

Theory and History of Ontology ([www.ontology.co](http://www.ontology.co)) by Raul Corazzon | e-mail: [rc@ontology.co](mailto:rc@ontology.co)

## Reinhardt Grossmann and the Ontology of Categories

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### Ontology, categories and the world

"Ontology, I said at the beginning, asks what the categories of the world are. What is a category? It is a kind of entity. What kind of kind? In answer to this question, we can only give examples. It is that sort of kind, as we have seen, that distinguishes between individuals, on the one hand, and properties on the other. It is that sort of kind, as we have noted, which obeys a certain kind of law, namely, categorial laws. But this reply does not really help much either. We must therefore rest content, as on so many other occasions, with examples rather than definitions. In these most fundamental matters of metaphysics, definitions are impossible." (p. 5)

"The world, I said earlier, is the ultimate object of ontological analysis. But this world must be distinguished from the physical universe. The universe is a complicated spatio-temporal structure. Facts, on the other hand, do not form such a structure. It follows, as Armstrong fails to realize, that a world consisting of facts cannot be identical with the universe. (D. M. Armstrong, *Universals and Scientific Realism*, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 126-135.) But if the world is not the same as the universe, to what category does it belong? There are a number of plausible answers. It may be said that the world is the totality of entities. Or it may be claimed that it is the totality of facts. (Compare L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* 1961, p. 7.) If these answers imply that the world belongs to the category of class, then I think that they are wrong. But I must admit that I do not know how to argue for my view. I believe that the world is a fact; that it belongs to the category of fact. If this is the correct view, then we can distinguish between two levels of ontological analysis. On the first level, the world can be analyzed into its constituent facts. On this level, we do not arrive at new categories, but discover the kinds of fact there are. We discover, in other words, the subcategories of the category fact. On the second level, we analyze facts which do not consist of further facts into their constituents. It is on this second level of analysis that we encounter the traditional categories of individual, property, relation, etc." (p. 8)

"Ontology asks what are the categories of the world. So far, I have tried to elucidate the crucial terms 'category' and 'world'. But I could have begun instead by saying that ontology attempts to categorize everything there is, and this alternative introduction would have led us earlier to a number of questions which we must now consider. There is an old and hallowed tradition, according to which being comes in many modes. One distinguishes, for example, between the existence of individual things and the mere subsistence of facts. Concrete things are said to exist, while abstract entities are held to subsist. But even though this view has been maintained by some of the recent philosophers I most admire -- by Bolzano, Frege, and Meinong, among others -- I do not think that it is correct. I do not believe that there are modes of being. Existence is the only kind of being there is. I shall later defend this belief. What is of primary interest to us right now is how the possibility of modes of being affects our conception of ontology. It seems to me clear that if there are modes of

being, then it is the task of ontology to categorize all entities, irrespective of their particular modes of being. The field of ontology is as wide as the realm of being itself. But it is not any wider: What has no being cannot be categorized. What has no being cannot be the subject of ontology. Meinong, as we all know, would demur. According to him, there is an enterprise that deals, not only with existents and subsistents, but also with objects that have no being whatsoever; with objects like the golden mountain and the round square. And he claims that we are merely prejudiced if we exclude such objects from categorization. (A. Meinong, [*On the Theory of Objects*] 1904.) But Meinong's defense of a general theory of objects rests on an important assumption which I do not share. He maintains that objects without being may nevertheless have properties and stand in relations. He holds that the golden mountain is golden, that the round square is both round and square. Now, if it were true that objects without being bristle with properties, then it would make sense to attempt to classify them, according to these properties. But if Meinong's assumption is mistaken, as I shall contend in a later chapter, then there simply can be no such classification; for one can only classify what has properties and stands in relations; what has, in short, attributes. My conviction that ontology cannot be extended beyond the realm of being thus rests on my rejection of the view that beingless objects can have attributes." (pp. 9-10)

From: Reinhardt Grossmann, *The Categorical Structure of the World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1983.