

Introduction

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In contrast to Quine’s (meta-)ontology and his preference for desert landscapes, recent years have seen a renewed interest in ‘non-being’: non-existent entities, mere possibilia, negative properties, negative facts, absences, nothingness, voids, holes, etc. Interest in the category of non-being is not limited to ontology but has also found applications in the philosophy of mind, particularly regarding the role intentionality plays in relation to non-entities (Crane 2013; Priest 2016) and the problem of perceiving absences. Additionally, it has influenced the philosophy of art, especially in discussions about absence art - i.e., art that features absences as aesthetic objects (Farennikova 2019).

The questioning of Quine’s orthodoxy began by first challenging the Parmenidean assumption that we cannot reference non-being. Indeed, this view seems self-defeating (aren’t we speaking of non-being right now and thus referring to ‘it’?), motivating philosophers to explore the realm of non-existence, particularly with the revival of neo-Meinongian (meta-)ontologies. Alternative approaches involve examining the possibility of empty reference, i.e., fully legitimate singular terms without any referents. Soon, however, non-entities acquired an even more significant role. Philosophers began discussing that strange object which is Nothingness, characterized as the

absence of everything,¹ sometimes arguing that it grounds all of reality (Priest, Gabriel 2022; Casati 2021; Casati, Fujikawa 2024). Others have argued for causation by absences or omissions, claiming that absences can feature in causal explanations (Dowe 2001; Schaffer 2004). The idea that non-being can play an explanatory role in various philosophical contexts seems to be gaining ground. At the same time, these ideas have faced significant criticism, notably from Mumford (2021) and Della Rocca (2020). While the former defends a position called Soft Parmenidism, the latter argues for the far more extreme view that there are no distinctions in reality, denying any positive role for non-being.

If we admit reference to nonexistent objects, why should we not admit that there are circumstances in which we see what is not? Psychologists are familiar with illusory contours such as the Ehrenstein illusion or the Kanizsa triangle. Recently, however, there has been a growing body of literature arguing that we experience and/or perceive absences. For example, Farennikova (2013) argues that absence experiences are perceptual phenomena. Moreover, Farennikova (2019) even contends that absences can possess aesthetic properties, implying that absence art has objective value. By contrast, others have claimed that while we can experience absences, we do not perceive them (Gow 2021a; 2021b).

This issue of *JoLMA* highlights the richness of the topic by presenting eight fresh papers that range from metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology, to philosophy of language, aesthetics, and philosophy of mind.

Metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological aspects of non-being are addressed by Fritzman, Meadows, Priest, and Simionato. Fritzman engages with contemporary discussions on grounding, arguing that being is incomplete since each entity partially grounds, generates, and constitutes other entities. As grounding is always partial, Fritzman contends that nothing is ever fully real, implying that non-being is integral to the constitution of every entity. Meadows critiques eliminativist error theories of absence causation, arguing that these theories are inadequately motivated. He challenges various arguments in the literature that conceptualize absence causation as problematic, concluding that there is no compelling reason to reject it. Priest raises a question for the modal noneist's understanding of fictional objects: what properties do fictional objects possess in the actual world? He argues that modal noneism does not fully answer this question and explores six possible solutions. Finally, Simionato engages with the analytic debate on nothingness, drawing on Kant's

¹ Priest 2014; Casati, Fujikawa 2019; Casati 2021; Costantini 2020; 2021a; 2021b; Sorensen 2022.

Table of Nothing to critically assess three accounts in the literature (Priest 2014; Casati, Fujikawa 2019; Costantini 2020).

Moltmann and Pavone explore issues in linguistics and the philosophy of language. Moltmann introduces a new theory to account for the semantics of verbs such as ‘lack’ or ‘be missing’, proposing that these verbs reflect a strong notion of absence, on which the absence of a thing presupposes that that thing should have been there, to make something else complete. This modal notion of absence involves the concept of completion. Pavone examines the use of bare pairs of quotation marks to represent the empty string in formal linguistics and computer science, arguing that this practice is well-founded. Pavone contends that the conventions governing quotation marks in natural language make sentences containing empty quotations grammatical and meaningful.

The role of absences and negativity in aesthetics is the subject of Planiceanu’s article on Spanish artist Manolo Millares. In one of the first contributions in English on this key figure of Spanish informalism, Planiceanu demonstrates how the interplay of presence and absence, figure and background, and material and void aligns with Adorno’s concept of mimesis. Moreover, this interplay challenges traditional aesthetic formalism by exposing the artwork’s inherent incompleteness.

Lastly, the field of philosophy of mind is addressed by Voltolini, who argues for a moderate version of the perceptualist position on absences. According to Voltolini, perceptual experiences of absence involve the removal of occlusion, which affects the non-conceptual content of perceptual experience and aligns with changes in its overall phenomenal character. Notably, Voltolini extends this view to the case of pictorial experiences of absences.

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