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The Objects of Thought. By TIM CRANE. (Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp xii + 182. Price £27.50.)

The problem of what to make of thoughts and other mental states that get characterised as ‘about Hamlet’, ‘about Pegasus’ and in general ‘about things that don’t exist’ is the focus of Tim Crane’s new book *The Objects of Thought* (TOT). Crane aims to give an account of these mental states that respects their similarity to mental states that are about real entities. It is of crucial importance that this aim is realisable, if a proper understanding of the *aboutness* of mental states - of intentionality (for Crane the mark of the mental) - is to be achieved. The phrase ‘thoughts and other mental states that get characterised as “about Hamlet”’ (let me for shorten this to ‘Hamlet-thoughts’) is my attempt at a specification of the subject matter of TOT that doesn’t assume the position that Crane argues for - that there is something, Hamlet, that Hamlet-thoughts are about.

‘The best phenomenological account of intentionality’ (p. 5) Crane says, entails there are non-existent objects of thought, like Hamlet and Pegasus, and truths about these. (These truths include ‘Pegasus is a mythical horse’ but not ‘Pegasus is a horse’; there is no such *horse* (p. 62).) Let me call the denial that there is something, Hamlet, that Hamlet-thoughts are about ‘eliminativism’. Crane is not an eliminativist in this sense but he is also not, or doesn’t want to be, what Mark Sainsbury calls an ‘exoticist’ ((2010) ‘Intentionality without Exotica’ in Jeshion, Robin, *New Essays on Singular Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)). A Hamlet-thought, he is adamant, does not relate the thinker to some kind of ‘exotic’ item. Aboutness is not a ‘real relation’ (p. 9). Having defended, in the first part of TOT, the ‘truisms’ that eliminativists deny, in the second part Crane offers ‘reductive’ explanations of the ‘truths about non-existent objects... in terms of truths about existing things’ (p. 5). TOT is an attempt to carve out a new position between eliminativism and exoticism, and finally solve ‘the problem of nonexistence’ (p. 3).

This is a bold ambition and TOT is a brilliant attempt to pull it off - ingenious, full of insight and wonderfully clearly written. The worry I will express in this review is that there just isn't space between eliminativism and exoticism for another position.

Crane uses names like 'Hamlet' in the subject position of statements, and says things like: 'there are non-existent objects of thought'. Does this not make him an exoticist? Crane maintains not. He denies that quantifying over non-existent objects commits him to such items; that is he rejects Quine's criterion of ontological commitment. In support of this rejection he points to the use of 'possible worlds talk' by metaphysicians who deny a commitment to possible worlds (pp. 40-41). This makes the deniable assumption that metaphysicians express themselves strictly and literally in these cases. But Crane says a lot more in defense of and explanation of his rejection of Quine's criterion in chapter 2's discussion of quantification and ontological commitment.

The 'existential quantification' 'there are Fs' is true just if the 'domain of quantification' contains items that satisfy 'F'. How then can Crane deny that in endorsing 'there are Fs' I am committing myself to Fs? He claims:

The semantics for the quantifiers in a given language will be given in a metalanguage, and the domains will standardly be introduced by metalanguage quantifiers. There is no semantic or logical obstacle to seeing these quantifiers as 'non-committing' just as the object-language quantifiers are (p. 37).

The domain of quantification specified by the semantics for my language, Crane says, is the 'universe of discourse ... a specific generalization of the idea of an object of thought: viz. all the things relevant to what we are talking about' (p. 40). Non-existent objects like Pegasus 'can be "values" of the variables bound by the quantifiers, just in the sense that things can be true or false of these objects of thought' (p. 40).

This is why Crane feels free to quantify over non-existent intentional objects and why he maintains that he isn't thereby committed to exoticism. But can he explicitly *reject* exoticism? His denial that there are such *existing* things as Hamlet and Pegasus is compatible with many versions of exoticism,

as is his denial that non-existent objects have real (one place) properties. Much of what is asserted by the 'reductive' explanations of the 'truths about non-existents' that Crane offers in the second part of TOT, is compatible with certain varieties of exoticism. According to Crane's explanation 'Holmes is famous' is true because Holmes possesses the 'representation dependent property' (p. 135) of fame. Holmes having this property in turn is explained as down to the ubiquity of Holmes-representations. The ultimate explanans in the explanations are facts about real people's mental states but this is not incompatible with what an exoticist like Amie Thomasson ((1999) *Fiction and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)), who takes the 'abstract artefact' Holmes to 'depend' on concrete mental states, would say. Thomasson could go along with Crane's story, disagreeing only when it comes to the identity conditions of Holmes-representations and of Holmes.

For Crane, crucially, Holmes doesn't have identity conditions (and so the identity of Holmes-representations can't depend on Holmes). Crane makes explicit his rejection of exoticism by denying that there are any facts about the (numerical) identity of non-existent objects of thought. Crane also makes explicit his denial of exoticism by denying that non-existent objects of thought stand in any 'real relations'. Reference, unlike aboutness, is a real relation (p. 9), so Crane denies that 'Holmes' refers. In the remainder of this review I will argue that there are difficulties attending these denials. First, the denial that names like 'Holmes' refer. It is puzzling how this squares with what TOT says about the semantics of talk 'about non-existent objects'. Remember, the metalanguage in which we talk about reference and other semantic notions like truth, is supposedly non-committing. So there seems to be nothing stopping me from saying that 'Holmes is famous', which for Crane is literally true (his reductive explanation doesn't deny this), is true just if the member of the domain of quantification that 'Holmes' *refers to* satisfies 'is famous'.

The only thing stopping me saying this is Crane's 'stipulation' (p. 10) that reference is a relation of words to real existent entities. If this prevents me from using the word 'reference' though, I can employ Kripke's device and use the word 'schmeference'. It will become apparent that schmeference is just what we mean by 'reference'. It seems that Crane needs to reject the semantic conception of

truth that accords reference the role it plays in the above explanation of the truth of ‘Holmes is famous’.

Let me turn to the denial that there are facts about the (numerical) identity of non-existent objects.

What to make then of, for example, ‘Mercury and Hermes are the same (mythical) god?’ Crane says:

My proposal is that what is at issue in cases of *mere* intentional identity is not identity at all, but *similarity* of representation. We can talk about sameness and difference here, but what makes this talk true, when it is true, is the similarity or sameness of properties. We count Mercury and Hermes as the ‘same’ god, because the stories that are told about them are relevantly similar: they say similar things about these two characters. (p. 164)

Crane addresses the troublesome case of differently represented characters that we count as ‘the same’ (e.g. Clark Kent and Superman); we count them as the same, he says, because the story says they are identical. Another case that spells trouble for the suggestion that ‘same’ in the relevant contexts means ‘similarly represented’ is the case of two similarly represented characters (mythical gods, say) who belong to myths that don’t have a common historical origin, or who belong to fictions developed independently by different authors with no common influence (cf. Thomasson 1999). Imagine the two characters were first believed to have a common origin and then it is discovered that they don’t. The judgement that they are the same (mythical) god is revised without the representations of the characters changing.

Also consider, if Crane is right that, because they lack identity, we can’t count non-existents, then statements like: ‘most of Jane Austen’s characters are unappealing’ can’t be included among ‘the truths about non-existents’ (alongside e.g. ‘Siegfried is an unappealing character’ (cf. p. 20)) without inflicting the sort of violence to their intuitive semantics that Crane avoids in other cases.

I conclude that there are reasons to doubt that Crane has solved the problem of non-existence. But that doesn’t mean TOT is not a landmark contribution to the debate. And there is so much in the book (for instance the discussion of ‘singular thought’) that demands to be read by anyone who would wish to enquire into all the issues that Crane explores.