# (Mock-)Thinking about the Same

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I want to address once more the venerable problem of *intentional identity*, the problem of how different thoughts can be about the same thing even if this thing does not exist. First, I will try to show that antirealist approaches to this problem are doomed to fail. For they ultimately share a problematic assumption, namely that thinking about something involves *identifying* it. Second, I will claim that once one rejects this assumption and holds instead that thoughts are *constituted* either by what they are about, their *intentional objects*, or by what determines their proposition-like *intentional contents*, one can address the problem of intentional identity in a different way. One can indeed provide a new solution to it that basically relies on two factors: a) what sort of metaphysical nature intentional objects effectively possess, once they are conceived as *schematic* objects *à la* Crane (2001, 2013); b) whether such objects really belong to the overall ontological inventory of what there is. According to this solution, two thoughts are about the same nonexistent intentional object iff i) that object satisfies the identity criterion for objects of that metaphysical kind and ii) objects of that kind belong to the overall ontological inventory of what there is, independently of whether they exist (in a suitable first-order sense of existence). As such, this solution is neither realist nor antirealist: *only if* condition ii) is satisfied, different thoughts can be about the same nonexistent *intentionale*; otherwise, they are simply constituted by the same intentional content (provided that this content is not equated with that *intentionale*). Third, armed with this solution, I will hold that one can find a suitable treatment of the specific and related problem of whether different people may mock-think about the same thing, even if there really is no such thing. Finally, I will try to show that this

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treatment can be also applied to the case in which different thoughts are, according to phenomenology, about the same *intentionale* and yet this *intentionale* is of a kind such that there really are no things of that kind. For in this case, such thoughts are about the same *intentionale* only *fictionally*.

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I want to address once more the venerable problem of *intentional identity*, the problem of how different thoughts can be about the same thing even if this thing does not exist. First, I will try to show that antirealist approaches to this problem, according to which there is no such thing and yet there is a legitimate sense in which the relevant thoughts are about the same thing, are doomed to fail. For they ultimately share a problematic assumption, namely that thinking about something involves *identifying* it. Second, I will claim that once one rejects this assumption and holds instead that thoughts are *constituted* either by what they are about, their *intentional objects*, or by what determines their proposition-like *intentional contents* (provided that these contents are not equated with such objects) one can address the problem of intentional identity in a different way. One can indeed provide a new solution to it that basically relies on two factors: a) what sort of metaphysical nature *intentionalia* effectively possess, once they are conceived as *schematic* objects *à la* Crane (2001; 2013); b) whether such objects belong to the overall ontological inventory. According to this solution, two thoughts are about the same nonexistent intentional object iff i) that object satisfies the identity criterion for objects of that metaphysical kind and ii) objects of that kind belong to the overall ontological inventory, independently of whether they exist (in a suitable first-order sense of existence). As such, this solution is neither realist nor antirealist: *only if* condition ii) is satisfied, different thoughts can be about the same nonexistent *intentionale*; otherwise, they are simply constituted by the same intentional content (provided that this content is not equated with that *intentionale*). Third, armed with this solution, I will hold that one can find a suitable treatment of the specific and related problem of whether

different people may mock-think about the same thing, even if there is no such thing. Finally, I will try to show that this treatment can be also applied to the case in which different thoughts are, according to phenomenology, about the same *intentionale* and yet this *intentionale* is of a kind such that there really are no things of that kind. For in this case, such thoughts are about the same *intentionale* only *fictionally*.

## 2. Intentional identity: the problem

From Geach (1980) onwards, a subtle problem has been dogging contemporary philosophy of language and mind: how can different people talk of and think about the (numerically) same thing, if this thing does not exist? In Geach's notorious example,

(1)     Hob believes a witch has blighted Bob's mare, and Nob believes that she (the same witch) killed Cob's sow

many of us have the intuition that by uttering (1), one intends to talk of the same individual, so that (1) amounts to a *de re* report of different thoughts about it. We are therefore tempted to read (1) either strongly as:

(1a)    $\exists \alpha \, (W(\alpha) \wedge \text{Hob believes that } B(\alpha,b) \wedge \text{Nob believes that } K(\alpha,c))$

or weakly as:

(1b)    $\exists \alpha \, (\text{Hob believes that } W(\alpha) \wedge B(\alpha,b) \wedge \text{Nob believes that } K(\alpha,c)).$

Both (1a) and (1b) entail that there is an individual (1) talks of and the reported thoughts are about. (1b) is simply a weaker reading than (1a) for it does not force one to hold that the individual it talks of is a witch, but just that it is believed to be such. Yet how can this entailment be right, if the individual in question – the alleged witch – does not exist?[2]

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[2]    For this elegant way of introducing the problem, see García-Carpintero (2016, 334).

## 3. The antirealist solutions

Clearly enough, if one is a *realist tout court* about nonexistent things, the problem is easily solved. Different thoughts can be about the same non-existent thing just as other thoughts are about the same thing that straight-forwardly exists. In this respect, the fact that the former thing, unlike the latter thing, does not exist (in a suitable first-order sense of existence) makes no difference, since the realist is ontologically committed to it as well.[3] Yet the problem is serious for those who do not believe in nonexist-ent entities, *antirealists*. Now, several antirealist answers have been pro-vided to the question of how different thoughts can be about the same non-existent 'item' – I put this expression within quotes in order to indicate that *qua* antirealists, sustainers of this approach are not ontologically commit-ted to such a nonexistent thing. Neither of them, however, appears to be fully convincing, as the following review will show.

To begin with, according to the so-called 'name-centric' approach,[4] dif-ferent people think about the same nonexistent 'item' insofar as they share the same name-using practice involving a certain baptism, though unsuc-cessful because referentless, and the same communication chain. The nec-essary condition for that chain is a certain referential intention, i.e., the in-tention of referring to the same thing, if any, one's mentors referred to (e.g. Donnellan 1974; Taylor 2003; Sainsbury 2005).

Clearly enough, in order for this approach to work in the case of (1), one must name the nonexistent 'item' in question, the alleged witch in that case: "Hob believes that a witch, *namely* [a name follows], …". Yet this clarification notwithstanding, the approach does not seem to work. First of all, it fails to provide *necessary* conditions of intentional identity. As Friend (2014) has shown, in thinking e.g. about Santa Claus and about Father Christmas, people nowadays clearly think about the same nonexistent 'item'. Yet they fail to use the same name ("Santa Claus", "Father Christ-mas"). Granted, a supporter of this approach may invoke Mentalese and hold that such people mobilize the same Mentalese name. Yet this move fares no better. For, adds Friend, those people share no referential intention.

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[3]    For an example of a realist solution, see Salmon (2002), who equates the relevant nonexistent thing with an abstract artifact non-spatiotemporally existing.

[4]    For this label see Friend (2014, 308).

Intending to refer to what one's mentors originally allegedly referred to by "Father Christmas", a certain personification of Christmas, is not the same as intending to refer to what one's informants originally allegedly referred to by "Santa Claus", an imaginary variant of an ancient bishop; those referential intentions mobilize different chains (cf. Friend 2014, 315).

At this point, fans of name-centrism may bite the bullet and say that in this case there is just a sort of intentional match: people nowadays using "Father Christmas" no longer want to defer to their mentors' referential acts, they just want to use it as they also use "Santa Claus". Yet even if this move worked, the approach fails to provide *sufficient* conditions of intentional identity. In thinking about a nonexistent 'item', even if one has the intention of referring to what her mentors allegedly referred to, she may fail to preserve such a reference. Another example by Friend shows this point. In writing *Hamlet*, Shakespeare may have intended to refer by "Hamlet" to what Kyd referred to. Yet he failed to refer to what Kyd actually referred to; namely, a real Danish prince actually named "Amleth" (as Friend prompts us to suppose; see Friend 2014, 316).

As an alternative antirealist approach, Friend herself has proposed the 'info-centric' approach (see Friend 2014). According to this approach, people think about the same nonexistent 'item' insofar as they mobilize the same *network* of notions, either because they share the same *mental file*, a certain mental repository of information, or because different such files, which may even be labelled differently, *suitably* overlap, by also being appropriately connected in that notional network.

To begin with, appealing to the idea of sharing a notional *network* rather than mere sharing a single file or mere having a file overlap has the advantage of overcoming a problem that antirealists who simply appeal to files' similarities in order to account for intentional identity unsuccessfully face (cf. Crane 2013, 161). The problem consists in the fact that not only repository similarity, but also repository identity *per se*, does not guarantee intentional identity.[5] Consider indeed the following counterexample to this simple account. Intuitively, in their being located in different though quasi-identical planets, Earth and Twin-Earth, Leverrier and Twin-Leverrier think about different nonexistent 'items', Vulcan and Twin-Vulcan, even if their mental files share the same information (witness the fact that they

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5    As Dennett (1968, 337) originally envisaged.

would notice nothing if they unconsciously swapped their planetary positions) and are also labelled the same ("Vulcan"). Now, the supporter of the info-centric approach may say that this counterexample to the simple account hits its target. For, since the Twins are disconnected in their being placed in different planets, they share no notional network.

Yet sharing the same notional network is again no *necessary* condition of intentional identity. For, as Everett (2013) has pointed out, people may think about the same nonexistent 'item' even if they do not share the same notional network. For example, different people may think about Mrs. Polonius, even if they attend different acts of different performances of *Hamlet* in which they grasp different ascribed features of what actually is one and the same nonexistent 'individual' – say, being Ophelia's mother, being Polonius' wife (cf. Everett 2013, 96).

On behalf of Friend, one may reply that the counterexample is misconceived. Appearances notwithstanding, those people share the same notional network. When no such network is actually shared, the fan of info-centrism acknowledges that the situation matches the one her detractor proposes in the 'Mrs. Polonius' case. Consider another case[6] involving two utterly independent 'Vulcan'-like baptisms, namely utterly independent baptisms mobilizing the same nominal form – "Vulcan" – yet allegedly focused on the same nonexistent 'celestial body', or anyway two utterly independent pointings allegedly ostending the same nonexistent 'item'. Definitely, in this case the baptisms or the pointings share no notional network. Thus, appearances notwithstanding, they do not focus on the same 'target'. Yet the 'Mrs. Polonius' case is different from this 'Vulcan' case, for unlike this case the people involved are trapped into the same network.

Yet this info-centric reply only prompts the further question of what makes two people be members of the same notional network. To begin with, a fan of info-centrism must hold that not only *causal*, but also *intentional* dependence of one's file on the relevant files of a practice's producers counts on this concern. For mere causal dependence is not enough. There may be cases of people thinking about different nonexistent fictional 'individuals' even if their thoughts are causally based either on a thought about the same nonexistent fictional 'individual' or even on a thought about

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6   To reformulate Edelberg's (1992, 574-575) example. *Pace* García-Carpintero (2016, 342), this case is no counterexample to the info-centric approach.

the same concrete individual. Examples of the first kind of situation are given by uses of "Holmes" that trace back to Doyle's original use and nevertheless they are embedded in practices concerning completely different fictional 'Holmeses' (cf. Pautz 2008, 7). Examples of the second kind of situation are given by uses of the same name that trace back to an original use in which the name refers to a real individual – say, the very author of a certain novel – and nevertheless they are embedded in practices concerning completely different fictional 'individuals' (cf. García-Carpintero 2016, 343).

Yet if this is the case, then belonging to the same notional network is not even *sufficient* for intentional identity. For, as Friend herself admits, in thinking about a nonexistent 'item' one can exploit a certain intentional dependence on another file and yet fail to think, by means of her own file, about the same 'item' the other file focuses on. For example, Flaubert's writing "Madame Bovary c'est moi" shows that his 'Emma'-file intentionally depended on his own 'I'-file. Yet when writing *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert was obviously thinking about the nonexistent 'individual' *Emma*, not about himself (cf. Friend 2014, 324, 329).

As we have seen before, pretense may be involved in cases of intentional identity. Indeed, a third option in the antirealist camp is the 'pretense' approach. As Everett (2013) maintains, people think about the same nonexistent 'item' insofar as they belong to the same pretense practice of co-referring to, or better co-thinking about, the same 'individual'.

This way of putting things allegedly accommodates the aforementioned 'Mrs. Polonius' case. Although different people may attend different acts of different performances of *Hamlet* in which they grasp different ascribed features of what actually is one and the same nonexistent 'individual', they share the same pretense practice of make-believedly referring to, or even thinking about, the same 'individual'.

This option immediately prompts a question as to the conditions for being members of the same pretense practice. On behalf of this approach, one may suggest that a condition for the identity of a certain pretense practice is the existence of a *causal* relation between pretend uses of the same referential term.[7] If "referential term" is used here broadly enough, this

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[7]    For this suggestion, which traces back to Evans (1982), Everett (2000), and Kroon (2001), cf. Pautz (2008).

sounds at least a necessary condition for pretense membership. People involved in the 'Mrs. Polonius' pretense practice may not even grasp that the same name, "Mrs. Polonius", is mobilized, yet there is a causal relation between them that makes them make-believedly point to the same nonexistent 'individual' by means of the same demonstrative. The 'Mrs. Polonius' case suggests that this causal relation is also a sufficient condition, but this is controversial. Being causally induced to pretend something by the existence of a certain pretense practice hardly seems to be enough in order for the new practice to be the same as the old practice. Perhaps not even reinforcing this requirement with an *intentional* requirement is enough for being members of the same pretense practice, for people intending to play the same pretense game may be wrong. Probably, identity in story-telling is also required (cf. Voltolini 2006, 70-71).

Yet this problem notwithstanding, the existence of a shared pretense practice is once again not a *necessary* condition of intentional identity. The Geach original case, for one, does not involve pretense (cf. also García-Carpintero 2016, 346). It is also hardly a *sufficient* condition. Let me reformulate an aforementioned worry in different terms. Let us suppose that in writing *Ulysses*, Joyce protracted the same kind of pretense that Homer initiated. Yet by allegedly pretending that in so writing he was thinking (under the different name "Leopold Bloom", but possibly under the same masculine pronoun) about the same thing Homer did (under the name "Odysseos"), did Joyce think about the same nonexistent 'individual' as Homer did?[8]

## 4. Why the antirealist solutions do not work

Clearly enough, the above options do not exhaust the possibilities an antirealist has of solving the problem of intentional identity. So, it may well

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[8] García-Carpintero (2016) defends a 'presuppositional' approach to intentional identity that bears some similiarities to the 'pretense' approach. For a similar view, see also Howell (2015). Being more general than the latter, this approach yields necessary conditions of intentional identity. Yet to my mind it fails to provide sufficient conditions, for it unsuccessfully faces the same counterexample as the 'pretense' approach. I guess that Manning's (2015) 'simulationist' approach suffers from the same problem.

be the case that another antirealist option is put forward that does not present the same troubles as those presented by the previous options. Yet such troubles point to a common general worry that all antirealist solutions, whether actual or possible, raise. All of them in fact share the assumption that thinking about the same thing involves *co-identifying* (unsuccessfully, in the case of nonexistent 'items') the same thing.[9] Yet this assumption is worrisome. It is clear how to rank together mental arrows of identification when they actually and literally point towards the same target, an object that is out there. For in this case, in being such a target, that object attracts such mental arrows, by letting them somehow depend on it. Yet it is less clear how to rank together mental arrows of identification when there actually is no such target; speaking of arrows (co)-pointing towards something here seems to be only an obscure metaphor. If we share the Kripkean lesson on these matters as applied to thoughts, a descriptivist account of that co-identification is ruled out.[10] Moreover, any alternative non-descriptivist account seems to be just a rather artificial way of ranking together disparate identification practices. In this respect, speaking here of a "common focus" for the thoughts involved, as Geach did (see Geach 1980, 147), merely amounts to putting the cart before the horse, by again trying to meaning literally what is just an obscure metaphor, namely speaking of thoughts as being *codirected*. If there literally is no target, how can mental arrows be codirected upon 'it'?

## 5. An alternative approach

Let me try a different approach that does not share the above problematic assumption. Suppose that, as many externalists say (cf. McDowell 1994; 1998, McGinn 1989), thinking about something has not to do with identifying it, if thinking is instead *constituted* by that very something, the thing that (*inter alia*) *individuates* it.

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[9]   As Friend explicitly acknowledges, by talking of the problem of intentional identity as a problem of *co-identification* (see Friend 2014, 308).

[10]   For troubles about a descriptivist account of the intentionality of thoughts, cf. Sainsbury & Tye (2012, chap. 1). Notoriously, Geach himself (1980) rejected a descriptivist solution of his puzzle.

In this paper, I cannot argue in favor of this new assumption,[11] yet I can show its utility for my present purposes. For in virtue of this assumption, I can find an alternative solution to the problem of intentional identity. Instead of looking for a solution that mobilizes a sort of identity in the thinking subjects' situation, as the antirealist solutions do, I may look for a solution that points to an identity in the objects that are thought-of by such subjects, provided that there are any such objects. First, thinking about the same thing, even if it does not exist, is guaranteed by i) the fact that it satisfies the *metaphysical* criterion of identity for that thing – that thing belongs to a certain *metaphysical* kind and things of that kind are identical iff (here follows what states the relevant identity criterion) – and ii) the fact that *there are* things of that kind, i.e., that we are *ontologically* committed to such things. For then, given that assumption, the thing in question coindividuates such thoughts. Second, clause ii) has the following consequences. In certain cases, the entity that coindividuates thoughts is precisely what such thoughts are about according to our phenomenology, i.e., to what appears to us,[12] sometimes even a nonexistent object of a certain kind, for we are ontologically committed to an object of that kind even if they do not exist (in a suitable first-order sense of existence). Yet in other cases, the entity that coindividuates thoughts is not what such thoughts are about according to our phenomenology, sometimes again a nonexistent object of a certain kind, for we are not ontologically committed to that object, independently of the fact that it does not exist (again, in a suitable first-order sense of existence).

In order to understand this point better, let me first of all agree with Crane's (2001; 2013) claim that from a *metaphysical* point of view, i.e., from the point of view concerning the *nature* of the thing of a certain kind (provided that there is any such thing), *intentional objects*, i.e., the objects thoughts are about, are *schematic* objects; that is, that they have no metaphysical nature *insofar as they are thought-of*. In other terms, no metaphysical conclusion as to the nature of intentional objects can be drawn from

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[11] I did it elsewhere: see Sacchi & Voltolini (2012); Voltolini (2015).

[12] This phenomenological appearance may be meant as a *second-order belief* in the aboutness of one's thought (weak reading) or as a *feeling of directedness*, leading to a phenomenological conception of intentionality itself (strong reading). In this paper, I remain neutral on this issue.

the fact that thoughts have such objects. It just phenomenologically appears to us that they are what our thoughts are about. As Sainsbury (2010) comments, this means that *intentionalia* are no *exotica*, that is, they are not metaphysically bizarre entities that possess a *sui generis* metaphysical nature individuating all of them as *intentionalia* (e.g. Brentanian immanent entities, Meinongian entities, and the like).

Metaphysically speaking, this claim has a main consequence; namely, that *intentionalia* may have a thought-independent metaphysical nature and such a nature may be various. As Crane himself admits, different *intentionalia* have different thought-independent such natures (cf. Crane 2001, 17; 2013, 92). Yet the claim has also another yet *ontological* consequence, i.e., a consequence concerning the overall ontological inventory;[13] namely, that there are just those *intentionalia* whose thought-independent metaphysical nature is such that we are ontologically committed to objects of that nature. Now, given the previous assumption that a thought is constituted by what it is about, it further follows that only in that case a thought is individuated by its *intentionale*, for the latter constitutes the former. Otherwise, since a thought cannot be constituted by an *intentionale* if there is no such object, not only it is not really about such an object, but it is also individuated by the other things that actually constitute it. Such things determine for it a proposition-like *intentional content*, the semantically relevant element it turns out to involve; quite likely, a general content of the kind, there is a (unique) *F* that *G*s.[14] In this case, properly speaking there is no *intentionale* for two thoughts that merely share their intentional content. These thoughts just think the same insofar as they are constituted by the same intentional content, provided of course again that one has a suitable criterion of identity for that content. Since that content is proposition-

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[13]   For this conception of the relationship between metaphysics and ontology cf. e.g. Thomasson (1999).

[14]   Since Crane does not endorse a conception of thoughts as being constituted by their *intentionalia*, he does not endorse this ontological consequence either. For him (see Crane 2001, 2013), thoughts are always about their *intentionalia*, independently of whether such *intentionalia* figure in the overall ontological inventory. Whereas for me, thought are about *intentionalia* just in case they figure in that inventory. As a further consequence, for Crane aboutness is a nonrelational property of thoughts, whereas for me it is a relational property of them. I have criticized Crane's approach elsewhere; see Voltolini (2009; 2013).

like, in order to assess that two thoughts think the same one will have to resort to one's favorite theory of propositions.

In order to clarify this issue, let me start by providing some examples. First, in reflecting on Elizabeth II, one may think both about her Majesty and about the number Two, as phenomenology tells one: it appears to one that one's thoughts are respectively about them. Both objects are *intentionalia* in a schematic sense: they have no metaphysical nature insofar as they are what those thoughts are about. They do have a thought-independent metaphysical nature, yet that nature is utterly different: her Majesty is a concrete entity (notably, a person), number Two is an abstract entity (notably, a number). Suppose also that in the overall ontological inventory there are not only *concreta*, persons in particular, for ontological skepticism about them seems to be self-defeating, but also *abstracta*, numbers in particular, as many of us are disposed to believe by relying e.g. on some indispensability argument. Thus, we are ontologically committed to both these *intentionalia*. Given the new assumption about constitution, both *intentionalia* respectively individuate our thoughts.

Yet second, in reflecting on Elizabeth II, one may think both about her Majesty and about her entelecheia, i.e., her teleological end or perfection, as phenomenology again tells one. Both objects are again *intentionalia* in a schematic sense. Yet their thought-independent nature is different: as we have already seen, her Majesty is a concrete entity (a person), yet her entelecheia is a (false) nonnatural posit endowed with causal powers insofar as it allegedly guides an organism's development. As we have seen, moreover, we accept persons in the overall ontological inventory. Yet we normally agree in rejecting non-natural posits endowed with causal powers, hence entelecheias as well. Thus, in the light of the new assumption about constitution, while Elizabeth II individuates the thought that according to phenomenology – correctly – is about her, her entelechia does not individuate the thought that according to phenomenology – incorrectly – is about it. Another entity indeed plays that job – plausibly, a proposition-like entelecheian intentional content, a content displaying the problematic determinations that makes entelecheias ontologically implausible.[15]

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[15] In (2001, 30), Crane defended a similar strategy as to intentional content, but for the fact that for him that content is nonconceptual, hence nonpropositional. This may depend on the fact that in his strategy (see Crane 2001; 2013), nonexistent *intentionalia*

Once the above is the case, moreover, as to intentional identity I can say that our thoughts are coindividuated by the *intentionale* they share, just in case we are ontologically committed to objects with the specific nature of such *intentionale*, even if that nature makes them to be nonexistent entities, in a suitable first-order sense of existence. Otherwise, those thoughts are still coindividuated, yet not by their alleged *intentionale* of a certain nature, for there really is no such thing, but by entities of a different kind. More precisely, two thoughts are individuated by the same object they are about, just as phenomenology conveys to one, iff: i) the object the first thought thinks about according to one's phenomenology and the object the second thought thinks about according to one's phenomenology are metaphysically the same object; ii) there really is such an object. If there is no such object, then they are not really about it. Thus, although as to them there is no proper intentional identity, they are coindividuated by another kind of thing that there is; namely, what determines their proposition-like identical intentional content. Both thoughts indeed mobilize a content of the kind, there is a (unique) *F* that *G*s.

Once again, let me clarify matters by means of examples. Let me start with three hopefully uncontroversial cases. To begin with, suppose Jules is thinking about the set of the cordates and Jim is thinking about the set of the renates, as phenomenology respectively tells them. Do they really think about the same thing? Metaphysically speaking, first, the things that according to their phenomenology the two guys are thinking about are *abstracta* of a certain kind; namely, sets. Second, as is well known, sets have the following identity criterion: $\{x: Fx\} = \{x: Gx\}$ iff $\forall x(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$. According to this criterion, the set of the cordates and the set of the renates are the same set, for they are coextensional. Ontologically speaking, moreover, there are sets, or so most of us believe, for sets merely supervene on

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never figure in the overall ontological inventory. Whereas I hold that the question of whether nonexistent *intentionalia* figure in that inventory is a case by case question, to be answered differently depending on whether the different kinds of nonexistent *intentionalia* that are at stake are accepted in that inventory – positively as to *ficta* and mere *possibilia*, negatively as to *impossibilia*. In a nutshell, in the positive case, instead of having a nonconceptual content we have a nonexistent intentional object that figures in the overall ontological domain, while in the negative case, since there is no such object, plausibly enough the intentional content one's thought possesses in that case is propositionally structured.

their members. Hence, Jules and Jim really think about the same thing, i.e., the very set that coindividuates their thoughts.

*Mutatis mutandis*, a similar story must be told as to thinking about numbers or about any other *abstracta*. In thinking about 2 and about II, as phenomenology respectively tells them, Jules and Jim are respectively thinking about the same thing that individuates both thoughts, i.e., a certain number, provided that: i) 2 and II are the same according to the identity criterion for numbers; ii) there are numbers (as we already acknowledged).

Finally, do Jules and Jim really think about the same thing when Jules is thinking about Elizabeth II and Jim is thinking about that lady over there (he is actually facing her Majesty), as their phenomenology respectively tells them? Metaphysically speaking, first, the things that according to their phenomenology the two guys are thinking about are things belonging to *concreta*, namely, things that *may* be spatiotemporal occupiers.[16] Second, *concreta* have the following identity criterion: *a* and *b* are the same *concretum* iff, in all worlds in which they exist, they have the same spatiotemporal profile.[17] According to this criterion, Elizabeth II and that lady are the same *concretum*. Ontologically speaking, moreover, there are *concreta*, as we have already acknowledged. Hence, Jules and Jim really think about the same thing, which coindividuates their thoughts.

Armed with these reflections, let me pass to scrutinize the controversial cases. First, suppose Jules is thinking about Sherlock and Jim is thinking about Holmes, as phenomenology respectively tells them. Do they really think about the same thing? Metaphysically speaking, first, the things that according to their phenomenology the two guys are thinking about are things belonging, if artefactualists about fictional characters are right,[18] to a particular kind of *abstracta*; namely, *ficta*, taken as abstract artefacts. Second, one may suppose that *ficta* have a precise identity criterion. For instance, one may say that *a* and *b* are the same *fictum* iff they share the same set of properties attributed to them in stories and they come out of the same make-believe process of a certain kind that there is a certain

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[16] For this conception, cf. Cocchiarella (1982). See also Priest (2016).

[17] For this conception, see Cocchiarella (1982).

[18] See paradigmatically Thomasson (1999).

individual.[19] According to this criterion, Sherlock and Holmes are the same *fictum*. Suppose further that we agree that there are *ficta*, for instance because dispensing with them is false parsimony, or because they are indispensable (dispensing with them entails dispensing with other entities we independently admit).[20] Granted, *qua fictum*, Sherlock aka Holmes does not exist. Yet since *qua fictum* it belongs to the overall ontological inventory, the fact that it does not exist, in a suitable first-order sense of existence, does not prevent Jules and Jim from really thinking about the same thing, which coindividuates their thoughts.

Second, suppose Jules is hallucinating Nessie and Jim is hallucinating that monster over there, as phenomenology respectively tells them. Granted, it may not appear to them that they are hallucinating, yet it appears respectively to them that their mental states are about Nessie and that monster. Do they really think of the same thing? Metaphysically speaking, first, the things that according to their phenomenology the two guys are thinking about are things that might have existed even if they do not exist (again in a suitable first-order sense of existence): mere *possibilia*. Hence again, they are allegedly thinking about things belonging to *concreta*, namely, things that *may* be spatiotemporal occupiers. Second, as we saw before, *concreta* have the following identity criterion: *a* and *b* are the same *concretum* iff, in all worlds in which they exist, they have the same spatiotemporal profile.[21] According to this criterion, if they share that profile in all worlds in which they exist, Nessie and that monster are the same *concretum*; namely, a certain mere *possibile*. Suppose further that we agree that in the overall ontological domain there are not only *concreta*, but also mere *possibilia*. For dispensing with mere *possibilia* would be false parsimony insofar as they are of the same metaphysical kind as actual *possibilia* (like Elizabeth II) that we already admit (cf. Lewis 1986; Voltolini 2007). Now granted, that mere *possibile* does not

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19    See Voltolini (2006). Caplan and Muller (2015) hold that *ficta* satisfy no criterion of identity: they are brutally identical. One may accept that basic entities satisfy no such criterion. Yet, as Caplan, Muller & Sanson (2017) admit, if *ficta* were no basic entities (as is probably the case), such a satisfaction would obtain.

20    For these arguments, cf. Thomasson (1999) and Voltolini (2006) respectively.

21    For a similar identity criterion for mere *possibilia* cf. Zalta (1983, 75).

exist. Yet since *qua possibile* it belongs to the overall ontological inventory, the fact that it does not exist, in a suitable first-order sense of existence, does not prevent Jules and Jim from really thinking about the same thing, which coindividuates their thoughts.[22]

To be sure, one might object that one can hardly apply this criterion to concrete cases involving mere *possibilia*, since *qua* mere *possibilia* Nessie and that monster have actually just a few properties among those that are predicated of them. Indeed, they lack all the so-called *existence-entailing* properties (cf. again Cocchiarella 1982). Neither Nessie nor that monster, for example, actually swims in Loch Ness, has a shiny skin, and attacks boats; they have such properties only in the merely possible worlds where they exist. So, how can one settle whether they are the same or not?

Yet the objector forgets that among the existence-entailing properties that are falsely ascribed at one and the same time to Nessie and that monster, there are also spatiotemporal properties, which are the properties mobilized in the identity criterion for mere *possibilia*. Now, if contrary to the above hypothesis, in the closest merely possible world where both exist, Nessie and that monster do not share such properties, then they are different entities. Suppose that, while facing Loch Ness, I hallucinate Nessie to be *here* while you hallucinate that monster to be *there*. This means that, in the closest merely possible world where both exist, Nessie has a certain spatiotemporal profile while that monster has another one. Hence, they are different entities. This is surely the case of the aforementioned Vulcan and Twin-Vulcan, which in the closest merely possible world where both exist have a spatiotemporally utterly different orbit.[23]

Third, suppose Jules is thinking about Twardy, the wooden cannon made of steel, and Jim is thinking about Cazmy, the steel cannon made of wood, as phenomenology respectively tells them. Do they really think about the same thing? Metaphysically speaking, first, the things that according to their phenomenology the two guys are thinking about belong to *impossible* objects. Second, *impossibilia* have the following identity criterion: *a* and *b* are the same *impossibile* iff, in the impossible worlds in which

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[22]  For similar views, see Glick (2012) and Pagin (2014).

[23]  Thus *pace* Dennett (1968, 337), Jules and Jim do not have to share all their beliefs on a certain subject, but just the relevant spatiotemporal beliefs.

they exist, they share all their properties. According to this criterion, Twardy and Cazmy are the same *impossibile*. Yet ontologically speaking, as most people think, in the overall ontological domain there are no *impossibilia*, independently of the fact that they do not exist (actually, they cannot exist) in a suitable first-order sense of existence. For even allowing for impossible worlds[24] does not suffice for allowing for such things: impossible worlds are just one kind of impossible entities, impossible objects are another one. If this is the case, then their phenomenology notwithstanding, Jules and Jim are not really thinking about the same *intentionale*. Properly speaking, therefore, as to their thoughts there is no intentional identity. Yet they still think the same, for something else really (co)individuates such thoughts, i.e., something that really figures in the overall ontological inventory; possibly, a certain Twardian/Cazmyan propositional-like intentional content to the effect that there is a certain cannon that is both made of steel and made of wood.

This last case is very important. For as to *impossibilia*, a certain[25] amount of consensus holds as to the fact that an antirealist account must be adopted wrt a problem of intentional identity. Different people here think the same, yet this sameness has not to do with the kind of thing they seem to be thinking about, an *impossibile*, for in point of fact there is no thing of that kind.

Now, this antirealist account may be exported as to any *intentionale* of another kind for which it turned out that an antirealist approach is correct, for there is no such kind. Thus, not only if it were right *not* to believe in *ficta* and in mere *possibilia*, but also if it were right not to believe in sets, numbers and any other *abstracta*, a similar antirealist story as to the problem of intentional identity should be told in all such cases. Nevertheless, it remains that whatever cases support an antirealist stance, the relevant thoughts think the same thing not because they co-identify something, as antirealists traditionally believe (see the previous Section), but because they are constituted by the same ontologically relevant stuff. Simply, that stuff is not the thing is one is thinking about according to one's phenomenology, for there really is no such thing.

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[24]  As Priest (2016), Yagisawa (2008), and Berto (2012) do.

[25]  Admittedly, a limited one: Impossibilists and Meinongians of any sort would disagree.

If this is the case, then a general solution to the problem of intentional identity can be found. First, one must check the nature of the entities people really think about when they are entertaining certain thoughts, insofar as by being really there in the overall ontological inventory, such entities constitute those thoughts. Second, if such entities are metaphysically identical, then those thoughts are really about the same thing, even if its having that very nature forces that thing not to exist, in a suitable first-order sense of existence. Third, if the things people seem to be thinking about are not really there in the overall ontological inventory, then their thoughts are not about the same *intentionale*, yet they may still be thoughts involving the same entities, i.e., what really constitutes such thoughts instead of that *intentionale*: a certain proposition-like intentional content.

This solution is neither realist nor antirealist *in general*. According to it, different thoughts can be about the same nonexistent object *only if* that object belongs to a kind such that there are things of that kind in the overall ontological inventory.

At this point, one may arise the following doubt. Since by following Crane I said that, *qua* object of one's thought, an *intentionale* has no metaphysical nature, what prevents one in the problematic cases from *not* ontologically dispensing with that *intentionale*, by metaphysically *identifying* it with an intentional content that really *belongs* to the overall ontological inventory? Thus, one might apply also to these cases the positive solution I have proposed for the problem of intentional identity. E.g. as to *impossibilia*, what prevents one from ontologically allowing for the relevant *intentionale*, by metaphysically identifying it not with an object that cannot exist, but with the relevant intentional content – a content that is impossible to satisfy – that is really there, so as to say that the relevant thoughts are really both about that content?

To be sure, such a move would save the intuition that intentionality is *uniform*, so that the thought's aboutness is to be taken at face value: *whenever* it seems to one that one's thought is about something, that thought is *really* so.[26] For there really is something that thought is about, simply its metaphysical nature is not the kind of nature one would have expected. E.g. in the case of *impossibilia*, whenever it seems to one that one is thinking about something, there really is something one's thought is about, yet it is

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26  On this intuition, cf. e.g. Spinelli (2016, 94).

not an impossible object but an ontologically palatable intentional content that is simply impossible to satisfy.

Yet unfortunately, there is a reason for not *utterly* endorsing such a welcome result.[27] In some cases, people seem to think about *different* objects. But if what they think about were intentional contents, it might implausibly turn out that they are thinking about the *same* entity. For instance, suppose that Jules seems to think about the set of sets that are not members of themselves, whereas Jim seems to think about the property of being a property that does not apply to itself. Intuitively, they seem to think about different things. Yet suppose one claimed that what they really think about are intentional contents and, owing to one's particular theory of propositions, such intentional contents are the same proposition. This would mean that, appearances notwithstanding, they are thinking of the same *intentionale*. Now, it may well be the case that phenomenology fails to be a good guide to metaphysics. One may believe that what one is thinking is an object of a *certain* metaphysical kind, whereas in point of fact it is an object of *another* metaphysical kind. Consider e.g. children's thinking of Santa Claus, who they assume to be a concrete entity whereas in point of fact it is a kind of fictional entity, a mythological entity. Yet phenomenology is a reliable guide to metaphysics at least as to the *number* of objects, if any, that are involved by one's thoughts. Now, in the case at issue one phenomenologically counts two objects – the paradoxical set and the paradoxical property – where metaphysically speaking just one entity would be at stake, a certain proposition. This suggests that in that case at least, it is better not to identify intentional objects with intentional contents, while going on saying that, since the alleged intentional object does not really figure in the overall ontological domain, instead of having that object, one's thought merely has an intentional content.

To complete the picture, let me conclude this section by saying that settling the kind of entity involved and its metaphysical relationship with the qualifying properties that are predicated of it also determines the kind of *de re* report of intentional identity that is true of it *just in case* that entity really belongs to the overall ontological inventory. As we saw before, reports like (1) can be read either in a strong or in a weak form, precisely depending on whether the entity they allegedly truly quantify

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[27]   In the final section, we will see that there is a *partial* way of endorsing it.

over possesses the property ascribed to it in the relevant report. Since *ficta*, if there are any, actually possess the properties that are predicated of them within stories, the kind of *de re* reports that turn out to be true of them is of the (1a)-form, the strong reading. For instance, we can truly read:

(2)     Magica De Spell is a witch such that Hob believes that she hates Uncle Scrooge, whereas Nob believes that she likes Donald Duck

as:

(2a)    $\exists\alpha(W(\alpha) \wedge$ Hob believes that $H(\alpha,U) \wedge$ Nob believes that $L(\alpha,D))$.

For Magica De Spell is a *fictum* that actually possesses the property of *being a witch* predicated of her in the Disney stories. Yet since mere *possibilia*, if there are any, do not actually possess the existence-entailing properties ascribed to them in the thoughts about them, the kind of *de re* reports that turn out to be true of them is of the (1b)-form, the weak reading. We can truly read (1), which is about a *merely possible* witch, merely as (1b).

## 6. How one can mock-think about the same thing, and a final consequence

On the basis of the above solution to the general problem of intentional identity, I can also provide a treatment of the particular problem of how in pretense one can think about the same thing, when in the overall ontological inventory there is no such thing. Once I endorse the above solution to the problem of intentional identity, this further problem becomes just a specific yet related problem, whose treatment provides no solution to the general problem of intentional identity, yet it may shed light to the above solution itself by integrating it.

To begin with, as Evans (1982) and Walton (1990) have shown us, pretense involves two forms of *as-if* activity. *Of* certain things that are there, one can make *as if* they had certain properties. But one can also make *as if*

*there were* things of certain kinds having certain properties, even if there are no such things.[28] Now, in so pretending that there are such things, one's thoughts about them are also pretended thoughts. Following Evans' terminology, let me call them *mock-thoughts*. Mock-thoughts are therefore to be distinguished from thoughts that are about nonexistent things, in a suitable first-order sense of existence. For unlike the latter things, the former things do not utterly figure in the overall ontological domain; in one's mock-thought, one merely pretends that such things figure in that domain.[29]

Now, in the light of the above solution of the problem of intentional identity, it is easy to say when two mock-thoughts are mock-thoughts about the same thing, by thus pretending to be about the same thing even if there is no such thing. In such mock-thoughts, one must not only pretend that there are certain things, but also that they are things of a certain kind, thereby pretending to satisfy an identity criterion for things of that kind. No identity in the kind of pretense one is engaged in is required any longer, as it was the case in the 'pretense' antirealist approach to the problem of intentional identity we saw in Section 3. For even if such kinds of pretense differ, the identity criterion people are pretending to adopt for the kind of things they mock-think about suffices for those mock-thoughts to be about the same thing.

Let me illustrate this point again by means of examples. First, in their respective pretend plays, Homer mock-thought about Odysseus and Dante mock-thought about Ulysses. Clearly enough, those plays did not by themselves affect the overall ontological inventory. Homer just pretended that there was such a thing as Odysseus, while Dante just pretended that there was such a thing as Ulysses. Nevertheless, did they mock-think about the same thing? Both pretended not only that there is a certain thing, but also that such a thing is both a *concretum* and satisfies the identity criteria for

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[28]   The two forms of pretense respectively occur in what Evans (1982) calls *conservative* and *creative* make-believe games. The former correspond in part to Walton's (1993) *prop-oriented* make-believe games.

[29]   Mock-thoughts may even be unintentional, in the sense that one may not realize that one's mental activity merely amounts to a mock-thought. For those who reject fictional entities and think that in fiction one merely pretend that there are certain things, the Santa Claus case (along with all myth-involving cases) may be reinterpreted as a case in which children inadvertently pretend that there is a guy who does such and such.

*concreta*. If they had not pretended the latter at least implicitly, they would have rather pretended that such a thing is an impossible entity having incompatible determinations. But in their plays there is no sign of that form of pretense. Now, as we already know, two things are the same *concretum* iff they share the same spatiotemporal profile in all worlds in which they exist. Hence, two things are pretended to be the same *concretum* iff they are pretended to share that spatiotemporal profile. As a matter of fact, the pretended spatiotemporal profile of what Homer and Dante mock-thought is the same. Dante simply reprises Homer's narration by adding new events that involve Ulysses after his return home. Once he started navigating again, Ulysses bypasses the Hercules' pillars and eventually dies in the Southern hemisphere. Hence, both Homer and Dante mock-thought about the same thing. By the same reasoning, one may show that (Joyce's intentions notwithstanding) Homer and Joyce did not mock-think about the same thing. For obviously enough, Odysseus' pretended spatiotemporal profile and Bloom's pretended spatiotemporal profile do not coincide.

Second, *Hamlet* notoriously contains a play within a play, *The Murder of Gonzago*. In *Hamlet*'s nesting play, Shakespeare pretends that Gonzago, the hero of the nested play, is a fictional character. Granted, we know very little about Kyd's *Ur-Hamlet*. Yet let me suppose, for argument's sake, that it also contained a play within a play whose hero is Ur-Gonzago, let me call it *The Murder of Ur-Gonzago*. So in *Ur-Hamlet*'s nesting play, Kyd pretends that Ur-Gonzago is a fictional character. Do they mock-think about the same thing? Well, the mock-thoughts featuring the nesting plays involve fictional characters coming out of the nested plays (unlike mock-thoughts that would feature the nested plays, which just involve concrete individuals: in the above nested plays, *The Murder of Gonzago* and *The Murder of Ur-Gonzago*, both Gonzago and Ur-Gonzago are men, not fictional characters). Thus, both Shakespeare and Kyd pretend that there is a certain thing, that such a thing is a *fictum* and (at least implicitly) that it satisfies the identity criteria for *ficta*. As we have seen before, one may provide various identity criteria for *ficta*. For instance, one may say that two things are the same *fictum* iff they share the same set of properties attributed to them in stories and they come out of the same make-believe process that there is a certain individual. Hence, two things are pretended to be the same *fictum* iff they are pretended to share that very set and their

process of generation. As a result, one may show that (Shakespeare's intentions notwithstanding?) Shakespeare and Kyd do not mock-think about the same fictional character. For, since *Ur-Hamlet* does not coincide with *Hamlet*, either the properties respectively mock-attributed to Gonzago and Ur-Gonzago in their nesting plays or the respective mock-generation processes in those plays plausibly differ.

At this point, on the basis of this treatment, I may supply the general solution I have put forward to the problem of intentional identity with an additional fictionalist account. This account holds just for the cases in which there really are no *intentionalia* figuring as the relevant thoughts' constituents, for in the overall ontological domain there really are no things of the metaphysical kinds such *intentionalia* belong to. I may indeed say that in such cases, while it is still really the case that the relevant thoughts think the same insofar as they are constituted by the same proposition-like intentional content, it is just a shallow pretense that such thoughts are about the same *intentionale*, as phenomenology suggests. As one may put it, what is phenomenologically the case is in such cases just what it is *fictionally* the case.

This way of putting things has an additional advantage. For it partially saves the *uniformity* intuition we considered in the previous Section that, in a sense, both thoughts that in my account are constituted by *intentionalia* and thoughts not so constituted are *about* something. For the former are such that they are *really* about something, yet the latter are such that they are *merely fictionally* about something.

Cases in which different thoughts are allegedly about the same *impossibile* are paradigmatic instances of this situation. Coming back to a previous example, when allegedly thinking about Twardy and Cazmy respectively, it is just fictionally the case that Jules and Jim think about the same *impossibile*, as phenomenology suggests. For it is instead really the case that they are both mobilizing in their thoughts a certain Twardian/Cazmyan proposition-like intentional content. Clearly enough, such cases definitely are not the only cases of this kind (situations involving thoughts allegedly about imaginary companions, idiosyncratic posits, indeterminate fictional characters are other clear instances).[30]

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[30]  For these examples, see Kroon (2011; 2013; 2015).

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