

GRAHAM PRIEST. *Towards non-being: the logic and metaphysics of intentionality*. Oxford University Press, 2005, xi + 190 pp.

Priest's recent book is a homage to his deceased friend and collaborator Richard Sylvan (formerly Routley). Priest defends, with Sylvan, an ontological position derivative of Meinong's they call *noneism*. Noneism, basically, is the view that there are non-existent objects. This view is motivated by semantic considerations about what Priest calls "intentional" verbs, which are also often called "intensional" verbs. Priest puts to work many clever formal tools, the book contains several interesting historical excursion, a short story, many technical appendixes, and lots of good philosophy. Parts of the book overlap with Priest's earlier publications, but much of it is new. It is a notable achievement.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part presents Priest's proposal for a semantics of intentional verbs, the technical framework on which it is based, a discussion of identity and substitutivity, and his solution to one of the main problems that Sylvan thought his account of non-existent objects never fully provided: the characterization problem. The characterization problem is the problem to say which non-existent objects there are. On the one hand one might hold there are only a few, maybe just Santa and the Easter Bunny. On the other hand one might hold that there as many as conceivably could be: for any set of properties there is an object which has just those properties. Priest defends a version of the latter view, with Sylvan. But a naive version of this leads to triviality. Take the property of *being self-identical and p*. If anything has this property then it follows that *p*. The characterization problem is to say which sets of properties characterize an object, i.e., for which sets of properties is there an object (existing or not) which has exactly those properties. Traditionally, there have been two strategies to solve this problem. One is to allow only combinations of certain kinds of properties, the other is to claim that the non-existent objects don't really have the properties that characterize them, they merely "encode" them. Priest proposes a third solution. According to him any combination of properties is allowed, and the objects have the properties that characterize them in the usual sense. However, they might not actually have them. They instead might have them merely in other 'worlds', which includes impossible and inconsistent worlds. To defend this position, and thus to propose a solution to a problem that Sylvan felt was still open, is one of the main goals of the book.

The second part of the book is the more philosophical part. It discusses various philosophical objections to noneism, and applies the theory to philosophical issues about fiction and mathematics. It also includes an intriguing discussion of what Priest takes to be the best objection to noneism, which is related to the paradoxes of denotation. (His solution is based on the idea of allowing terms to denote more than one object.)

Overall, the book is a significant advancement over earlier attempts to solve the same problems, in part because of the more sophisticated technical tools. Priest's treatments of open and inconsistent worlds, various "non-standard" logical systems, and the way they are brought together are without question progress turned to ink. But there are also a few aspects of the book where it falls short of full glory. I will briefly mention two. The first is the account of noneism and Priest's claim that his semantics for intentional verbs supports it. Noneism is the view that there are non-existent objects, and it is contrasted with Meinongianism in that it claims that non-existent objects have no ontological status at all, whereas Meinong held that non-existent objects had some secondary status, that of subsisting. But whether noneism so characterized is really a substantial view, in particular one related to ontology is not so clear. In a sense, everyone agrees with it. We all believe that Santa doesn't exist, i.e., that Santa is non-existent, and thus there is an innocent sense in which Santa is a non-existent object. But then, who would deny that there are non-existent objects, with Santa being one of them? Ordinary talk seems to allow for an apparently innocent way of saying this truly. But noneism, as a philosophical position, probably puts some more substantial weight on

this talk about what doesn't exist. After all, Priest holds that his substantial and intricate semantics of intentional verbs supports noneism. But there isn't too much discussion in the book how that semantics supports this metaphysics. Sure enough, Priest talks about lots of things which don't exist in giving the truth conditions of sentences that talk about things that don't exist. But does that alone support a particular metaphysical view of the non-existing? And could it support noneism over Meinongianism? I wish he would have said more here.

A second aspect of Priest's book that makes it less than maximally glorious is this: When discussing the semantics of propositional attitude verbs Priest writes that "contemporary discussion of how to treat intentional verbs with non-propositional objects is all but non-existent" (p. 6). And thus Priest does not discuss or cite any such treatments. But this is a real oversight on his part. There is in fact a quite active and sophisticated discussion of the semantics of intentional verbs in the more linguistic literature. This literature deals with the same question as Priest: how to give a semantics for intentional verbs. There are two main traditions in this semantic literature, and Priest, in effect, sides with one of them. The first goes back to Montague and treats the arguments of transitive intentional/intensional verbs as higher type objects. The second, which is congenial to Priest's semantics for certain tricky cases, treats intentional verbs to ultimately express propositional attitudes. Both of these approaches have their advantages and their problems, and which one is the better candidate for the semantics of natural language is the subject of quite a bit of debate in the literature on natural language semantics. For example, the sentence

(1) Fred is looking for a wife.

has at least three readings (someone to marry / any wife / a particular wife). How such sentences are to be understood semantically is not just restricted to specifying what the truth conditions are in each case, but also to explain why one and the same sentence has these three different readings, i.e., how the readings arise from this sentence. The linguistic literature is very much concerned with this question, and I think Priest could have profited from considering it.

To understand our talk about non-existing things, and what metaphysical position it requires, we need to look at least at philosophy, logic, and natural language semantics. Priest neglects contemporary natural language semantics, contemporary natural language semantics neglects the technical tools Priest and others have developed. One day soon everyone will sit at the same table, and then we will see what approach to the semantics of talk about what doesn't exist is best, and what follows for metaphysics from this. We are not there yet, but Priest has gotten us closer.

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