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Noneism and Allism on the Objects of Thought

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Abstract

Noneism is a version of Meinongianism, the view that some things do not exist. Allism is the view that everything exists, including those things that the noneist takes as non-existent. Since [23], there has been a discussion on whether or not one can translate the noneist theory into the allist theory and if, in that case, the differences between the two remain substantive. In this paper we propose a notion we call *Theoretical Equivalence*: two theories are theoretically equivalent, relative to an explanandum, if the models they produce to explain it are isomorphic. We take intentional objects – which are often considered as providing a *prima facie* motivation for Meinongianism – as our explanandum. We argue that noneism and allism are theoretically equivalent with respect to the problem of intentional objects, lending some support to Woodward's [40] translation of the noneist's 'to exist' into the allist's 'to be actually concrete', in the face of recent objections by Priest [31]. We also claim, however, that while in a sense this makes the disagreement between noneism and allism insubstantial, in another sense, it doesn't.

> The domain or universe of discourse includes a wide variety of objects, existent as well as incomplete and impossible nonexistent objects.
>
> Jacquette [20, p. 101]

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1 Intentionality and Intentional Objects

As you read this article, there are many things you may start thinking about. You may think or worry about the theses of this paper; you may get distracted and start thinking about the dishes that still need to be washed; you may then think about Sherlock Holmes, the main character of some Conan Doyle book on your bedside table; you might even think about a round square – a weird thing some of the protagonists of the debate we will describe below nevertheless accept in their ontologies. Similarly, we, the authors, think about Jacquette's form of Meinongianism and wonder about the metaphysics of non-existent objects. This feature of mental acts – that they are about things, the directedness of thoughts – is called *intentionality*. Gallagher and Zahavi [17] characterise intentionality as follows:

> '[I]ntentionality' is a generic term for the pointing-beyond-itself proper [...] (from the Latin *intendere*, which means to aim in a particular direction, similar to drawing and aiming a bow at a target). Intentionality has to do with the directedness or *of*-ness or aboutness of [mental acts], i.e., with the fact that when one perceives or judges or feels or thinks, one's mental state is about or of something. (p. 109, original emphases)

How to define intentionality exactly is a vexed question, one we do not hope to settle here. However, we will assume some distinctions in order to focus our discussion (here we follow current accounts of objects of thought, e.g., [11, 31]).

First of all, one might argue that there are *object-directed* mental acts as well as acts that lack this object-directedness (we will leave aside whether these can be properly called 'mental acts'). For example, feelings of nausea seem to lack the kind of object-directedness that searching for something or thinking of something do have. For the purposes of this paper we will assume that thinking of and searching for something are examples of *object-directed mental acts* and we will focus on these. Secondly, we will focus on the notion of intentionality as it is used in the tradition of Brentano, Twardowski, and Meinong. That is, we will assume the 'ordinary relation' interpretation of intentionality, i.e., that it is a dyadic relation that presupposes two relata (see [17] for another possible interpretation). Finally, one may distinguish between the content and the object of thought. So, when Jacquette thought of unicorns, the *content* of this thought was very existent, whereas the *objects* of the thought are non-existent.[1]

[1] The distinction between the object and content of thought was first made by Brentano's student Twardowski [37]. Betti clearly formulates the contribution of Twardowski as follows: "He [i.e.,

Our paper will focus on the debate about *the nature* of these objects of intentionality. In this sense, our discussion is located in metaphysics as opposed to the philosophy of mind (which, arguably, concerns the *content* of intentionality). Below, we will briefly discuss two contemporary accounts of the metaphysics of intentional objects and work towards the main hypothesis of our paper.

1.1 The Metaphysics of Intentional Objects

In the Meinongian tradition of intentionality, mental acts are directed towards an object, i.e., you think *about* something, e.g., when you read this article. However, it is unclear *what* these objects are, especially when our mental acts are directed towards objects that, at least *prima facie* or seemingly, do not exist. For the obvious question then arises, what is it, if anything, that our mental act is directed towards?

We will assume that we can have mental acts, like that of thinking about Sherlock Holmes, or about some dragon, that are directed towards seemingly non-existent objects. Although this is rather controversial, there are many who agree with us (amongst others [37, 26, 34, 20, 11, 31]). Moreover, we take it that there is rather intuitive evidence for it as well. Consider the following example of Priest:

(1) I thought of something I would like to give you as a Christmas present, but I couldn't get it for you because it doesn't exist. [31, p. 152, fn. 25]

This is a very mundane, everyday, thought and similar thoughts occur on a regular basis in everyday life. For example, we can think of Vulcan, Santa Claus, Sherlock Holmes, a dragon, and much more. Relatedly, consider the apparent similarity of the following truths:

(2) Some kings of England died violently and some did not.

(3) Some characters in the Bible existed and some did not. [11, p. 17]

We take (1) and (3) to be *prima facie* evidence that mental acts can be directed towards objects that, seemingly, do not exist; and that true things can be said about them. These are data a theory of intentional objects needs to account for.

So, our aim here is not to engage with those who *do not* think that we can have intentionality towards things that, seemingly, do not exist, for there are no such

Twardowski] drew inspiration from arguments in favor of the content-object distinction present in Bolzano, but he reinterpreted them in a Brentanian framework to sustain conclusions that were opposite to Bolzano's and that were new for the Brentanians" [6, §2]. This is the starting point of and inspiration for, Meinong's [26] famous theory of objects.

things at all.[2] Rather, we want to discuss two views that both are, in some sense, realist about said objects – they accept that such things are there, and can play the role of targets of intentional acts – but propose a, seemingly, different view of the ontological status of these objects of thought.

Below, we will consider two views that can be used to give candidate accounts of such objects of thought: *allism* and *noneism*. The comparison of these two has been a hotly debated topic since Lewis' [23] seminal paper. After an initial presentation of the accounts, we aim to contribute to this debate through a certain interpretation of the differences between the two.

Noneism

Noneism is a kind of Meinongianism – broadly, the view that some objects do not exist. Dale Jacquette has played an important role in the revival of Meinongianism (cf. [20, 21]). Typically, Meinongians are not only realists on the objects of thought – they accept such things – but also, they claim that these things really – not just seemingly, or *prima facie* – do not exist: there are things in the world, which just lack the feature of existence. Meinongians hold that one can have mental states directed to objects that do not exist, and that one can make true claims on them.

The term "noneism" was introduced by Routley [33] and it is a particular form of Meinongianism: its specificity consists in holding that there is a unique sense of being or existence (arguably, this was not the view of Meinong himself). The corresponding property or feature is a "real property" in Kant's sense: a feature that some objects have, other lack.[3]

[2]For example, Broad [7] held that we could not. He says of a thought of dragons that, if "true, it is certain that it cannot be about dragons for there will be no such things as dragons for it to be about" (p. 182, found in [11, p. 8]).

[3]There are many subtly different forms of neo-Meinongianism and one does well to carefully distinguish between these. For example, one that is often confused with noneism is so-called *Modal Meinongianism*, however, they concern significantly different issues. Noneism holds, as said above, that there is one sense of being or existence and that there are objects that do not exist. Modal Meinongianism, on the other hand, concerns what non-existent objects there are, how these are characterised, and what properties they can have. One can be a noneist without being a modal Meinongian and *vice versa*. Meinong, for example, was neither a noneist nor a modal Meinongian, whereas Routley was a noneist who was not a modal Meinongian – although he might have been the first to have some ideas that then became embedded in the modal Meinongian view. One of us (FB), on the other hand, is a modal Meinongian who is not a noneist, and Priest is both a noneist and modal Meinongian. See [3] for an overview of different neo-Meinongian accounts.

Allism

Allism holds that all objects exist. In this, it follows, *contra* Meinong, the view of existence held by authors like Quine, or Peter van Inwagen, according to whom the meaning of existence is, essentially, captured by the quantifier. But in particular, we take allism to be the position of those who think that all the objects of thought exist – also those that, *prima facie*, do not exist, like Holmes or a dragon. The allist also subscribes, following Quine and van Inwagen, to a unique sense of existence: that is existence-as-quantification, not existence-as-a-real-property, as the noneist has it. Also, for allists, objects may be concrete or abstract – roughly: endowed with or, respectively, devoid of, the disposition to enter into causal relations, and/or endowed with or, respectively, devoid of, spatiotemporal address.

The term 'allism' was first used, as far as we know, by Lewis [23], but it is unclear if Lewis had anyone in particular in mind who defended such a view. Within the philosophy of mathematics, both Beall [1] and Priest [28, 29] have discussed forms of allism (*Really Full-Blooded Platonism* and *Paraconsistent Plenitudinous Platonism* respectively). However, it is unclear whether there are actual proponents of allism. For example, we take it that Woodward [40], whose work we will discuss below, would not consider himself an allist as he points out that "most philosophers regard allism as being crazy" (p. 183).

Allism, just as noneism, may be put forth as providing an account of intentional objects. Or so it seems. Most Platonists hold that Platonic objects really exist, they are just abstract objects outside spacetime, that we cannot causally interact with.[4] An allist is one who claims that there really are objects of thought, but they only seemingly do not exist. In fact, they do exist, but are abstract, that is, devoid of causal features, or dispositions to causal interactions, etc. So, one might worry then that an allist, who holds that all these things really exist, cannot deal with the seeming literal truth of negative existentials ('Round squares do not exist', 'Holmes does not exist'). The allist, in turn, might claim that if one translates 'to exist' into 'to be spatio-temporally located', or 'to be endowed with causal features', in *this* sense none of the Platonic entities exist. (Below, we will discuss translation issues in much more detail.) So, the allist may hold that she can account for the data of (1), via translation.

At this point, one may wonder: is there a really significant difference between the noneist and the allist? After all, for each object accepted by one to play the role

[4]See, for example, debates on fictional entities where Artifactualists hold that such entities are abstract and really existent objects (cf. [38, 36]). Or Platonists about mathematical objects, who hold that numbers, though abstract, really exist (e.g., see the discussion in [32]).

of an object of thought, there is a corresponding object accepted by the other, and vice versa. One calls some of them non-existent, but the other can translate such talk in terms of abstractness, or perhaps of non-concreteness. Is the disagreement merely verbal? This tangled issue is what we shall explore.

2 Theoretical Equivalence

We believe that the answer to the above question calls for a distinction of respects: the difference between allism and noneism is significant in one respect, but not very significant in another. We will propose a notion of *Theoretical Equivalence* that holds, we will then argue, between allism and noneism, and shows in which sense the difference between the two views is *not* very significant. We will add that one should not conclude from this that the disagreement between an allist and a noneist, as a consequence of this, ends up being merely verbal: mere talking past each other due to some crucial words having different meanings in the two parties' mouths. The disagreement is still substantial, but it does not lie at the level of the *models* of the two competing views.

2.1 Modal Metaphysics and Logic: an Example

To set up our account of this metaphysical debate relative to the problem of intentional objects, let us draw an analogy with the discussion of the metaphysics of possible worlds within the scope of a theory of semantics or logic.

The metaphysical status of possible worlds has been a point of controversy ever since their formal introduction by Kripke (see [13] for an overview). However, if one turns to the discussion of this debate in logic or semantics textbooks, she always finds a very indifferent or agnostic stance towards the issue. The semanticist often stresses that she is *not* doing "heavy-duty metaphysics" when she uses the "vivid [possible worlds] way to talk about these models" [35, p. 141] (see also [9, p. 207]). The reason why semanticists and logicians often hold such an indifferent stance towards this metaphysical debate is nicely captured by Fine, who notes that "[p]hilosophers have been intrigued by the ontological status of impossible worlds. Do they exist and, if they do exist, then do they have the same status as possible worlds? To my own mind, *these questions are of peripheral interest*. The central question is whether impossible worlds or the like are of any use, especially for the purposes of semantic enquiry" [16, p. 4, emphasis added].

This reminds us of the distinction between *pure semantics* and *applied semantics* (cf. [15, 10, 30, 2]). Pure semantics is what the mathematicians and logicians do

when they research the mathematical structures of modal space as 'uninterpreted', mathematical formalisms, or "pieces of mathematics" [14, p. 188]. When one wants to give an intended meaning to the logical connectives and explain the representational power of these points of evaluation, one moves to applied semantics. The move to applied semantics is characterised by the fact that "a semantics gives an account of meaning *only once* the mathematical formalism of the semantics itself has been explained *in terms of concepts relating to the actual or intended use* of the sentences of the language for which the semantics is given" [10, p. 202, emphases added].

Formulating Fine's comments through the lens of this old distinction hints towards our proposal: with respect to explaining mathematical structures, the metaphysical status of the points of evaluation (worlds) is irrelevant; however, in explaining the representational power and *how* these points capture the intuitive meaning, the metaphysics of these worlds *does* matter.[5]

2.2 Theoretical Equivalence Introduced

We aim to capture and generalise the above sentiment with the notion that we will call *Theoretical Equivalence* and then use this to evaluate the apparent similarity between allism and noneism.

Definition 1. **Theoretical Equivalence**
Let there be a phenomenon that needs to be explained, i.e., an explanandum, $\mathcal{E}$, and two theories, τ_1 and τ_2, that are put forth as explanantia. Then these two theories are theoretically equivalent, with respect to $\mathcal{E}$, if the respective models purportedly doing the explaining are structurally the same, i.e., there is an isomorphism from one to the other.

Two models are isomorphic when there is a one-to-one and onto structure-preserving map between the two.[6] Notice that the notion of *Theoretical Equivalence* is relative to something: to a particular explanandum.

Our thesis is the following: allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent relative to the phenomenon of intentional objects. In order to support our thesis, we

[5] Arguably, there is a stronger thesis that even within applied semantics the metaphysical differences do not affect the models. Or one might disagree completely if she has a different interpretation of the pure and applied semantics distinction, that is fine. This example is just for illustrative purposes and nothing hinges on it.

[6] For formal definitions of isomorphisms, see, e.g., [19] and [18].

will explore the aforementioned issue of the possibility of a translation between the noneist and allist vocabularies.[7]

Before that, let us first briefly flag some potential confusion in order to clearly delineate how to interpret our claim that allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent, namely that our thesis is not to be confused with two stronger theses: instrumentalism and epistemic structuralism. First of all, one might think that our thesis is a form of instrumentalism in that, in the case of intentional objects, one only cares about the explanatory value of these objects in the models. However, note that instrumentalism in the philosophy of science is often described as a stronger view, namely that it sets "aside the issues of objective truth and real theory-independent existence" [12, p. 204] and holds that "unobservable things have no literal meaning at all" [8]. This is not what we advocate. Our hypothesis allows for the fact that the disagreement between allism and noneism might be very real, meaningful, and substantial, as we will see. It just does not influence the models they produce relative to the theory of intentional objects.

Secondly, one might think that for *Theoretical Equivalence* one only needs to be interested in the structure of the models and that it therefore is a version of epistemic structuralism (cf. [22]). On one characterisation of epistemic structuralism, it is a view where "we put an epistemic constraint on realism to the effect that we should only commit ourselves to believing in the structural content of a theory" [22, p. 410]. However, our notion of *Theoretical Equivalence* still allows for a view where one has more knowledge of reality than only knowledge of its structure; this is something an epistemic structuralist would deny.

2.3 Allism and Noneism: Theoretically Equivalent

Our thesis is that allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent as explanantia of the phenomenon of intentional objects. To unpack our thesis, we will use the notion of *domain of discourse*. Crane uses, equivalently, 'the universe of discourse'. As he puts it, the domain of discourse contains "all items we assume or stipulate to be relevant to our *discourse*" [11, p. 38, original emphasis]. (It is unclear if the domain of discourse is context-sensitive for Crane and whether or not it is relative to a particular subject, in a Carnapian vein. For our purposes, this subtlety does not really matter.) If (1) and (3) are evidence that we can think and make true claims about things that, seemingly, do not exist, it follows, according to Crane, that the

[7]Note that the use of 'paraphrasing' and 'translation' might be non-standard in the context of isomorphism, however, we use this terminology in line with the translation debate in philosophy between allism and noneism (see section 3).

mere fact that something is in the domain of discourse does not tell us much about the ontological or metaphysical status of that thing.

We take it that both the noneist and the allist agree on what intentional objects there are: all those that are in the relevant domain of discourse. This points towards the first step of a putative isomorphism f between the allist and the noneist models. Each object, o, in the domain of the noneist, is mapped via the one-to-one and onto map f to some object, $f(o)$, in the domain of the allist. Moreover, we need each property P in the noneist model to be mapped to a property $f(P)$ in the allist model which applies to the correspondingly mapped objects: o has P just in case $f(o)$ has $f(P)$. The crux of the matter is the translation of 'exists' of the noneist vocabulary into the allist vocabulary, and the mapping of the corresponding property to a suitable property in the allist model. Remember that when we introduced allism and noneism this issue was already raised and an initial stab at a translation was for the allist to interpret the noneist's 'exists' as 'is concrete'. However, as we will see below, this translation breaks down in modal contexts.

We take it that there is a translation that does the job; in particular, we think that the one suggested by Woodward [40] works. To develop our claim that allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent, we will defend Woodward's translation between the noneist and allist theories against some recent objections from Priest [31].

3 The Translation Debate

The most recent contributions in the translation debate are made by Woodward [40] (in favour of the translation) and by Priest [31] (against the translation). Our main aim in this section is to reply to Priest. However, let us first briefly go over the precursor of Woodward and Priest.

Lewis [23] was the first to point out the similarities between the noneist and the allist, when responding to the revival of Meinongianism by Routley's [33] exposition of noneism. The most important point that Lewis discusses is how the allist and the noneist can best understand each other and his discussion focuses on the issue of the quantifier. Lewis has it that we *should* interpret Routley as an allist, for even "[t]hough most philosophers regard allism as being crazy, they at least find it intelligible [...] [And] better [to be] a crazy allist than a nonsensical noneist" [40, pp. 183-186]. It is not completely clear whether for Lewis a hypothetical noneist and a hypothetical allist that seemingly disagree on the notion of existence would actually have a merely verbal disagreement – they would just be talking past each other. But it seems clear that for Lewis, who was a committed Quinean on the notion of

existence, translating noneism into allism meant translating a view of which one has a hard time making sense of, into one that is understandable, though it might well be plain false.

After Lewis, the discussion has moved away from questions concerning the interpretation of the quantifier, and rightly so we believe. We agree with Woodward when he says that "[e]ven though it fits the rhetoric of Routley and Priest, there is something a little odd about the Lewisian thought that that [sic.] the distinction between loaded and neutral quantification is at the heart of noneism" [40, p. 185, fn. 4], what is really at stake is that "the noneist holds that only the objects in a certain restricted domain deserve to be called 'existent' whereas the [allist] thinks otherwise" [40, p. 186].[8]

In particular, the debate focused on the translation of the noneist's 'exists' into the allist's 'is concrete'. However, as Priest, in his earlier work, has argued, this translation gets the wrong results. There are "statements whose truth-value is not preserved under [this] translation" [29, p. 155].[9] Especially, in modal contexts such as (4) and (5) the translation fails:

(4) Routley existed, but he might not have done so.

(5) Routley was concrete, but he might fail to have been so.

If we take it to be necessary whether something is concrete or abstract, as Priest does, then the translated sentence (5) is false, whereas the former seems true. So, Priest concludes, the translation fails. Note that some people accept *contingently concrete* objects (cf. [25] and [39]). However, as Woodward [40] notes, we need not accept such a controversial view. The Priestian point seems to be simply based on a very robust intuition: we may characterize concreteness and lack thereof in very different ways, but it seems very commonly accepted that everything is either concrete or not, nothing can be both, *and* concreteness is part of the essential features of whatever is concrete: if you are an uncontroversially concrete thing, like a chair or a donkey or a person, there's no way *you* could have been abstract. But, of course, you are contingent existent: your parents may never have met, or your manufacturer may never have produced you.

[8] See also Berto on this: "[T]heir involvement [i.e., of the quantifiers] depends on their being connected, or rather not, with the only remaining item at issue between [Quineans] and [Meinongians], that predicate, 'exists' [...]. From now on I will confront Meinongianism and Quineanism, [...], as two opposite theories of the property of existence, i.e., of what the predicate 'exists' refers to" [4, pp. 240-241].

[9] From now on, we will try to distinguish between the 'pre-Woodward' Priest by quoting the first edition of *Towards Non-Being* [29] and the 'post-Woodward' Priest by quoting the second edition of his book [31].

3.1 State of the Art: Woodward versus Priest

Woodward [40], in a recent paper, responds to Priest and aims to provide a new translation scheme on behalf of the allist that does work in the face of these challenging cases. His solution is quite simple: in order to overcome issues in modal contexts one adds an 'actuality'-condition. That is, we "interpret Priest as using 'exists' to pick out those objects that are concrete *and actual*" [40, p. 188, original emphasis]. Or, in other words, we take 'to exist' to mean 'to be actually concrete' (or 'to be actual and concrete', though we do not take there to be a difference, following Woodward).[10] This translation scheme works perfectly fine with the problematic sentence of Priest, the translation of (4) now is:

(6) Routley was actually concrete, but he might fail to have been so.

Both (4) and (6) are true, for even though Routley could not have failed to be concrete, he could certainly have failed to be actual. So, it seems that this new suggestion provides a good translation scheme between the allist and the noneist, as it "does not break down in modal contexts" [40, p. 188].[11]

So, if this paraphrase indeed completes the isomorphism then we can conclude that allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent with respect to a problem of intentional objects. (As we will see below, this translation is not without objectors.) Woodward's reformulation of his argument nicely captures this:

[10] Note that for the formal isomorphism, 'actually concrete' should be a non-conjunctive property, e.g., $\mathcal{C}_@$. However, it seems natural to assume this to be equivalent to the conjunctive property.

[11] It has to be noted that, in 'is actually concrete', the locution 'is actual' cannot work rigidly. So, it has to work indexically, but Priest argues that this raises some issues. "If, [...], the extension of 'is actual' varies from world to world, then for any world, w, there may be things that exist, *simpliciter*, that do not exist at w" [31, p. 202, fn. 11]. However, it is unclear what Priest means with 'exists simpliciter' and how it relates to the noneist's (his) notion of 'exists'.

First of all, note that if Priest holds that there are two ways of existing, 'to exist' and ' to exist simpliciter', then he gives up one of the main points of noneism, namely that there is only one sense of being (cf. [34, 29]). Secondly, it is unclear how this is supposed to be problematic for the proposed translation. Given that noneism, as we defined it, has a unique sense of being, Priest can either hold that this is 'exist' or 'exist simpliciter', where the former seems to be existence at a world and the latter seems to be existence at the actual world ("presumably, truth at @ coincides with truth *simpliciter*" ([31, p. 202, fn. 11], original emphasis)). The former is captured by the proposed translation of Woodward, so in that case Priest's observation does not pose a problem for the translation. Thus, only in that case that Priest's unique sense of being is existence at the actual world, there is a potential problem.

If Priest really holds that existence simpliciter is the unique sense of being that noneists have, then it is no longer clear why (4) would be true for the noneist and it might be that the allist can just translate 'exists' of the noneist to 'is concrete'. We will leave this for what it is, as we do not see how Priest could have a genuine issue with Woodward's usage of 'actually' here.

> Let's spot for the moment that noneism is true. Now imagine that we rewrite our noneism theory: whereas previously we said that an object exists, we now say that an object is actually concrete, and where we previously said that an object is self-identical, we now say that an object exists. *No one seriously thinks that this relabelling exercise has changed anything*: all we've done is rewritten the theory in a different way. But our rewritten noneist theory just is allism.
>
> [40, p. 191, emphasis added]

What is important here, is the claim that the relabelling exercise does not change anything. Let us phrase Woodward's translation in terms of our *Theoretical Equivalence*: the feature of existing from the noneist's theory is mapped, while preserving the structure, to the feature of being actually concrete from the allist's theory.

In the second edition of *Towards Non-Being*, Priest [31] raises three main objections against Woodward [40], which we will dub: (i) symmetric translation; (ii) failure of translation; and (iii) unwarranted conclusion. Let us first briefly address the worry of the symmetric translation. Priest argues that a good translation is symmetric and that, hence, there being a translation *by itself* does not give any advantage to either view. We agree, but we note that this is not how Woodward intended his argument to be taken; his argument is that *if* one accepts the translation, then she has a problem maintaining that there is a substantive disagreement.[12] Woodward is *not* suggesting that the translation itself is problematic for the noneist. In the remainder of the paper, we will address the other two objections by Priest.

3.2 What it Means to Exist

Addressing Priest's 'failure of translation'-objection is a subtle issue and hinges on a very clear understanding of the role of the translation in the claim that allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent. The reason why it is important to get this clear is that it is here we diverge from Woodward [40].

The role the translation plays for us is a technical one; it is involved in the isomorphism between the *models* that are proposed as explanantia. We do not aim to say something on the folk meaning of existence, nor on the meaning of existence as used by other theorists.[13] Importantly, this also means that if the translation works in this isomorphism-sense, nothing follows on what the intuitively correct meaning

[12] Thanks to Richard Woodward for helping us get clear on this. Moreover, he agrees that if the allist accepts the translation *and* holds that the disagreement is substantive, she also has to address this worry.

[13] Another reason to ignore the folk meaning of such technical terms is if one believes these to

or interpretation of 'to exist' is and whether any of the two accounts has the better account of this intuitive meaning.[14] Priest, in a sense, seems to concede to this type of translation when he notes that one might always "coin a neologism, [...], to mean whatever relation it is to the concrete that is needed to make the translation manual work. [...] The word then just becomes a term of art. Moreover, it divorces the word from whatever content it would normally seem to have" [31, p. 202]. But the fact that the translation becomes divorced from the 'normal content' is not a problem for us, because as we just pointed out, with respect to *Theoretical Equivalence*, we are not concerned with capturing the intuitive meaning of 'exists'.

The simplicity of noneism, insofar as it takes 'exists' to be univocal, is one of its main selling points over, e.g., Platonism. For example, Priest notes that "the picture of reality whereby it comprises the existent, *which are concrete objects in space and time*, and, for the rest, the non-existent, has an appealing cleanness about it" [29, p. 134, emphasis added]. So, everything, from mathematical objects [29, p. 135] to fictional objects [31, p. 317], are all non-existent objects for the noneist. Similarly, Routley points out that noneism "enables [...] that what is said to exist can coincide with what really does exist, namely only certain individual objects now *located in space*" [34, p. 152, emphasis added].[15] So, it seems that Woodward's translation does capture the noneist's use of 'exists'.

Yet, despite all this, Priest disagrees with the proposed translation. He does so based on another sentence pair that he takes to be problematic for Woodward's translation:

(7) If 3 were an actually concrete object, then it would be in space-time.

(8) If 3 were existent, then it would be in space-time. [31, pp. 201-203]

The first sentence is, trivially, true for both the noneist and the allist; to be actual and concrete just is to be in space-time (of this world). The second, according to Priest, "is false for a noneist—and certainly not trivially true. Plato, after all, could have been right. 'Exists' does not *mean* to be in space/time. So there can be possible worlds where things exist which are not in space/time" [31, pp. 201-202, original emphasis]. Our response to this argument of Priest is two-fold: (i) first we will argue that this response is not compatible with the type of noneism we have

bare no relation to the 'philosopher's use' of the technical terms (cf. [5, Sec. 3]). We will not engage with this debate here.

[14] For accounts of the natural language usage of 'exists' and 'there is', see [27], [11, Ch. 2], and [31, Ch. 17].

[15] But see also Meinong [31, p. 311] and others, [24, p. 440], [20, p. 116, fn. 2], and [3]. See also the noneist's semantics for the existence predicate, e.g., [29, p. 13].

described above and (ii) then we will respond to a possible reply by Priest, namely, that we have the wrong of type of noneism in mind.

(i) When Priest claims that there may be things that exist but are not in space-time (and, we take it, have no causal powers), and supports this by referring to Plato, he seems to give up the intuitive appeal of simple noneism. It is true that Priest seems to consider a form of Platonic noneism (he says that "a noneist can certainly endorse a platonist account" of mathematical objects [29, p. 135]), but he does not seem to support this himself ("[b]ut for the noneist, a simpler view beckons" (ibid.)). And, more importantly, this is *not* the type of noneism that we referred to since the start of the paper: the type of noneism we argue to be theoretically equivalent with allism. According to the noneist, 'exists' is univocal, and what 'exists' means can be glossed metaphysically (if not defined) by saying that what exists is in space-time, and/or has causal powers. Now, it does not seem to be compatible with this noneist view to claim that it is merely contingent that existents have causal powers or space-time location. The noneist seems to be giving a general, metaphysical characterization (if not a definition) of existence in its unique sense. Then even if 'to exist' does not *mean* to be in space-time, or to have causal powers, for the genuine noneist there are no possible worlds where something exists, but lacks space-time location or causal powers. Plato could not have been right, that is: there is no possible world where he is. There might well be worlds where things exist but lack spatiotemporal location, or causal features, but these will be impossible worlds: ways things could not be. It seems, thus, that one cannot hold that there could be things which exist but are not in space-time and/or have no causal powers, and remain a genuine noneist.

(ii) Maybe then, we have described a form of noneism that Priest does not support, as opposed to a form of noneism that would make Priest's analysis of (7) and (8) correct. If that is the case, this does not show that the translation scheme is flawed, it just shows that the noneist was not clear on what meaning of 'to exist' needs to be translated. Consider the following analogy: Franz cannot provide Tom with a proper English translation of the Dutch 'gezellig', if Tom does not first tell Franz what 'gezellig' means.[16] Again, with respect to our notion of *Theoretical Equivalence*, one is not trying to come up with a translation for 'exists' that matches the folk meaning of the word. One is trying to come up with a translation that matches the property picked out by 'exists' in the noneist's model with a corresponding property in the allist's model. What is at stake here is the theoretical equivalence between allism and noneism; not who does better with respect to the

[16] 'Gezellig' is a notoriously difficult word to translate from Dutch to English, some say it cannot be (properly) translated at all.

folk meaning of 'exists'.

3.3 Not Talking Past Each Other

The above all dealt with Priest's objection that the translation proposed by Woodward does not work. We believe that we have sufficiently weakened the objection with respect to the work translation does for the theoretical equivalence. Let us now turn to Priest's final objection against Woodward, which is aimed at the conclusion Woodward draws from his argument. That is, Priest argues that *even if* we grant that the translation scheme works, then it is still not the case that the conclusion Woodward draws is warranted. Priest uses the following example:

> Let us suppose that I believe that Nicaragua is a country in Central America, that Spanish is spoken there, and (correctly) that its capital is Managua. You believe that Honduras is a country in Central America, that Spanish is spoken there, and (incorrectly) that its capital is Managua. Neither of us has any other beliefs about Central American countries, and in all other respects our beliefs are identical. The translation from my vocabulary to yours which maps 'Nicaragua' to 'Honduras', and otherwise leaves everything unchanged, preserves things held to be true, in both directions. Must it then be the case that 'Nicaragua' in my mouth means the same as 'Honduras' in yours? Clearly not.
>
> [31, pp. 204-205]

Now, we agree with Priest on this point: it is not the case that, when there is a translation, the disagreement is not substantive. However, we do not suggest that the translation, by itself, tells us anything; it is only with respect to a particular explanandum – to which the models function as explanantia – that we may draw certain conclusions. Importantly, this allows us to agree with Priest that there *is* a distinct fact of the matter (in this case, a public meaning or a concept) the noneist and allist are disagreeing about, without weakening the force of the translation with respect to our notion of *Theoretical Equivalence*.

To see this, consider two models of Central America, both exactly matching in the cities they represent, the lakes, and the relative distance of everything to each other. That is, for all points in the one model and all relations between the points, there correspond points and relations between the same points in the other model. One model is such that the demarcated area where the point labelled 'Managua' is located, is labelled 'Honduras', whereas in the other model, this area is labelled 'Nicaragua'. Now, if the explanandum is to help navigate the agent from point (city) to point in the most efficient way, the difference between the two models

is irrelevant. That is, relative to the problem of navigation the two models are theoretically equivalent. Yet, there is a distinct fact of the matter as to what the public meaning of 'Honduras' and 'Nicaragua' is.

Similarly, even though allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent with respect to the problem of intentional objects, we still agree with Priest that there may be a fact of the matter on which the noneist and the allist, meaningfully, disagree. That is, the disagreement between the allist and the noneist might still be very substantial: "[o]ntological questions are *not shallow*, insofar as they are substantive, structural questions about the nature of such [i.e., existence] property" [4, p. 242, emphasis added]. It is just that the disagreement does not prevent the models of intentional objects of the two theories from being isomorphic – i.e., allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent with respect to the explanandum of intentional objects.

Just as we agree with Priest that it is not the case that 'Nicaragua' in one's mouth means what 'Honduras' means in the other's in the example above, we do *not* think that, in the noneist-allist debate, 'exists' in one's mouth means what 'is (actually) concrete' means in the other's – so that the two parties are *merely* talking past each other. 'Exists', in particular, both in the mouth of the allist and in that of the noneist, means whatever the word means in English: meanings are public and shareable. *What* exactly the word means, is controversial. And noneism and allism come with two very different accounts of the notion of existence: the latter asserts, while the former denies, that the notion of existence is essentially captured by the quantifier. The disagreement is very real. The theoretical equivalence view is just the claim that the two theories are posited as explaining a phenomenon via models that are isomorphic to each other. If one theory has an advantage over the other, thus, this cannot be spotted by just looking at the respective models.

4 Conclusion: Theoretical Equivalence and Disagreement

Let us take stock of where we are at this point. We started out discussing the phenomenon of intentionality and intentional objects, i.e., the objects our thoughts are 'directed towards'. We assumed that there are indeed intentional objects, some of which, seemingly, do not exist. We took the main data point to be explained by a theory of intentional objects to be provided by claims like (1):

(1) I thought of something I would like to give you as a Christmas present, but I couldn't get it for you because it doesn't exist.

We considered two theories that are put forth as accounting for the phenomenon of intentional objects: noneism and allism. The former claims that some objects of thought are what they appear to be: non-existent; whereas the latter claims of all objects of thought that they exist. We looked at the thesis that allism and noneism are theoretically equivalent, relative to intentional objects as the explanandum. The most important part of the isomorphism view is connected to how the allist should interpret the noneist's 'exists' predicate. We agree with Woodward [40] that 'being actually concrete' seems to get the translation right. In order to strengthen this point, we evaluated recent arguments by Priest [31] against Woodward's translation and argued that, with respect to *Theoretical Equivalence*, these objections lose their force. Hence, we conclude that the differences between allism and noneism have little to do with the models they produce as explanantia for (1).

However, allism and noneism's theoretical equivalence with regards to intentional objects does *not* entail that their disagreement is shallow, in a different sense: the two parties are not just talking past each other. As we pointed out above, our view still agrees with Priest that there is a fact of the matter: what the *authentic* content of the notion of existence is – as expressed, typically, by the folk or common sense of verb 'to exist' in its so-called absolute uses.

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