MEINONG’S ANALYSIS OF LYING

Ursula ZEGLEŃ
Catholic University of Lublin

Meinong’s works still inspire and encourage the discussion of many questions. In On Assumptions I found a question which did not attract Meinongians, but which seems to be very interesting from the semiotic and logical point of view. In Chapter Four there is a small paragraph (17) in which Meinong deals with the question of lying.

The purpose of my paper will be a presentation of Meinong’s concept of lying and an application of Meinong’s ideas to a certain formal analysis. The analysis will be based on two primitive terms which are the predicates: B – “to believe” and W – “to want”. On the basis of the above predicates, I will give the Meinongian definition of lying (the predicate L – “to lie”), together with another definition of a speech act (the predicate S – “to say”).

However, my purpose is not just to present a ready-made formal system, but rather to show that such a system is possible to construct. I want to show that my proposal which will be presented with the application of formal tools and which has Meinongian style is open for different interpretations which might be included in a sort of epistemic logic from the one hand, and theory of speech acts from the other. This sort of logic I propose to call the logic of intention for reasons which will be seen below.

I. Meinong’s definition of lying

I am going to start my paper with Meinong’s definition of lying which is given from an epistemic-semiotic point of view.

The essence of lying has been summarized by Meinong in the following sentence:
"A liar says something different from what he thinks".

This has been then modified by Meinong’s characterization of lying. Let us write it down as ML:

"A liar says something different from what he believes in".

Thus, according to Meinong the characterization of lying can be interpreted as an inconsistency between an expression which has been uttered by a speaker and his/her belief. In such an interpretation I want to stress the role of a speech act in communication where a speech act of a speaker is always directed to his/her hearer. If a liar says something, this means that he/she says that for some purpose. Thus a liar is aware that he/she does not believe in what he/she says. But a liar says that with an intention that his/her interpreter (hearer) will believe in what he/she says to him.

Suppose that Bill says to his parents that his new fiancée’s father is a millionaire, but he himself does not believe in it. This means that Bill’s intention is to cause that his parents will believe that the father of his new fiancée is a millionaire. Without stressing the moment of intention we did not have to do with a speech act as a natural linguistic event, and without stressing the moment of inconsistency between a speaker’s utterance and his/her mental state we did not have to do with a case of lying. However, in everyday communication there are many examples which are more complicated and controversial. For their adequate analysis it is necessary to take into account not only the intention of a speaker, but also a context of a speech act, and only then try to recognize whether a given utterance can be treated as lying. However, I will remain here by a simple formulation given by Meinong.

II. A formal analysis

In a formal analysis in which I am going to give a formal characterization of Meinong’s concept of lying I will be interested in the concepts which in epistemology belongs to the domain of doksa. In their characterization I want to account for their role in a speech act,