NON-EXISTENCE AND PREDICATION

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NONEXISTENCE AND REID'S CONCEPTION
OF CONCEIVING*

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§1. It is widely known by now that Brentano's famous thesis of the Intentionality of the Mental was laid down long before by Thomas Reid, in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, where it figured prominently in Reid's campaign against the Locke-Berkeley-Hume Theory of Ideas. One of Reid's most vivid formulations of this thesis may by found in Essay II, Chapter 11:[1]

> In perception, in remembrance, and in conception, or imagination, I distinguish three things — the mind that operates, the operation of the mind, and the object of that operation. That the object perceived is one thing, and the perception of that object another, I am as certain as I can be of anything. The same may be said of conception, of remembrance, of love and hatred, of desire and aversion. In all these, the act of the mind about its object is one thing, the object is another thing. There must be an object, real or imaginary, distinct from the operation of the mind about it.

Being mainly interested in what Reid had to say about conceiving, I shall concentrate on the following instance of Reid's thesis:

(A) To conceive is to conceive something.

In the chapter from which the cited passage is taken Reid employs his thesis only to distinguish perception, memory, conception etc. from sensation. The latter, he says, involves only "the mind, or sentient being, and the sensation".[2] This might tempt us to think that sensation for Reid is a property of the mind, while perception, remembrance and conception are relations of the mind to something

1. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*; Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The M.I.T Press 1969, p. 197.
2. *Ibidem.*

else; a temptation which seems to be well supported by the passage cited.

But we had better resist this temptation in the case or conception. As may be inferred from the last sentence in the above passage, Reid has another principle concerning this operation of the mind:[3]

> ... that which essentially distinguishes it from every other power of the mind ... is, that it is not employed solely about things which have existence. I can conceive a winged horse or a centaur, as easily and as distinctly as I can conceive a man whom I have seen.
>
> ... the powers of sensation, of perception, of memory, and of consciousness, are all employed solely about objects that do exist, or have existed. But conception is often employed about objects that neither do, nor did, nor will exist. This is the very nature of this faculty, that its object, though distinctly conceived, may have no existence. Such an object we call a creature of imagination; but this creature never was created.

These passages sustain a second principle about conception which may be rendered in the following way:

(B) We can conceive what does not exist.

As may be seen from the second passage above, the term 'exist' in principle (B) should be understood as expressing timeless existence. Otherwise a parallel principle would hold about remembrance and foresight — if there is such a mental power as foresight. Hence (B) should be read as saying: we can conceive what did not, does not, and will not exist.

§2. It is now obvious why we should resist the temptation to believe that conception for Reid is distinguished from sensation by necessarily being a relation of the mind to something while sensation is only a property of the mind. The reason is that when contrasting conception with perception, memory and consciousness in principle (B) Reid seems to deny principle (A) and thereby to assimilate conception to sensation.

The tension between these two principles becomes visible if we rephrase them into standard "philosophy-English", using the locution 'S conceives' as a description of a mental state of some person S. Principle (A) then becomes:

3. *Ibidem*, pp. 404f.

(a) If S conceives then there is some x such that S conceives x and principle (B) then seems to imply the negation of principle (A):

(b) S conceives and there is no x such that S conceives x.

Another way of drawing a contradiction from (A) and (B) together requires us to assume that S can conceive x and nothing but x, whether or not x exists. Taking Pegasus as value of 'x', we can construe the following argument:

(X)   S conceives Pegasus and nothing else
      Pegasus does not exist
      Therefore: There is nothing that S conceives
      i.e. S conceives nothing
      Therefore: S does not conceive

Argument (X) purports to show that starting from the supposition that someone conceives only one thing, namely Pegasus, we can conclude that he does not conceive at all. Contrary to common-sense the distinction between a man who conceives what does not exist and a man who does not conceive at all seems to dissolve.[4]

I think it is well worth trying to resolve this dilemma, since principles (A) and (B) are rather plausible and common-sensical. The only way to do this, of course, is to argue that either the interpretation (a) of (A), or (b) of (B), or both, are not correct and thereby to block argument (X) which obviously depends on these interpretations.

§3. One way to get out of the dilemma is to propose that we construe the conceive-locution 'S conceives something' not in the way we did, that is, as 'There is something such that S conceives it', but as 'S conceives that something is such and such'. Adopting this strategy

4. Concerning the first premise of argument (X) Werner Murg reminded me of the Humean approach to the problem of our conception of nonexistent objects. This approach roughly says that we can only build the conception of a nonexistent object by somehow conceptually combining conceptions of existent parts. This might be taken to imply that we cannot conceive Pegasus *and nothing else*, since when conceiving Pegasus we have to conceive objects different from Pegasus, e.g. wings and a horse I originally planned to discuss this point in a lengthy footnote but I realized that I would have to write another paper to discuss the question adequately.

we might hold that what is meant with the first part of the first premise of argument (X) is:

S conceives that Pegasus does exist.

According to a well-known method developed by Russell this may be rendered as:

S conceives that there is exactly one thing which is a winged horse captured by Bellerophon.

If the first premise of argument (X) is reformulated in this way the problematic conclusion is no longer derivable. Interpretation (a) of (A) may stand as it is but it has to be kept in mind that variable 'x' in (a) is now taken to range over propositions.

But this way out of the dilemma is not very satisfying. Conceiving Pegasus, interpreted in this Russellian fashion, has nothing whatsoever to do with principle (B), for it is no longer a case of conceiving what does not exist; it is now a case of conceiving what is not true. Of course it might be argued that, under the threat of contradiction, principle (B) *has* to be interpreted as (B'):

(B') We can conceive what is not true.

But (B') would be no help for Reid, since he could not allow rephrasing (B) as (B') when 'conceive' is used in accord with its proper meaning. This is obvious from the following passages:[5]

> In bare conception there can neither be truth nor falsehood, because it neither affirms nor denies. ... the qualities of true or false, in their proper sense, can belong to nothing but to judgements, or to propositions which express judgement. In the bare conception of a thing there is no judgement, opinion, or belief included, and therefore it cannot be either true or false.
>
> If we analyse those speeches in which men attribute truth or falsehood to our conceptions of things, we shall find in every case, that there is some opinion or judgement implied in what they call conception.

The Russellian "solution" of our dilemma presupposes that conceiving, understood in its proper sense, is a propositional attitude. Reid denies this. According to him conceiving is to be distinguished from judgement; it is not a propositional but an objectual attitude. We have to formulate a third principle which blocks the Russellian solution:

5. Thomas Reid, *Essays*, pp. 385ff.

(C) Conceiving something is never to be analysed as conceiving that something is such and such.

From this it can be seen that a 'conceives that'-locution which, according to the passages cited above, always implies a judgement, must never be construed as a *de-dicto* locution but is necessarily *de-re*. This, of course, just underlines the dilemma. How can an attitude be necessarily *de-re* if the *res* to which it is directed does not have to exist? — It might be that the only solution to this dilemma is to give up (C) and to embrace the Russellian strategy. But this would be a pity, since (B') is a rather farfetched interpretation of (B).

§4. Another way out of our dilemma might be provided by Locke's version of the Theory of Ideas. This theory starts with a definition of the concept of conceiving:

To conceive is to have an idea before the mind.

This definition is in accordance with principle (C). Our interpretation of principle (A) may remain as it is provided we keep in mind that now variable 'x' in (a) is to be taken to range over ideas. Principle (B) certainly has to be reinterpreted as follows:

(B'') We can have an idea before the mind which is an idea of nothing.

I will not go at length into the reasons for which Reid cannot accept this solution. Suffice it to say that principles (A) and (B) play the leading part in his enterprise to refute the Theory of Ideas. But (B'') is an interpretation of (B) by which the literal meaning of (B) simply is negated: an idea which is an idea of nothing may perhaps be regarded as an idea of what does not exist, but the idea itself cannot be regarded as something which does not exist.

§5. Still another way of getting rid of our difficulty is proposed by Brentano in his later writings.[6] There he seems to suggest that our interpretations (a) and (b) of principles (A) and (B) cannot be right, since they do not preserve the difference between someone who does conceive Pegasus and someone who does conceive nothing, i.e. does

6. Compare Franz Brentano, *Kategorienlehre*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1933, pp. 7f, 14f and 48f.

not conceive. Trying to avoid our dilemma Brentano argues that the expression 'conceives Pegasus' in 'S conceives Pegasus' expresses a property of S and not a relation between S and anything. The expression is a one-place predicate like 'is red' and should, for the sake of clarity, be written as 'conceives-Pegasus' or 'is-a-Pegasus-conceiver', thus indicating that it merely contributes to the description of S.

This theory which, I think, Brentano wanted to maintain may be called the "Adverbial Theory of Conception". It says that to conceive a particular object is nothing but a certain mode of conceiving — just like running slowly is a certain mode of running — and that a man who conceives the moon merely conceives in a different way than a man who conceives a unicorn. The locution:

(1) Jones conceives a unicorn

should be rendered less misleadingly as something like:

(2) Jones conceives unicornally.

Sentence (1) wrongly suggests that Jones is related to a unicorn. Sentence (2) makes it clear that we are only describing Jones as conceiving in a certain way. Chisholm, analysing a similar example, expressed this point rather nicely:[7]

> The original sentence seems to relate Jones to a unicorn but actually it does not. 'Jones is thinking about a unicorn' has no more to do with a unicorn than does 'The Emperor decorated his tunic ornately'. Neither sentence has to do with unicorns, despite the fact that the word 'unicorn' may be found in each.

Chisholm also furnishes us with one standard objection against this theory, namely, that if 'conceives a unicorn' is construed as a one place predicate or adverbial phrase then the following argument is not valid, which it should be:

(Y) S conceives a unicorn
  Everything S conceives does exist
  Therefore: a unicorn does exist.

A more general objection to the Adverbial Theory is that it does not seem to allow us to maintain principles (A) and (C). It fairly

7. Roderick M. Chisholm, "Homeless Objects", in *Brentano and Meinong Studies*, Amsterdam: Rodopi 1982, p. 41.

denies that in conception we can distinguish the operation of the mind from the object of that operation and thereby denies that conception may be distinguished from sensation. That is, it denies principles (A) and (C) and makes it impossible to apply (B).

§6. It is, I think, quite easy to see that Reid held none of the three proposed solutions of our dilemma, since they are not consistent with (A) or (B). But what, then, is Reid's position?

Let us look at another passage of the *Essays* which reveals that Reid was well aware of the possibility that he might be blamed for holding a contradictory position:[8]

> I conceive a centaur. This conception is an operation of the mind, of which I am conscious, and to which I can attend. The sole object of it is a centaur, an animal which, I believe, never existed. I can see no contradiction in this.

We already have seen that our interpretations (a) and (b), with the help of which we formulated the contradiction between principles (A) and (B), cannot be taken to be correct, since there is a difference between conceiving nothing, i.e. not to conceive at all and conceiving Pegasus; and, we may add, a difference between conceiving Pegasus and conceiving a centaur. But merely to claim that (a) and/or (b) are not correct interpretations of Reid's principles is not enough. We have to show why they are not correct and why argument (X) is not valid, otherwise we will be forced to give up (A) or (B).

Reid, when talking about conception as distinguished from sensation *and* perception, obviously wants to have it both ways: he wants to hold that conceiving is a relation between the mind and something, else, and he wants to hold that conceiving is not a relation between the mind and something else. In other words, he wants to hold that we are allowed to existentially generalize into the context 'S conceives...', and he wants to hold that we are not allowed to existentially generalize into such a context. If we are to interpret Reid without attributing a contradiction to him, we have to conclude that we are presented here with two senses of 'relation' and two senses of 'existentially generalize'; i.e. two senses of 'exist'.

The quoted passages should already have made it sufficiently clear that Reid is committed to Meinong's famous thesis:

(M)There are objects which do not exist,

    i.e. There is some x such that x does not exist,

    i.e. Something does not exist.

Principle (M) implies that the expression 'is an object' *is* dispensible in favour of the existential quantifier while the expression 'does exist' *is not* dispensible in favour of the existential quantifier. (M) thereby contradicts the common interpretation of predicate logic which says that we can dispense with both expressions in virtue of the existential quantifier.

Principle (M) in itself enables us to dismiss both interpretation (b) of principle (B) and argument (X), because both depend on the assumption that a sentence of the form '... do(es) not exist' implies some sentence of the form 'There is no x such that ...x...'. By holding (M) Reid not only drops this assumption but holds on the contrary that a sentence of the form '... do(es) not exist' implies some sentence of the form 'There is some x such that ...x...'.

It is now apparent how Reid wants to have it both ways: in conception we are necessarily related to something in the sense of being related to some object, but we are not necessarily related to something in the sense of being related to some existent. We are allowed to "existentially" generalize into the the context 'S conceives...' when reading the result as 'S conceives something (an object)' but we are not allowed to do so when reading the result as 'S conceives some existent object'.

§7. Principle (M) faces us with one of the most bewildering problems in philosophy, a problem concerning our notions of existence, truth and predication.

What is at stake here is the standard interpretation of the expression 'to exist' in the semantics of predicate logic. This interpretation, which underlies paraphrase (b) of principle (B) as well as argument (X), becomes manifest in the following equivalence:

(E) x exists *iff* $(\exists F)(Fx)$,

where the formula '$(\exists F)(Fx)$' signifies the same as 'x has some property', or simply, 'x is something'.

In holding Principle (M) Reid denies (E). He argues that Pegasus is an object, i.e. is something, since there are true statements about Pegasus, e.g.:

(3) Pegasus is a winged horse,

(4) Pegasus is conceived by S.

But since it is also true that

(5) Pegasus does not exist,

we are forced to the conclusion that equivalence (E) has to be false.

Against Reid the advocate of the common view concerning the interpretation of predicate logic takes the negation of Reid's conclusion as a premise. He argues that, since (E) is trivially true, and since (5) is true, it follows that sentences (3) and (4) cannot be true sentences about Pegasus.

Reid may now point out that his opponent presupposes the truth of (5) but that (5) itself may be generalized to '$(\exists F)$ (FPegasus)' so that the negation of (5) is derivable from (5) together with principle (E). If the opponent wants to avoid contradiction and wants to assert (5) he has to renounce (E).

Having learned his lessons about the semantic interpretation of standard predicate logic, the opponent counters with the claim that the expressions 'does exist' and 'does not exist' are not real predicates i.e. that existence and nonexistence are not properties in the proper sense. Therefore, sentence (5) cannot be regarded as exemplifying the form 'Fx'; therefore, it cannot be generalized to '$(\exists F)$ (Fx)'; therefore, the above contradiction is not derivable.

Reid might now try to convince us that this has the flair of an *ad hoc* manoeuvre invented just in order to save (E) from contradiction. — But is it really *ad hoc*? The original position of the champion of (E) was that the expression 'does exist' is nothing but a linguistic variant of the expression 'is an object'. And concerning the latter Reid obviously wants to hold a principle analogous to principle (E), namely:

(F) x is an object *iff* $(\exists F)(Fx)$.

But it is quite easy to see that this principle is subject to exactly the same criticism which Reid put forward against principle (E). Take any expression, say 'Simsam', for making the following stipulation:

(6) Simsam is not an object.

A contradiction can be derived from (6) together with (F) in the way Reid derived a contradiction from (5) and (E).

In order to overcome this difficulty Reid would have to claim that

being-an-object is not a property in the proper sense and that, therefore, sentence (6) does not exemplify the form '*Fx*'. But this manoeuvre, be it *ad hoc* or not, is also open to Reid's opponent, since he wants to use 'exist' in such a way that:

(G) *x* exists *iff x* is an object.

It now appears that the discussion about whether (E) does or does not hold has been on the wrong track. By assuming (F) Reid accepted principle (E) at the outset.

§8. The preceding discussion, however, has not been entirely fruitless, since it enables us to grasp a crucial point about Reid's conception of nonexistence. To catch this point we have to see where we stand with our argument.

Principle (G) has shown that principles (E) and (F) collapse into one "fusion"-principle:

(EF) *x* is an object
  x exists } *iff* (∃*F*)(*Fx*).

Once this fusion-principle and the non-propertyhood of existence and of being-an-object has been granted as common ground, Reid's opponent is still well under way. He simply has to argue that, since (EF) is trivially true and since

(5) Pegasus does not exist

is true as well, there cannot be any true statements about an alleged object called 'Pegasus'.

For Reid the situation is now different from before. We have seen that he does hold (EF), and since he also holds that there are true statements about Pegasus, e.g. (3) and (4), he now has to say that Pegasus *does* exist. But it is of course the essence of Reid's Meinongian principle (M) that there are objects, e.g. Pegasus, which do not exist. What, then, is Reid's position with respect to sentence (5)?

Up to this point the discussion has proceeded under the assumption that Reid and his opponent are in perfect harmony in respect to (5), but it turned out now that this harmony was mere appearance only. If 'to exist' is taken in the broad sense explicated in principle (EF), then Reid must deny statement (5): Pegasus *does* exist. But since Reid wants to hold principle (M) it follows that for him

there must be another, restricted sense of 'to exist' in which it is true that Pegasus does *not* exist.

That Reid is committed to such a restricted sense of existence can be seen from the following passage:[9]

> A man cannot believe his own existence or the existence of anything he sees or remembers, until he has so much judgement as to distinguish things that really exist from things which are only conceived.

It is possible to divide the whole universe of things into those that are red and those that are not red. According to this passage, existence is very much like being-red. It is possible to divide the whole universe of objects into those that do exist and those that do not exist. But this is nonsense if existence is here taken in the broad sense of being-an-object. Hence Reid is committed to a restricted sense of 'to exist' in which it expresses a property like being-red, i.e. a property in virtue of which objects are distinguished from each other. Let us mark this restricted sense of existence with a '*':

(7) Pegasus does not exist*.

Reid denies (5) and affirms (7). His opponent affirms (5) and holds that in virtue of the truth of (5) it is unnecessary to distinguish two modes of existence.

Our discussion of principle (E) has shown that what really is the issue between Reid and his opponent is not (E) or (EF) but (5). The crucial premises leading to the opposing views about (5) are the theses hat there *are*, respectively, *are not* any true statements about Pegasus. Hence, in order to decide the issue about (5) we have to turn to the point of separation and to consider the reasons for accepting or dismissing the premise that there are true statements about Pegasus.

§9. But how are we to decide this question without falling back on spurious claims like "There are no true statements about Pegasus, since Pegasus does not exist", claims which simply presuppose what we need to prove?

A promising line of argument starts from the observation that it should be possible to give §9. But how are we to decide this question without falling back on spurious claims like "There are no

9. Thomas Reid, *Essays*, p. 543.

true statements about Pegasus, since Pegasus does not exist", claims which simply presuppose what we need to prove?

A promising line of argument starts from the observation that it should be possible to give a definition by *genus proximum et differentia specifica* of the restricted concept of existence. This cannot be done for existence in the broad sense because there cannot be any *genus proximum* to being-an-object, i.e. being-something. As we said earlier, the universe of objects is divided into two classes only in virtue of existence* but not in virtue of existence. — Now, what would this definition of 'to exist*' look like?

According to Reid conception is distinguished from perception and consciousness in that we can perceive only "present external things" and be conscious only of "the present operations of our mind".[10] This I take to imply that we can only perceive objects which are in time and space and that we can only be conscious of objects which are in time. And this, in turn, suggests a definition of existence in the restricted sense:

(D) x exists* =def x exists (is an object) and x is in time or is in both time and space.

We turn back now to our alleged candidates for the role of true statements about Pegasus, viz.:

(3) Pegasus is a winged horse,
(4) Pegasus is conceived by S.

These two sentences are specimens of two different types of statements: sentence (4) represents the statements which purport to ascribe intentional properties, more accurately, converse intentional properties[11] to Pegasus, and sentence (3) represents the statements which purport to ascribe non-intentional properties to Pegasus.

On the background of the definition of existence* given above sentence (3), taken literally, cannot be regarded as being true.[11] Having-wings implies, among other things, having-bodily parts and

10. Compare *ibidem*, pp. 8-11.
11. For this notion compare Chisholm's " Converse Intentional Properties", in *The Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982), pp. 537-545. It will suffice here to give some further examples of such properties: being believed to be wise; being sought after; being taken to be a tree; being wanted; being considered as a candidate.

being-a-horse implies, among other things, being-born. These are properties which can only be exemplified by objects which are in time and space. But Pegasus, being nonexistent*, cannot have any such properties, since according to definition (D) Pegasus is nowhere at any time. It is just not true that Pegasus has wings in the same sense as my sister's canary-bird has wings, and it is just not true that Pegasus is a horse in the same sense as my neighbours horse is a horse. The best we can truly say about Pegasus — if we can say anything about him at all — is that Pegasus is a conceived horse and has conceived wings. This I take to mean nothing else than that there is someone who conceives Pegasus to be a winged horse.

According to this argument it is a mistake to think that sentence (3) taken literally expresses a true statement about Pegasus. We only tend to call sentence (3) true because we tend to interpret it as saying something like

(8) Pegasus is conceived by someone to be a winged horse

or, since Reid would not allow us to construe conceiving as anything like a propositional attitude, we had better say

(8') Pegasus is conceived by S and S judges that Pegasus is a winged horse.

This analysis purports to demonstrate that the class of allegedly true statements which, like (3), seem to ascribe non-intentional properties to Pegasus reduces to the class of statements like (8), i.e. (4), which ascribe only converse intentional properties to Pegasus; properties which imply that there is a thinking subject that conceives Pegasus. But if the candidates for the role of true statements about Pegasus reduce to statements like (4) we may reasonably ask why we should think that there are any true statements *about* Pegasus at all.

The claim that sentences of type (4) express true statements *about* Pegasus, i.e. that they really *ascribe* converse intentional properties *to* Pegasus lacks support by true statements of type (3). Why should we be entitled to reason from the truth of a sentence like

(9) S conceives Pegasus

to the truth of the sentence

(4) Pegasus is conceived by S

— where the latter is taken to imply that there is some object such

that S conceives it — when there is no type (3) sentence about Pegasus?

It now appears that only principle (B) could give justification to Reid's claim that we are entitled to reason from (9) to (4), i.e. that there are true statements about Pegasus. But to invoke (B) at this point would be circular, since in order to save (B) from our contradictory interpretation (b) Reid had to advance principle (M) and to deny sentence (5). But to defend (M) and his denial of (5) he had to show that there are true statements about Pegasus and the only true statements which at least purport to be about Pegasus, are conceive-locutions, examples of the very principle which is at stake, namely (B).

In view of this circularity Reid's opponent will insist that, since the thesis that (4) is a truth about Pegasus is not backed up by any true non-intentional statement about Pegasus, there is no reason for accepting true statements *about* Pegasus, but only for accepting true sentences which comprise the expression 'Pegasus'. In other words, if the only true sentences "about" Pegasus result from combining 'Pegasus' with predicates expressing converse intentional properties then we may conclude that these sentences do not ascribe any properties to something called 'Pegasus' at all but that they merely ascribe intentional properties to conceiving subjects. And if there are no true statements *about* Pegasus then, according to (EF), it is not true that Pegasus exists, i.e. is an object.

The conclusion of this argument is that S when conceiving Pegasus is not related to Pegasus, since Pegasus does not exist in any sense of this word, and the distinction between a restricted and an unrestricted sense of existence is superfluous.

§10. If the above argument against Reid's position is conclusive we still have no satisfactory interpretation of principles (A), (B) and (C). But some features of Reid's position and of the foregoing discussion might suggest the following line of interpretation.

When formulating his principles, Reid obviously wanted to use expressions like 'object' in an ontologically non-committing way. It seems that all the complications concerning the notion of existence can simply be circumvented if we regard Reid's use of the word 'object' as an unsuccessfull effort to express in the *material-mode* what can only be expressed in the *formal-mode*.

This assumption makes it quite easy to give a non-contradictory interpretation of principles (A), (B) and (C). We just have to keep in mind that Reid should have said 'name' or 'singular term' when he said 'object', and we can then adjust his principles according to the spirit of formal-mode talk. The interpretation runs like this:

(A*) If a sentence of the form 'S conceives' is true then there is a true sentence 'S conceives n', where 'n' is a singular term.

(B*) A sentence of the form 'S conceives n' may be true even if the singular term 'n' does not refer to anything.

(C*) In a sentence of the form 'S conceives n' 'n' has to be replaced by a singular term which is not an expression of the form 'that p', if 'conceive' is to be taken in its proper sense.

Let me conclude with two comments: *first*, this formal-mode-reading of Reid's principles is not to be confused with the thesis that in conception we are directed to expressions and, *second*, it has to be conceded that this linguistic approach is satisfactory only in that it provides a non-contradictory interpretation of Reid's principles without rejecting any one of them. — But is there any more satisfactory interpretation of these principles which does not become entangled into the confusions surrounding the concept of non-existence?