



**HAL**  
open science

## Considering Possibilities. G.F. Stout and the Meinongian Annahme

Bruno Langlet

► **To cite this version:**

Bruno Langlet. Considering Possibilities. G.F. Stout and the Meinongian Annahme. *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica*, 2021. hal-03089590v2

**HAL Id: hal-03089590**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03089590v2>**

Submitted on 13 Jan 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Considering Possibilities. G.F. Stout and the Meinongian *Annahme*

(Pénultième version. À paraître dans la *Rivista di Filosofia neo-scolastica*, numéro 2020-4, *Meinong and his contemporaries*, édité par Michele Lenoci, Savina Raynaud, Lorenzo Fossati, et Venanzio Raspa)

Meinong's famous concept of assumption (*Annahme*) was integrated by Stout into his own work as the notion of « supposal » in 1911. This paper examines the *rationale* of such an explicit import into Stout's views and reasoning. Initially interested in the problem of error and in the non-doxastic thinking that is involved in fictions, hypothetical reasoning, as well as in thoughts about alternative possibilities, universals, and propositions, Stout incorporated the Meinongian concept of assumption into his views as a psychic attitude fitted for accounting for such thoughts. We argue in this respect, that such an integration could occur due to a strong analogy between Meinong's realm of objects and Stout's universe of alternative possibilities. Meinongian assumptions were dedicated to the non-doxastic grasping of objects through « objectives » while Stoutian supposals were dedicated to the non-doxastic consideration of alternative possibilities.

*Keywords:* G. F. Stout, Meinong, Supposals, Assumptions, Objects, Possibilities, Universals, Non-doxastic thinking.

### 1. Introduction

George Frederick Stout was Russell and Moore's teacher and a well-known figure of early analytical philosophy. For several decades he was also interested in the work of several « continental » philosophers: he met Husserl, exchanged letters with Meinong, and as an editor-in-chief of *Mind*, he encouraged his colleagues to review Austro-German philosophers' work. Stout discussed views belonging to Brentano, Ehrenfels, Meinong, among others, as they shed light on several points of interest to him. His *Analytic Psychology*<sup>2</sup> examined Brentano's theory of representations and Stout developed an approach matching Twardowski and Meinong's thesis on the distinction between the act, content and object of representations. He argued, for example, that if representations always refer to something, then content, and object must be ontologically distinct, as the representation's content still exists, even though its object does not. Similar arguments are to be found in Twardowski's book on the content and object of representations<sup>3</sup>. The third chapter of *Analytic Psychology*, dedicated to the « Apprehension of form », relied partially on Ehrenfels' « Über Gestaltqualitäten » and on Meinong's article on the psychology of complexions and relations<sup>4</sup>. Regarding the distinction between form apprehended as such (as a whole), and apprehended as structured by relations between its constituents, Stout recommended Meinong's aforementioned paper to the reader. In 1899, he discussed the account

---

<sup>1</sup> Aix-Marseille Université, Aix-en-Provence, France. Email : bruno.langlet@univ-amu.fr.

<sup>2</sup> G.F. STOUT, *Analytic psychology*, Vols. I and II., George Allen & Unwin, London 1896. Stout wrote in « Some fundamental points in theory of knowledge » (in G.F. STOUT, 1930, *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, Macmillan, London 1930, p. 355) that he arrived independently to the same conclusion than « zwardowsky » (sic). However, *Mind* published in 1894 (vol. 3, n°10, April 1894, pp. 274-275) an unsigned review of Twardowski's book, which is commonly attributed to Stout.

<sup>3</sup> *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen—Eine psychologische Untersuchung*, Wien 1894; repr. in Philosophia Verlag, München-Wien 1982.

<sup>4</sup> C. EHRENFELS, « Über Gestaltqualitäten », *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie*, 14, 1890, pp. 249-292; A. MEINONG, « Zur psychologie der Komplexionen und Relationen », in *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, II, p. 245-265, 1891, repr. in *Gesamtausgabe (GA now)*, Vol.I, R. Haller (hrsg.), Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Graz 1969, pp. 281- 300.

of temporal objects that Meinong developed in his article on higher-order objects<sup>5</sup> and concluded that Meinong had weakened his own view through a few unsound arguments.

However, the famous Meinongian concept of assumption (*Annahme*), which appeared in *Über Annahmen*<sup>6</sup>, made a more striking impression on him. Such a concept is deeply connected with the mature version of Meinong's Object Theory: assumptions as psychical acts are directed toward complex proposition-like entities called « objectives »; assumptions are similar to judgments, as they are directed toward objectives in a positive or a negative way, but also differ from them, as they lack the conviction in the existence of what they are targeting. The *Annahme* is a critical adjunction to Brentano's tripartition between representations, judgments and feelings. Assumptions are connected with the doctrine of extra-being (*Aussersein*), as they enable the mind to grasp any object, and with the concepts of intending (*Meinen*) and presentation (*Präsentation*), which belong to the apprehension theory (*Erfassenstheorie*). According to Meinong, such general theory of apprehension is required as a precondition for a theory of truth: understanding how it is possible to *apprehend* some object has priority over understanding what it is to *know* something about this object. Here lies a deep and vast domain of thought that is beyond judgment and that mere representations cannot account for, wherein assumptions rule. There are some parallel considerations in Stout's approach that led him to adopt the Meinongian *Annahme*, which he referred to as « supposal » (or « supposition »). However, this does not mean that he endorsed the full Meinongian apparatus – far from it. The theoretical interests that drove Stout, and the consequences of views developed by a thinker like Russell (for example, as he worked out his theory of definite descriptions), lead him to see, in the *Annahme*, a concept suitable to the conception of general relations between some ontological, psychological and epistemological features of his views.

The Meinongian *Annahme* was known within English-speaking philosophy, almost immediately upon the publication of Meinong's book, thanks to Russell's 1904 paper<sup>7</sup> « Meinong's theory of complexes and assumptions ». In his review, Russell acknowledged the relevance of the very notion of *Annahme*, which, as he noticed, is also found in Frege's work (who conceived of it in logical terms). While admitting the role that such a notion could play in psychology and epistemology, Russell did not admit in 1904, that objectives (moorean propositions, according to him) are not graspable through representations, but only through judgments and assumptions. Russell recognized later<sup>8</sup> that representations are not fit for grasping propositions<sup>9</sup>. However, right after the 1904 review, which presented logical realism and Meinong's views as objective allies, Russell's famous « On denoting » was released: an article<sup>10</sup> tackling theories that acknowledge some types of non-existents, and offering new grounds to philosophers looking for arid ontologies - the consequences of which are very vivid in contemporary metaontology. Stout did not welcome warmly the Russellian theory of definite descriptions as this theory appeared to involve, among other things, the denial that all representations should be considered as having objects<sup>11</sup>. In this respect, some reasons explaining Stout's admission

---

<sup>5</sup> A. MEINONG, « Über Gegenstände höherer Ordnung und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung », *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, 21, 1899, pp. 182-272; repr. in *GA* Vol.II, R. Haller (hrsg.), Graz 1971, pp. 377-471.

<sup>6</sup> A. MEINONG, *Über Annahmen*, Barth, Leipzig 1902, 1910, repr. in *GA*, IV, Haller & Kindinger (hrsg.), Graz 1968.

<sup>7</sup> B. RUSSELL, « Meinong's theory of complexes and assumptions », *Mind* 13, n°50, 51, 52, 1904, p. 204-219; 336-354; 509-524; repr. in D. LACKEY (ed.), *B. Russell, Essays in Analysis*, Allen & Unwin, London 1973.

<sup>8</sup> in « Knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description », *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 7 (1911), p. 108-128; repr. in B. RUSSELL, *Mysticism and Logic*, Routledge, London 1994, chap. 10

<sup>9</sup> C. D. BROAD, wrote a review, in 1913, of the second edition of *Über Annahmen*: « Critical notice of A. Meinong, *Über Annahmen* (Leipzig 1910) », *Mind*, n.s. v.22, January 1913, pp. 90-102.

<sup>10</sup> B. RUSSELL, « On Denoting », *Mind*, 14, 1905, p. 479-493.

<sup>11</sup> According to O. W. Nasim, Stout understood the Russellian theory of descriptions as a theory admitting that there are representations *without* objects. See O. W. NASIM, « Explaining G. F. Stout's Reaction to Russell's "On Denoting" », in N. GRIFFIN & D. JACQUETTE (Eds.), *Russell vs. Meinong. The legacy of « On Denoting »*, Routledge, New York 2008. See also A. URQUHART, « G. F. Stout and the Theory of Descriptions », *The Journal of the Bertrand Russell Archives*, n.s. 14, 1994-1995, pp. 163-171, and M.V. D. SCHAAR, *G. F. Stout and the psychological origins of analytic philosophy*, Palgrave MacMillan, London 2013, pp.97-100.

of Meinong's assumption lay in the spirit of his own approach, as he would not follow the full tracks of the Russellian insights.

The concept of assumption proved itself useful, enabling Stout to achieve a more consistent view on the relationship between his theory of mental acts and his ontology, which included particular existents and their « natures », that is, universals understood as « general beings » having « distributive unities »<sup>12</sup> intrinsically linked to sets of particular instances of properties, and involving « alternative possibilities ». According to Stout, such universals have, like propositions, an intrinsic feature of indeterminateness that makes them « determinable » and as such, they involve various alternative possible determinations. Let us consider redness as a color: the universal « redness » has a distributive unity according to Stout, which means that in order to conceive of what it is to be a red thing, one has to conceive what it is to be *this* instance of red, *either* this one, *or* this other one, and so on.

Such a view needed to be associated with a theory of psychic and epistemic attitudes in order to explain, for example, how real possibilities are graspable as such, without reducing all mental acts to beliefs in *realized* possibilities. Stout distinguished early on various kinds of psychic attitudes as modes of relation of the mind to its objects. He was interested in a mode of thinking that could be distinguished from believing (or judging), doubting, and feeling. Such thinking in his early work was first called, « mere apprehension », then « indeterminate thinking » (as some kind of « questioning »), and later, partially understood as mere imagination. Indeterminate thinking appeared to be insufficiently finely grained - Stout replaced it with the very notion of supposal, as a translation of the Meinongian assumption, which describes a type of mental acts that are directed toward non-actual entities. The theory of supposals that Stout inherited from Meinong enabled him to then complete his theory.

## 2. *Some features of supposals*

The inclusion of the *Annahme* into Stout's theoretical apparatus can be observed in the changes he made to the third edition of his *Manual of Psychology*<sup>13</sup>. In the 1899 and 1901 editions, one can find a chapter on « ultimate modes of being conscious » that distinguished cognition, feeling attitudes and conative attitudes. In the 1913 edition, Stout renamed the chapter « ultimate modes of the relation of the conscious subject to its objects »<sup>14</sup> and then examined simple apprehension, judgment and supposal, feeling attitudes, and conative attitudes.

The section dedicated to « simple apprehension » deals with the relationship between a representation and its object, and is said to require clarifications that are given through the examination of judgment and supposal – as « mere apprehending » does not make much sense by itself, according to Stout<sup>15</sup>. In the third section, Stout introduced supposal as a mental attitude, which stands for the Meinongian « *Annahme* », though Stout does not quote Meinong. However, the substance of this section is also to be found in some of his other texts which give explicit credit to Meinong. As a classical feature of the « supposal-*Annahme* », Stout exposed a case of hypothetical reasoning; indeed an important case of assumptions for Meinong as well<sup>16</sup>. According to Stout, when reasoning hypothetically, we are *supposing* an antecedent proposition (« if ice were heavier than water »), and we are committed to the admission of a consequent (« then what we now call the temperate zone would be uninhabitable

---

<sup>12</sup> A Universal has a « form of unity ». About the relationship of such a concept with Ehrenfels' *Gestaltqualitäten*, see M.V.D. SCHAAR, « The Red of a Rose; on the Significance of Stout's Category of Abstract Particulars », in R. Poli, R. Rollinger, F. Coniglione (eds.), *Idealization XI: Historical Studies on Abstraction and Idealization*, Poznan Studies 82, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2004, pp. 197-216.

<sup>13</sup> Hind and Nobles, London 1913.

<sup>14</sup> *Manual of Psychology*, book I, chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> Stout means the presentation of an object through simple representation. Meinong made a similar point in the §35 of *Über Annahmen*, as he argued that the representation's directedness toward an object should be conceived through the assumption: such attitude's intrinsic activity is what account for the representation's *objectuality* (*Gegenständlichkeit*).

<sup>16</sup> MEINONG, *Über Annahmen*, § 31.

»), without involving any bit of reality that would be judged through this process. Stout, in his *Manual*, also explained how supposals are involved in imaginative thinking and fictions – as assumptions are in Meinong’s theory. When reading a novel, we are prepared to « accept propositions put before (us) by the author », and we neither doubt nor do we believe or disbelieve, what is presented. Stout also mentioned children’s plays, where they pretend to be a character, which involve supposals, and such examples are also to be found in *Über Annahmen*<sup>17</sup>. (Stout added that such pretending is also seen in mock dog fights, in which they take care to not hurt themselves.) Stout made other insertions in chapter VIII (dedicated to belief and imagination): he wrote that when imagining we are dealing with « a flow of suppositions connected in an ideally constructed whole, which *as a whole* is merely supposed and not asserted as actual fact »<sup>18</sup>. Such a free play of imagination is ruled by supposals to which judgements and beliefs, if any, are subordinate. Meinong also dealt with imaginative thinking, as assumptions are linked with this type of thought, even if the former does not reduce to the latter. Stout had explicitly connected his concept of supposal with Meinong’s work in his 1911 articles « Real being and being for thought » and « Some fundamental points in the theory of knowledge »<sup>19</sup>. In other texts, including *God and Nature*, or « The nature of universals and propositions », he is once again silent concerning Meinong, despite using the concept of « supposal » in the same way as in his other texts. As we shall see below, assumptions found their own way into Stout’s thought as « supposals », as his researches led him to problems requiring the incorporation of a concept, akin to Meinong’s notion of assumption, into his own view.

### 3. From « mere apprehension » of objects to « supposals », through « indeterminate thinking »

Stout’s early Austrian-wise theory of mental acts, and his interest in a theory of error, led him to integrate a concept like the Meinongian *Annahme* into his view. As previously stated, his 1896 discussion of Brentano’s theory of content led Stout to distinguishing the content and the object of thought, as did Twardowski in 1894, and Meinong<sup>20</sup> in 1899. Stout then had to explain what it is to think to such an object, which might be non-existent without being just made of thought. As he endorsed a tripartition of mental acts similar to Brentano’s, Stout distinguished between what he called mere apprehensions, judgements, and feelings. He saw « mere apprehension » as a mental act that could be understood as « simple thinking », without involving any mental attitude that pertains to assertion (or belief) and denial (or disbelief). Stout examined cases of doubting (and suspension of judgment), acts of imagining, and aesthetic contemplations in which he found other signs of such « mere thinking ». Doubting, in a way, includes mere thinking as doubting involves the suspension of judgment; however, judgement might also be understood as being present, at least in a defective way. As regards acts of imagining, Stout saw children’s games and the mental attitudes of people reading novels (or of spectators of art performances), as cases in which one has meaningful thoughts, without having to form corresponding assertions or denials. The examination of the human attitude in aesthetic considerations led him to the same conclusion that some thinking, wherein no element of classical judgment is to be found, involves some apprehension of objects. In this respect, despite not having a concept akin to assumption, Stout had been trying to conduct a proto-analysis of some kind of non-doxastic thinking in his *Analytic Psychology*.

In 1902<sup>21</sup>, Stout connected such an approach with a framework that could accurately explain error by accounting for the conditions under which we happen to judge something falsely. An error is seen, here, as a possibility which is judged to be realized although it is not the case. One must then admit

<sup>17</sup> *Ibi*, § 17.

<sup>18</sup> STOUT, *Manual of Psychology*, p. 671.

<sup>19</sup> STOUT, *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, p. 359, for example.

<sup>20</sup> According to Findlay, The Stoutian notion of « content » mismatches the Meinongian notion. We must let this complex question aside. See J. N. FINDLAY, *Meinong’s theory of objects and values*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1963, pp. 26-27.

<sup>21</sup> « Error », in STOUT, *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, pp. 258-301.

alternative possibilities, each one being a *real* possibility, even though they are not necessarily *realized*. In Stout's 1902 view, alternative possibilities are objects of some « indeterminate thinking » which must be distinguished from believing and from knowing. Indeterminate thinking, he wrote, is a kind of *questioning* that takes place along with judging, believing, doubting, and which necessarily precedes *knowing*. With such an approach, the « mere apprehension » view has been replaced by the « indeterminate thinking » view. In his 1908 article<sup>22</sup> « Immediacy, mediacy and Coherence », Stout had not yet used the notion of supposal. He recognized « belief, disbelief, doubt, or mere imagination » as psychic attitudes and that as a result of such attitudes, objects of thought could be grasped, according to the 1908 article.

Stout appears to have finally begun integrating the Meinongian notion of assumption into his view around 1910. In his 1911 text « Real being and being for thought », the notion of « supposal » appears, and is explicitly related to Meinong's concept of *Annahme*. Stout suggested that his theory of supposal, as it incorporated the very heart of Meinong's concept, covered the problems and properties relative to assumptions stated by Meinong, in his « epoch-making discussion of the subject »<sup>23</sup>. The « supposal » found its place next to mental acts that had already been theorized by Stout, including believing, disbelieving, and doubting. Supposal presents itself as a powerful substitute for « mere apprehension », « mere imagination » and « indeterminate thinking ». This does not mean that Stout eliminated imagination: plays and functions of imagination have been theorized anew as a kind of mental activity dependent upon the act of supposing, or at least, upon one kind of supposing.

#### 4. « *Supposals* », *Annahmen*, and *Stoutian ontology*

In his « Real being and being for thought »<sup>24</sup>, Stout argued for a realistic view of entities that relies on his Austrian-wise distinction between act, content and object of thought, and that is dependent upon his view on the explanation of error. Stout refused the idea that the objects of thought receive their being from the fact that they are being thought. This would mean that they acquire their being from a relation they bear with the mind, and as a consequence, something like a *relatum* would depend, as regards his being, upon the very relation that it bears to the mind, although any relation cannot but depend, as its presupposition, upon the entity that it relates. Such a view would be equivalent to thinking that relational attributes constitute, or are, real attributes. As a consequence, an object of thought is not an object just because it is thought, nor just because it is presented, according to Stout – who is arguing in a manner that Meinong would not have opposed.

In his article, Stout explained that truth cannot be understood as the agreement of thought with what exists. To Judge that something is true, according to Stout, is to believe that a possibility is realized; if the possibility is not realized, then there is an error: an unrealized possibility that has been misjudged<sup>25</sup>. He also argued that thought cannot be limited to actuality. This point relies, in Stout's words, on Meinong's expression on the « prejudice in favour of the actual ». Stout resumed the point in a very efficient manner, writing that « the fact that C is a particular existent is not itself a particular existent ». Meinong would have said that we are dealing here with a « factual objective », and that such an objective (« C is a particular existent ») must be said to « subsist » (*Bestehen*) – a vocabulary that Stout did not use.

There is nevertheless a strong analogy between Meinong's realm of objects and Stout's universe of alternative possibilities; as Meinongian assumptions are dedicated to the non-doxastic grasping of such objects through objectives, Stoutian supposals are dedicated to the non-doxastic consideration of alternative possibilities. Stout argued for different, but interconnected modes of being: common

---

<sup>22</sup> In STOUT, *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, pp. 302-334.

<sup>23</sup> In STOUT, *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, p. 345.

<sup>24</sup> A paper Stout read at a meeting of the *Aristotelian Society* under the title « The object of thought and real being ».

<sup>25</sup> As one can see, this conception of alternative possibilities as being real, although non-existents, avoid the Russellian difficulty of the false objective. Stout's solution is similar to Meinong's, who argued that a true objective « subsists », as factual; a false objective neither exists nor subsists.

natures or sorts are essentially related to particular existents and have a « distributive » being. Universals are, by their own nature, capable of determinations and more importantly, capable of *different specifications*. Alternative possibilities are thus involved: to conceive of a general being, like animality, requires that different and alternative possible specifications are conceived as well, as in our thinking of a hawk, *or* of an octopus, *or* of a deer, in which the universal « animal » is « distributed » through such particular instances. As « general » or « distributive », a Stoutian universal has a proper form of unity, that matches the set of its particular instances, without involving neither uninstantiated Platonistic universals nor immanent Aristotelian universals. Universals, then, are determinable entities as they admit different possible specifications, and as such, they involve alternative possibilities: an animal is *either* a cat, *or* a fish, *or* a bird, etc.; a bird is *either* a hawk, *or* a crow, *or* a dove, etc.; an oak is *either* this oak, *or* this other one, *or* the one that is over there, etc. There is, according to Stout, a « relativity of possible alternatives to variable generalities »<sup>26</sup> (a view that seems to endorse the Aristotelian classification in genera and species). Such alternative possibilities are real and cannot simply be thought of as having a *being for thought*, according to Stout. The same applies to what he called « logical possibilities » which, according to him, are real possibilities, such as dispositions of things. The non-actuality of a dispositional property is no reason to see it as unreal, as it is logically possible that some actualisation occurs and as the relations between dispositions and their dispositional partners are logical possibilities. An ultra-thin crystal glass breaking if a fat quick-flying bumblebee hits it, is a real possibility. The same goes for active and passive Lockean powers, like fusibility, malleability<sup>27</sup>, etc., and for the possible relations of things capable of interactions: all of them constitute real possibilities that are part of a broader set of alternative possibilities. As one can see, the reign of particular existents is only a subset of the Stoutian ontology, which includes logical possibilities and alternative possibilities.

There is an evident parallelism here with the Meinongian *Aussersein* or extra-being, « in which » lies the infinity of objects and properties and their infinite gradabilities. Through assuming, the mind apprehends some objects which happen to be selected from other *graspable* objects. According to Meinong, thought about abstract substantives involve objectives of so-being, of the form « x is A », which, in a way are hidden, but which show themselves as we incline to see any property as determinable, or as being, by nature, a feature that must have instantiations. According to Meinong, conceiving of redness as an abstract property, or as a universal, involves thinking that « some x is red »: the very fact that a property must have instances, pertains to the thought about properties<sup>28</sup>. Stout had something very similar in mind with his doctrine of the « distributive unity » of universals, arguing that universals cannot be thought of without particular instances. Moreover, Meinong highlighted that assumptions grasp objects through objectives of so-being and that such objectives, as they include predicative thinking, involve alternative possibilities concerning objects (as when we think of « something that is triangular »: something that might be equilateral *or* right scalene *or* obtuse isosceles *or* ...) as well as impossibilities<sup>29</sup> (as when we think of « something that is triangular and round »). There are also evident similarities with Stoutian « alternative possibilities » that are connected to universals<sup>30</sup>. Stout did not appear to have much interest in impossible objects. In fact, such impossibilities are treated by Stout as an erroneous attempt to conceive of determinations of some general being in a way that contradicts its very nature: in this respect, we have impossibilities and by their very nature, according to Stout, we cannot believe that they obtain. In a similar manner, according to Meinong, impossibilities cannot be thought of as existing objects of factual judgements, but they can be objects of thought.

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibi*, p. 341.

<sup>27</sup> « Immediacy, mediacy, and coherence », in STOUT, *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, p. 305.

<sup>28</sup> MEINONG, *Über Annahmen*, § 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibi*, § 45.

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the Meinongian theory of incomplete objects, stated in his *Über Möglichkeit und Wahrscheinlichkeit*, Barth, Leipzig 1915, involved a more direct relationship between thinking via objects that are not complete (x's redness) and the mere possibilities involved by such undeterminateness. Meinong mentioned that they have an obvious link with universals.

The Stoutian distinction between what is *judged* (a possibility believed as being realized) and what is *supposed* (alternative possibilities that are just « considered », for example) enables one to see the various ways of accessing alternative possibilities, which usually are poorly noticed. Alternative possibilities are usually disregarded because of a « prejudice in favour of the judged possibility », as one might call it, which parallels the « prejudice in favour of the actual ». In the second of his *Gifford Lectures*, given in 1921 and published under the title of *God and Nature*, Stout still used the concept of « supposition », as he was considering error and alternative possibilities, and wrote that believing, as a peculiar attitude, is directed toward alternative possibilities that are otherwise considered and presented through supposal: « In supposal we do not lose sight of the fact that there are other alternatives which may also be real. When we ignore, or fail to notice, or dismiss from consideration other alternatives, our mental attitude is belief. In other words, we proceed in thought and action as if what is before our mind were not what may be real, but what is real. Then, if the alternative considered to the exclusion of others is not the realized alternative, we are making a mistake »<sup>31</sup>.

The prejudice in favour of the judged possibility is on par with the non-acknowledgement of the omnipresence of supposals as a neutral thinking about alternative possibilities. Through supposal, the mind relates itself to alternative possibilities, or to real objects of thought that do not inherit their being from being thought of. In « The nature of universals and propositions », Stout, again, argued about supposition in a way that reveals its similarity to the *Annahme*: « in mere supposition, the mind attends to the nature and implications of an alternative as such, ignoring, either provisionally or entirely, the question whether it is realized or unrealized »<sup>32</sup>. Stout observed that as one believes a proposition, meaning that an alternative is realized, and as one does not have to direct the mind toward all the other alternative possibilities that are not realized, such possibilities are disregarded<sup>33</sup>. Inversely, as one knows that a possibility is not realized (is disbelieved), fictions come to his mind, which means that a full range of unrealized possibilities are then the object of his consideration anew: as judgement fails, one is led back to supposals.

## 5. Conclusion

In the Stoutian ontology, there are particular properties and particular existents, as well as alternative possibilities, propositions, or universals that have distributive unity. The Stoutian ontology, then, appears as quasi-baroque. Alternative possibilities that are not realized are objects of supposal – a concept that Stout borrowed from Meinong. Meinongian assumptions serve a goal similar to Stoutian supposals, as some attitudes are required to explain the fact that we can think of objects without believing in their existence or in their realization; objects that might not exist in actuality, but that are nevertheless to be considered as having some being. Meinong and Stout then had a common desire to free the objects that one is able to think of, from prejudice in favour of the actual and to free the mind's relationship to objects, from prejudice in favour of the judgment<sup>34</sup>. The consideration of Stout's Meinongian-wise approach on this matter, might help shed light on some aspects of Quine's famous paper « On what there is ». Quine surely attacked Meinongian positions, but his criticisms were hardly directed against the *identifiable* thesis held by the *historical* Meinong. Quine seemingly

---

<sup>31</sup> G.F. STOUT, *God and Nature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1952, p. 103.

<sup>32</sup> in STOUT, *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, p. 401.

<sup>33</sup> As he wrote in « Being for thought and real being »: « The distinctive character of the judgment (...) is that the alternative asserted completely and persistently preoccupies attention to the disregard of other alternatives, as if there were no others », in STOUT, *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, p. 344.

<sup>34</sup> We should however note some interesting discrepancy between Stoutian supposals and Meinongian assumptions about « questioning ». In his 1902 paper, Stout thought that « indeterminate thinking » was a case of questioning. Then he thought that questioning, as it is looking for alternative possibilities in order to assert one of them as realized, comes close to judging. Meinong treated also this case, in *Über Annahmen* (§18). He admitted that as one is asking a question, one wants to be able to judge something, but he does not judge anything as he is questioning. As the question involves necessarily at least an objective, the psychic state of the questioner must be an assumption.



preferred to criticize upholders of unrealized possibilities and of universals, indirectly targeting Meinongian ideas by arguing against particular views of a Stoutian flavor.