Surprisingly for an Oxford University Press book there are a few editorial infelicities – 'credendi' is the counterpart of 'orandi' in the formula which applies the rule of prayer to the rule of faith; 'kenotic', whilst derived from the Greek of the New Testament, is an English word with a short o, and needs no macron; the phrase 'Anglicans as well as Anglo-Catholics' (163) seems to assume the latter are not a subset of the former. But these small complaints are very much outweighed by the depth of scholarship, breadth of knowledge, and clarity of writing which constitute this splendid book.

Emma Mason is to be congratulated on achieving so much in a monograph of little over two hundred pages. This book will be of interest to anyone surveying the theology of Anglicanism, anyone interested in the interplay between poetry and theology in English, and anyone seeking to understand and promote the role of theological discussion in the pressing contemporary debate concerning environmental issues. In this context, Rossetti's voice is justly heard as being of considerable importance. Few nineteenth-century theological figures address contemporary issues so directly or so beautifully.

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John-Mark L. Miravalle *God, Existence, and Fictional Objects: The Case for Meinongian Theism*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). Pp. 186. £85.00 (Hbk). ISBN 9781350061613.

In *God, Existence, and Fictional Objects,* John-Mark L. Miravalle makes two claims that will strike many philosophers and theologians as initially implausible: (i) meinongianism – the view that there are non-existent objects – is the best theory of non-existence and (ii) meinongianism best accommodates the metaphysical implications of traditional theism. While theologians have spent a great deal of time reflecting on the nature of existence and philosophers, at least in the last century, have spent a great deal of time reflecting on the nature of non-existence, little reflection has taken place on the question of God and non-existence. *God, Existence, and Fictional Objects* seeks to fill this lacuna, offering a meinongian-theist merger that Miravalle hopes will clarify and render coherent traditional theistic claims and heighten the religious believer's gratitude to God through a proper appreciation of the non-existence out of which all creatures emerge.

The book is tightly argued, organized into four parts. In Part One, Miravalle surveys the relevant phenomena of experience and linguistic practice related to fictional objects, arguing that meinongianism does a better job than nominalism and realism in accommodating those experiences and practices. Consider the sentence 'A unicorn is a horse with a horn.' The sentence seems to be true and it seems to ascribe a property (i.e. *being a horned-horse*) to a fictional object. The problem with nominalism, according to Miravalle, is that none of the strategies either to explain away the apparent truth of sentences involving fictional objects or to explain away the existence of the fictional objects themselves succeed. Russell's paraphrase strategy changes the subject, Kendall Walton's pretence theory isn't ultimately plausible since in rejecting genuine talk about fictional objects all discourse is rendered suspect, and Jody Auzzouni's denial that we need to give any philosophical account of our experience and linguistic practices when it comes to fictional objects is to undo the point of philosophy, which is (partly) to try to bring experience and theory into harmony.

Whereas the fictional object nominalist denies the existence of fictional objects, the fictional object realist affirms that such objects exist and have features. But the fictional objects are not what we typically imagine them to be. When we imagine the unicorn Pegasus, we think we are imagining Pegasus. Not so, according to the fictional object realist. Rather, some Pegasus-proxy exists in the place of Pegasus. The main problem in identifying fictional objects as either this-worldly abstracta (following Peter van Inwagen) or other-worldly concreta (following David Lewis) is that the resultant picture either 'makes for an awkward ontology' (30) or is so 'incongruous with our intuitions' (32) that it hardly needs to be taken seriously. Understanding fictional objects to be mental entities is the position 'closest . . . to the instinctive views of the man in the street' (33). The main problem with this view, contrary to some assertions from Aquinas, is that Pegasus and the Pegasus-idea are not the same thing. When we think about one we are not thinking about the other, and vice versa. We are left, according to Miravalle, 'with little confidence in [fictional object realism's] soundness' (39). Only meinongianism can account for the fact that we speak, think, and refer to fictional objects; meinongianism represents 'the best option in terms of elegance, coherence, and correspondence to experience' (42).

In Part Two, Miravalle argues that the cosmological and ontological arguments for God are rendered coherent and sound only if we adopt meinongian principles. Without the distinction between a thing and an existent thing, Leibniz's question reduces to: why is *this* existent thing itself instead of another? No first cause is needed to answer *that* question, just clarification. Thus, the admission of non-existents is 'an epistemological prerequisite to the cosmological argument' (60) and all non-meinongian systems 'harmonize poorly with classical theism' (66). Regarding the ontological argument, any hope of advancing a successful version depends on our ability to compare one and the same thing with existence and without it, which according to Miravalle entails meinongianism. Just as an outfit can be fully

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determinate and still receive the further determination of a hat, so too can a non-existent be fully determinate and still receive the further determination of existence (81). And since, argues Miravalle, it is better to exist than to not exist, God, a perfect being, exists too.

In Part Three, meinongian solutions to problems surrounding the creator–creature relation are explored. One problem with traditional accounts of creation *ex nihilo* is that if God is the only thing logically prior to creation, then there is no coherent way to derive other things. Divine creating requires *some* raw materials to serve as the patient being acted upon in causation and the subject of change. Meinongianism provides the resources to render *ex nihilo* creation coherent: in creation, God selects a set of non-existents and by fiat confers existence on them. God doesn't literally create out of nothing; rather God creates out of non-existent things.

A second set of problems explored in Part Three relate to the notion of existence itself. Miravalle argues that existence is a necessarily existing property; existence is something 'with *de re* absolute necessity' (108). Reflection on the nature of necessary existence suggests that it is also infinite, eternal, and perfect. In short, God *is* existence itself. Two problems follow. First, if God is infinite, then every finite thing that exists cannot exist outside God. This entails panentheism, an objectionable doctrine to traditional theists that is thought to blur the distinction between creator and creatures. The only plausible way to render panentheism acceptable to traditional theists, according to Miravalle, is to develop a meinongian account of 'shared existence' (112). In creating, God does not turn creatures into God since 'they have other features besides existence that can distinguish them from God' (115). The second problem is that it is odd, if not incoherent, to call God a property. In response to this worry, Miravalle's reply is quite brief and general: we can truly call God a 'property' as long as we understand this unique 'property' to be concrete, self-exemplifying, a single instance, and the ground and cause of all other existents.

In Part Four, Miravalle applies meinongian principles to the question of divine providence, moral evil, and human freedom, showing again the explanatory power of meinongianism to solve philosophical and theological problems. While Miravalle thinks that libertarian conceptions of human freedom are easier to reconcile with the existence of an all-good creator than compatibilistic conceptions of human freedom, crucial questions remain. In particular, prior to the divine decree, how does God know the truth-values of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom? Many theists are attracted to molinism, the view that prior to the decree, God knows through his middle knowledge what free creatures would do and his free knowledge what free creatures will do. Two prominent objections to molinism – the grounding objection (i.e. 'middle knowledge is knowledge without an object' (129)) and the circularity objection (i.e. our free choices cause God's knowledge and God's knowledge causes our free choices) – can be overcome, in a now familiar pattern, if augmented by meinongian principles. On meinongianism,

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counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are about something – non-existents – and what they would do in various 'nonexisting scenarios' (130) if those scenarios were made real, solving the grounding objection. The causal circularity charge (as well as the threat of incoherence) is removed since, given meinongianism, there are no genuine causal relations between God's knowledge and non-existing scenarios. While there is a *correspondence* between God's knowledge, free human choices, and the non-existent scenarios described by the true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, none of these elements causally determine the others.

A full-blown account of divine providence will say something about evil too. Since theists typically don't want to postulate evil as some coexisting force alongside God, it is usually understood in terms of privation: evil is an absence or lack of some kind. When it comes to offering a robust philosophical and theological account of evil as a privation, we find ourselves once again 'on meinongian grounds' (141). In the final chapter of Part Four, Miravalle focuses his discussion on morally deficient – i.e. sinful – acts, arguing that all evil can be explained in terms of creaturely resistance. The basic picture is this. Everything that exists comes from God and is good. Evil, understood as a privation, results when a created person resists the grace of God and fails to bring some moral property into existence. The meinongian is in a strong position to deal with objections to this picture. Since on meinongianism a thing's character is not up to God (even if a thing's existence is up to God), the character of a sinner is not up to God either. God is off the hook when it comes to sin, and thus evil. Moreover, the divine will is not thwarted on meinongianism since non-existent things have no real causal impact on God. God is neither surprised by sin (given divine omniscience) nor are his plans frustrated by sin (preserving divine omnipotence).

While I found Miravalle's meinongian gloss to certain theological and philosophical puzzles provocative, interesting, and (to a degree) plausible, I have one overriding concern with the project. Miravalle says very little about the ontological status of non-existents and more is needed to provide a full and satisfactory metaphysical account of objects. I fear that in providing a more fine-grained ontological account of non-existents, however, the project will become increasingly less plausible. To draw out my worry, consider Miravalle's claim that meinongianism neatly solves the notorious grounding objection to molinism. Miravalle claims that the meinongian solution to the grounding objection is superior to its nearest realist competitor, platonic theism, since meinongianism asserts that one and the same thing can be known to God whether it exists or not and this is more elegant than platonism, which asserts that God knows a proxy of a thing (e.g. an uninstantiated individual essence) but not the thing itself (134–136). But this claim saddles Miravalle with a dilemma. Consider Curley Smith, Plantinga's well-known fictional mayor of Boston. Either non-existent Curley is a living human person or not. If so, then Miravalle's claim that God knows one and the same thing on both sides of the existential divide can be maintained, but at a cost: meinongianism sounds perilously close to Lewisian concrete realism, a view that Miravalle abhors as

implausible (31–33). If on the other hand, non-existent Curley is not living or a human or a person or shaped or extended in space, then our intuitions about non-existents are intact but the view is no longer meinongian, for non-existent Curley is no longer one and the same thing as existent Curley. Non-existent Curley is a proxy for existent Curley, a different kind of thing (say, an abstract object) that stands in the place of Curley if Curley were to exist. But that's just platonism. As far as I can tell, it seems Miravalle's meinongianism is unstable, threatening to collapse into either Lewisian concrete realism or platonism.

With my main worry stated, there is much to like about *God, Existence, and Fictional Objects*. Miravalle's writing is clear, his knowledge of the salient philosophical and theological issues expansive, and his chutzpah to defend an unfashionable view with originality and verve is admirable. While I remain unconvinced that Miravalle's two central claims (that meinongianism is the best theory of non-existence and that meinongianism best accommodates traditional theism) are true, I think that *God, Existence, and Fictional Objects* does go a considerable distance towards showing how they *might* be true. Finally, in my own wrestling with the issue of non-existence in reading Miravalle's book, my gratitude to God was heightened, and thus his purpose for writing was met and, I suspect, will be met for others. For this reason, I recommend *God, Existence, and Fictional Objects* as an example of the best kind of philosophical theology: that which moves our minds and hearts to worship and praise of the divine.

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