

## ABSURDITY AND ASSOCIATED ONTOLOGICAL ISSUES

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the article is to consider the ontological framework for logical paradoxes, the Gorgias logical paradox and the Parmenides' poem in particular. The research methods: Aristotle's semantic analysis of the verb "to be", which the traditional interpretation is based on, a semantic analysis of the verb "to be" carried out by analytical philosophers, comparison of Meinong and Russell's positions on the use of objects in logic. Conclusions and results: the article examines different interpretations of the Gorgias' paradox and the Parmenides' poem. The traditional interpretation is related to the understanding of the verb "to be" as a verb having existential meaning. An analytical interpretation gives true meaning to the verb "to be". As a consequence of the change in the verb meaning, the meaning of Parmenides' poem and Gorgias' paradox changes as well: traditional interpretation placed the emphasis on the problem of Parmenides' being, analytical interpretation shifts the focus to gnoseological issues.*

**Keywords:** *Gorgias, Meinong, Russell, Parmenides, Aristotle, absurdity, nonsense, non-existent object, incomplete object*

### INTRODUCTION

The object of the research is logical paradoxes, the Gorgias logical paradox and the Parmenides poem in particular. The research aims to consider the ontological framework for logical paradoxes. The relevance and novelty of the subject are that they do not only identify the ontological framework for logical paradoxes they also define the area of object use in logics.

The theoretical background of the article includes the fragments from the works by the ancient philosophers, Gorgias and Parmenides in particular. Aristotle, Zeller, Gomperz, etc. focus on ontological issues when analyzing these fragments. Analyzing the fragments, Meinong, Russell, and other analytic philosophers consider them in a gnoseological way.

The provisional hypothesis of the article – a discussion about the Meinong and Russell's logic – is not the discussion about logic, it has various ontological views on the use of objects in logic at its core. Depending on what ontological position philosophers take towards the use of objects in logic, logical paradoxes may or may not acquire different meanings.

The methodological background of the article is based on Aristotle's semantic analysis of the verb "to be" which forms the base for the traditional interpretation, semantic analysis of the verb "to be" carried out by philosopher analysts, comparison of Meinong and Russell's positions on the use of objects in logic.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Strictly speaking, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1898), who became Lewis Carroll in 1856, cannot be classified as the author writing in the nonsense genre. The term nonsense is used to refer to everything that is beyond common sense. Going beyond common sense may happen in different ways and produce different results. The property of agreeing with common sense in the middle between two extremes: on the one hand - nonsense, on the other hand - an absurdity. The difference between nonsense and absurdity is that the former neglects or denies the generally accepted rules of logic, language use, motivation and behavior of characters, while the latter adhere to them too closely. The Carroll's genuine genre is an absurdity, although such a literary term has not yet been introduced in his days.

The absurdist persistently adhere to the generally accepted rules even when it is senseless to follow them, despite any extravagance arising from such behavior (Heath and Carroll, 1982:13).

According to A. Kamus, Kafka reveals absurdity the same way. He illustrates this thesis with a funny story about a crazy man who is fishing in a bath. The attending doctor asks the patient: "What if it bites?" the patient's answer is logical: "It is impossible because it is a bath". The patient's response indicates that absurdity bears an overflow of logic. A. Kamus notes: "The world of Kafka is a truly unwordable universe in which a man devotes himself to the painful luxury: he goes fishing in the bath knowing that nothing is going to happen" (1989:312).

In this context, the absurd evidence includes the Gorgias' argument who in his poem *On Nature or Non-Existent* refers to Zeno's dialectics to justify the following:

1. Nothing exists: if there were anything, it cannot be non-existent or existent. It cannot be non-existent because attributing the properties of existence to a non-existent is a logical contradiction. If there is something, it must arise or be eternal. If something is existent, it must come into existence or be infinite (Melissus), but the infinite does not fit anything, then nothing can be eternal. If it is argued that something has come into existence, it may come into existence out of non-existence which is impossible, or existence, but it is also impossible since existence is the one and only.
2. If something exists, it is impossible to apprehend it, because the existent does not match the conceivable. After all, false thoughts may occur. If existent is inconceivable, it means that it is unrecognizable.
3. Assuming that something is conceivable, nothing can be reported to the other person about it, as the thought is expressed using signs, and the signs are not identical to thoughts especially since thoughts differ from person to person (Celler, 1996:81).

Philosophers did not tend to consider Gorgias to be insane, so they treated his arguments very carefully even in ancient times. New interest and a new interpretation of the Gorgias' paradoxes emerged in the analytical philosophy after an analysis of the verb "to be" had been conducted. The basic meanings of the verb "to be" are the predicate revealing existence and linking.

In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle describes the four main meanings of the verb "to be" in Greek (2002:155-156). According to Aristotle, the verb "to be" has 4 meanings:

- 1) It is something coming into existence.
- 2) It is what exists independently, such existence is expressed through the categorical statements.



- 3) Existence and the verb "to be" refer to the truth of the argument, non-existence implies the falsity of the argument.
- 4) Existence and things existent mean that the former is possible (δυναμει), the latter is real (εντελεχεια).

The Aristotle's examples point only to the predictive use but do not answer the question: "What does exist?" Such use corresponds to ousia or tiesti in the Aristotelian interpretation, it is something about which the rest is said - an unrecognized substance with certain qualities, the definition of which, according to generic and species characteristics, gives only approximate knowledge of things.

Analytic philosophers gave a new interpretation of the Parmenides' poem: based on linguistic research, they abandoned the εστι existential interpretation. Based on this interpretation, Parmenides' poem was split into 2 parts, and it became unclear why the Way of Opinion was mentioned. Instead of the existential interpretation, the true meaning of the verb "to be" was proposed. Such an interpretation suggests that Parmenides was concerned about the gnoseological problems, not the problems of existence. Accordingly, positive arguments like "X is Y" can be referred to the first way, negative arguments like "X is not Y" can be referred to the second way, which Parmenides considered to be unproductive.

Some researchers are quite reserved about this Parmenides' interpretation and offer their interpretation of the Parmenides poem, the fragments of which get a different meaning: the fragment of the poem "Since thinking is the same as being existent" (Meinong, 2003:21-28) is now interpreted as "The same thing exists for thinking and for existing" (Lebedev, 1989:298). In this interpretation, logical reality precedes both existence and thinking, and the thing can possess the thinking existence.

Here we smoothly move to A. Meinong's theory of non-existent objects, which is based on the intentionality approach, according to which consciousness is always focused on the object. A. Meinong interprets an object as the most general concept, the content of which includes physical bodies, sensations, abstract properties. The object characteristics also include existence and non-existence, possibility and impossibility.

A. Meinong distinguished an object of thought and a thought content: a thought content is a mental area, an object of thought is independent of consciousness even if an object of thought is a nonexistent object. An object can be non-existent for the following reasons: logical contradiction, absence, non-existence in the present, an object is not possible by nature.

A. Meinong introduces a nonexistent object to explain mental acts and to create a theory of truth rejecting principles dating back from the ancient philosophy: the identity of objects and existing things, nonexistent has no properties.

From this point of view, the arguments "Pegasus is flying", "Aristotle is frowning" have the meaning of truth, though Pegasus is a mythological horse, and Aristotle already died, but being non-existent objects, they possess a certain property of existence. The argument "a round square" refers to an impossible object, as it does not exist even in a certain property due to its internal contradictions.

Along with the impossible objects that violate the law of contradiction, Meinong distinguishes incomplete or defective objects that violate the law of the excluded middle. If the truth-falsity criterion can be applied to existent or non-existent objects this criterion cannot be applied to



judgments about the incomplete objects: such statements, for example, as "The Golden Mountain is higher than Mont Blanc" are neither true nor false.

According to Meinong, the introduction of the "defective object" concept allows resolving logical paradoxes. Considering logic, it does not matter whether the used term exists, only the fact that the term has an identifiable meaning is enough. A judgment having an identifiable meaning can be estimated as true or false.

As an "object", Meinong considered any object, such an object could include any thought: physical anxiety, relations, etc. The object may not exist in time and space, maybe logically contradictory, it is enough that we refer to it. Thus, Meinong creates a formal theory covering all possible objects, due to which such phrases like "Visa request to Russia" become plausible. In this phrase, only Russia is a physical object, a visa does not yet exist as an object, and a request is a social object. If we talk about material objects only, this phrase becomes unreasonable.

Meinong divides the objects into objectives, the contents of which are linguistic judgments, and he divides objects into 3 types:

- The first type includes physical objects existing in time and space
- The second type includes nonexistent objects (the gold mountain)
- The third type includes the existing objects (numbers) which do not exist independently but depending on some medium only.

At first, B. Russell agreed with A. Meinong on the issue of the existence of non-existent objects: anything or thought exists and can be the object of true or false judgment. Nevertheless, B. Russell distinguished the concepts of "being" and "existence": existence is peculiar to specific individuals, and being - to nonexistent objects. B. Russell tended to identify the concepts of "to be" and "to be something."

In *On Designation*, B. Russell puts forward a different view (1965:39-56). He changes his mind about non-existent objects, as he sees them as a contradiction:

The idea of non-existent objects is based on the fact that logic complies with the natural language, but the natural language does not comply with logical connections.

Logic, for all its abstract nature, deals with the real world. For this reason, logic treats the existence of a unicorn the same way as it is true for zoology, thus the judgment about the unicorn, the golden mountain, etc., is the judgment about the pseudo-objects. Common sense should not allow such pseudo-objects into logical judgments.

According to B. Russell, A. Meinong restricts the use of judgements about non-existent objects, but it is better to confine to judgements about existing objects only. Another objection to A. Meinong is as follows: objects are things, objectives are statements, but A. Meinong uses both things and statements as objects. B. Russell proposes to limit objects to things only.

B. Russell also rebuked A. Meinong for violating the law of the excluded middle. A. Meinong objected to B. Russell: the internal negation "A is not B" is not equal to the propositional negation "A is B" and their identity refers only to real and possible objects. The law of the excluded middle is violated by the incomplete objects concerning internal negation, while impossible objects violate the law of contradiction.

At the heart of the discussion between B. Russell and A. Meinong is a fundamental difference: B. Russell insists that the use of non-existent objects indicates a lack of sense of reality, while A.



Meinong believes that limiting to real objects only narrows the logic capacity, as other forms of objects exist (2011:202-229).

Now let us return to the analytical interpretation of Gorgias and the Eleatic philosophers, which is the result of this discussion. Based on the analytic tradition, another fragment taken from the Eleatic philosophers' work "One can only say and think of what does exist; existing after all, and non-existence does not exist"(Lebedev, 1989:299) turns into" What exists for speaking and thinking must be existing, for it exists for being, and non-existence does not exist (for being) (Selivörstov, 2015:331-340).

The object research alternative to understanding can be interpreted as follows: the way of truth states that everything we know exists and cannot but exist.

The conceivable is x, existence is E, and so the way of truth is xE. The traditional problematics is related to the problem E, that is, to be in any interpretation, the object research - to problem x, that is, to the sense logic. The object research interpretation focuses on the objects of cognition and allows true reading.

If to hold the same concept, where the verb "to be" means only existence, Parmenides is the first philosopher to argue that only the things that exist can be thought about. If we use the analytical concept, the Parmenides' "to be" transforms into what is true or what is not true, which corresponds to Parmenides' proposed 2 ways of knowing.

This analytical Greek philosophy interpretation makes it possible to detect the first philosophers who explored the inherence of qualities to the objects of the world around them.

As a result, there is an opinion that Gorgias uses the verb "to be" in the predictive construction. In this case, any judgements regarding world phenomena are contradictory. Eleatic philosophers showed these contradictions as negative, while Gorgias' judgements turned out to be positive.

## CONCLUSION

Meinong and Russell's discussion is a discussion about the ontological status of logical judgment: Russell defended the position that reasoning in logic is required regarding real objects only. Meinong stood up for the possibility to use conceivable objects that are not contradictory in logic. If to adopt the Meinong's viewpoint, the Gorgias' logical paradoxes are not paradoxes, and Parmenides' views are interpreted differently.

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