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Book Review
Towards Non-Being: the Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality, by Graham Priest

Fred Kroon
The University of Auckland

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important literature on this, and I thought it undermined his otherwise interesting discussion.

I think it is possible to make a strong case for the view that what Kripke has done, throughout his work, is cast a line through some of the most entrenched issues in philosophy of language, mind, metaphysics and epistemology, linking them with great originality along an axis that turns mainly on his intuitions concerning necessity. The fertility of this approach has been extraordinary. It is quite likely that some of Kripke's positions do not stand the test of time, but I am not convinced that Hughes has taken the most efficient path to demonstrating it: he has gone vertical, as it were, instead of horizontal. If you have never read Kripke and you want an introduction, this book will teach you a lot about some very specific issues. If you are well up on Kripke's views and some of the literature that has clustered around the topics of names, necessity, and identity, this book will satisfy your desire to dig down, if not wide.

Consuelo Preti
The College of New Jersey
Dept. of Philosophy, P.O. Box 7718
Ewing, New Jersey 08628–0718, USA
preti@tcnj.edu

Towards Non-Being: the Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality, by Graham Priest. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005, pp. xv + 190, £30.00.

In his new book, Graham Priest, well known for his vigorous defense of dialetheism (the view that there are true contradictions), espouses the no less philosophically unpopular view that there are many objects that do not exist in any sense whatsoever, such as fictional and mythical objects, merely possible (and impossible!) objects and worlds, and abstract objects such as numbers and propositions. The book is dedicated to the memory of Richard Routley/Sylvan, the New Zealand philosopher who had earlier championed a view of this kind in his *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond*. Routley called this radical neo-Meinongian view 'noneism' — Meinong himself had thought that some non-concrete objects like numbers do have a form of existence, while Routley thought that *none* of them did. Priest follows this

terminology, but his version of the noneist approach is in some ways very different from Routley's.

To see what is at stake, note that one of the most distinctive features of Routley's noneism is his characterisation principle (CP): it states that an object given by means of a certain characterisation really does have all the properties it is characterised as having. In particular, the golden mountain really is golden and a mountain, and Sherlock Holmes — characterised in terms of the properties ascribed to 'him' in the Holmes stories — really does live in London as a detective. But as Priest reminds us, in unrestricted form the principle quickly leads to trivialisation: applied to a description of the form 'the x such that x = x and B', it immediately yields B. (First advanced by Routley, this argument strengthens Russell's famous complaint about 'the existent round square.') Unrestricted CP must be given up, therefore.

Routley himself had toyed with various solutions to this problem. He apparently favoured the view that only what Meinong called the *nuclear* properties featuring in an object-characterising description were guaranteed by (CP) to hold of the object, where the nuclear/extranuclear distinction divides ordinary properties like being round, being a mountain, being golden, and so on, from unusual properties like existence and possibility. But this kind of distinction, which was given its most influential formulation by Terence Parsons in *Nonexistent Objects*, has met with increasing resistance. For one thing, many of the properties its supporters are prepared to regard as nuclear appear to be existence-entailing (a mountain must be *somewhere* to be a mountain, surely) and hence ought to fall on the extranuclear side.

This is a good place to introduce Priest's ideas. Priest is a noneist who rejects the nuclear/extranuclear distinction, and who thinks that every characterisation of a putative object — every description, no matter which properties it features — does indeed 'give rise to' an object fitting the characterisation. His main weapon against trivialisation is to argue that representing an object by means of a characterisation is to involve oneself in an intentional relation to a proposition featuring that object. To that end, he begins his book by providing a Kripkean world-based semantics for intentional operators (intentional verbs with sentential complements, such as 'knows that,' 'wishes that,' etc.), although one that is far more flexible than the usual variety since it is able to capture the way (most) intentional ascriptions are not closed under entailment, for example. Priest achieves this by letting an intentional ascription 't Φ p' be true at the actual world just

when its sentential complement p is true at all worlds appropriately accessible from the actual world, namely, all worlds which are the way that agent t Φ's the actual world to be (in the case of an ascription like 'Sally wishes that George W Bush never became president of the US,' all worlds in which Sally's wishes are fulfilled, and hence George W Bush never became president of the US). Closure under entailment of 't Φ's …' fails because of the inclusion of 'open' worlds where formulae may behave more or less arbitrarily. Chapter 2 builds on this account by including a worlds-based semantics for identity that prohibits substitution into intentional contexts. (Priest even argues that his semantics treats names as rigid, although the trick involves assigning what Priest calls *identities* to names, and these are in fact akin to evaluation functions that need not assign a name the same object across different worlds.)

Of course, we do not just have intentional attitudes towards propositions; we also have intentional attitudes to objects: we fear and loathe some people, while admiring others. The semantics of sentences ascribing intentional attitudes to objects is discussed in chapter 3. Priest takes such ascriptions to be fully extensional, and insists that they include people's attitudes to anything that can be characterised in one way or another, whether or not the thing characterised exists. But a crucial problem facing such attitudes is the apparent unruliness of such objects: if we are able to think about the existent round square (and Priest's kind of noneist certainly accepts that we can), then are we not committed to being able to think about something that is, *per impossibile*, both round and square and even exists? Chapter 4 finally addresses this characterisation problem. Let p be a proposition to the effect that a particular object has a certain property. Priest's intriguing solution is that in putting forward p (say, when describing a fictional character from a work of fiction W), an agent represents the world as being a certain way for the particular purpose at hand (describing the world of W, say). Since representing is an intentional operation, what is represented only holds at worlds that are appropriately accessible, worlds that realise the way the agent represents things to be in the case at hand. Thus, given an object like Hamlet, we can say that Hamlet is represented by Shakespeare as being a Danish prince; it follows that Hamlet is indeed a Danish prince, but only in worlds that really are the way Shakespeare represents things to be in. Similarly, we can say that the existent round square does indeed exist, and is round and

square, but only in worlds that are appropriately accessible from the actual world (which presumably does not include the actual world).

The second part of the book defends this version of noneism against various objections, and discusses some applications. Chapter 5 criticises familiar attempts to dispense with nonexistents (principally Russell's and Quine's). Chapter 6 considers various features of the way Priest's noneism applies to fictional objects. He suggests, for example, that if we want to block the possibility of fictional characters sometimes turning out to be identical to real individual, we can do so by letting fictional characterisations count as only holding non-actually. (Priest seems to think we have no real reason to block this possibility, but gives no reason, despite the fact that many theorists now agree with Kripke, Fine, and others that purely fictional characters are never identical to actual or even possible individuals. In any case, I doubt that Priest's way of blocking this possibility can work: authors of fiction are often quite explicit about wanting their readers to imagine that the *actual* world is as they describe it to be, not some other possible world.) Unsurprisingly, Priest also makes much of what he takes to be the inescapable inconsistency of certain fictions, something that in his view makes an appeal to impossible worlds well-nigh mandatory when doing the semantics of fiction. Chapter 7 discusses some other objects classed as non-existent by Priest (mathematical objects and worlds), and focuses on a number of puzzles facing his noneism about such objects: in particular, how can we know about them and how precisely does such a noneism differ from Platonism? These problems Priest takes to be relatively easy ones. Not so, he thinks, the final problem facing his version of noneism, which concerns a certain paradox of denotation that generalises Hilbert's 'the number denoted by this description + 1'. This paradox and its solution are the subject of chapter 8.

What are we to make of Priest's new noneism? Despite the elegance of Priest's theory, it seems to me that there are strong reasons for preferring something like Routley's version of noneism, even though most of us will share Priest's dislike of the nuclear/extranuclear distinction. For one thing, Priest's leading idea appears to involve a deep confusion. The confusion can be brought to the surface by considering Priest's otherwise unremarkable claim that we stand in intentional relations to non-existent objects. I might fear the ghost under the bed, for example, pity Anna Karenina, and search feverishly for the golden mountain. But acknowledging such claims as true

comes at a price. Thus, I pity Anna Karenina because of what happened to her, I fear the ghost under the bed because of its threatening moans, and I search for the golden mountain because finding something massive and made of gold will make me very rich indeed. I do not pity Anna Karenina because she is fictionally *represented* as suffering a certain fate (that might make me admire the author, not pity the character), and I do not search for the golden mountain because it is *represented* as being golden. Intentional relationships of this kind are only appropriate to the extent that the objects to which we have the relations have the properties they are characterised as having. We might call this the 'representational problem.'

(Although I take this to be a problem for Priest's account, there are even reasons internal to his account for denying that representing plays the role he thinks it does. For Priest holds that if *something* has property A, then the thing describable as *the A* does [p. 95]. But consider the property of being a golden mountain, say. If (as Priest insists) it is obviously true to say that Meinong thought about the golden mountain, it is no less obviously true to say that among the many problematic objects philosophers have thought about there are quite a number of golden mountains (including some of determinate height, and some even *existent*). Since this second claim entails the instantial claim that *some* things are golden mountains, it should follow that *the golden mountain* is a golden mountain, and *mutatis mutandis* for other objects given by means of a description 'the A'.)

Closely linked to the representational problem is the 'missing nature' problem. For Routley, Holmes is a detective. For Priest, however, all we can say is that Holmes is *represented* in the Conan Doyle's stories as being a detective, so that he/it is a detective in all relevantly accessible worlds. But what then is Holmes's nature in the actual world? Priest classes Holmes as a concrete object, but only in the sense that, in worlds in which 'he' exists, 'he' enters into appropriate causal relations with other existing objects. Priest even denies that Holmes is in any robust sense a *created* object. The only creative act involving Holmes is Conan Doyle's act of representing 'him' as being a detective. It is hard, however, to see what sense to make of an imaginative act that supposedly takes hold of such an object, given that about all that is known about 'him' is that 'he' is an object. Indeed, it is even hard to see how Priest can distinguish supposedly distinct fictional and mythical objects like Holmes and Pegasus. Priest argues that there must be closed worlds in which Holmes and Pegasus

have different properties (p. 89). But even if this is true, that is no bar to their identity. One and the same object, say Venus, can at once be represented as the Morning Star and also as a distinct object the Evening Star (imagine a fictional tale about the Morning-Evening Star Wars). Priest's brand of noneism appears to have no basis for individuating and distinguishing the objects that he takes to be the focus of our fictional endeavours.

Routley's account avoids both the representational and the 'missing nature' problems (as well as the associated problem of individuation), although at the cost of buying into the suspect nuclear/extranuclear distinction among properties. But of course Routley's is not the only way of avoiding these problems. For a two-modes-of-predication theorist like Ed Zalta, the golden mountain really is golden and Holmes really is a detective, but only in an internal encoding sense: non-existent objects like Holmes and the golden mountain are abstract objects that are constituted by the properties they encode. And for those who think that fictional objects are like artefacts (Kripke, Fine, Salmon, Voltolini, Thomasson, among others), Holmes is literally created as an abstract artefact in the course of Doyle's writing the Holmes stories. These accounts may have their own problems, but none of them have the problems that accrue from Priest's idiosyncratic treatment of characterisation; and all of them reject the nuclear/extranuclear distinction.

There is also a more general way in which such accounts strike me as *prima facie* more promising than Priest's account. They tend to focus on a relatively rich array of linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena, whereas Priest has relatively little to say about such phenomena, and seems for the most part convinced that his account can handle them. His argumentative strategy is inspired more by what he takes to be his success at articulating a semantics of intentionality, and his distinctive view that agents' characterisations of non-existent objects in stories, myths, and even theories, should be represented by means of special intentional operators. Priest's account of non-existents therefore receives little direct support in his book, and much of the support it does receive seems based on a confusion about the role of representation.

In short, and to put it mildly, I am not persuaded by Priest's arguments for his version of noneism. But none of this has really dented my admiration for the book. Despite its abstract metaphysical content, this is a breezily written book, full of bold ideas and with Priest's characteristically deft use of logic to sustain these bold ideas. As with

so much that Priest writes, one can disagree strongly with his intuitions and with the ensuing development of a theory that caters for them, while feeling that the journey remained worthwhile. Inevitably, one encounters intriguing (even infuriating) challenges to one's own views, and even when these views stay intact, their articulation, and the reasons for holding them, are almost always sharpened as a result of the encounter. If I do have a reservation about the way Priest has carried out his project, it is that Priest could profitably have engaged more with some of the voluminous material on non-existence that has appeared since Routley's work. Even a cursory look at some of this later work would have revealed some of the difficulties facing Priest's account. While I do not doubt that attempting to deal with such difficulties would have made the book much bigger than Priest wanted it to be, it might also have made it more believable.

Fred Kroon
Dept. of Philosophy
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand
f.kroon@auckland.ac.nz