surely the mental content exists as a state of mind. What, then, does not exist? There is no way to answer this question within a purely psychological framework, which, as shown in chapter 1, made Gorgias the Sophist to confuse *nonbeing* with *nonexistence* because both of them are nothing more but imagery (see also conclusion; Lindenfeld, 1980: 55, 121).

Meinong managed to overcome this psychologism. The solution came from a book of another Brentano's student, Kasimir Twardowski, entitled "On the Theory of Content and Object of a Presentation" (Vienna,1894, 30-31). Twardowski's argument was that to describe an intentional mental state, one must posit not only a mental act and content, but also a non-mental object. These objects differ from contents as follows:

The predicate "existence" and "nonexistence" apply to this independent object, and not to the content, thus a nonexistent wine would be an object. The object "box" has the property of being cubical, but the content which represents that object in the mind is not. Thus ideas resemble reality in the sense that they merely serve as signs of reality. In "Objects of a Higher Order" (1899: 381) Meinong adopts this point, which enabled him to find a new place for relations, such as "similarity". In his own words, "Think of the similarity of a copy to its original: both pictures exist … The similarity does not exist, but it obtains (besteht)" (Meinong, 1899: 395). This theory proved Meinong's common-sense realism. Physical objects now actually existed. As for the nonexistent "golden mountains", they "pseudo-exist", that is, they exist only in the imagination, as a mental content (Meinong, 1899: 373; Lindenfeld, 1980: 121-3).

To ask about the being of the golden mountain or the ontological status of Hamlet is to ask a wrong question: such things no more have being than the oxygen in water has wetness. Meinong says of such objects that they are "indifferent to being" (ausserseinend) (Meinong, 1899: 490). On this account, Crittenden identifies *nonbeings* with unreal fictional objects as embedded in literary discourse. These conceptual or "intentional" objects are accepted by our culture in the sense that they are recognized as specialized types of objects reflecting particular interests and associated with appropriate vocabulary and practices. There are such objects solely in the sense they have been written about and thereby become available for thought or reference. Crittenden calls them "mere referents" or "conceptual" or "grammatical" objects (Crittenden, 1991, 59-60, 65-66). So there is a firm distinction between what exists and what is fictional. David Lewis offers a view whereby "reasoning about truth in fiction is very like counterfactual reasoning", which considers *nonbeings* and creatures in fiction real ones subject to considerations of genuine possibility and not unreal, created grammatical objects that could not appear in the real world or in some possible world (Crittenden, 1991, 132 n.2; Lewis, 1983, 269ff). For Parsons *nonbeings* as fictional characters are logically incomplete in the sense that these characters lack the completeness of real features. That is, they are only what they are stated or immediately implied to be, which leaves them, logically speaking, quite gappy (Crittenden, 1991, 138-9; Parsons, 1980, 183-4). Kripke has similar views, since he treats fictions as *nonexistent*. He says that there are no Sherlock Holmes, because "one cannot say of any possible person that he *would have been* Sherlock Holmes, had he existed". Unicorn and chimera myths do not specify their internal structure, and internal structure is what identifies members of a species (Kripke, 1980, 156-8)

According to Quine's logical interpretation of *nonbeing*, this is the old Platonic riddle of *nonbeing. Nonbeing* must in some sense be. Otherwise what is it that there is not? If pegasus *were not,* we should not be talking about anything. So, if Pegasus is, what is it?. It may be an idea in men's mind, which is the mental Pegasus-idea. Nevertheless, Pegasus-idea is not physical like a real horse. Thus, we may maintain

that Pegasus has his being as actualized possible. If Pegasus existed he would be in space and time, whereas, let us say, the existence of the cube root of 27 is not a spatio-temporal kind of thing. Pegasus also has nothing to do with the being or *nonbeing* of universals. According to Quine, we can use terms significantly in sentences without presupposing that there are the entities which those terms are supposed to name. When we speak, we have ontological *immunity*. That is, *nothing* we may say commits us to the assumption of universals or other entities. To be assumed as an entity in a language is simply to be reckoned as the value of a variable. In other words, to be is to be in the range of reference of a (pro)noun, which is the basic media of reference. The variables of quantification, "Nothing", "Something", "Everything", range over our whole ontology, whatever it may be. On Quine's referential theory of meaning, there is something Pegasus stands for, since the expression "Pegasus was a winged horse" is meaningful. Since Frege, many philosophers have held that expressions with no reference refer to nonexistent or fictional objects. For Wittgenstein, the practices falling under the language game of fiction are ones carried out solely within a linguistic context. This linguistic practice itself and not some independent ontological realm is the fundamental fact in fictional characters (Quine 1980, 1-3, 8, 12, 13; Hookway, 1988, 8-15; Wittgenstein, 1954, 654; Crittenden, 1991, 28, 69).

Acccording to Crittenden, the origin of *nonexistent* objects is storytelling. They come from our capacity to think about imaginary figures and put them into a story. So this is the basic capacity underlying talk about *nonexistent* objects. That is, the public activity of telling a story is the foundation of fictional discourse (Crittenden, 1991, 80, 89). Following this working hypothesis, there are two other theories according to which we cannot certainly assume that there is a firm distinction between what exists and what is fictional. First, there is the Cartesian sceptical theory according to which "how can I know, say, that I am not (merely) a (native) object of a very detailed and cleverly designed story?" (Parsons, 1980, 218; Crittenden, 1991, 158-159). Secondly, there is the Buddhist's metaphysical, "pan-fictional" theory that the everyday world is fictional or illusory (Matilal, 1971, 134-145). Plato and christianity seem to have held a similar view: the creator (demiurge) creates the material world that is wrongly interpreted by the ignorant humans as constituting a real world. On Berkeley's view, ordinary things are merely objects in God's mind and hence our world is the product of God's thought. Schopenhauer, Kant and the German idealists after him claimed that we can only grasp the "phenomenal" reality not the reality itself (nooumenon). For Bradley (1971, chap. 24), only the Absolute alone is fully real, with the empirical world being so to a lesser degree. The pan-fictional outlook claims that ordinary, commonsense things have their properties merely conventionally rather than through possessing metaphysical natures. In this sense *nonbeing* is "manmade", or physical in so far as man is nature's (and not God's) creation, as the ancient Greeks believed (Bakaoukas, 2004). In taking on these issues we can incorporate the eastern

metaphysics of *nonbeing* into the rather localized logical problems generally associated (in Western philosophy) with the problem of *nonbeing* (Crittenden, 1991, 158, 163, 165, 169).

Conclusion. How to interpret nonbeing in context

After having expounded the basic ancient and contemporary theories on *nonbeing* we should answer the question "if there is any substantial resemblance between the ancient and the contemporary theories on *nonbeing*". As has been shown in chapter 2, psychologism seems to connect ancient and contemporary theories. Also, tt is interesting to note that Quine follows Plato in treating the issue of *nonbeing.* He says that *nonbeing* emerges in ontological controversies as follows:

two philosophers differ over ontology. Suppose McX maintains there is something which I maintain there is not. I maintain that there are no entities, of the kind which he alleges. […] This is the old Platonic riddle of *nonbeing*.

 [Quine, 1980, 1]

Plato expounds this riddle as follows:

It is impossible for two people to contradict each other.[…] Hence in uttering your different form of words, either you put a different thing into words, in which case you do not contradict me but merely change the subject; or you fail to put anything into words, which would seem to imply that <u>you have not said anything at all</u> (…) this argument rule out the possibility of false assertions (*Sophist* 201d8-202b7; *Euthydemus* 285d7-286b6)

[J. MacDowell, 1978, 235]

There seems to be a family resemblance between Quine's and Plato's treatment of *nonbeing*. However, scholars have to deal with multiple frames of interpretation before they can offer any settled account of how the ancient, medieval and contemporary philosophers interpret   *nonbeing*. In order to avoid any sort of interpretative anachronism, we should discriminate classical Greek philosophy from contemporary philosophy. Our guide shall be (a) the classical paper of C. H. Kahn "Why Existence Does Not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy" (1982), and (b) the most recent authoritative interpretations by Mourelatos (1976) and Curd (1998).

In the discussion of the concept of Being in Greek philosophy from Parmenides to Aristotle, the theme of existence does not figure as a distinct topic for philosophical reflection (Kahn, 1982, 7). According to Kahn:

the (modern) notion of existence (is) articulated in Descartes' doubts about existence and in his proofs of his own existence, the existence of God, and the existence of the external world, and further developed after Descartes in the arguments about the existence of "other minds." The modern concept of existence took a new, contemporary turn as a result of the development of quantification theory in logic. And it was applied to a new set of problems as a consequence of Russell's puzzles about denoting in the case of *nonexistent* subjects such as 'the present king of France',as well as in the more directly puzzling case of negative existentials such as 'Santa Claus does not exist' (...) We might summarize the modern concept of existence as the notion for which one analysis is suggested by Quine's dictum "to be is to be the value of a variable"

[Kahn, 1982, 8]

It might be supposed that the non-emergence of the concept of existence could be explained quite simply by the fact that classical Greek has no distinct verb meaning "to exist". But this is not the case, since ancient Greeks did have a special verb "to exist" (eimi). Greek philosophers occasionally *discuss* questions of existence. Nevertheless, the notion of existence never became a subject for philosophical reflection. The reason is that what is most important for ancient Greeks is the conception of truth. In Greek truth involves some kind of correlation or "fit" between what is said or thought, on one side, and *what is* or *what is the case,* on the other. "Reality" is *the fact that it is so* or *what happens to be the case.* This is the veridical use of "to be" which affirms a state of affairs (Kahn, 1982, 8-11; Mourelatos, 1970, 48-49; Curd, 1998, 27). This interpretation is followed by Mourelatos and Curd according to whom the Greek verb "to be" is "predicative" and "informative" in the sense that this verb "calls forth the characteristic essence of a thing" or "reveals the nature of a thing, saying what something is" (Mourelatos, 1976; Curd, 1998, 26-27, 39).

If we bear in mind the veridical (or "informative") use of the verb, we shall easily see why Greek philosophers' interest is in knowledge, truth and Being as reality. Greek philosophers did not care especially about *be* as verb of existence or as copula. They treated the notion of Being as truth and reality. That is why, according to Kahn, "if we *begin* to interpret the concept of Being by looking for existential or copula uses of the verb, not only shall we make unnecessary trouble for ourselves, but we may miss the real point, as well. We shall fail to grasp the essential features of the Greek concept of Being" (Kahn, 1982, 12).

What Parmenides says about Being or *what is* and *what is not* can help us to understand in the real historical context what is *nonbeing* for ancient Greeks. Being is the object for knowledge and the territory of truth. Being, or *what is,* is what we can and should believe because it is identical with truth. *Nonbeing* (*that it is not*), on the other hand, is "unheard of" or "uninformative" which cannot be trusted, "for you cannot know *what is not* nor can you point it out. *Nonbeing* cannot be an object of knowledge, a path for understanding, or a topic of information discourse. *Nonbeings* normally manifest themeselves verbally as illusory sense-impressions, deceptive appearances (sensory images), deceptions, lies, contradictions, fictions, false beliefs and ignorance; *nonbeing* does not signify an object of knowledge or reliable information. Parmenides identifies "the thing which is not" with falsehood and error, with *nothing* or non-entity (Parmenides, frag. 8.10; Kahn, 1982, 113).

Finally, as shown in chapter 2, contemporary thinkers attribute the origin of *nonexistent* objects to storytelling, that is our basic capacity underlying talk about *nonexistent* objects (Crittenden, 1991, 80, 89). This is another element connecting the ancient and contemporary theories on *nonbeing*. Gorgias' psychologism treats *nonbeing* as a fictional being too. The process of how the fictional *nonbeing* as literary deception affects the human psyche is described by Gorgias the Sophist (5th c. BC) who understood that the spectators are victims who succumb to an emotional situation. Plutarch attributes this view to him as follows:

"tragedy through its myths and feelings (*pathe*) furnishes a deception (*apate*), as Gorgias says, with reference to which the one who deceives is more just than the one who does not, and the one who is deceived is wiser than the one who is not. For the one who deceives is more just, because he has done what he promised, and the one who is deceived is wiser, for what is not insensible is easily captured by the pleasure of *logoi*".

(Gorgias, Buchheim, 1989, fr. 23; trs Wardy)

What Gorgias is saying is that tragedy, to have its characteristic effect, must generate a theatrical deception ("apate") in order to captivate the audience both intellectually and emotionally: members of the audience must react to the *nonexistent* fictional characters as if what happens on stage were indeed happening, if they are to enjoy the tragic experience. For this to occur successfully, the playwright must produce an imaginary world (imagery), but the audience must also imbue it with reality, by means of the willing suspension of disbelief. Thus the tragic spectacle demands a sort of a paradoxical collusion in pretence*:* we should conceive of the theatrical experience as a sort of "contractual (fair) deception" ("dikaia apate"), relying on cooperation

between the deceptive tragedian and the receptively deceived audience (Wardy, 1996, 35-36).

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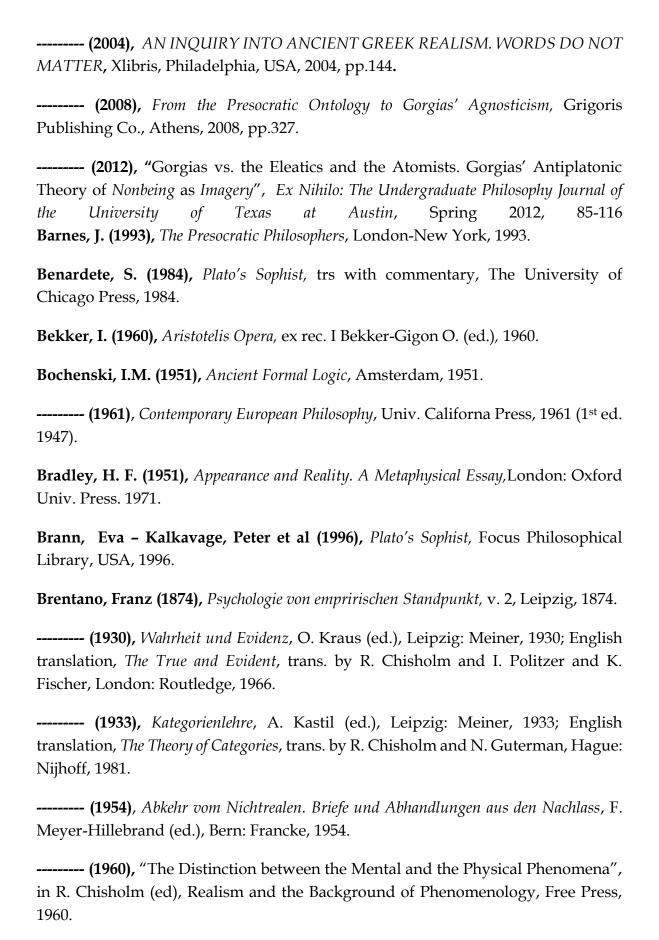
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