 TYPES OF NEGATION 
IN LOGICAL RECONSTRUCTIONS OF MEINONG 

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Summary
Russell’s criticisms force Meinong to adopt a distinction between two types of negation. Logical expositions of Meinong’s theory show the distinction is easily drawn in formal terms, but that alone does not justify the distinction intuitively. I criticise Routley’s treatment of the distinction and argue that only Terence Parsons’ theory retains and preserves the tight network of conceptual connections between the notions of negation, contradiction and impossibility. Hence, Parsons’ approach best expresses the Meinongian perspective.

Russell’s Criticisms of Object-Theory
Bertrand Russell attacks Meinong’s position in two reviews published in Mind in 1905 and 1907, as well as in his celebrated article “On Denoting.” Russell claims in his 1905 review that Meinong’s beingless objects can be resisted in either of two ways: It may be denied that there are such objects, or it may be denied that such objects have no being (p. 532). In these reviews Russell chooses the former way having earlier abandoned the latter one (the position adopted in The Principles of Mathematics.). The chief objection to Meinong’s theory is, according to Russell, that it involves denying the law of contradiction when impossible objects are constituents (p. 533). This objection is also pressed in “On Denoting.” Meinong’s round square, for example, is held to be both round and not round. Russell thinks this is intolerable.

It is worth considering just how the round square is supposed to jeopardise the principle of contradiction. The principle has traditionally been espoused to two distinct forms: one material,1 one semantic. It has

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1. The material version is not, strictly speaking, a logical principle at all, at least in so
been said that an object cannot both possess a property and the opposite of that property. George W. Bush cannot both be wise, and unwise in the same sense at the same time. Having the one property is thought to preclude the other. In the other (semantic) version of the principle, it is held that one and the same proposition cannot be true and false in the same sense, at the same time (alternatively, that a proposition and its negation cannot both be true at the same time). Meinong holds that ‘the round square is round’ and ‘the round square is not round (because it is square)’ are both true. If these statements are indeed both true, it appears that both versions of the principle of contradiction have been violated.

In response to this argument, Meinong argued that the principle of contradiction has only been applied to actual and possible objects, not impossible ones (1907, p. 14). It is because the round square violates this principle that it is impossible (i.e. that it could not be possible). Indeed it may be necessary to ascribe both the property of being round, and the property of not being round (because square), to the round square in order to think of it. Clearly, Meinong’s response is only apposite to the material version of the principle. According to Russell, he (still) needs to meet the challenge of the semantic version of the principle.² I will,

far as logic is treated as a theory of deductive consequence. This point was made by an anonymous referee for this journal.

2. Russell: “This reply seems to overlook the fact that it is of propositions (i.e. of ‘Objectives’ in Meinong’s terminology), not of subjects, that the law of contradiction is asserted. To suppose that two contradictory propositions can both be true seems equally inadmissible whatever their subjects may be.” Review of “Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie im System der Wissenschaften”, Mind 1907 p 439.

Russell is clearer in his reviews than in ‘On Denoting’ that it is the semantic version of the principle of contradiction that is threatened by Meinong’s theory. Both the immediately preceding quote from his 1907 review and the following quote from his review of 1905 indicate that it is conflict with the logical principle of contradiction rather than the metaphysical version that troubles Russell.

Russell: “But the chief objection to Meinong’s view seems to me to lie in the fact that it involves denying the law of contradiction when impossible objects are constituents.” having earlier mentioned Ameseder’s point, from a preceding article in the collection Russell is reviewing, that when B is impossible ‘A differs from B’ and ‘A does not differ from B’ can both be true, Russell continues “If ‘A differs from B’ and ‘A does not differ from B’ are to be both true, we cannot tell, for example, whether a class composed of A and B has one member or two.” Review of ‘Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie’, Mind 1905 p. 533. Here Russell is quite explicitly objecting to the joint truth of contradictory propositions.

In contrast, Russell’s statements in ‘On Denoting’ are in the material mode, the chief objection on this occasion being that impossible objects are ‘apt to infringe on the law of