

Ficta as Contingently Nonconcrete

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ABSTRACT: Fictional realism allows direct reference theorists to provide a straightforward analysis of the semantics of fictional discourse by admitting into their ontology a set of objects (*ficta*) that serve as the referents of fictional names. *Ficta* may be modeled using an axiomatic object theory, but actualist interpretations of the formalism have been the subject of recent objections. In this paper, I provide an interpretation of object theory's formalism that is consistent with actualism and avoids these objections. Drawing on insights from an actualist semantics for quantified modal logic, a central point in my proposal is to interpret *ficta* as contingently nonconcrete objects.

KEYWORDS: Actualism – fictional realism – object theory.

One of the many problems facing proponents of the direct reference theory of proper names is the family of difficulties collectively referred to as the problem of empty names. That is, the problem of accommodating the intuitive truthfulness of sentences containing proper names that appear to lack a referent. A straightforward approach, and the one to be supported here, is for the direct reference theorist to endorse fictional realism and deny that fictional names are empty.¹

I will use the label *ficta* for the objects that serve as the referents of fictional names. These *ficta* will be understood as objects within a more gen-

¹ See Sawyer (2012) for an overview and criticisms of the approaches a fictional realist may take.

eral ontological and metaphysical framework, called *object theory*, from Edward Zalta.² The combination of fictional realism and object theory has been heavily criticized in a series of works by Anthony Everett (see Everett 2000; 2003; 2005; 2007a; 2013).³ In this paper, I will defend this combination of views against a set of logico-ontological objections put forward by Everett. Central to this defense is an actualist interpretation of the object theoretic framework inspired by the work of Linsky – Zalta (1994; 1996). By applying their analysis of quantified modal logic to object theory, one can assert the existence of all elements in the domain of objects including both abstract objects (i.e., necessarily nonconcrete objects) and contingently nonconcrete objects. As such, the interpretation is compatible with the thesis that everything exists, so the approach defended here will be of interest to actualists as well as fictional realists. In brief, I will interpret *ficta* as belonging to the class of contingently nonconcrete objects and do so in a way that avoids Everett's objections.

The paper is structured as follows. In §1 I discuss the motivations for the set of theses to be defended by looking at the semantics of fictional discourse. For §2, I present the fragment of Zalta's object theory that pertains to fiction. I place the framework within the broader dialectic and highlight the points of the formalism open to interpretation. Guided by philosophical considerations, in §3 I propose an interpretation of the formalism. This will consist of combining the *ficta* as contingently nonconcrete thesis with anti-creationism and a rejection of impossible stories. I bring these ideas together in §4 and show how collectively they allow a straightforward response to Everett's objections. I conclude in §5 with some concerns about the implications of Everett's objections to his own account.

² Object theory comes from Edward Zalta (via Ernst Mally) and is first outlined in Zalta (1983). The theory and application of Zalta's abstract object theory can be found in the following: Linsky – Zalta (1994; 1996), Menzel – Zalta (2013), and Zalta (1988; 1992; 1993; 2000; 2003).

³ My goal is not to argue for any one of these theses individually. Arguments for referentialism can be found by looking at the arguments against Fregean and Descriptivist accounts of proper names in Donnellan (1974), Kripke (1980), and Salmon (1981). Arguments for fictional realism can be found in Berto (2008; 2011), Caplan (2004), Thomasson (1999; 2003a; 2003b), van Inwagen (1977; 2000; 2003), Voltolini (2006). A helpful overview of the arguments for fictional realism is given by Everett (2013, 120–139).

1. Semantics of fictional discourse

Following Everett (2000, 40), I will use the label *referentialism* for the view that a name's semantic contribution is just the object it picks out. So, regarding fictional discourse, referentialists are faced with giving an account of the ontology and metaphysics of the objects to which fictional names refer. Sentences like the following have an intuitively true reading and one's semantic theory should accommodate this, or so the argument goes.

(F) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

By adopting fictional realism, the referentialist has an easy answer here. The name 'Sherlock Holmes' denotes an object that has (in some sense) the property of being a detective. However, it seems less clear how this explanation would work for other types of sentences, such as sentences about fiction (metafictional sentences) or negative existentials.⁴

(M) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character.

(E) Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

If the referentialists alter their position by abandoning fictional realism, then they can straightforwardly explain the truth of (M) and (E). They would be true in virtue of the fact that the names do not denote. This, for example, is the approach Everett (2000) takes. But then the problem returns when considering cases of apparent co-reference.

(R) The names 'Santa Claus' and 'Father Christmas' are co-referential.

The truth of (R) seems to require objects for the names to refer to. It seems as though a semantic explanation of one of these sentence types will result in problems for one or more of the others.

At this point, the referentialist might accept that these cases need to be treated separately. They might give an account of why the different types should be understood differently, but this answer would not be satisfactory to critics. A recent example is Sawyer (2012) where she argues that the

⁴ The set of sentences I will focus on in this paper come from Sawyer's (2012) presentation. This will be enough for my purposes, but there are more extensive sets of sentences. See, for example, Zalta (2000, §7.2).

challenge is to give a semantics that can uniformly explain these different types of sentences. In other words, they should be analyzed in a systematic way.⁵ I will not argue for this here, but will note that I think it is reasonable to expect the referentialist to achieve this. So, the difficulty lies in explaining the set of sentences using the same semantic account. I think the most promising approach is to combine referentialism and fictional realism with an actualist interpretation of object theory. That is the approach to be defended here, but I will only be defending the view against certain logical and ontological problems.

I should briefly note what I will not do and three prominent issues stand out. First, I will not address the way or mechanism by which fictional names acquire their denotation. Second, I will not address the problem of abstract objects entering into causal relations. This is a problem for those, such as myself, that endorse the causal-historical theory of reference. Third, I will not address the problem of referring to characters that occur in more than a single story. Essentially, I will set aside issues pertaining to the act of referring and focus on problems with fictional objects as such.⁶

The combination of actualism and fictional realism results in an ontological commitment to fictional objects, but this leaves many issues unsettled. For a precise account of fictional objects, I turn to object theory, but object theory does not refer to a fixed program. Rather, it is the combination of a formal system, which is fixed, and an interpretation of the formalism. Zalta and others have successfully addressed a variety of problems by varying the interpretation of the formalism.⁷ A similar strategy will be employed here, but before looking at the proposed interpretation, an overview of the formalism relevant to fictional objects will be helpful.

⁵ For a precise formulation of what I mean by giving a systematic analysis, see Zalta (2000, §7.2).

⁶ For answers that I find plausible, the reader should consult Zalta (2003) for the first and second problems and Parsons (2011) for the third problem.

⁷ Zalta has discussed the theory and application of object theory in a large number of publications and the work is ongoing. For full presentations one should consult his early works: Zalta (1983) and Zalta (1988). The presentation in his early works is based on a Meinongian ontology. Zalta has since been open to, and employed, non-Meinongian interpretations of the view. So much so that Menzel (2013) and Everett (2013), for example, no longer consider Zalta's object theory to be Meinongian.

2. Object theory

Syntactically, object theory has three important distinguishing characteristics: a distinguished predicate, two kinds of atomic formulas, and a special definition of identity (i.e., identity is not primitive). Regarding semantics, object theory is based on quantified S5 modal logic or what is sometimes labeled the simplest quantified modal logic. It is simple for two reasons. First, because frames in S5 are symmetric, reflexive, and transitive, each world is accessible from every other. Hence, the system effectively has no accessibility relation. Second, the semantics of the quantifiers are based on constant domain models. This is sometimes labeled “constant domain semantics” to distinguish it from the more typical “variable domain semantics” often associated with Kripke. The label “constant domain” indicates that in these models, the domain of quantification does not vary from world to world. In the next section, I will discuss how an actualist can accept such a system, but the takeaway here is that there are no world-relative domains of objects or relations.⁸

Before going into more detail, the uninitiated reader will find it helpful to consider the motivation for these syntactic and semantic variations. This is best seen by considering, albeit briefly, the historical context. Alexius Meinong is famous (perhaps infamous) for his apparent commitment to nonexistent objects in what he called object theory.⁹ His student, Ernst Mally, is recognized as making the initial progress on a formal logical analysis and basis for Meinong’s object theory.

Mally’s work is what many contemporary Meinongians base their formalizations on. In addition to the formal language of object theory, Meinongians must also explain the nature of nonexistent objects. It is expected that Meinongians give an account of how to interpret a simple subject-predicate sentence, e.g., “ x is F ”, when x is purported to refer to a nonexistent object.

⁸ For a helpful overview of the syntax and semantics of object theory, see Zalta’s summary in Zalta (1993, §4).

⁹ My discussion here will sacrifice precision for accessibility. My knowledge of the philosophy of Meinong and Mally are based on the second-hand accounts of which there are a number of great resources. Of note are Berto (2013), Jacqueline (1996; 2008), Lambert (1983), and Routley (1980).

Mally distinguished two ways to interpret “ x is F ” so as to make sense of how nonexistent objects could stand in relation to properties. One option was to distinguish between two types of properties: nuclear and extranuclear. On this account, nonexistent objects would bear properties in the same way as existent objects, but the type of property would be different. Existent objects would exemplify nuclear properties and nonexistent objects would exemplify extranuclear properties.¹⁰

A second option Mally proposed was to distinguish between two modes of predication: exemplifying and encoding.¹¹ On this account, nonexistent objects would encode and exemplify properties but existent objects would only exemplify properties. This dual predication object theory is the one being discussed in this paper and the one formalized and defended by Zalta (1983; 1988). In these works, Zalta uses the label abstract object for nonexistent objects and ordinary object for existent objects. In later work the meaning of these labels varies, but what remains constant is that Zalta partitions the domain of objects into abstract objects and ordinary objects. Whether this domain contains nonexistent objects, and how ordinary objects are characterized, are points on which there is interpretive variance.

Given the Meinongians inspiration and Zalta’s partition of the domain of objects into abstract and ordinary objects, it’s easy to see the motivation for the syntactic and semantic elements of Zalta’s object theory. Syntactically, Zalta introduces a distinguished predicate ‘ E ’ which denotes the property of existence. For Meinongians, this is because existence is a property that objects can fail to have.¹²

Zalta incorporates Mally’s dual predication thesis into the language syntactically by the distinction between two kinds of atomic formulae. The

¹⁰ This dual property object theory has been formalized and defended by Terence Parsons (1980), among others.

¹¹ As with the nuclear/extranuclear distinction, the exemplifying/encoding distinction is not universally accepted by Meinongian scholars. Such philosophers disagree on the labels and how to precisely make the distinction. Moreover, there is debate about whether the dual property theory is more fundamental or the dual predicate view is reducible to the dual property view. This claim was originally made by Jacqueline (1989), to which Zalta responded in Zalta (1992), to which Jacqueline responded in Jacqueline (1996; 1997). I will set these details aside. What I’m offering here is enough to locate the reader in the dialectic.

¹² Zalta allows the distinguished predicate to have a different, non-Meinongian, denotation. This will be addressed in the interpretation section to follow.

formula ‘ Fx ’ asserts that object x *exemplifies* the relation F whereas the formula ‘ xF ’ says that the object x *encodes* the property F . The semantics are modified accordingly. So, ‘ Fx ’ is true at a world just in case the object denoted by x is in the *exemplification* extension of F and ‘ xF ’ is true at a world just in case the object denoted by x is in the *encoding* extension of F . The context of a natural language sentence will determine which type of predication to use for semantic evaluation.¹³

The partition, and size, of the domain of objects is captured by the following ontological principles:¹⁴

Ordinary Objects Exist: $O!x =_{df} \Diamond E!x$

Ordinary Objects cannot Encode Properties: $\forall x(O!x \rightarrow \Box \neg \exists Fx F)$

Abstract Objects are not Ordinary: $A!x =_{df} \neg O!x$

Abstract Objects Exist: $\exists x(A!x \wedge \forall F(xF \leftrightarrow \phi))$ (where ϕ has no free x s)

Given the foregoing, we arrive at Zalta’s (1993, 404) general definition of identity which I will call general object identity (GOI):

$$x = y =_{df} [O!x \wedge O!y \wedge \Box \forall F(Fx \leftrightarrow Fy)] \vee [A!x \wedge A!y \wedge \Box \forall F(xF \leftrightarrow yF)]$$

Given that the domain of objects is exhausted by abstract and ordinary objects, GOI applies to *any* objects x and y for any expressible property F .

Propositions are captured as well, because in object theory, as is typical, propositions are taken to be 0-place properties. Additionally, Zalta uses lambda abstraction to generate propositional properties for every proposition. That is, he incorporates into object theory, λ -notation, such as ‘ $[\lambda x P]$ ’ which reads: being such that P . With this we can formulate Zalta’s (2000, 147) definition of a *situation*:

$$Situation(x) =_{df} A!x \wedge \forall F(xF \rightarrow \exists P(F = [\lambda y P]))$$

Consider a situation s , then this reads: A situation s is an abstract object and for any expressible property F , if s encodes F then there is a proposi-

¹³ For precise formulations and a nice overview see Zalta (1993, 403).

¹⁴ These are from Zalta (1993, 404-405). Additional details and proofs are to be found in Zalta (1983; and 1988). Regarding the size of the domain of objects, object theory’s explanatory power is due in part to its abundant ontology. Zalta (1993, 405) writes: “for any expressible condition ϕ on properties F , there is an abstract object that encodes all and only the properties satisfying the condition.”

tion P such that the F is the propositional property being such that P . In other words, situations encode only propositional properties.¹⁵

This is enough of the theory to state the principles governing fictional objects.¹⁶ For the remainder of the discussion, I follow Zalta's presentation of the fragment of object theory relevant to modeling ficta in Zalta (2000, 123-127). There, a *story* is just a situation (as defined above) that is authored by some existing thing. This is captured by the authorship relation where ' Ayx ' means y authors x .¹⁷

$$\text{Story}(x) =_{\text{df}} \text{Situation}(x) \wedge \exists y(E!y \wedge Ayx)$$

Given this definition, one can think of stories, derivatively, as sets of propositions. They are, after all, individuated by the propositional properties they encode, and propositional properties are, via lambda abstraction, based on propositions. In this paper, I will understand stories in this derivative sense. With the definition of a story, characters will be defined relative to them. Using the notation ' $s \models P$ ' for story s models proposition P , then characters are defined thus:

$$\text{Char}(x, s) =_{\text{df}} \exists F(s \models Fx).$$

This reads: A character x of a story s is defined as there being a F such that the proposition that x exemplifies F is true in s .

Stories may contain a combination of characters, some of which may be ordinary while others may be abstract. To mark this distinction, Zalta defines a fictional character as one that originates in a story where *originates* means features as a character that is abstract only and is not a character of any prior stories. For the temporal ordering, Zalta uses ' $P < Q$ ' as a primi-

¹⁵ I will adopt Zalta's convention of using the label "situation" rather than world, but there is a relation between the two. Zalta, for example, defends the compatibility of situation semantics and possible worlds semantics in Zalta (1993). There he notes that states of affairs, situations, and worlds are three kinds of entity, but can be built up from his object theory (cf. Zalta 1993, 386).

¹⁶ For brevity, I must direct the reader to the details of the rest of the language, including precise definitions of propositional formulas, properties, and relations, in Zalta (1983, 59-60).

¹⁷ I continue to use $E!$ as the primitive predicate denoting existence. An alternative interpretation, one that I will adopt in this paper, will be discussed in the next section.

tive two-place relation representing the fact that proposition P occurs before proposition Q. So,

$$\text{Orig}(x, s) =_{\text{df}} A!x \wedge \text{Char}(x, s) \wedge \forall y \forall z \forall s' ((Azs' < Ays) \rightarrow \neg \text{Char}(x, s'))$$

This says that for any character x , any authors y and z , and any stories s and s' , a character x of a story s originates in s if x is abstract and is not a character of any prior story. So, fictional characters, what I will call *ficta*, are defined as follows,

$$\text{FictionalChar}(x) =_{\text{df}} \text{Char}(x) \wedge \exists s(\text{Orig}(x, s))$$

This makes *ficta* the subset of objects that are characterized by a story that may contain ordinary and abstract characters. For example, in the Conan Doyle stories, Holmes would be a fictional character, London a character, and the two are distinguished using the notion of origin.

Finally, Zalta uses an iota-operator as a description operator. For example, ' $\iota y[A!y]$ ' reads, the y such that y is abstract. With this, the identity conditions for *ficta* can now be given:

$$\text{Orig}(x, s) \rightarrow x = \iota y[A!y \wedge \forall F(yF \leftrightarrow s \models Fx)]$$

This reads: If character x originates in story s , x is (identical to) the abstract object that encodes all and only the properties F such that according to s , x exemplifies F . Consequently, if x is a fictional character in story s , then x encodes property F , if and only if, according to s , x exemplifies F .

This is enough machinery for my purposes and hopefully enough to orient the reader unfamiliar with Zalta's views.¹⁸ Much of the explanatory power is a result of the separation of formalism and interpretation which leaves open the possibility for many interpretations.¹⁹ Philosophical consid-

¹⁸ I do not intend this section to be considered an argument (or even to contain the start of an argument) for Zalta's dual predication object theory. I simply will assume this framework without argument. I recognize that Everett (2013) goes to great lengths to argue against Zalta's dual predication view, but I hope this section provided enough background and motivation to at least see it through. If nothing else, the significant increase in explanatory power that the dual predication view affords is enough for me to justify its introduction. I should note that Zalta is not the only proponent of a dual predication object theory, there is also Castañeda (1974) and Rapaport (1978).

¹⁹ I will assume, with Zalta, that the formalism of object theory is metaphysically neutral. This is a contentious issue for sure, but I will assume this here without argument.

erations guide the different interpretations, and for this paper, it's Everett's arguments in Everett (2005; 2007a; 2013) that inspire the following proposal.

3. Actualist interpretation of the framework

The foregoing account is based on Zalta's original (1983; and 1988) presentation of object theory. The proposal here centers on three points of interpretive deviation: (1) interpreting *ficta* as contingently nonconcrete, (2) rejecting creationism, (3) and rejecting impossible stories.²⁰ These three will be discussed in turn.

3.1. *Ficta as contingently nonconcrete*

Despite the Meinongian lineage, Zalta's abstract object theory may be interpreted in a way that is compatible with those whose auxiliary ontological ideologies are incompatible with Meinongianism. The benefit for my purposes is that object theory may be interpreted in a way that does not require a commitment to nonexistent objects, and hence, is consistent with actualism. Zalta has suggested in Zalta (2000; 2003; 1993) that it is a straightforward matter to reinterpret the system so as to avoid commitment to nonexistent objects. For an actualist object theory, the distinguished predicate '*E!*' is replaced with '*C!*' denoting concrete. Under this interpretation, ordinary objects are either concrete or contingently nonconcrete whereas abstract objects are necessarily nonconcrete.²¹ Given that the

Linsky and Zalta defend this position in Linsky – Zalta (1994). For the opposing view see, for example, Williamson's (2013a) and his extended treatment in Williamson (2013b).

²⁰ It's not clear to me how Zalta would react to (2), but given what he has said in print, I think he would accept (1) and reject (3).

²¹ I will not explicitly state the distinction between abstract and concrete. This is a contentious issue that cannot be resolved here. Fortunately, a precise definition is not required. Linsky – Zalta (1994, 446) identify being concrete with being spatiotemporal and being abstract with being not concrete, so nonspatiotemporal. This is how I will understand them here, but not much depends on this claim should it turn out to be wrong. The point is to partition the domain of objects into abstract and concrete, so the reader is free to substitute whatever version of the distinction they like so long as there is a partition.

domain of objects is jointly exhausted by ordinary and abstract objects, changing the distinguished predicate this way means that everything in the domain of objects exists. Under this actualist interpretation of object theory, possible objects are interpreted as being contingently nonconcrete rather than contingently nonexistent. Thus, the proposal here is to understand ficta as objects that are contingently nonconcrete.²²

The relevant modifications to the definition of ordinary objects are as follows:

Ordinary Objects: $O!x =_{df} \Diamond C!x$

Abstract Objects: $A!x =_{df} \neg O!x$

Thus, ordinary objects are possibly concrete. Using the possible worlds idiom, this means that contingently nonconcrete ordinary objects are concrete in at least one world, but nonconcrete in the actual world. Conversely, concrete ordinary objects are concrete in the actual world, but nonconcrete at some other world. It follows that the set of all ordinary objects is exhausted by objects that are concrete at some world.

The domain of all objects is still jointly exhausted by ordinary and abstract objects, but now to be abstract means to be necessarily nonconcrete. So the domain of objects now has a tripartite division based on these modal properties. The domain of objects is partitioned by necessarily nonconcrete objects (abstract objects nonconcrete at every world), contingently nonconcrete objects (ordinary objects not concrete at the actual world), and contingently concrete objects (ordinary objects concrete at the actual world). According to the ficta as contingently nonconcrete thesis, ficta are ordinary objects that are not concrete at the actual world. Thus, since everything in the domain of objects exists under this interpretation, the system can accommodate the existence of ficta while remaining consistent with actualism. Whether there are any ficta, remains to be discussed.

²² Linsky and Zalta, in Linsky – Zalta (1996; 1994), did not introduce the contingently nonconcrete thesis with the application to fictional realism in mind. Rather, they were defending the view that there is an interpretation of the simplest quantified modal logic that does not entail a commitment to mere possibilities. Consequently, it provides a way to consider actualism and the simplest quantified modal logic as compatible. Roughly, contingently nonconcrete objects serve the role of mere possibilities, and that is how I am using contingently nonconcrete objects in this paper.

3.2. *Anti-creationism*

Creationism is the view that ficta are created by, or ontologically depend on, the authors with which they are associated with. For example, Amie Thomasson writes: “fictional characters should be considered entities that depend on the particular acts of their author or authors to bring them into existence” (Thomasson 1999, 7). This view is called artifactualism or creationism and its denial, anti-creationism.²³

Typically, fictional realism is combined with creationism, but that is not the approach taken here. I will not argue against anti-creationism here, but will briefly mention my motivation for pursuing the anti-creationist position. Considering the Thomasson quote above as representative, depending on how the creationist defines the notions of “dependence” and authors “bringing their fictional characters into existence”, one worry, from Everett (2005), is that nothing prevents authors from “bringing into existence” problematic entities.

[I]magine, for a moment, that God created the world so that it was completely precise and determinate, so that there was no ontic indeterminacy of any form. If fictional realism was true then human beings could still generate cases of ontic indeterminacy simply by writing fiction. This seems disquieting. Surely we do not have this degree of control over the metaphysical nature of the world. ... If God created a world in which the law of noncontradiction and the laws of identity otherwise held, we would nevertheless be able to violate these laws simply by making up stories... Surely we do not have this degree of control over the laws of logic and identity. (Everett 2005, 633)

Here I agree with the spirit of Everett’s worry, but the target, I claim, is not fictional realism generally, but creationism. To avoid such worries, the creationist, it seems, needs to incorporate a principle that disallows the creation of entities when the creative act results in problematic entities, but permit the creation when the resulting entity is not problematic. To this, Everett (2005, 635) writes, “without some independent motivation this seems a terribly *ad hoc* maneuver and I doubt it could be maintained.”

²³ For the creationist view see Braun (2005); Goodman (2004); Salmon (1998); Schiffer (1996); Soames (2002); Thomasson (1999; 2003a); van Inwagen (1977); Voltolini (2006). For a helpful overview of creationist arguments see Caplan (2004).

I will simply grant this point to Everett. Perhaps the creationist would be fine with accepting that an author can alter such fundamental components of reality with the stroke of a pen, so to speak. But this should not be taken lightly, and I think the burden is on the creationist to provide compelling arguments that avoid or answer these worries.²⁴

I do not, however, think these worries motivate rejecting fictional realism. The creationist notion of ontological dependence is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for fictional realism. Everett would accept this as well since his fictional realist principles, the principles which he takes to define fictional realism, do not entail creationism. So, I think Everett's mistake is conflating the two. For the anti-creationist, *ficta* are objects whose existence is independent of authors. As independently existing objects that are a part of the world, they obey the laws of logic like everything else.

One may wonder, then, what the role of the author is on this account. Especially since stories in object theory are defined in terms of an author. But the definition of a story in object theory allows interpretive variation on the authorship relation 'Axy'. For Zalta, the authorship relation is primitive and he takes it to be intuitive (cf. Zalta 1983, 91). Here I propose that the authorship relation be a defined notion and one that is a function of both what the author produces and whether or not this corresponds with a possible situation.²⁵ The idea is that an author will produce a set of sentences, call this a fictional *work*, that fallibly correlates with a set of propositions, the fictional *story*.²⁶

The correlation is taken to be a mapping between the author's sentences and the propositions they express, if they express propositions at all. The notion of a correlation that I'm using will be made precise in the next section. The claim here is that, in object theory, the definition of a story is

²⁴ In addition to Everett's arguments, to be discussed, other arguments against creationism that I find plausible are found in Brock (2010) and Yagisawa (2001).

²⁵ Everett (2013, 123) uses this label as well. The following proposal is inspired by Zalta's discussion in Zalta (2000, 125-126) where he gives a definition of the authorship relation that is consistent with pretense theory.

²⁶ I am assuming that fictional works are concrete objects of some kind. This assumption is shared by Zalta (2000, 126). But this isn't required. One could give a more inclusive definition of the authorship relation that incorporates, for example, intentional entities. The point here is to make a distinction between the acts of an author and the fictional stories with which the authors are associated.

based on propositions rather than sentences, so if an author produces a work where none of the sentences express propositions, then they failed to author a story. The authorship relation is defined accordingly:²⁷

$$x \text{ authors } s =_{\text{df}} \exists y (x \text{ produces } y \wedge y \text{ is correlated with } s)$$

One way to think of this is in terms of *selection*. When an author succeeds in authoring a story, rather than creating the ficta in the story, the author selects objects from a set of objects that already exist. This selection thesis makes explicit the ontological independence between an author and story because correlation, unlike entailment, does not preserve ontological commitment. According to the selection thesis and the authorship relation in which it figures, a fictional work is neither necessary nor sufficient for there to be a fictional story. For the anti-creationist, the object to which the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ refers, exists and would have existed whether or not Doyle existed or any other author. Consequently, this is one of the ways the proposal maintains its goal of being consistent with actualism.

There has been plenty of work on combining actualism with creationism; for example, Braun (2005), Salmon (1998), and Thomasson (1999). Much work has also been done on combining Meinongianism and anti-creationism. What I take to be the best work in this tradition is what serves as the background for this paper, namely, Zalta’s (1983; and 1988). All of these accounts have received plenty of criticism and there is no need to rehearse them.²⁸ Here I am considering the prospects for combining actualism with anti-creationism.

But a rejection of creationism does not mean that there are no occurrences of logical and ontological problems within a fictional work as it has been characterized thus far. Indeed, such a view would be obviously false. Even if there were no actual cases of fictional works that contained contradictions and indeterminacies, there is nothing preventing an author from producing a problematic fictional work. But the same worries that motivate anti-creationism are the same worries that motivate rejecting impossible stories.

²⁷ The authorship relation is adapted from Zalta’s (2000, 125) presentation.

²⁸ For a helpful survey of criticisms against these two versions see Sainsbury (2010). Note, however, that the debate is still active on all fronts – see, for example, Lihoreau (2010).

3.3. *Rejecting impossible stories*

There is disagreement as to whether stories, as sets of propositions, may be consistent, complete, both, or neither. There are plenty of advocates for the view that stories may be, and in fact are, both inconsistent and incomplete. The proposal here is one that Everett does not consider, namely, that stories are *both* consistent and complete. Fictional works are permitted to be inconsistent and incomplete, as they typically are, but the stories correlated with the work will be neither incomplete, nor inconsistent.

Being that the stories are not inconsistent, this is not an account that requires impossible worlds. To do this, I will take being possible a necessary condition for being a story. This means placing constraints on the properties from which the stories are built. In the language of object theory, stories are defined in terms of situations that are themselves defined in terms of propositional properties derived, via lambda abstraction, from propositions expressing a relation between an object and an *exemplifiable* property.

To say that properties must be exemplifiable is to place a restriction on properties as Zalta conceives them. Zalta only requires properties to be expressible in his underlying property theory (see, for example, Zalta 2000, 145; and Zalta 1993, 405). Given that I am exploring the actualist interpretation of object theory, the constraint on properties is that they are exemplifiable by a concrete object. Consequently, given that ficta are being modeled as contingently nonconcrete objects, and the proposal here is actualist, ficta cannot possibly exemplify inconsistent properties.²⁹

To give an account of how fictional works may contain sentences which purport to ascribe inconsistent properties to fictional objects, but nevertheless fail to result in actual inconsistent objects, I will utilize the selection thesis and the distinction between a fictional work and fictional story. Using the exemplifiability constraint, the notion of correlation in the authorship relation can now be made precise.

Consider a canonical version of a fictional work where a set of sentences (atomic and compound) is constructed to capture the intentional and linguistic information contained in the author's work. Let Γ be this set of

²⁹ This is part of what makes this account distinctly non-Meinongian. There are excellent accounts that exclude this requirement, for example, Zalta's as noted above. Another excellent example is Berto (2008) in which he employs his own semantics of impossible worlds in his account of fictional objects.

sentences and Σ be the largest consistent subset of atomic sentences in Γ . The subset Σ may be empty. Let the set of atomic sentences $\{S_1, \dots, S_j \in \Sigma\}$ be the domain, then there is a bijective mapping between the domain Σ of sentences and the range Π of propositions P_1, \dots, P_j . Since the mapping is bijective, if $\{S_1, \dots, S_j\}$ has the property of being consistent, then $\{P_1, \dots, P_j\}$ will be consistent. But, Π cannot be identified with a story yet, since it is only complete relative to Σ .

A complete story s can be built up from Π using an additional notion from Zalta, namely, *relevant entailment*. The idea is that stories are closed under relevance: “All of the relevant consequences of propositions true in $[\Pi]$ are true in s ” (Zalta 2000, 126). Given the notation defined above, and adding $P \vdash_R Q$ which reads Q is relevantly implied by P , we have,

Rule of Closure: $[(s \models P_1 \wedge, \dots, \wedge s \models P_j) \wedge (P_1, \dots, P_j \vdash_R Q)] \rightarrow s \models Q$

From relevant entailment, then, Π has $\{Q_1, \dots, Q_j\}$ added as additional true propositions of the story where $\{Q_1, \dots, Q_j\}$ is the set of propositions said to be relevantly entailed by $\{P_1, \dots, P_j\}$. The remaining propositions, those not mapped from the work or closed under relevance, will be disjunctive propositions. Here, though, the disjunctive propositions will only contain disjunctive properties that are possibly exemplifiable.³⁰

This can be accommodated using object theory by interpreting the disjunctive propositions in terms of encoding. For example, the number of hairs on Sherlock Holmes’ head is left open in the Conan Doyle fictional works. He may have n hairs, or $n + 1$ hairs, and so on.³¹ For this, object theory offers a straightforward solution, namely, to admit that contingently nonconcrete objects encode disjunctive properties of which there are many. The only limitation being possible exemplification. So, for example, Holmes encodes the property of having $0 \vee 0+1 \vee, \dots, \vee 0 + n$ hairs, for any n .

Holmes also encodes the property of being either left-handed, right-handed, or ambidextrous. And so on, for all properties that Holmes could

³⁰ I take disjunctive propositions to be the kind of propositions expressed by sentences containing disjunctive predicates. This, of course, assumes that there are disjunctive properties which is admittedly contentious. For example, see Armstrong (1978, 19 ff.).

³¹ This is what Parsons (2011, 37) calls “the problem of the many Sherlock Holmes”. His answer there is to allow fictional names to refer to incomplete objects.

possibly exemplify.³² The only constraint on the disjunctive properties is that they are exemplifiable. Given that this constraint is placed on properties as they feature in the definition of a situation, a situation will be considered complete once the set of all disjunctive propositions, labeled $\{R_1, \dots, R_j\}$, are added.

So, a story consists of the union of three sets: $\{P_1, \dots, P_j\}$, $\{Q_1, \dots, Q_j\}$, $\{R_1, \dots, R_j\}$. That is, a story is built up from the set of propositions correlated with the maximal consistent subset of sentences of the work, the set of propositions relevantly entailed by those propositions, and all remaining disjunctive propositions.

This process takes place only when the author's work meets the initial conditions. Given the selection thesis and definition of the authorship relation, authors can string words, sentences, thoughts, etc., together and fail to produce a work that maps to a fictional story. Again, this is often the case, but there is no need to search for cases; examples are easy to generate. Consider a fictional work that contains only one sentence (or thought) which states that a named object has inconsistent properties. In such a case, the author produces a work but fails to author a story. This is because the work does not select or correlate with a situation. There is no mapping between such a work and a story because the domain is empty. The domain must include a non-empty maximal consistent subset of the fictional work in order for a mapping to occur.

Eliminating the ability of an author to generate actual inconsistencies comes at a cost. For example, following Zalta, I will assume that a sentence containing a proper name that fails to denote results in a meaningless sentence (cf. Zalta 1988, 123). This is not problematic for Zalta because his Meinongian account permits every name to denote, including those that would refer to impossible objects, if there were any.³³ However, under the proposal here, some names, such as the name of an object alleged to have inconsistent properties, will fail to denote. Consequently, some sentences

³² This is inspired by my actualist point of view. In the actual world, I accept that a causal-historical theory of reference can be maintained in spite of, for example, the number of hairs on an object not being specified at any point in the causal chain. Further, the number of hairs may be in a state of flux and the material object may not even have sharp boundaries, yet reference can still succeed.

³³ Meinongians have varying ontological commitments and I am sympathetic to the position in its contemporary variants. Excellent examples include Parsons (1980), Zalta (1988), McGinn (2000), and Priest (2005).

on this account are meaningless. I'm willing to accept this and say that sentences containing names that purportedly refer to impossible objects are meaningless. The advantage of the proposed interpretation, however, is that this account allows a straightforward response to Everett's criticisms.

4. Defense of object theoretic fictional realism

Everett and I are interested in the same project. We both want to maintain referentialism and resolve difficulties surrounding empty names. Everett, however, thinks that the referentialist must treat the names that occur in fiction as being semantically unique from names that occur in other contexts. Fictional names, Everett (2000) argues, do not refer to anything. If they did refer, they would refer to objects that are problematic for a number of reasons. This is the overall theme of Everett's objections to object theoretic fictional realism which began in (2003), and were further developed in (2005; 2007a). Everett gives the most extensive criticisms yet in his (2013).

Central to Everett's criticisms are the claim that the object theorist's identity conditions for fictional objects result in a number of problems, but his criticisms apply more generally. Everett defends his anti-realism by arguing that no fictional realist account, object theoretic or otherwise, can be maintained given the set of objections he offers.³⁴ The objections are based on the following two principles that Everett takes every fictional realist to be committed to:

- (P1) If the world of a story concerns a creature *a*, and if *a* is not a real thing, then *a* is a fictional character. (Everett 2005, 627)
- (P2) If a story concerns *a* and *b*, and if *a* and *b* are not real things, then *a* and *b* are identical in the world of the story iff the fictional character of *a* is identical to the fictional character of *b*. (Everett 2005, 627)

³⁴ As Kroon – Voltolini (2011) note, Everett's (2005) article has caused fictional realists, like Robert Howell in Howell (1979), to abandon their position. In a later article, after discussing Everett's objections, Howell writes, "Everett's problems show that fictional realism must be rejected" (Howell 2010, 176). Schnieder – von Solodkoff (2009), Thomasson (2010), and Voltolini (2010) responded to Everett's (2005) to which Everett has replied in (2013).

One immediate response by the fictional realist would be to deny one or both of these principles. To this Everett writes, “the fictional realist cannot reject (P1) and (P2) without thereby undermining our motivation for accepting fictional realism in the first place” (Everett 2005, 627).³⁵ Further, Everett (2013) thinks many of the responses to his (2005) presentation relied on misinterpretations of these principles. So, in response, he distinguishes between two interpretations (P2) and notes that the one he wants to use for his arguments is the following (cf. Everett 2013, 205):

- (ID') If a fiction f is such that (1) in that fiction a exists and b exists, and (2) no real thing is identical to a or b , then:
- i) It is true that fictional character a is identical to fictional character $b \leftrightarrow$ in fiction f it is true that $a = b$,
 - ii) It is false that fictional character a is identical to fictional character $b \leftrightarrow$ in fiction f it is false that $a = b$.

I will grant this point to Everett and my response to his arguments will not require rejecting his principles. Everett's general strategy is to show that for the fictional realist, these identity conditions entail serious problems.

I will argue that these principles generate serious problems for those who accept an ontology of fictional objects. For they entail that some fictional objects are ontically vague entities, and that others flout the laws of logic and identity. (Everett 2013, 208)

My aim is to show that, for the object theoretic fictional realist, they do not entail the problems he claims. The problematic entailments are divided into two groups. The first group are what Everett calls *indeterminacy arguments* and the second, *incoherence arguments* (2013, 213-214). I will regiment the arguments and respond to each in turn.

³⁵ I disagree and think denying Everett's fictional realist principles is a live option, but it will not be pursued here. Voltolini's (2006) extensive discussion of identity can be drawn upon to modify/reject Everett's principles and deny his conclusion. Voltolini's account (2006), though, has already been criticized by Everett (2007b).

4.1. Indeterminacy arguments

For indeterminacy, Everett argues that there are, or could be, stories that contain genuine ontic indeterminacy. He writes:

it is a genuinely and ontically indeterminate matter whether character *a* and character *b* from within a given fiction are identical, for it may be genuinely indeterminate whether, within a fiction, protagonist *a* is the same as protagonist *b*. (Everett 2013, 209)

Everett considers two ways in which this can happen. He uses the labels *type A* and *type B* indeterminacy. The way Everett characterizes these different types of indeterminacy correspond to his distinction between characters within a given fiction and fictional characters. A distinction characterized by (P1) and (ID'). That is, he marks a distinction between indeterminacy within a fiction (*type A*) and indeterminacy not within the fiction (*type B*).

For *type A*, Everett gives an example of a story in which a woman is at a party, and then some years later a woman departs on a train. He then writes,

The author might write the story with the deliberate intention of getting the reader to ... wonder whether the first woman and the second woman are the same. And the author, herself, might intend to leave this matter open. Since the fiction depicts a world very much like the real world, it depicts a determinate world, a world in which the woman at the party is *not* indeterminately identical to the woman at the station. But the fiction itself will leave it open as to whether or not the identity holds. (Everett 2013, 209)

For the object theorist, this is unproblematic and it's typical for fictional works leave details unspecified. After the mapping from the sentences in the work to the propositions of the story, the remainder is built up from truths relevantly entailed and disjunctive propositions. Under this proposal, then, there are only two options. Either the set of properties encoded are the same or they are not. If the former, there is only one woman. If the latter, there are two. If there are no properties ascribed to either woman, then neither woman is in the story. In no *story* is it indeterminate whether there is one woman or two, even though this may be left unspecified in the *work*. The proposed authorship relation precludes underspecification within a fictional work from generating the problems Everett de-

sires. Nothing in the presentation of object theory or the proposed interpretation results in underspecification in a fictional *work* entailing indeterminate objects, at least not this type of indeterminacy.

For type B indeterminacy, Everett's target is those who would respond to him by saying that his cases of indeterminacy are simply cases of semantic indeterminacy. Everett contrasts semantic indeterminacy with what he calls ontic or genuine indeterminacy. Everett writes:

however we understand indeterminacy in the real world, in a fiction it may be a genuinely *ontically* indeterminate matter whether $a = b$... for any account of indeterminacy, it seems someone might write a fiction about a world in which $a = b$ was indeterminate in that way ... a fiction might describe a world in which $a = b$ was indeterminate without the fiction settling exactly how we are to understand that indeterminacy. (Everett 2013, 210)

The move Everett is making here is supposed to force the fictional realist into accepting actual indeterminacies as a consequence. Even the object theorist, allegedly, since a fictional character is just a character that originates in a fictional work and has identity conditions based on the properties they encode. So, if a fictional work explicitly states that a character a has the property of being indeterminately identical to b , then this would be a property that a encodes. Unlike Zalta's original presentation of object theory, this is more of a problem for the actualist proposal presented here.

There are two ways to go here for the actualist. One option is to accept actual indeterminacies, the other is to deny that actual indeterminacies occur. In response to the first option, Everett cites the well-known argument by Gareth Evans in Evans (1978) against actual indeterminacies.³⁶ The second option, however, is available. Given that the proposal here is actualist,

³⁶ Using the variables under discussion, here's one way to interpret, albeit roughly, Evans' (1978) reductio:

1. Suppose it is indeterminate whether a is identical to b .
2. Then b has the property of being indeterminately identical to a .
3. But a does *not* have the property of being indeterminately identical to a .
4. So, there is a property which b has that a lacks.
5. So, a is *not* identical to b . (That is, it not indeterminate whether a is identical to b .)

Using modal operators and a modal form of the indiscernibility of identicals, Evans generalizes the reductio to reach the conclusion that actual vague objects are impossible.

and fictional stories are built from possibly exemplifiable situations, a fictional work stating genuine ontic indeterminacy fails to map those statements to propositions of a story. The conclusion of Evans' argument is that genuine indeterminacies cannot be actual, so the failure of the mapping is justified by Evans' argument.

Moreover, the subset of propositions, Σ , is permitted to be empty. So, if there were no other descriptions in the fictional work beyond a statement of genuine indeterminacy, then the work just fails to correlate with a story. The interpretation of object theoretic fictional realism offered here renders Everett's type A indeterminacy harmless, and precludes the occurrence of his type B indeterminacy. A similar response is available for his incoherence arguments.

4.2. *Incoherence arguments*

The incoherence arguments are more brief. The idea is that some fictional works describe impossible worlds. So, unlike the indeterminacy arguments where details are left out, here the details are included but they are details that describe an impossible world. He writes, "since, by (P1) and [(ID')], what exists in the world of a story determines which fictional characters occur in that story, various impossibilities within the world of a story may infect the fictional characters that occur in that story" (Everett 2005, 633). As before, examples are easy to generate and Everett considers two fictional works where in each case some impossibility occurs.

In the first fictional work, the logical law Everett is concerned with is the law of non-contradiction, and in the second, symmetry of identity. The details for each fictional work are as follows:

[1] consider a dialetheist story involving two protagonists a and b who both are, and are not, identical to each other. Then in the fiction $a = b$ will be both true and false. So granted (ID') it follows that it will be both true and false that character a is character b . That is to say character a and character b will be both identical and distinct. (Everett 2013, 214)

[2] protagonist a is identical to protagonist b while b is distinct from a . But then in the story $a = b$ will be true while $b = a$ will be false. Granted (ID') it then follows that fictional character a is identical to fictional character b even though character b is distinct from character a . Hence, it seems, the symmetry of identity can fail for fictional characters. (Everett 2013, 214)

As with the indeterminacy arguments, the response is straightforward. If the object theoretic fictional realist has as background assumptions that the law of non-contradiction and symmetry of identity cannot actually be violated, then the occurrence of those in a fictional work will fail to carry over to a story. This applies to both cases by Everett. Given what little details are given in his examples, the maximally consistent subset of the sentences in these fictional works is empty. So, there is no story with which these fictional works correlate. The problem is not with fictional realism or the actual world, but rather the fictional works themselves.

Much of the work being done here is by the selection thesis and the authorship relation, both of which were inspired by Everett's criticisms of creationism. A creationist, according to Everett, permits an author to violate logical laws just by imagining such, and that seems drastic at best. The interpretation of object theory provided here allows fictional characters to exist and places no limits on an author's creativity. An author is free to create, write, and imagine whatever they desire, but the act itself does not guarantee that there is a mapping from the fictional work to a story. Even if Everett constructs additional examples from other types of logical problems, they will fail to "infect", as he says, the actual world.

5. Closing remarks

Whether it's Everett's ontological arguments or logical arguments, a central claim of this paper is that it is the fictional works that are problematic not the stories. The proposed interpretation of object theory is setup in such a way that the object theoretic analysis occurs on stories, not fictional works. This allows the expressive power and utility of an otherwise impressive global theory to not be undermined by the imaginative will of an author. Notice that nothing in my account explicitly contradicts or rejects Everett's formulation of the fictional realist principles. I take this to show, then, that these principles do not result in the problems he claims.

In general, the problematic cases that Everett presents, remain features of the linguistic and mental artifacts, the fictional works, rather than being inherited into the story. Anti-creationism and the selection thesis preclude stories from containing such problems. Consequently, the proposal offered here protects Zalta's object theory from being "infected" by problems cre-

ated, intentionally or unintentionally, by authors. It is in this sense, that I say philosophical considerations have guided the proposal.

However, it's not clear to me that Everett's alternative pretense theoretic account avoids his own worries. His pretense-theory relies on placing these problematic sentences within the scope of an "In the fiction" operator. As he says, these problems "exist only within the scope of certain games of make-believe and we may sometimes make-believe things that are metaphysically or even logically impossible in certain ways" (Everett 2013, 213). How does this answer the semantic argument that motivated both of our endeavors? The pretense-theorist owes us a systematic account of the intuitive truthfulness of sentences like (F), (M), (E), and (R).

Everett goes to great lengths to explain these in Everett (2013), but my point here is that the same problems he leverages against the fictional realist apply to his account as well. The idea is simple. His pretense-theoretic operator is either truth-functional or not. If it's not truth-functional, then he is not giving an account of truth which is the motivation for the project. If the pretense operator is truth-functional, then its output is a function of the truth-value of the sentence within its scope.

So, if he wants to maintain referentialism, he has two options. The sentences, like (F), that occur within the scope of pretense operator are either truth-valueless or have a truth-value. If they have no truth-value, then he is back to not giving an account that explains the intuitive truthfulness of the sentences that motivate the project. If they do have a truth-value, then he must explain how the sentences acquire their truth-value. At this point it seems that the pretense theorist must deny either referentialism or compositionality. Those unwilling to give up either are a short step away from fictional realism.

Further, critics will demand that the semantics for fiction be systematic in the sense that it applies to (F) in the same way as it applies in Everett's problematic cases. These considerations make the combination of referentialism, fictional realism, and object theory an attractive view. Combined with an actualist interpretation whereby ficta exist as contingently nonconcrete objects, this set of views offers a systematic and straightforward semantic analysis of fictional discourse. Though Everett and I share the same worries, I think his efforts are misplaced. Rather than being about what an author can write, the debate should be about what is possible, and that debate has equal significance for the fictional realist and pretense theorist.

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