

Bennett and “Proxy Actualism”*

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Abstract

Karen Bennett has recently argued that the views articulated by Linsky and Zalta 1994 and 1996 and Plantinga 1974 are not consistent with the thesis of actualism, according to which everything is actual. We present and critique her arguments. We first investigate the conceptual framework she develops to interpret the target theories. As part of this effort, we question her definition of ‘proxy actualism’. We then discuss her main arguments that the theories carry a commitment to actual entities that do not exist. We end by considering and addressing a worry that might have been the driving force behind Bennett’s claim that Linsky and Zalta’s view is not fully actualistic.

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1. Introduction

We examine Karen Bennett’s claim, in Bennett 2006, that the view articulated in Linsky and Zalta 1994 and 1996 is not consistent with actualism. Actualism is the thesis that everything there is, i.e., everything that exists, is actual. Actualism has long been thought to be incompatible with the simplest quantified modal logic (QML), in which there is a fixed domain common to every world. In this logic, the Barcan formulas ($\Diamond \exists x \phi \rightarrow \exists x \Diamond \phi$ and $\exists x \Diamond \phi \rightarrow \Diamond \exists x \phi$) and the claim that everything necessarily exists (NE) are all valid. Many have thought that these results run contrary to actualism. Furthermore, the simplest QML has long been thought to have a problem accounting for the intuitions that ground the claim that there could have been individuals that do not actually exist (call this claim *Aliens*) and the claim that there are individuals that might not have existed (call this *Absentees*).

Linsky and Zalta defended what they take to be a new form of actualism consistent with the simplest QML and capable of accounting for the intuitions supporting Aliens and Absentees. The view involves several important claims, but the ones that will play the most important role here are the following: (1) ‘there exists’ and ‘there are’ can be regimented in the same way (namely, with the classical existential quantifier of predicate logic) and interpreted as “existentially loaded”; (2) concreteness and its contrary are contingent properties; (3) ordinary intuitions often conflate nonexistence and nonconcreteness; and (4) every object that a possibilist thinks is a merely possible object is in fact an actually existing nonconcrete object. We shall call this view *Contingent Nonconcretism*, or *CN* for short. Bennett does not argue against any of these four claims. Instead, she argues: (i) that CN has deep and important structural similarities to the view articulated and defended by Alvin Plantinga (1974) and, more importantly, (ii) that the view is not actualist. She sets to one side Williamson’s (1998) somewhat similar defense of fixed-domain interpretations of QML, since he does not claim to be an actualist. It is worth noting, however, that Williamson is reluctant to call himself an actualist because he thinks there is no genuine dispute between actualism and possibilism (1998, 259), which is quite distinct from Bennett’s reasons for refusing to call CN a form of actualism.

With regard to Bennett’s claim (i), we think that although there are some structural similarities between Plantinga’s view and CN, there are

also some important structural dissimilarities.¹ While the structural dissimilarities will be discussed further below, our focus in the present paper will be on claim (ii), which we shall argue is false. We shall defend CN’s status as a robust form of actualism.

2. Bennett on Contingent Nonconcretism

Bennett argues that CN is *not* a form of actualism. Bennett’s crucial arguments for this conclusion are contained in Section 8 of Bennett 2006 (283–85). Bennett characterizes actualism in the following ways:

Actualists . . . recognize one and only one use of the existential quantifier — it means “there is”, “there exists”, and “is actual”, all at the same time. (281)

I think it is best to take actualism to be defined by a biconditional between existence and actuality; everything that exists is actual *and the other way ’round*. (282)

Bennett then argues that, because CN entails that there are actual individuals that do not exist, it falsifies the thesis of actualism. Her argument turns on a certain characterization of actualism and a characterization of CN on which it involves “proxies” and two quantifiers. Before we turn to her argument, we question whether the analysis that leads to these characterizations is accurate. Although we find fault with her preliminary analysis in the remainder of this section, the main thrust of her argument survives these problems. In Section 3 we will show that, even with these preliminary problems fixed, there is a response to her argument that CN is not a form of actualism.

2.1 Bennett’s Characterization of Actualism

We begin with Bennett’s characterization of actualism. In the above quote, she claims that actualism is the thesis that everything is actual iff it exists. This is an inadequate characterization. Any view according to which there are nonexistent and nonactual entities should count

¹The structural similarities between the views consist in the fact that the two views agree on the truth of certain logical formulas, even though they interpret those formulas completely differently. We’ll discuss some of these truths below, but see Nelson forthcoming for a fuller discussion.

as nonactualist. But if every nonexistent entity is nonactual and every nonactual is nonexistent, a version of the view in question is counted as a form of actualism by Bennett’s characterization because it satisfies her biconditional! The biconditional is satisfied because there is nothing in the domain that is actual and nonexistent or existent and nonactual, which is all the logic of the biconditional excludes.

There are two options for repairing Bennett’s characterization of actualism. We could follow Linsky and Zalta 1994 (436) and characterize actualism as the thesis that everything that exists (i.e., everything there is) is actual,² or we could define actualism simply as the thesis that everything there is is actual.

The first way of repairing Bennett’s characterization has the virtue of capturing the intent of the actualists like Russell, Quine, Prior, Plantinga, Adams, Fine, and others, for this suggestion rules out both the Meinongian claim that there are nonexistent objects (by collapsing “there is” and “there exists”) as well as the claim that there are nonactual possible objects. However, the drawback is that possibilism is not defined as the denial of actualism, for it allows two ways of being non-actualist, namely by introducing either nonexistent objects or nonactual objects into one’s ontology.

The second way of repairing Bennett’s characterization of actualism involves defining actualism more simply as the thesis that everything there is is actual, leaving out the existence requirement. Then possibilism is the denial of actualism. Lewis’s views are counted as nonactualist because he has objects that exist that are not actual, whereas certain forms of Meinongianism (e.g., those that claim that all nonexistent objects are actual) are counted as actualist. The drawback is that this suggestion does not capture the stronger views of the above historical actualists, who were seeking to exclude objects endorsed by Lewis and by Meinong.

It may just be a matter of bookkeeping which option for repairing the characterization of actualism we choose. In any case, Bennett’s objection to CN requires that we follow the first option. For if we characterize actualism as the second thesis, that everything is actual, then even if Bennett is right that CN entails that there are actual individuals that do

²Linsky and Zalta might have been even more explicit by saying that actualism is the conjunctive thesis that everything exists and is actual. The text following the official characterization of actualism on p. 436, however, makes clear that that is the intended reading.

not exist, that would not conflict with actualism so characterized. So, for present purposes, we shall follow tradition and conceive of actualism as requiring that everything is both actual and existent.

2.2 Bennett’s “Two-Quantifier” Analysis of CN

Bennett describes the proponent of CN as follows (281):

He is precisely, though surreptitiously, introducing a second existential quantifier. His two quantifiers are not the same as the possibilists. . .

She seems to be saying that CN requires one quantifier — the inclusive one — which for a given world ranges over the “stock” of all the things that there are in that world, and a second quantifier — a narrower one — which for a given world ranges over the things that exist in that world (she calls this the world’s ‘display case’) (282). The stock remains constant from world to world, whereas the display case (the entities that are concrete) varies from world to world. But we’re not sure we have this exactly right, for Bennett also says the following:

In contrast, the proxy actualist’s inclusive quantifier ranges over the stock — all of whose members actually exist — and his narrower one ranges over the display case of the actual world. (282)

Bennett shouldn’t say here that the members of the stock “actually exist,” for her claim that CN is not a form of actualism requires that CN entail that there be actual individuals that do not exist.

In any case, it is incorrect to claim that proponents of CN, surreptitiously or otherwise, use two quantifiers. On their view, there is a single quantifier ranging over a single domain, what Bennett calls *the stock*. The proponent of CN claims that only some objects in a world are concrete in that world. Concreteness does not correspond to a distinct domain of quantification for that world. After all, we can distinguish objects that have a property and those that don’t without introducing two domains of quantification.

We can document the fact Linsky and Zalta employ a single quantifier by inspecting their system more closely. Linsky and Zalta define the simplest QML as having a single quantifier whose interpretation requires

a single domain. They believe that this language is sufficient to regiment our modal intuitions as expressed in natural language. And they say, when describing the interpretation of the simplest QML,

Just read the quantifier \exists of the language of *QML* as ‘there exists’ or ‘there is’. By actualist lights, these mean the same. Moreover, let us suppose that everything that exists is actual. This squares the object language with the thesis of actualism. Since the quantifier ranges over everything in domain \mathbf{D} in the models of *QML*, everything in \mathbf{D} therefore both exists and is actual. (448)

It is true that Linsky and Zalta do not also explicitly assert “everything that is actual exists.” But it is clear that, by using a single quantifier and saying that everything in the single domain \mathbf{D} both exists and is actual, their intention is to reject the claim that there are actual things that do not exist. Indeed, consistency *requires* this, for, as they identify ‘there is’ and ‘there exists’, the claim ‘there are actual things that don’t exist’ would otherwise become for them ‘there exist actual things that do not exist’, which is clearly contradictory.

2.3 Bennett’s Definition of Proxy Actualism

A third subtle mistake with Bennett’s analysis concerns her characterization of CN as a form of proxy actualism. We think Bennett is not justified when she concludes:

So although Plantinga’s view and Linsky and Zalta’s differ in three important and connected ways . . . these differences are swamped by the fact that both say that each possible thing has a particular nonqualitative witness or stand-in in the actual world. Both views are forms of proxy actualism.

She first defines the proxy relation as follows (272):

. . . entity p stands proxy for an object o just in case p necessarily exists, and there is some property F such that, necessarily, o exists (in the standard English sense) . . . iff p has F

She then develops a formal characterization of proxy actualism (which draws the quantified relation variable out to the front):

More formally, proxy actualism is the view that the following holds, where E is the existence predicate, and D means ‘is in the display case’:

$$\Box \exists F \forall x \exists y [\Box E y \ \& \ \Box (F y \leftrightarrow D x)] \text{ [footnote suppressed]}$$

Call the relation between things and their proxies the *proxy relation*, call F the witness property, and call D the *display property*.

Let’s call the formula in this quote (1). Bennett then notes:

For Linsky and Zalta, the proxies are normal objects, and both the witness property F and the display property D are *being concrete*. . . . On Linsky and Zalta’s view, the proxy relation is identity; objects stand proxy for themselves.

We think that there are two problems with this analysis. First, her talk of a proxy relation strikes us as illegitimate as applied to CN and second, we doubt whether the formal claim offers an interesting characterization of proxy actualism in its application to CN.

Consider first the question of whether talk of the proxy relation is legitimate as applied to CN. A problem arises when Bennett says that on Linsky and Zalta’s view, the proxy relation is one of identity. Clearly this should raise a warning flag, since no matter how one might go about defining a proxy relation, the definition should exclude x being a proxy for y when x is identical to y . When I cast my own vote, I do not vote proxy for myself. x stands proxy for y only if x is distinct from y .

The tag ‘proxy actualist’ is potentially applicable to Plantinga’s view (although we shall question this below). Plantinga does posit surrogates (individual essences) distinct from the merely possible objects countenanced by the possibilist. By contrast, CN has only the individuals themselves, not surrogates or “stand-ins.” Of course, unlike the merely possible objects countenanced by the possibilist, the contingently nonconcrete individuals all actually exist. Nothing in the ontology of CN deserves the title “proxy.”

Consider now the second problem, namely, whether (1) can be applied in an interesting way to either CN or Plantinga’s view. We should say, at the outset, that it is not clear to us which language (1) is expressed in. Let us assume for now that the relevant instances of (1) are expressed in

the language of the theories in question, namely, either CN or Plantinga’s. (We will examine the consequences of dropping this assumption below.)

With this assumption, let’s examine whether we can instantiate (1) so that it applies to CN. We first substitute ‘ $\exists z(z = y)$ ’ for the existence claim Ey ,³ then follow Bennett’s directive that both the witness property F and the display property D are *being concrete*, and finally use $C!x$ as the concreteness predicate. We then get the following instantiation of (1) as applied to CN.

$$(1)_{\text{CN}} \forall x \exists y [\Box \exists z (z = y) \ \& \ \Box (C!y \leftrightarrow C!x)]$$

Though (1)_{CN} is indeed a theorem of CN, it is trivially (logically) true and its truth is independent of the interpretation of the predicate $C!x$. Its truth in the theory hardly shows that CN is a form of proxy actualism.

It isn’t even clear that (1) applies to Plantinga’s view, although the issues are subtle. Plantinga clearly thinks that an adequate account of a thing’s possible nonexistence and of the possible existence of something that does not actually exist, must invoke individual essences that can exist unexemplified, where an individual essence of \mathbf{o} is a property \mathbf{F} such that: (i) for every world \mathbf{w} , if \mathbf{o} exists in \mathbf{w} , then \mathbf{o} exemplifies \mathbf{F} in \mathbf{w} ; and (ii) for every world \mathbf{w} , if \mathbf{F} is exemplified in \mathbf{w} by \mathbf{o}' , then $\mathbf{o}' = \mathbf{o}$. (See Plantinga 1974, 72.) But Plantinga is not as explicit as one would have hoped about the exact role individual essences play in the formal semantics. This was worked out by Thomas Jager (1982). In Jager’s system, quantifiers range over individual essences and individual essences serve as the values of free variables. Whereas Jager directly defines $\exists x Fx$ as being true in a world \mathbf{w} just in case there is an individual essence that is coexemplified with \mathbf{F} in \mathbf{w} (1982, 337), it would be more in keeping with an objectual treatment of the quantifier to define $\exists x Fx$ as being true in a world \mathbf{w} just in case there is some individual essence \mathbf{I} in the domain of \mathbf{w} such that Fx is true of \mathbf{I} . We can then state the nonstandard theory of predication at the heart of Plantinga’s account of the contingency of existence as follows: Fx is true of \mathbf{I} just in case \mathbf{I} and \mathbf{F} are coexemplified, where coexemplification is a primitive relation between properties (intuitively, that of being exemplified by a single object). In any case, the accounts are equivalent.

³CN doesn’t include a primitive existence predicate, and so to apply Bennett’s formal definition so that it accurately describes Linsky and Zalta’s view, we defined ‘ x exists’ as $\exists y(y = x)$.

Let’s now see how (1) applies to Plantinga’s account, as presented above. We again define Bennett’s existence predicate Ex as $\exists y(y = x)$. Then Bennett must be supposing that there is some predicate, say $I!x$, for ‘ x is exemplified’ (i.e., co-exemplified with some property) in the language of Plantinga’s theory. For Bennett writes:

For Plantinga, the proxies are individual essences, the display property D is just existence, and the witness property F is the second-order property being exemplified.

So, the application of (1) to Plantinga must look something like the following:

$$(1)_P \quad \forall x \exists y [\Box \exists z (z = y) \ \& \ \Box (I!y \leftrightarrow \exists y (y = x))]$$

But $(1)_P$ is false given the above Jager-based semantics. $(1)_P$ only makes sense if, peeling away the first two quantifiers, x takes an individual as value and y is its individual essence. But in the Jager system, an individual is never the value of a variable and predication is indirect. Furthermore, there are difficulties in simply adding a predicate like $I!x$ to the language: on the one hand, the predicate is intended to apply to individual essences and not individuals, given that the property of being exemplified (i.e., co-exemplified with some property) is a second-order property of properties, but on the other hand, it ascribes a property to the individual exemplifying **I**, not to **I** itself, given the indirect theory of predication at the heart of Jager’s system. Some modification to the system would have to be made to accommodate the addition of such a predicate.⁴

It seems clear that Bennett is conceiving of a very different semantics than the one Jager presented and Plantinga endorsed (Plantinga 1985, 92). She writes:

On Plantinga’s view, the proxy relation is the nonidentity relation that holds between a thing and its individual essence. The essences constitute an additional class of individuals, each of which stands in the relevant relation to one and only one possible thing.

⁴The intended interpretation of $I!x$ requires that it be excluded from the non-standard theory of predication. An alternative is to introduce higher-level individual essences of individual essences in order to ascribe a property like being exemplified to an individual essence with the nonstandard theory of predication.

While it is true that Plantinga’s *metaphysics* includes both ordinary individuals and individual essences as “an additional class of individuals,” it is not true, as we have seen, that his *semantics* does. The domains employed in the semantics only include individual essences. And it is only what is in the domains that effect the evaluation of (1) as applied to Plantinga.

Perhaps we can keep Plantinga’s metaphysics and offer an alternative semantics. We could conceive domains as including both individuals and individual essences. Then there would be the proper kind of entities — contingently existing individuals — to serve as the value of x in $(1)_P$. $(1)_P$ would then say that for every individual there is an individual essence that necessarily exists and is such that, necessarily, it is exemplified iff the individual exists, which is clearly what Bennett intends. There would be, however, several problems with such a view. First, if we develop the semantics in the most straightforward way, $(1)_P$ still ends up being false. The simplest way is to have a single domain that includes both the individuals there are and the individual essences, where only the first class varies from world to world. But then the initial universal quantifier in $(1)_P$ ranges over individual essences as well and it is either nonsensical or false for them. We might avoid this problem by introducing two quantifiers, one that ranges only over individuals and the other ranging only over individual essences, reading the universal quantifier in $(1)_P$ as an individual-ranging quantifier and the initial existential quantifier as an individual essence-ranging quantifier, which would at least avoid the first problem. But there is a second problem, which is that it is no longer clear what purpose the addition of individual essences is serving. In particular, if we have both individuals and individual essences in our domain to serve as the value of free variables, then it is unclear what theory of predication we are to use. If we use the indirect theory, outlined above and clearly favored by both Jager and Plantinga, we couldn’t make sense of Fx being true or false of an individual, as the way of predicating a property to an individual is to say what properties are coexemplified with its individual essence. But if we use the standard, direct theory of predication, then it is not clear how individual essences get into the act of accounting for the contingent existence of individuals, as that account rested on the indirect theory of predication.

We have raised worries about the application of Bennett’s formal characterization of proxy actualism (i.e., (1)) to CN and Plantinga’s view.

These worries, however, were based on certain assumptions that we made about the language Bennett used to couch (1). We assumed (1) is expressed in the language of the theories in question. However, Bennett might argue that (1) is expressed in a high-level, meta-ontological philosophical language that formalizes the language of her paper. It is certainly not clear from Bennett’s paper that this is what she is doing. Are we supposed to assume that the variables in (1) can range over the domains of various ontologies? Does the language allow us to refer to the properties of Lewis’ *possibilia*, the properties of contingent nonconcreta, and the properties of essences? We would like to know more about the semantics of this language, for without a thorough understanding of how the language is to be evaluated, it is difficult to assess whether (1) is a clear definition of proxy actualism and can be applied in the manner Bennett suggests to characterize the various positions.

We suspect that we can capture Bennett’s insights without developing such a language and without producing a distinguished schema that is true in both the language of CN and the language of Plantinga’s theory. We can discern two insights in her attempt to characterize CN and Plantinga’s view as forms of proxy actualism. The first is that there is a correspondence between crucial possibilist claims and those of the proponents of CN and Plantinga’s view and the second is that there are entities in the ontologies of proponents of CN and Plantinga that play similar roles to the possibilist’s mere *possibilia*. To illustrate the first insight, compare what the three theories respectively imply concerning the ordinary modal intuition “there might have been a talking donkey”:

Possibilist: there is a talking donkey which is not actual but could have been actual.

Plantinga: there is an existing (and actual) individual essence which is possibly co-exemplified with the property of being a talking donkey but is not actually co-exemplified with any property.

CN: there is an existing (and actual) nonconcrete object that might have been concrete and a talking donkey.

This correspondence extends to the analysis of other, similar modal intuitions as well. This shows how the contingency of what is actual, the contingency of what individual essences are exemplified, and the contingency of concreteness play similar roles in each of the three theories.

To illustrate the second insight, note that the possibilist claims that whenever it is true that there could have been something that does not actually exist, there is something that is nonactual but could have been actual. Plantinga and proponents of CN have no truck with such entities, but for every such entity recognized by the possibilist, there is, in the ontology of CN, a contingently nonconcrete entity and, in Plantinga’s ontology, a contingently unexemplified individual essence. In general, each theory posits an existing entity that grounds the possibility in question.

This contrasts with actualists like Robert Adams (1981), Kit Fine (1977, 1985), and Greg Fitch (1996). For these theorists, it is possible that there is a talking donkey, but this possibility is not grounded in any entity of their ontology. For Adams, Fine, and Fitch, it is a purely general possibility, with no supporting witness, that could have been true. This is the sense in which the views Plantinga and Linsky & Zalta propose are importantly different from the views proposed by Adams, Fine, and Fitch and it corresponds to a genuine choice point among actualist theories.

3. What Bennett Says About CN and Mere *Actualia*

We can now turn directly to Bennett’s primary objection to CN. Bennett argues that CN is not a form of actualism on the grounds that the view entails that there are actual things that do not exist. She claims,

What he [the proponent of CN] *does* say, though, is that there exist in the stock things that do not exist in the display case. And since normal English speakers elide “exist in the display case” as “exist”, full stop — the normal English quantifier is the narrow one — it is natural, if tendentious, to translate that claim as saying that *there are actual things that do not exist*.

Consequently, the proxy actualist is quite right to insist that he is not committed to mere *possibilia*. He is committed, instead, to mere *actualia*. He does not believe that anything exists without actually existing; what he believes is that some things are actual without existing. . . . These things are mere *actualia*. And they are why proxy “actualism” is not actualism at all. (282, her emphases)

Bennett claims that proponents of CN are committed to mere *actualia*. Mere *actualia* run contrary to actualism because such entities do not exist. This is her primary reason for refusing to count CN as a form of actualism. Bennett is claiming that the proponent of CN employs a distinction between the stock and the display case of a world to respect the truth of Aliens mentioned at the outset of the paper. Take the ordinary intuition that there are no talking donkeys but there could have been. Bennett understands the proponent of CN as maintaining that there exist no talking donkeys in the display case of our world. But, since talking donkeys exist in the display case at other possible worlds, it follows (on the simplest QML) that talking donkeys are in the stock of the actual world and hence there actually are things that might be talking donkeys, although they do not exist. So, concludes Bennett, the proponent of CN is committed to actual entities that do not exist and hence must deny the thesis of actualism.

We shall argue that CN endorses neither the claim that there are actual objects that don't exist nor the claim that “there exist in the stock things that do not exist in the display case” (282). CN isn't committed to mere *actualia*. Linsky and Zalta do not regiment the term ‘actual’ nor do they formulate the claim ‘everything that is actual exists’ in the simplest QML. So, the original formulation of CN (Linsky and Zalta 1994) simply does not have the resources to even formulate the thesis Bennett argues it is committed to. Bennett does not tell us how she thinks it should be formulated, but we will extend CN by enriching it with the resources to regiment the predicate ‘ x is actual’. Our preferred regimentation of ‘actual’ is by way of the actuality operator, $\mathcal{A}\phi$.⁵ In what follows we regiment ‘ x exists’ as $\exists y(y = x)$ (this regimentation was implicit in the original formulation of CN in Linsky and Zalta) and ‘ x is actual’ as

⁵The truth conditions for this operator are as follows: $\mathcal{A}\phi$ is true at a world \mathbf{w} (in a model \mathbf{M}) iff ϕ is true at the distinguished world \mathbf{w}_0 (of \mathbf{M}). Part of a logic of such an operator is given by the following two logical axiom schemata (Zalta 1999):

Axiom 1: $\mathcal{A}\phi \equiv \phi$

Axiom 2: $\mathcal{A}\phi \rightarrow \Box\mathcal{A}\phi$

(We say “part” for reasons given in note 9. A complete logic for this operator might involve axioms that govern the interaction between actuality and other logical notions.) Note that the first axiom, but not the second, is an example of a logical truth that is not necessary. Given such an axiom, one must use a restricted Rule of Necessitation: infer $\Box\phi$ from any line ϕ of a proof as long as ϕ depends only on necessary truths.

$\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x)$.⁶ Thus, the claim ‘everything that is actual exists’ would be regimented as $\forall x(\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \exists y(y = x))$. This claim is a theorem of the simplest QML (extended with the logic of actuality) and is necessary!⁷ We've shown that the most straightforward regimentation of the predicate ‘ x is actual’ in the language of CN has the consequence that everything that is actual exists. In the absence of an alternative regimentation that does not have this consequence, we conclude that Bennett's charge that the proponent of CN is committed to mere *actualia* has been shown to be false. Once the claims are formalized, we see that CN is inconsistent with the existence of mere *actualia*.

We suspect that the primary reason Bennett characterized CN as endorsing mere *actualia* — of conceiving of only the “display case” of a world as the set things that exist in that world — is the fact that she reads Linsky and Zalta as attempting to respect the intuitions supporting Aliens by making this thesis come out true in their theory.⁸ But this is not what Linsky and Zalta aim to do. Aliens (as well as Absentees) is deemed false and the intuitions supporting them are explained away.

⁶Given this regimentation, it follows that ‘ x is actual’ is equivalent to ‘ x actually exists.’ This itself should answer any worry that the theory is committed to mere *actualia*!

⁷Here is the proof that the above is a theorem. The proof has the necessity of the conclusion as a sub-proof.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. $\Box\exists y(y = x)$ | Theorem, simplest QML |
| 2. $\Box(\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \Box(\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \exists y(y = x)))$ | S5 theorem: $\Box\phi \rightarrow \Box(\psi \rightarrow \phi)$ |
| 3. $\Box(\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \exists y(y = x))$ | MP 1,2 |
| 4. $\forall x\Box(\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \exists y(y = x))$ | UG, 3 |
| 5. $\Box\forall x(\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \exists y(y = x))$ | Barcan Formula, 4 |
| 6. $\forall x(\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \exists y(y = x))$ | T Axiom, 5 |

Note that the logic of actuality plays no role in this proof, but consider the following proof of the nonmodal claim:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. $\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \exists y(y = x)$ | Logic of Actuality (Axiom 1) |
| 2. $\forall x(\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \exists y(y = x))$ | UG, 1 |

Note that we can't apply the Rule of Necessitation to line 2 to derive its necessity, as such an application violates the restriction on the Rule of Necessitation mentioned above in footnote 5.

⁸Bennet says (283):

[T]he only way for such a view to accommodate the possibility of aliens is by postulating proxies, by distinguishing between two importantly different domains of quantification within the actual world. But as I have just argued here, drawing that distinction amounts to giving up on actualism.

This suggests she thinks Aliens should come out true in CN.

To investigate this, let us formalize both Aliens and Absentees as follows:

Aliens: $\diamond\exists x\neg\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x)$
(i.e., there might have been something that doesn't actually exist)

Absentees: $\exists x\diamond\neg\exists y(y = x)$
(i.e., there is something that might not have existed)

Our focus in this section shall be on Aliens, but we shall mention relevant results concerning Absentees in passing and in preparation for our analysis in Section 4. (Absentees does not explain Bennett's positing the distinction between stock and display case in the way that Aliens does.)

Linsky and Zalta did not formulate Aliens explicitly as above because, as we've noted, their system does not include an actuality operator. But all we need to do to show that they are committed to denying this claim is to note that the negations of both Aliens and Absentees are logically true in the simplest QML+logic of actuality. The negation of Aliens asserts that it is not possible that there is something that does not actually exist. This is true in every model, since the domain of every world of a model is the same and hence, at no world, can we quantify over an object that fails to be in the range of the quantifier at the actual world. The negation of Absentees asserts that there doesn't exist something that might not have existed. This is true in every model, since, again, the domain of every world of a model is the same and hence, every object over which the quantifier ranges is in the range of the quantifier at every other world. Furthermore, the negations of these claims are theorems of the simplest QML+logic of actuality.⁹

⁹The derivation of the negation of Aliens begins with the fact that NE ($= \forall x\square\exists y(y = x)$) is a theorem of the simplest QML (Linsky and Zalta 1994, 435):

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | $\forall x\square\exists y(y = x)$ | NE |
| 2. | $\square\exists y(y = a)$ | UI, 1 |
| 3. | $\exists y(y = a)$ | T Axiom, 2 |
| 4. | $\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = a)$ | From 3, by Logic of Actuality (Axiom 1) |
| 5. | $\square\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = a)$ | From 4, by Logic of Actuality (Axiom 2) |
| 6. | $\forall x\square\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x)$ | UG, 5 |
| 7. | $\neg\diamond\exists x\neg\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x)$ | BF Corollary, 6 |

The BF Corollary cited on line 7 is:

$$\vdash \forall x\square\phi \rightarrow \neg\diamond\exists x\neg\phi$$

The proof of this is no doubt ugly, but intuitively, note that if the \square commutes with $\forall x$ as required by the Barcan formula (BF), then it commutes with $\neg\exists x\neg$, so from $\forall x\square\phi$

Furthermore, given their regimentation of 'x exists' as $\exists y(y = x)$, they are committed to the claim that anything that could exist necessarily exists and so actually exists, which is inconsistent with both Aliens and Absentees.¹⁰

Linsky and Zalta should be viewed as rejecting Aliens, not attempting to construct a theory that renders it true. Rather, they suggest that the underlying intuition stems from the fact that, when we consider the concrete objects around us, we recognize that there might have been concrete objects other than the ones there actually are. For example, even though there are no talking donkeys, we intuit that there might have been. On Linsky and Zalta's view, this modal claim is true because there actually exist nonconcrete objects that are possibly concrete and, had they been concrete, would have been talking donkeys. Using this picture, Linsky and Zalta therefore *explain away* Aliens as based on conflating actual nonexistence and actual nonconcreteness.

Although Linsky and Zalta reject Aliens, they reconstruct it with an underlying intuition that can be formally expressed, if we also add 'C!x' as the (primitive) concreteness predicate to the simplest QML, as follows:

$$\text{Aliens}_{\text{CN}}: \diamond\exists x(C!x \ \& \ \neg\mathcal{A}C!x)$$

In other words, there might have existed concrete objects that aren't actually concrete. Since the Barcan Formula is valid in CN and allows us

(i.e., $\neg\exists x\neg\square\phi$), it follows that $\square\neg\exists x\neg\phi$, i.e., $\neg\diamond\exists x\neg\phi$. Finally, we prove the negation of Absentees:

- | | | |
|----|---|------------------------------|
| 1. | $\exists y(y = x)$ | Axiom, quantification theory |
| 2. | $\square\exists y(y = x)$ | RN, 1 |
| 3. | $\neg\diamond\neg\exists y(y = x)$ | Df \square , 2 |
| 4. | $\forall x\neg\diamond\neg\exists y(y = x)$ | UG, 3 |
| 5. | $\neg\exists x\diamond\neg\exists y(y = x)$ | QN, 4 |

¹⁰The claim that anything that could exist actually exists is a theorem of the simplest QML enriched by the logic of actuality:

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | $\exists y(y = a)$ | Axiom, Quantification Theory |
| 2. | $\mathcal{A}\exists y(y = a)$ | From 1, by Logic of Actuality (Axiom 1) |
| 3. | $\diamond\exists y(y = a) \rightarrow \mathcal{A}\exists y(y = a)$ | from 2, by QT: $\phi \rightarrow (\psi \rightarrow \phi)$ |
| 4. | $\forall x[\diamond\exists y(y = x) \rightarrow \mathcal{A}\exists y(y = x)]$ | UG, 3 |

What carries the day is the fact that classical quantification theory is a part of the simplest QML. This shows the elegance of the simplest QML. If one were to adopt varying domains (and the logic of actuality employed in this paper), one would have to tamper with classical quantification theory by restricting the Rule of Universal Generalization.

to commute the possibility operator and quantifier, $\text{Aliens}_{\text{CN}}$ and Axiom 1 of the logic of actuality entail that these possibly concrete objects actually exist.

We’ve been arguing that Bennett’s claim that proponents of CN countenances mere *actualia* is driven by the mistaken idea that their view attempts to preserve the truth of Aliens. Were a proponent of CN to try to make Aliens true, then the best that they could do would be to appeal to something like the stock/display case distinction, claiming that the display case varies from world to world and the stock does not. An alien would then be an object that is not in the display case at our world but is in the display case of another world. As there are no mere *possibilia*, this object is in the invariant stock of actual objects that could exist. But it does not actually exist as only objects in the display case of the actual world exist. Hence, this object would be a mere *actualium*. But, as we have shown, this is not Linsky and Zalta’s aim; they reject Aliens. What’s more, the truth of Aliens is simply inconsistent with basic tenets of their view; in particular, it is inconsistent with their allegiance to the fixed domain of the simplest QML, their ban on merely possible objects, and their identification of ‘there is’ with ‘there exists’. Everything in Linsky and Zalta’s ontology actually exists. Linsky and Zalta have no use for a distinction like Bennett’s distinction between the stock of a world and the display case of a world.

4. Addressing a Lingering Worry

We have so far argued that any straightforward literal reading of the claim that proponents of CN are committed to mere *actualia* is false. This is the foundation of Bennett’s claim that CN is not a genuine form of actualism. But there might be another way to raise the worry that CN is not a genuine form of actualism by bringing out the structural similarities between CN and a form of Meinongianism. This worry too can be met. Although the structural similarities are genuine, this fact does not undermine CN as a form of actualism.

Recall that Linsky and Zalta’s characterization of actualism is formulated with the claim:

Everything that exists (i.e., everything there is) is actual.

This consists of two theses:

Anti-Meinongian thesis: there are no nonexistent objects

Anti-Possibilist thesis: there are no merely possible objects.

Informally, Meinongianism is the thesis that fundamental reality includes entities that do not exist and possibilism is the thesis that fundamental reality includes entities that are possible but not actual. To say that such entities are included in fundamental reality is to say that they are part of our ontology and hence available for the most unrestricted of quantifiers to range over and to serve as the values of free variables. Although both theses are similar in that they conceive reality as including more entities than one might have thought there were from just a casual look around, their important differences should also be kept in mind. It is one thing to say that reality includes objects that do not exist and quite another to say that reality includes objects that are merely possible.

The distinctive thesis of Meinongianism is as follows.

Meinongianism: $\exists x \neg E!x$

(i.e., there are objects that don’t exist)

Meinongians must introduce a distinct existence predicate ‘ $E!x$ ’, which they must claim to be nonequivalent to $\exists x(y=x)$. Given our formalization of ‘ x is actual’, the Meinongian will conclude from the distinctive thesis of Meinongianism that it is actually the case that there are nonexistent objects, i.e., $\mathcal{A}\exists x \neg E!x$.¹¹

Clearly, such Meinongians do not count as actualists in the sense described above, since they accept that there are nonexistent objects. But as these objects, along with everything else, are actual, they do accept the anti-possibilist component of actualism. So let’s call this form of Meinongianism *anti-possibilist Meinongianism*. The anti-possibilist Meinongian can claim that so-called “merely possible objects” are to be found among the actual nonexistent objects. The anti-possibilist Meinongian is committed to mere *actualia*. For it follows from $\mathcal{A}\exists x \neg E!x$ that $\exists x[\mathcal{A}\exists y(y=x) \ \& \ \neg E!x]$.¹² This latter asserts that there are objects that are actual but do not exist.

One might be concerned about the following parallel between the anti-possibilist Meinongian and CN: interpret Linsky and Zalta’s quantifier as

¹¹There are other ways of formalizing ‘ x is actual’ that do not have the above consequences and that will lead to a form of Meinongianism compatible with the possibilist thesis. We shall not explore these forms of Meinongianism here.

¹²Here is the proof:

‘there is’ instead of ‘there exists’ and replace their talk about concreteness with talk about existence, and they thereby have been turned into anti-possibilist Meinongians. For under this transformation, the characteristic CN claim “actually there exist nonconcrete objects” becomes the anti-possibilist Meinongian claim “actually there are nonexistent objects,” which, as we’ve seen, entails the existence of mere *actualia*. So, by two simple substitutions, CN has been turned into a theory that is committed to the existence of mere *actualia*.

The critic of CN might also find further comfort in the fact that the anti-possibilist Meinongian endorses principles that are structurally similar to those endorsed by the defenders of CN. For example, (1) they both accept the formula $\forall x \Box \exists y (y = x)$, though of course the anti-possibilist Meinongian will interpret this as asserting “Everything is necessarily identical with something,” while the advocate of CN will interpret this as “Everything necessarily exists.” And (2) whereas the anti-possibilist Meinongian insists that Aliens and Absentees are to be captured as follows:¹³

$$\text{Aliens}_M: \Diamond \exists x (E!x \ \& \ \neg \mathcal{A}E!x)$$

$$\text{Absentees}_M: \exists x (E!x \ \& \ \Diamond \neg E!x)$$

the proponent of CN would use structurally similar formulae as the proper formalization of the relevant intuitions:¹⁴

1.	$\mathcal{A} \exists x \neg E!x$	anti-possibilist Meinongian axiom
2.	$\exists x \neg E!x$	Logic of Actuality
3.	$\neg E!b$	Assumption for Existential Elimination (EE)
4.	$b = b$	=I
5.	$\exists y (y = b)$	EI, 4
6.	$\mathcal{A} \exists y (y = b)$	Logic of Actuality, 5
7.	$\mathcal{A} \exists y (y = b) \ \& \ \neg E!b$	& I, 3,6
8.	$\exists x [\mathcal{A} \exists y (y = x) \ \& \ \neg E!x]$	EI, 7
9.	$\exists x [\mathcal{A} \exists y (y = x) \ \& \ \neg E!x]$	EE, 2, 3–8

We use EI and EE to refer to Existential Introduction and Existential Elimination.

¹³Indeed, Meinongians would reject the formulation of those principles that we offered in Section 3. For those principles capture the intuition that existence is contingent only if ‘ x exists’ is regimented as $\exists y (y = x)$, which, of course, Meinongians reject.

¹⁴This structural similarity has led Zalta to suggest that formal systems, like the one developed in his 1983 and 1988, which both (a) distinguish the quantifier \exists from the existence predicate $E!x$ and (b) define the predicate ‘ x is abstract’ ($A!x$) as $\neg \Diamond E!x$, have two fundamental interpretations: (1) a Platonic interpretation in which the quantifier ‘ \exists ’ is given the Quinean “existentially loaded” reading (‘there exists’) and the predicate ‘ $E!x$ ’ is read ‘ x is concrete’, and (2) the Meinongian interpretation in which the quantifier ‘ \exists ’ is given the existentially unloaded reading (‘there is’) and the

$$\text{Aliens}_{CN}: \Diamond \exists x (C!x \ \& \ \neg \mathcal{A}C!x)$$

$$\text{Absentees}_{CN}: \exists x (C!x \ \& \ \Diamond \neg C!x)$$

So both our anti-possibilist Meinongian and the proponent of CN accept $\forall x \Box \exists y (y = x)$, deny Aliens and Absentees as formulated in Section 3, and offer in their place structurally similar principles that are claimed to account for our intuitions concerning the contingency of existence.

Here, then, is a route to the conclusion that CN closely resembles a nonactualist interpretation of the simplest QML that is committed to mere *actualia*. The structural similarity between the anti-possibilist Meinongian strategy and Linsky and Zalta’s strategy might give us cause to wonder whether or not CN is, at bottom, a nonactualist view in sheep’s clothing.

But one should not wonder long. The structural similarities noted above arise from the fact that anti-possibilist Meinongianism and CN are two interpretations of a single formalism. But they are *inconsistent* interpretations of a single formalism and competing frameworks for the proper regimentation of ordinary modal intuitions. The advocate of CN is an anti-Meinongian (and therefore denies anti-possibilist Meinongianism) and an anti-possibilist; everything, on her view, both exists and actually exists. The argument from analogy loses sight of these facts and it is precisely because of these facts that CN is a robust form of actualism whereas anti-possibilist Meinongianism is not. And because CN is compatible with NE, BF, and CBF, and the simplest QML more generally, Linsky and Zalta’s original claim to have presented a version of actualism consistent with the simplest QML stands defended.

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predicate ‘ $E!$ ’ is read ‘ x exists’. Interpretation (1) is Platonic because theorems of the form $\exists x A!x$ assert the existence of abstract objects. Interpretation (2) is Meinongian because these same theorems only assert that there are abstract objects, i.e., that there are objects that couldn’t possibly exist. There are a variety of considerations, some metaphysical, others concerning the best ways of systematizing our beliefs, that might lead one to adopt one interpretation rather than the other. But the fact is that the interpretations are inconsistent despite the structural similarities.

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