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If Intentional Objects are Objects for a Subject, How are They Related?

Abstract

Tim Crane (2001, 2013) has put forward a theory of intentional objects (*intentionalia*), which has taken up again and expanded by Casey Woodling (2016a, 2016b). Crane's theory is articulated in three main theses: a) every intentional state, or *thought*, is about an intentional object; b) taken as such, whether or not it exists, an intentional object is a schematic object; c) taken as such, whether or not it exists, an intentional object is a phenomenological object.

In this paper, I will try to show that theses b) and c) can hardly be defended together, unless, in order to redirect and strengthen Crane's theory two further claims are simultaneously defended. First, certain *intentionalia* may be the same as other such objects without being identical with them, and second, from a metaphysical point of view outside phenomenology, the particular *intentionalia* involved by this *sui generis* sameness relation of *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of* weaker than *identity* are concrete objects.

Keywords:

Intentional objects (*intentionalia*), schematic objects, phenomenological objects, concrete objects, identity, appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of

1. Introduction

Tim Crane (2001, 2013) has recently put forward a new phenomenological theory of intentional objects (from now on, *intentionalia*: this is the Latin translation of “intentional objects” that has the same ontological import – possibly, none: see immediately later – as the English phrase). For Crane, *intentionalia* are mere schematic objects for a subject, which, as such, have neither a metaphysical nature nor an ontological import. Recently, Casey Woodling (2016a, 2016b) has taken up this theory again and expanded it against Uriah Kriegel’s (2011) adverbialist account of intentionality. Indeed, Kriegel’s adverbialism rejects such objects in favor of an account of apparently relational intentional properties (of the kind, *being about a certain object, having a certain content*) as monadic properties of intentional states – *thoughts*, to give them a generic name.

Crane’s theory is articulated in three main theses, which all involve a phenomenological level distinct from both the metaphysical and the ontological. More in detail, the theses concern *intentionalia* insofar as they are phenomenologically given to a thinking subject, independently both of what their actual, possibly varied, metaphysical nature amounts to and of whether they really figure in the overall ontological inventory of what there is. Crane explicitly endorses the first two theses whilst only implicitly defending the third. But this third thesis is a natural completion of the theory that allows Woodling to manifestly formulate it. Here are the theses:

- a) every thought is about an intentional object, i.e., there is an intentional object for any thought independently of whether it exists;
- b) taken as such, whether or not it exists, an intentional object is a schematic object, i.e., it is an object that has no particular metaphysical nature insofar as it is thought of;
- c) taken as such, whether or not it exists, an intentional object is a phenomenological object, i.e., an object for the thought's subject; more precisely, it is what that subject takes that thought to be about.

Such theses are certainly palatable. For, in providing a convincing phenomenological account of intentionality, they do not entail the (hardly explainable) claim that the phenomenology of intentionality leads astray from its metaphysics, which is what adverbialists are paradigmatically forced to do. In this paper, however, I will not deal with Woodling's attack against Kriegel's adverbialism. However, in Section 2 I will first of all try to show that theses b) and c) can hardly be defended together, unless two further metaphysical claims are simultaneously defended, as I will try to show in Section 3. First, certain intentional objects, where *intentionalia* are conceived as before, are the *same* as another such object without being *identical* with it. Thus, one must distinguish an, admittedly *sui generis*, *sameness* relation from the standard *identity* relation; namely, the relation of *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of*. Second, the particular *intentionalia* that are involved as the *relata* of this *sui generis* sameness relation are, from a metaphysical point of view outside phenomenology, concrete objects (*concreta*); namely, objects that *may* exist, i.e., *possibilia*.

By means of these two claims, Crane's theory can be metaphysically redirected and strengthened. Once one does this metaphysical job, the theory can be kept and maintain its phenomenological flavor, which makes it more appealing than other competing theories of intentionality.

2. *The Problem*

According to Woodling (2016a, 2016b), Crane's (2001, 2013) theory of intentional objects makes the act-object model of intentionality an irrevocable account of intentionality. The theory locates itself at a *phenomenological* level concerning what it *seems* to the subject of a thought. This level is distinct from both the *metaphysical* level, concerning the *nature* of the items involved by the theory, and the *ontological* level, concerning whether the items involved figure in the *overall inventory* of what there is. Indeed, the theory is primarily qualified by the phenomenological thesis a):

a) every thought is about an *intentionale*, i.e., there is an *intentionale* for any thought independently of whether it exists.

Because of its phenomenological character, both Crane and Woodling maintain that, appearances notwithstanding, a) does not involve one in the problem of how thoughts can stand in relation with what they are about, their intentional objects, even if such objects

do not exist. For only when an *intentionale* exists, is the thought that is about it really in a further genuine relation with it, i.e., the *reference* relation (however this relation is cashed out).¹ Indeed, when an *intentionale* does not exist, the thought is simply about it without being in this further genuine relation of *reference* with it. At most, as Crane (2013, p. 66) specifies and Woodling (2016a) agrees with, unlike *reference*, *aboutness* can be interpreted as a non-substantial relation that the *intentionale* has with the thought. Yet again, this merely means that it is true of the thought that it is about that *intentionale*.² For, as Crane adds, “a non-substantial relation might simply consist in the truth of a relational predication. There’s no reason to deny, for example, that whenever a relational proposition ‘aRb’ is true, the relation R holds between a and b.” (2013, p. 66). All in all, *aboutness* is a genuinely non-relational thing that phenomenologically applies to all thoughts and their *intentionalia*, while *reference* is another thing, a genuine, or (again in Crane’s terms) substantial, relation that affects only some thoughts and their *intentionalia*, i.e., the existent ones.

However, the idea that *aboutness* has no genuine relational character must be properly justified. Meinongians, for example, would instead take it as a genuine relation holding between thoughts and intentional objects, independently of whether these objects exist. As Priest (2016, p. 60 fn.7) says, objects, even intentional ones, do not have to exist in order for them to stand in a genuine relation with something else. As Priest stresses, a genuine relation obviously needs to have *relata*, but does not require these *relata* to exist. To give just one example, a merely possible object, i.e., an object that does not actually exist but might have existed – say, Elip, the merely possible offspring of Elisabeth I of England and Philip II of Spain – may actually stand in the genuine relation of *being more*

valuable than with an actually existent object – say, Anders Behring Breivik, the author of the massacre at Utøya, Norway, in 2011.

In fact, in order to justify the idea that aboutness has no genuine relational character, two further theses are needed on Crane's and Woodling's part. In further qualifying an *intentionale* phenomenologically, such theses have both metaphysical and ontological consequences about it. For they jointly show that, in itself, an *intentionale* is not a genuine *relatum* of a thought.

On the one hand, for them the following thesis must hold:

b) taken as such, whether or not it exists, an intentional object is a schematic object, i.e., it is an object that has no particular metaphysical nature insofar as it is thought of.

As Crane already envisaged (2001, pp. 15-17, 2013, p. 92), b) does not rule out that an *intentionale* has a metaphysical nature. As a matter of fact, different *intentionalia* may have different such natures. Indeed, some *intentionalia* are physical objects, while some others are abstract objects (numbers, sets, abstract artefacts...), and so on. To quote Crane himself:

It is clear then that 'objects' of intentional states form a pretty heterogeneous category. In fact, they can be of any ontological category whatsoever—this is just another way of saying that we can think about any kind of thing whatsoever. Intentional objects can be

objects in the ordinary sense (material or physical particular objects) but also facts, events, properties, as well as plural entities (pluralities) like snakes. (2013, p. 92)

Simply, as Crane himself underlines (*ib.*), b) rules out an *intentionale* having that nature as an *intentional object*. Indeed in itself, an *intentionale* is just an object of thought, something that only has a phenomenal import. Its metaphysical nature, if any, is assessed completely outside of phenomenology, i.e., completely outside of the fact that it is an object of thought. For example, in thinking about Santa Claus, a child may originally believe that Claus is a concrete being like you and me; this is why she sends letters to him. Yet once she discovers that Claus does not exist, she also discovers that Claus' actual metaphysical nature is utterly different: Claus is a mythical object, a kind of fictional individual.³ Yet from the phenomenological point of view, Claus remains the very same object of thought for the child.

On the other hand, thesis b) is completed by a further thesis that articulates the fact that b)'s phenomenal import has repercussions not only at the metaphysical, but also at the ontological level. Phenomenologically speaking, one may think of something independently of whether one is ontologically committed to that something. As the further thesis specifies, the phenomenological fact that something is an object for someone's thought does not entail that such an object figures in the general ontological inventory of what there is:

c) taken as such, whether or not it exists, an intentional object is a phenomenological object, i.e., an object for the thought's subject; more precisely, it is what the subject takes that thoughts to be about.

By making Crane's ideas on this point explicit, Woodling says that this *taking* is a *self-fulfilling* stance: whatever a subject takes, it holds – the thought is about the object the subjects takes that thought to be about (Woodling 2016a, 2016b, pp. 492-493 and fn.3, 498, 501, 507-510).⁴

All in all, as a result of b) and c), there is no problem of accounting in genuine relational terms for how a thought can be about a nonexistent intentional object. For that object is not a metaphysically *sui generis* entity, an *exoticum* (in the brilliant terminology coined by Sainsbury 2010): e.g., an abstract object (like a set of properties, or a correlate of that set), a mind-dependent object, a *qua*-object. Instead, it is simply the phenomenological target of the thought to which, outside phenomenology, one may not be ontologically committed. Granted, if one were so committed to that object, one's thought would have to stand in a genuine relation with it. But thinking about it does not require that ontological commitment. For example, one may think of Twardy, the wooden cannon made of steel.⁵ Yet since Twardy is metaphysically speaking an impossible object and ontologically speaking there are no *impossibilia*,⁶ one is not ontologically committed to it.

So far, so good. Yet from c) a certain problematic consequence ensues. Let me call it the 'many *intentionalia*' problem. As Woodling himself (2016a) acknowledges, if an *intentionale* is, as c) claims, what the subject takes a thought to be about, so-called Frege

cases force a proliferation of intentional objects; namely, all the objects that such cases end up mobilizing. For in point of fact, subjects involved in such cases take there to be *different* intentional objects at stake; namely, all the objects that those subjects take their thoughts to be about. For example in the *Oedipus Rex* case (pretending of course that the story is real), Oedipus takes his craving to be about a certain *intentionale* Jocasta, whom he further believes to be a certain concrete individual, and his filial love to be about the different *intentionale* Mummy, whom he further believes to be another concrete individual. For him, the Jocasta he craves for is not the same as the Mummy he filially loves. Since his takings are self-fulfilling, it turns out that there are two distinct *intentionalia*, Jocasta and Mummy. Indeed, this explains why the following is a valid inference:

(1) Oedipus craved for Jocasta and filially loved Mummy. So, there were two things he respectively craved for and loved

since it is modeled after the valid:

(2) Ponce de León was searching for the fountain of youth and the golden mountain. So, there were two things he was searching for. (Sainsbury 2018, p. 41)⁷

To be sure, this proliferation of *intentionalia* would not be a drawback in itself, if it did not seem to have a further, even more problematic, consequence. At a certain point in the

drama, Oedipus starts suspecting, and then fearing, that Jocasta is *the same* as Mummy, which is what he is forced to realize in the end. Now, if Jocasta and Mummy are *different* intentional objects, it would seem that he turns out to have a contradictory realization; namely, that *two* intentional objects are *identical*. Yet how can this be? For Oedipus certainly does not come to a contradictory realization. Quite the opposite: his realization explains why the drama is a tragedy.

At first blush, on behalf of Woodling (and Crane) one may radically deny that the realization concerns different *intentionalia*. But this is hard to maintain. For the realization is simply the opposite of what Oedipus has believed all along; namely, that Jocasta, whom he self-fulfillingly takes to be a certain *intentionale*, is *not* the same as Mummy, whom he self-fulfillingly takes to be another *intentionale*. Oedipus might indeed exclaim in desperation:

(3) For a long while, I believed that Jocasta was not the same as Mummy, but I now realize that the opposite is the case: *she*, Jocasta, is indeed the same as *she*, Mummy.

Definitely, as I have just said, for Woodling himself (and for Crane, I guess) *that* original belief on Oedipus' part cannot but concern Oedipus' different *intentionalia*. As Woodling himself admits, while talking of the analogous Frege case involving Hesperus and Phosphorus: "the thoughts [i.e., a 'Hesperus'- thought and a 'Phosphorus'- thought] have distinct intentional objects" (2016a, p. 553).⁸ So this must be the case as regards the later realization, which simply denies *the very content* of that original belief.

And *pour cause*. If one denied that in the Frege cases, there were different *intentionalia* for the subject involved (Oedipus, say) before her later realization that they are the same, absurdly one would be forced to deny that in other cases, *for us now* there are different *intentionalia*; namely, whenever we simply have no idea whatsoever whether they will turn out to be the same. For example, it would be odd for me to deny that, when I now think of Obama and of Trump respectively, I take my thoughts to be about different *intentionalia*. Yet, who knows? Maybe by some strange twist of fate, Obama and Trump will turn out to be the same guy. Would this mean that they would never have been distinct for me? This sounds like sheer absurdity.

Granted, Woodling (and Crane) may pursue a more moderate move; indeed, Woodling 2016a seemingly endorses this.⁹ Once one knows that a certain *intentionale* is the same as another *intentionale*, in the end there is a single *intentionale* that remains as what one takes one's thought to be about. In support of this move, note that Oedipus may utter some first-person reports that appear to be true in any case, independently of whether they respectively mobilize the name "Jocasta" and the name "Mummy":

(4) I wish I had not craved for Jocasta

(5) I wish I had not craved for Mummy.

One may further justify this move as follows, by jumping, *à la* Crane (2001, 2013), out of phenomenology and into metaphysics. First, whenever at the phenomenological level there is an *intentionale* one's thought is about, at the metaphysical level there instead is

an *intentional content* that state is in a genuine relation with (e.g. Crane 2001, p. 32). Second, this intentional content may be metaphysically conceived, as Crane does, in terms of a *mental file*, i.e., a mental repository of information labeled in a certain way (Crane 2013, pp. 158-159).¹⁰ Hence third, to say that a certain phenomenally-based *intentionale* is the same as another phenomenally-based *intentionale* is tantamount to saying that the first mental file metaphysically underlying the first *intentionale* and the second mental file metaphysically underlying the second *intentionale* merge into a single mental file metaphysically underlying the very single phenomenally-based *intentionale* arising out of that sameness.

I do not want to deny that there is an intuition according to which after the relevant sameness realization, a subject focuses on the single *intentionale* that the realization now offers to her attention, by so to speak attentionally bracketing what she was previously mentally involved with. In the next Section, I will try to accommodate this intuition. Yet for the time being, let me stress that even metaphysically buying intentional contents in terms of mental files¹¹ does not help one to dispense with the original different *intentionalia* that such contents allegedly underlie metaphysically. For the ‘merging’ metaphor is inappropriate to describe what happens when two *intentionalia* turn out to be the same, as one of the main sustainers of mental files, Recanati (2012, pp. 44-47), has clarified. Instead, says Recanati, the original different mental files that metaphysically speaking underlie the original different phenomenally-based *intentionalia* are *still there as distinct files* when such *intentionalia* phenomenally turn out to be the same. Simply, what happens in that case is that these files are *linked (ib.)*, by allowing for a passage of information from one file to the other. Hence, the different *intentionalia* that lie so to

speak at the phenomenological surface of that metaphysical iceberg *remain there* as well as *distinct intentionalia* even when they turn out to be the same.

However, there is a more plausible route for Woodling (and Crane) to pursue. To stick to the Oedipus case, one may accept that Oedipus' tragic realization concerns his different *intentionalia*, while however denying that it is contradictory at all. For one may claim that saying that two different *intentionalia* are the *same* is not tantamount to contradictorily saying that they are *identical*. For *sameness*, as predicated in that realization concerning Jocasta and Mummy, is a relation different from *identity* and weaker than it. As such, unlike *identity*, which notoriously is a *reflexive* relation, it does indeed concern different *intentionalia*.

Fair enough. Some Meinongians have indeed made such a claim, by defending it in a particular way. For Castañeda (1989), saying that a certain *intentionale* is the same as another *intentionale* is not contradictory at all. For it amounts to saying that such *intentionalia* hold a distinctive relation of *consubstantiation*; they are consubstantiated in a substance that embeds them among its facets, taken as aspectual folds of it.¹²

Yet Woodling (or Crane for that matter) cannot endorse the Castañedean defense of the above claim, or anything along those lines. For this defense amounts to denying b), the schematicity thesis. Indeed for Castañeda (1989), insofar as they can be consubstantiated, metaphysically speaking *intentionalia* are *guises*, i.e., correlates of property sets. As I hinted at above, for him consubstantiation is indeed a relation holding between a certain guise – a correlate of a certain property set – and another guise – a correlate of another property set – and consisting in their belonging to a substance as two of its facets. But

interpreting intentional objects as guises is a substantive metaphysical thesis about such objects. Indeed for him, guises are not schematic objects, but objects having a certain metaphysical status that makes them *exotica*, bizarre entities endowed with a peculiar metaphysical nature.

So in the end, it seems that theses b) and c) cannot be held together. Is there a way to end this stalemate, in order for Crane's and Woodling's original triad to have a new chance of being simultaneously defended?

3. *The Solution*

I think that there is such a way. To begin with, one may definitely take the more plausible route that I considered at the end of the previous Section, yet by developing it in an entirely different way. Saying, as c) requires, that a phenomenologically individuated *intentionale* is the same as another so individuated *intentionale* is indeed not tantamount to contradictorily saying that they are identical. For there is another way, though admittedly different from the Castañedean one, to read *sameness* as a relation different from *identity* and weaker than it.

The problem such a way must immediately address is the following: how can such a reading, unlike the Castañedean reading, be compatible with b), the claim that *intentionalia* are schematic objects, not endowed with a particular metaphysical nature insofar as they are thought of?

The only chance that I can see to get free of the problem is to appeal to a new *sui generis* relation of *sameness* as holding between particular *intentionalia*, those involved by Frege cases, which outside phenomenology have a *specific* metaphysical nature. This sameness is a non-identity relation holding among *intentionalia* conceived schematically *à la* Crane, in particular, among *certain* different *intentionalia*, as mentioned, those that are involved by Frege cases, which metaphysically are concrete objects (*concreta*). Let me clarify this basic point.

First of all, let me recall that phenomenologically speaking, as b) requires, *intentionalia* are just schematic objects, i.e., objects that have no metaphysical nature insofar as they are thought of. Yet as we have seen, Crane does allow that outside phenomenology, *intentionalia* have a metaphysical nature, which may differ for different *intentionalia* (one *intentionale* may be a *concretum*, another an *abstractum*, and so on). So, even the particular *intentionalia* that are involved by Frege cases and are the *relata* of the *sui generis* sameness relation I am talking about are phenomenologically speaking schematic objects. Yet metaphysically speaking, hence outside phenomenology, those *intentionalia* are *concreta*. In other words, not all *intentionalia* are metaphysically speaking *concreta*; however, at least those that are involved by Frege cases and are the *relata* of the *sui generis* sameness relation are such. Following both Cocchiarella (1982) and Priest (2016), I take *concreta* to be *possible* objects that *may* have causal powers. In other and more detailed words, *concreta* are objects that, in the possible worlds in which they exist but not in the worlds in which they do not exist, both induce and undergo causal modifications. Thus *concreteness*, so defined, affects *possible* objects (*possibilia*), both actually existent and actually nonexistent ones, i.e., mere *possibilia*. For actually existent

possibilia are *concreta* that are actually endowed with causal powers, while mere *possibilia* are *concreta* that are merely possibly endowed with such powers.

Moreover, armed with this metaphysical account of *concreteness*, I can clarify what this *sui generis* sameness relation amounts to. Indeed, I may claim that the different *intentionalia* that are involved by Frege cases and are outside phenomenology *concreta* stand in a relation of sameness that is not *identity*, but the weaker relation of *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of*, which precisely affects *concreta*.

In a way, Castañeda was right in thinking, along with many others and possibly Frege himself, that the solution to the puzzle that Frege cases raise involves items that have an *aspectual* flavor, as guises *qua* correlates of property sets have: e.g. Hesperus viz. *the Evening Star* and Phosphorus viz. *the Morning Star* are not identical with Venus, they are (*qua* guises) mere aspects of it; ways for Venus to present itself, Frege would have said. Yet he was wrong in thinking that aspectuality is a *metaphysical* feature of the items involved in that solution. As I said, those *intentionalia* are *concreta*, not aspectual entities of any sort. For aspectuality is only a *phenomenological* feature for them. Once discovered to be the same as Mummy, Jocasta *looks like* an aspect of her, while once they are discovered to be the same as Venus, Hesperus and Phosphorus *look like* different aspects of it.

Putting things this way definitely matches Crane's account of *intentionalia*. For the fact that aspectuality is a phenomenal, not a metaphysical, feature of *intentionalia* shows another point of conformity with claim c) above of Crane's account, notably with his thesis that *intentionalia* are what the subject *takes* her thoughts to be about.

Now, interpreting the *sui generis* sameness relation in the above way has repercussions on its formal features. Unlike Castañeda's *consubstantiation*, the *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of* relation is actually not only a nonreflexive relation, for it only involves *different* items, but is also an asymmetric many-one relation among such items. For not only may it obtain between *various* concrete *intentionalia* on the one hand – all the concrete *intentionalia* (one, two, even indefinitely many) that appear as aspectual alter-egos of another concrete *intentionale* – and *that very other* concrete *intentionale* on the other hand. But it also, it goes *in one direction* only: the former *intentionalia* appear as aspectual alter-egos of the latter *intentionale*, but not the other way round.¹³ As I hinted in the previous Section, this is the *intentionale* that after the relevant sameness realization the subject involved focuses her attention on, by so to speak attentionally bracketing the *intentionalia* standing on the left-hand side of the sameness relation.

In the *Oedipus Rex* case, matters are simple: Jocasta is the same as Mummy iff she appears as an aspectual alter-ego of Mummy, whereas Mummy is not the same as Jocasta, for Mummy does not appear as an aspectual alter-ego of Jocasta. Mummy (now also known as Jocasta) is what Oedipus exclusively focuses on after the tragic realization, as his reports (4)-(5) show.

As we have already seen implicitly, in other cases matters are more complicated. For one and the same concrete *intentionale* matches different concrete *intentionalia* that all appear as different alter-egos of it. In the Hesperus-Phosphorus case, both Hesperus and Phosphorus appear as different aspectual alter-egos of Venus, while Venus does not appear as an aspectual alter-ego of either. Venus (now also known both as Hesperus and Phosphorus) is what the ancient Babylonians started to exclusively focus on after the

realization that Hesperus is the same as Phosphorus. *Pace* Kripke (2013, p. 92), this is also the fate of Superman. It is not the case that Clark Kent appears as an aspectual alter-ego of Superman (or conversely, to put it as Kripke does (*ib.*), that Superman masquerades as Clark Kent)¹⁴. For (pretending again that the story is real) both Clark Kent and Superman appear as different alter-egos of a third thing, Kal-El, the individual actually born in Krypton; yet not even Kal-El appears as an aspectual alter-ego of either. And with a little imaginative effort, more complicated cases can be figured out, with even an indefinite number of *intentionalia* appearing as different aspectual alter-egos of just another *intentionale*. For example, one could come up with a case in which a subject not only thinks of Hesperus and Phosphorus but also both of Meridius, the alleged noon star, and of Postmeridius, the alleged afternoon star, by finally discovering that not only Hesperus and Phosphorus, but also Meridius and Postmeridius actually appear as different aspectual alter-egos of Venus (then also known not only as Hesperus and Phosphorus, but also as Meridius and Postmeridius).

Fair enough. Yet at this point two questions remain unaddressed. First, why must the *intentionalia* that are affected by this relation of *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of* be *concreta*, outside phenomenology? And second, why the left-hand *relata* appear as (aspectual) *alter-egos* of the right-hand *relatum*?

Let me address these questions at one and the same time, by further examining in greater detail what this relation amounts to in the following two points.

First point. Let me further qualify the relation of *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of modally*. In order to do so, let me start by focusing on the *relata* of this relation.

Remember that in the definition of *concreteness* I appealed to, *concreta* are *possibilia*, i.e., entities that may exist independently of whether they actually exist. Now on the one hand, this definition allows all the *intentionalia* standing on the left-hand side of the *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of* relation to be precisely *concreta*; in particular, *concreta* that fail to exist but might have existed, i.e., mere *possibilia*. Yet on the other hand, it allows the only *intentionale* standing on the right-hand side of the relation to be a *concretum* as well, yet a *concretum* that does exist, i.e., an actualized *possibile*.

Now first, putting things this way allows for an overpopulation of *intentionalia* as existent beings to be avoided. For the left-hand side *intentionalia* are *concreta* that are replaced among the existent beings by another but existent *concretum*; namely, the *intentionale* standing on the right-hand side of the relation. By possessing the features that would have identified the above *intentionalia* if they had existed – first of all, their spatiotemporal careers – this existent *intentionale* pushes all such *intentionalia* out of existence.

But second, the fact that the spatiotemporal careers of the nonexistent concrete *intentionalia* are actually occupied by the right-hand side existent concrete *intentionale* precisely shows why the left-hand side *intentionalia* appear as (aspectual) *alter-egos* of this latter *intentionale*. The former display the careers that the latter realizes.

This said, let me focus on the modal feature of the relation. Since the left-hand side *intentionalia* are *concreta*, those *intentionalia* might have occupied those spatiotemporal careers, and therefore they exist in the worlds that realize this possibility. In such worlds, therefore, such *intentionalia* would not have been the same as the right-hand side *intentionale*. Yet this is not the case in the worlds – in the Frege cases, the actual world –

where the relation holds. For in these worlds, as I said, the existent *intentionale* robs those *intentionalia* of such careers, by occupying them in their place and thereby pushing them out of existence. Hence modally speaking, the *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of* relation is a *contingent* relation, which holds among different *intentionalia* in certain worlds but not in others. This modal fact makes this relation even more different from *identity*, which in its being a reflexive relation, is also modally necessary: a certain thing cannot but be identical with itself. In a nutshell, the contingency that an intentional object is the same as another intentional object has nothing to do with the necessity that an object, even an intentional one, is identical with itself.

As a result, the possibility that *a* is not the same as *b* in the above sense is a *metaphysical* possibility that differs from the *epistemic* possibility that Kripke (1971, 1980) mobilizes as the only counterpart of a necessary identity of an object with itself. Notoriously for Kripke, if *a* is necessarily identical with *b*, the possibility that *a* is not identical with *b* is just the epistemic possibility that amounts to the metaphysical possibility of a world in which, unlike the actual world, a subject that is in the very same cognitive situation as in the actual world faces an *a*-like object that differs from a *b*-like object (1971, p. 157 fn.15, 1980, pp. 103–104, 143). Yet the possibility I am talking about here that *a* is not the same as *b* is the utterly different metaphysical possibility that a certain *intentionale*, a concrete object *a*, does not appear as an aspectual alter-ego of a different *intentionale*, a concrete object *b*, or even that (depending on the cases at stake) that a certain *intentionale*, a concrete object *a* and another *intentionale*, a concrete object *b*, do not appear as different aspectual alter-egos of a further *intentionale*, a concrete object *c*.

Let us go back to the previous examples. Oedipus' first *intentionale*, Jocasta, is an actually nonexistent *concretum* that actually appears as an aspectual alter-ego of Oedipus' second *intentionale*, the actually existent *concretum* Mummy. For the first *intentionale*, Jocasta, does not actually exist insofar as her alleged spatiotemporal career has actually been occupied by the second *intentionale* Mummy, who is instead a *concretum* that actually exists in her place, by virtue of actually having that career. Indeed, Mummy robs that *intentionale* even of her name: from now on, Mummy is also known as Jocasta. As a result, if *that* Jocasta had existed, she would not have been the same as Mummy. Besides, neither the *intentionale* Hesperus nor the different *intentionale* Phosphorus, two distinct *concreta*, actually exist, for the further *intentionale* and actually existent *concretum* Venus replaces them, by actually being the only celestial body figuring in a certain position of the sky at dusk and in another position of the sky at dawn and also robbing them of their names: Venus, from now on also known as both Hesperus and Phosphorus. Hence, if *that* Hesperus and *that* Phosphorus had existed, they would not have been the same as Venus. Ditto for Superman, Clark Kent, and Kal-El.

Second point. Let me stress once again something that I have already claimed before, yet from a perspective focusing on the alter-ego factor. As regards the *intentionalia* that are affected by the *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of* relation, the left-hand side nonexistent concrete *relata* of this relation merely *appear* as *aspectual alter-egos* of the right-hand side existent concrete *relatum*. For insofar as they do not exist, they fail to possess their identifying features, first of all their spatiotemporal careers; they just seem to possess them. Which is what must indeed be the case. For if they really *were* aspectual alter-egos of another object instead of *merely appearing* as such, as I said before they

would have a *specific* metaphysical nature *qua* intentional objects, thereby failing again to satisfy thesis b).¹⁵

All in all, the present solution is very much supportive of Crane's account of intentionality, For it allows that account to preserve its undisputable phenomenological appeal, while at the same time redirecting and strengthening its metaphysical structure in order to dispense it with a seemingly troublesome consequence of the 'many *intentionalia*' problem concerning the relevant *intentionalia*'s identity.

4. Conclusions

Needless to say, more could be said about this *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego of* that is the relevant *sui generis* sameness relation I was looking for among different *intentionalia*.¹⁶ But I guess that enough has been said in order to see how theses b)-c) can obtain together. Certainly, this does not yet mean that *the three* theses a), b), and c) can obtain together. For nothing has been said here to properly justify thesis a). Perhaps, the best way to show this problem is to stress once again that thesis a) only holds as a phenomenological thesis, but not as an ontological one – as, by following Crane (2013, pp. 5-6), Woodling himself is willing to admit (2016a, pp. 506-511). Let me reformulate this point as follows. On a phenomenological scenario (a world of phenomenology, to put it metaphorically), every thought has an intentional object. But this does not mean that, outside phenomenology, *there really is* an intentional object for any such state to which one is ontologically committed.¹⁷ However, the focus for this paper was simply to see

whether there is a way for thesis b) and c) to be compatible, and I hope to have proved that such a way exists. To repeat, *intentionalia* may both be schematic objects and also be what a thinking subject self-fulfillingly takes them to be, provided that, once one discovers that one *intentionale* is the same as another *intentionale*, this simply means that such *intentionalia* metaphysically are *concreta* that are linked by an *appearing as an aspectual alter-ego* of sameness relation weaker than *identity*. In this way, I can hopefully provide a metaphysical redirection and strengthening of Crane's account of intentionality that allows it to preserve its undisputable phenomenological appeal. For that strengthening allows it to dispense with a seemingly troublesome consequence of the 'many *intentionalia*' problem, a consequence concerning the relevant *intentionalia*'s identity.¹⁸

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¹ Woodling (2016a) suggests that this relation of reference can be a satisfaction relation of an intentional object with a thought, but this is irrelevant. Sainsbury (2018) defends a similar relation of *reference** that again holds only between thoughts and existent *intentionalia*. However, he not only distinguishes it from the metaphysically non-relational property of *aboutness*, but he also considers it as a mere technical notion.

² As Sainsbury (2018, pp. 146-149) also maintains, this relation is phenomenological, not metaphysical.

³ More precisely, it is a legendary being. See Voltolini (2020).

⁴ Crane limits himself to saying that *intentionalia* are objects *for something* (2013, p. 92). But he also adds that a subject may be confused about what she is thinking (*ib.*, p. 7). This *may*, but does not need to, be interpreted as meaning that for him taking something as an intentional object is not self-fulfilling. Indeed, another possible interpretation is that for Crane, outside phenomenology, the metaphysical nature of an *intentionale* is not transparent, as the above ‘Claus’- example clearly shows. To me, the second interpretation of Crane’s position is the most plausible one. For, as I have shown before, it nicely squares with his overall phenomenological account. Indeed, Woodling himself (2016a) remarks that the only kind of mistake one can make with respect to the *intentionale* one takes a certain thought to be about is a *descriptive* mistake, in which one ascribes to it features it does not possess.

⁵ I choose this name for the example comes from Twardowski (1977).

⁶ Or so the majority of philosophers think. Notable exceptions are Priest (2016) and Berto (2012).

⁷ For Sainsbury (2018), quantifications like those expressed in (1) and (2) must be interpreted substitutionally. Yet the validity of the inferences those sentences display is independent of this move.

⁸ Granted, Woodling also says “If however I know that Venus is identical to the Morning Star and the Evening Star, then the thoughts share the same intentional object” (2016a, p. 553 fn.18). But, as (3) shows, this cannot be correct. For in (3)’s second sentence, the two occurrences of the pronoun “she” respectively refer back to the different *intentionalia* Hesperus and Phosphorus that (3)’s first sentence mobilizes. As we will see in the next Section, however, there is another way to account for the intuition that, after the relevant sameness realization, the relevant subject focuses on just one *intentionale*.

⁹ See the previous footnote.

¹⁰ Granted, this conception of intentional content is not compulsory. For example, one may alternatively understand intentional contents in terms of concepts interpreted in terms of the originalist theory defended by Sainsbury-Tye (2012) and Sainsbury (2018), according to which a concept is basically individuated in terms of its original acquisition conditions. Yet this alternative conception of intentional content suffers exactly from the same problem that I will immediately address to the ‘mental file’ conception: once one realizes that *a* is the same as *b*, the concept A and the concept B do not merge, but remain distinct. However, since Crane defends the ‘mental file’ conception, let me stick to it.

¹¹ Or even alternatively: see the previous footnote.

¹² This idea comes originally from Meinong (1915). For Castañeda (1989), *consubstantiation* metaphysically differs from *identity*, yet it is a relation that is qualified by the same three formal properties: *reflexivity*, *symmetry*, and *transitivity*. But for my present purposes, this is irrelevant.

¹³ Besides, the relation is certainly transitive, but only vacuously. If *a* appears as an aspectual alter-ego of *b* and *b* appears as an aspectual alter-ego of *c*, then *a* appears as an aspectual alter-ego of *c*, yet one of the two conjuncts in the above antecedent is false, so that the very antecedent is false as well. For if *a* appears as an aspectual alter-ego of *b*, then *b* exists, so it is not the case that *b* appears as an aspectual alter-ego of *c*, whereas if *b* appears as an aspectual alter-ego of *c*, then it does not exist, so it is not the case that *a* appears as an aspectual alter-ego of *b*.

¹⁴ As some may remember, something along the lines of this Kripkean idea is put forward by the character of Bill in his famous final monologue in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*. Cf. <http://www.monologuedb.com/dramatic-male-monologues/kill-bill-vol-2-bill/>.

¹⁵ By taking the left-hand side *intentionalia* in question as *real* alter-egos of the right-hand side *intentionale*, Pitt (2001) conceives of them either as tropes of ordinary entities that particularize general roles or as fusions of time-slices of such entities.

¹⁶ For more on this, cf. Voltolini (2016).

¹⁷ See also Voltolini (2013, 2018).

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