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# A Suitable Metaphysics for Fictional Entities

## Why One Has to Run Syncretistically

*Alberto Voltolini*

There is a list of *desiderata* that any good metaphysics of fictional entities should be able to fulfill. These *desiderata* are: 1) the nonexistence of fictional entities; 2) the causal inefficacy of such entities; 3) the incompleteness of such entities; 4) the created character of such entities; 5) the actual possession by *ficta* of the narrated properties; 6) the unrevisable ascription to *ficta* of such properties; and 7) the necessary possession by *ficta* of such properties. (Im)possibilist metaphysics uncontroversially satisfy 1) and 2); Neo-Meinongian metaphysics satisfy 1), 2), 3), 5), 6), and 7); artefactualist or creationist metaphysics uncontroversially satisfy 1), 2), 3), and 4). Another metaphysics is needed in order to satisfy all such *desiderata*. In this chapter I develop such a metaphysics, claiming that a Syncretistic metaphysics that combines Neo-Meinongianism with Artefactualism achieves this purpose. According to Syncretism, *ficta* are hybrid entities individuated in terms of both a certain make-believe narrative process and the set of properties that one such narration mobilizes. Toward the end of the chapter I consider some possible criticisms to this approach: its non-intuitiveness; *ficta*'s unnecessary proliferation; and troubles with creationism of any sort.

### 1. How to Choose the Best Metaphysics for Fictional Entities

What are fictional entities, provided that there are any? In the relevant literature, there has been considerable discussion about the *nature* of fictional entities. Theoretically speaking, this is a *metaphysical* investigation of such entities that comes utterly apart from the *ontological* investigation as to whether, in the general inventory

of what there is, there are such things as fictional entities.<sup>1</sup> In principle, therefore, one can perform a metaphysical investigation of fictional entities utterly independently of one's ontological convictions about them. Moreover, even if one is not committed to such entities, that is, even if one is an *antirealist* about them, it would be desirable to provide a *metaphysical* explanation as to why the metaphysical kind *being a fictional entity* is not instantiated. (An individual believes this when she says that there are no fictional entities.) As a matter of fact, however, most of those who have seriously engaged in a metaphysical investigation of fictional entities have also been ontologically committed to them, i.e., they have been *realists* about such entities.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, even among those who believe there are fictional entities, there is serious metaphysical disagreement as to what such entities are. Basically, three different metaphysics are competing in the philosophical marketplace—the remaining alternatives being minor variants of these three.<sup>3</sup>

(*Im*)possibilists about fictional entities believe that *ficta* are a subset of (im)possible entities, i.e., entities that do not exist in the actual world, but exist in some merely possible (or impossible) world.<sup>4</sup>

*Orthodox Neo-Meinongians* believe that *ficta* are a subset of Meinongian objects, considered as ontological correlates of a set of properties—typically, the properties mobilized in the relevant narration, e.g. Emma Bovary is the fictional correlate of the set of properties *being a woman, living in the French countryside, being an unhappy bride* etc. that Flaubert mobilizes in telling the story *Madame Bovary*.<sup>5</sup> According to Orthodox Neo-Meinongians, *ficta* neither exist spatiotemporally nor subsist, i.e., exist non-spatiotemporally.

*Unorthodox Neo-Meinongians* think that *ficta*, like any other Meinongian object, subsist. For they take all such objects to be *abstract* entities, i.e., entities non-spatiotemporally located and (thereby) devoid of causal powers. This metaphysical

<sup>1</sup> In this way of putting things, I follow Thomasson (1999).

<sup>2</sup> A remarkable exception is Everett (2005).

<sup>3</sup> For example, the intentionalist metaphysics of fictional entities *qua* entities of imagination *à la* Sartre (1940) may be taken as a variant of Artefactualism, particularly Thomasson (1999); Wolterstorff's (1980) metaphysics of *ficta* as person-types may be taken as a variant of unorthodox Meinongianism.

<sup>4</sup> (Im)possibilists come in two varieties. Those inspired by Lewis' modal realism take *ficta* as world-bound entities inhabiting (im)possible worlds different from the actual one. For some doubts as to whether Lewis himself (1978) has to be legitimately ranked among those people, see Sainsbury (2009: 82–7). Priest (2005) defends a 'fixed domain'-approach to fictional entities, according to which one and the same *fictum* does not exist in the actual world, yet it exists in some other merely (im)possible world. If the properties that are mobilized in the relevant narration are compatible, the worlds in which a *fictum* exists are possible; impossible otherwise. See also Berto (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Rapaport (1978), Parsons (1980), Routley (1980), Castañeda (1989) may all be ranked among orthodox Neo-Meinongians. Parsons and Routley believe that the properties belonging to the relevant set are special properties, *nuclear* properties, to be distinguished from *extranuclear* properties as properties that also qualify *ficta* yet do not belong to one such set. Castañeda and Rapaport instead believe that *ficta* are predicated just one and the same kind of properties, yet the properties belonging to the set are predicated *internally*, while those not belonging to the set are predicated *externally*. Castañeda moreover believes that an ordinary *fictum* is a conglomeratum of set-correlates—Meinongian objects or *guises*, as he calls them—tied together by a special relation weaker than identity that he labels *consociation*.

account makes it the case that the relationship between *ficta* and the properties mobilized in the relevant narrations has nothing to do with set-membership.<sup>6</sup> *Qua abstracta*, *ficta* possess such properties more or less in the same way that a role, or a Platonic attribute, is characterized by its characterizing feature.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, *Artefactualists*, or *creationists*, about fictional entities, keep the idea that *ficta* are abstract entities. Yet they link *ficta*'s non-spatiotemporal existence with a human mental activity. *Ficta* are taken to be creations of their authors, insofar as a fictional entity comes into existence as soon as an author (or a community made both by the author and her audience) thinks of it, typically by engaging in an ontologically non-committal make-believe process<sup>8</sup> that there is something doing the things told in the relevant narration. In this sense, *ficta* are dependent entities, namely entities depending for their existence on the existence of their authors (or of the relevant communities made by authors and their audience). As such, they are relevantly similar to institutional entities (laws, nations, treaties, etc.), which also show similar patterns of dependence for their existence. In this respect, *ficta* are taken to be abstract artefacts. In cashing out this idea, Thomasson (1999) claims that *ficta* are a subset of pure *intentionalia*, those objects of thought that come into being insofar as they are thought of by someone. *Ficta* are those pure *intentionalia* that are kept in existence by the fact that some copy or other of the relevant narrations concerning them survives as well. If no copy of the Holmes stories were to survive, the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes would perish as well.<sup>9</sup>

Despite various similarities, the Neo-Meinongian and the artefactualist metaphysics are usually taken to be incompatible. Neo-Meinongians of all kinds take *ficta* to be some sort of entity localizable in a sort of mind-transcendent Platonic realm, either *qua* (correlates of) set-theoretical entities or *qua* roles viz. Platonic attributes. Artefactualists, on the other hand, tend to conceive of *ficta* as depending on the intentional working of human minds. Yet a few years ago I defended an approach aimed at showing that there is no such incompatibility (see Voltolini, 2006). Let me briefly explain why.

The main merit of Neo-Meinongianism is at the same time the main defect of Artefactualism, and vice versa. On the one hand, by appealing to a certain property set, the properties mobilized in the relevant narration, Neo-Meinongians yield a precise criterion of identity for *ficta*: *x* and *y* are the same *fictum* iff they share a

<sup>6</sup> Zalta (1983), who is the main defender of this approach, believes that the properties characterizing a *fictum* are predicated of it internally—are *encoded* by it, as he says. *Encoding* is, for him, a primitive mode of predication having nothing to do with set-membership.

<sup>7</sup> This idea is foreshadowed in Santambrogio (1990).

<sup>8</sup> Evans (1982) calls one such process an *existentially creative* make-believe game (to be distinguished from ontologically committal make-believe processes, i.e., *existentially conservative* make-believe games, that typically affect ordinary individuals).

<sup>9</sup> Artefactualism stems out of original ideas of Ingarden (1931), Kripke (2011), and van Inwagen (1979). Nowadays it is the most popular metaphysics among realists on *ficta*. Cf. e.g. Braun (2005), Goodman (2004), Predelli (2002), Salmon (1998, 2002), Schiffer (1996, 2003), Searle (1979).

certain property set.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Artefactualists claim that *ficta* do not properly possess such properties; abstract artefacts are neither brilliant detectives, nor sad or frivolous women. While the artefactualist provides existence conditions for *ficta* (in terms of the mental activities leading to their creation), she fails to provide secure identity conditions for them.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the artefactualist accounts for the human character of fictional entities by making them mind-dependent entities; the Neo-Meinongian fails to explain this character because she is forced to conceive of them as some sort of transcendent Platonic, and hence mind-independent, being. Now, *Syncretism*, as I label my approach, aims to preserve the merits of both doctrines without inheriting any of their respective defects. I do this by conceiving of *ficta* as hybrid entities made of both a make-believe process type (the storytelling process leading to the generation of a certain *fictum*) and a set of properties (the properties mobilized in such a narrative process).<sup>12</sup>

Of course it is one thing to put forward a Syncretistic metaphysics, quite another to motivate it well. A proper motivation cannot amount to a mere longing for shallow compromises. Here is why one has to run Syncretistically. As I said before, Orthodox Neo-Meinongians claim that *ficta* are correlates of property sets. Yet they do not usually explain how such a correlation works.<sup>13</sup> Syncretism claims that the relevant process of make-believe allows us to perform such a correlation. Once one sees the non-committal narrative process in which one makes believe that there is something having certain properties as a process in which one makes believe that *the set* of such properties is a (typically concrete) individual having those properties, then a certain *fictum* arises out of that very set. That way of seeing things allows one to focus on the aforementioned two components that for the Syncretist constitute a *fictum*, namely, a certain set of properties and the relevant make-believe process in which those properties are mobilized. More importantly, though, it allows one to see how these components are related, so that the make-believe process operates on the property set in question in order to correlate it with the relevant *fictum*. (Incidentally, unlike Orthodox Neo-Meinongianism, the *fictum*-set correlation is a *many-one* correlation, insofar as *different* make-believe processes may involve *one and the same* set.)<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, therefore, Syncretism shares with Orthodox Neo-Meinongianism the idea that a *fictum* is constituted by a certain set of properties. On the other hand, since for Syncretists a new way of seeing the relevant make-believe process is needed in order for a *fictum* to come into existence, Syncretism shares with Artefactualism

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. Parsons (1980: 28). <sup>11</sup> As Thomasson (1999: 68) acknowledges.

<sup>12</sup> Or at least properties corresponding to the properties mobilized in such a process (cf. Voltolini, 2006: 90 ff).

<sup>13</sup> Castañeda (1989) may be considered an exception. For one may take his individuator operator that gets a guise out of a set of properties as a mental operation acting directly on the properties belonging to the relevant set (cf. Orilia [2002: 148]). If properly evaluated, this proposal can be suitably developed in the terms of the present proposal. See immediately below in the text.

<sup>14</sup> See again Voltolini (2006: 105).

the idea that *ficta* are *generated* entities, depending for their existence on the existence of certain mental processes or states.<sup>15</sup>

Now, since so many different metaphysics for fictional entities are available in the philosophical marketplace, how can we choose between them? Of course, it is natural to argue in favour of one's own metaphysical perspective and against all the others. Yet there is another possibility involving what Castañeda (1980) takes to be a *diaphilosophical* method. According to this method, one has to collect as much data as possible concerning the topic of interest, in this case fictional entities. The best theory of those entities will thus be the one that accommodates most of the data. In what follows, I will therefore set out a bunch of data, and, on that basis, compare all the metaphysics of *ficta* I have hitherto outlined. I will show that, unlike its competitors, Syncretism manages to account for all such data.

Before proceeding, a caveat. One may criticize the idea that philosophical theories of any kind rely on something like indisputable data. A theorist may well claim that, in providing her own theory, her explanatory task requires her to stick to some data while rejecting others. On the basis of this, one may deny that the best theory on a given subject matter is the one that accommodates all the purported data, for some purported data aren't genuine data at all. Nonetheless, in the present case all the intuitions I will call upon are on the same footing: none of them is so indisputable that one has to stick to it and drop the rest (or, to put it the other way around, any such intuition receives the same amount of commonsensical consensus). Thus, instead of putting forward a metaphysics that saves some such intuitions and lets the others fall apart, as has hitherto been done, I claim that a theory that accounts for all such intuitions is preferable to other theories on the same subject matter. In this respect, let me call such intuitions *desiderata* rather than data, in the sense that for each of them it is *prima facie* better to preserve the intuition rather than reject it.

## 2. A List of Desiderata and How the Syncretistic Metaphysics Best Accounts for Them

Let me now outline the intuitive *desiderata* that any metaphysical theory of fictional entities should preserve rather than dismiss. Here they are: 1) the nonexistence of fictional entities; 2) the causal inefficacy of such entities; 3) the incompleteness of such entities; 4) the created character of such entities; 5) the actual possession by *ficta* of the narrated properties; 6) the unrevisable ascription to *ficta* of such properties; and 7) the necessary possession by *ficta* of such properties. Let me consider each of them in turn.

According to 1), fictional entities do not exist. Antirealists about fictional entities take 1) as simply having the *ontological* reading that (in the general inventory of what

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Voltolini (2006: Chapter 3).

there is), there are no such things as fictional entities. Yet this seems not to be the intended reading of 1). For one thing, such a reading does not enable us to draw a distinction between genuine fictional characters and only purported ones. Take for instance Mickey Mouse, who certainly does not exist. Yet there is a character so named, while there is no fictional character named ‘Pickey Pouse’. So, Mickey Mouse’s nonexistence cannot be accounted for by saying that there is no such thing as Mickey. Rather, one is clearly tempted to say that—unlike Pickey—there is such a thing as Mickey, yet it has the special feature that it does not exist. To explain what such a feature really consists in is the job of a metaphysician; the fact that there are nonexistent fictional characters has to be understood in *metaphysical* terms.

As to 2), in order for an entity to be endowed with causal powers, it must not only be able to produce effects, but also to be causally affected.<sup>16</sup> Now, although the issue is controversial, fictional entities may be said to produce some sorts of effects, e.g. on human behaviour. People claim to be moved by the fate of fictional entities—if the anecdote is correct, some people have even committed suicide after having been moved by the sorrows of Goethe’s young Werther. Yet *nothing can causally modify a fictional character*. No spectator can prevent Puccini’s heroine Tosca from jumping out of Castel Sant’Angelo and dying. If (in Stephen King’s famous novel *Misery*) the psychotic Annie Wilkes doesn’t want the fictional character Misery to die, she has to prevent the writer Paul Sheldon from publishing a story to the effect that Misery dies. For once the writer has published such a story, there is nothing Annie can do to prevent such a death. In sum, fictional characters are causally inefficacious.

As to 3), there are many features that *ficta* appear neither to possess nor to fail to possess, precisely when the relevant tale is silent on the matter. Sherlock Holmes appears neither to have a mole on his left shoulder nor to fail to have one. For in telling his story, Conan Doyle has neither said nor implied anything about such a mole.

As to 4), we clearly speak of *ficta* as the creations of an author, in the sense that *ficta* depend for their existence on the existence of their authors or on some mental activity on their authors’ part. Carlo Collodi is Pinocchio’s creator. Had Collodi not conceived of him by writing a tale that concerns him, Pinocchio would not have existed.

As to 5), we want the features we ascribe to *ficta* in the stories about them to be actually *possessed* by them. Anna Karenina is a woman, Sherlock Holmes is a detective. Perhaps Anna is not a woman in the same way as Penelope Cruz is, but she is nonetheless a woman. It would be hard to explain why we are moved by her sad fate, if her fate did not *actually* affect her. This actual possession of properties enables us to perform both interfictional and crossfictional comparisons, as when we say that

<sup>16</sup> As forcefully stressed by Frege, who precisely argued for the causal inefficacy of *Gedanken*, *qua abstracta*, along the same lines here suggested for *ficta*. Cf. (1986: 370–3), (1967: 212).

Holmes is cleverer not only than another fictional character such as Hercule Poirot, but than any real full-blooded detective.

As to 6), of course there are many discussions between critics about which features a character really possesses, notably in cases where an author of a story concerning such a character has not explicitly said anything on that matter. We know that Gertrude, the unhappy nun of Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed*, had intercourse with the mischievous guy Egidio, but there is debate about whether it was *sexual* intercourse. Yet once consensus has been found on the matter, the only kind of evidence that could dismantle the consensus is the discovery of another more authoritative version of the relevant story where the author says something explicitly to the contrary. Nothing like *empirical* evidence could lead us to revise our ascriptions, as happens with respect to concrete entities. It cannot, for example, turn out that Holmes is a transsexual, as may happen with concrete humans; the only thing that can emerge is a more authoritative version of the Holmes stories where Doyle makes this claim. For the author is the ultimate authority as to whether a *fictum* possesses certain features, so that, unlike concrete entities, no revision of feature ascriptions may take place. Again, Sherlock Holmes is a detective. Why so? Because Doyle decided to tell the story about him thusly. Had he decided to tell the story differently, Holmes would have had different features. Could it turn out that Holmes is not a detective? Certainly not in the sense in which we may discover that a concrete human e.g. merely pretends to be such. Holmes can turn out not to be a detective only if we find some more authoritative version of Doyle's stories in which he is not a detective.<sup>17</sup>

As to 7), a character appears to have its properties, the properties by means of which it is characterized in the relevant story, *necessarily*. I might have been, say, an F1 pilot but Holmes could not have been. Of course, Doyle might have written the Holmes stories differently, stating, for example, that Holmes wasn't a detective but an F1 pilot. Yet in such a counterfactual situation, Doyle would have been writing about an utterly different character (with the same name).

Let us now go back to the metaphysics of fictional characters I previously sketched in order to see how they cope with the above *desiderata*. Starting with (Im)possibilism, it turns out that this metaphysics uncontroversially satisfies only the first two *desiderata*. Fictional entities do not exist, or better they do not actually exist, for they (im)possibly exist, i.e., they exist in some (im)possible world. Given that they do not actually exist, they are causally inefficacious (even though they may well be so in the worlds in which they exist). Yet (Im)possibilism does not seem to satisfy 3). At least possible entities are complete, in the sense that for each possible world and property *P*, every individual either has property *P* or fails to have *P*. While there may be

<sup>17</sup> In point of fact, for Syncretism the discovery of another version of a story does not even force one to revise a property ascription to a certain *fictum*; it allows us to flank that *fictum* with another, admittedly related, *fictum* having partially different features. More on this later.

possible worlds in which an entity has *P* and other such worlds in which that entity (or one relevantly similar) fails to have *P*, there are no worlds in which an entity neither has *P* nor fails to have *P*.<sup>18</sup> As to 4), for (Im)possibilists, *ficta* aren't, *qua* (im)possibilia, creations of their authors; at most authors manage to select one such actually nonexistent entity existing merely (im)possibly.<sup>19</sup> As to 5), (Im)possibilists say that *ficta* possess the properties by means of which we characterize them in the relevant stories not actually, but only in some of the worlds in which they exist. As a result, 7) is also unsatisfied, for again *ficta* do not actually possess those properties but they possess them only in some of the worlds in which they exist. As to 6), one may say that for (Im)possibilists it is satisfied vacuously; insofar as *ficta* do not actually exist they do not actually possess the relevant properties, hence there is no space for ascription revision.

(Im)possibilists may cry, but Artefactualists should not laugh. Like (Im)possibilists, they satisfy both 1) and 2). *Qua* abstract entities, *ficta* lack causal powers; thus, they do not exist in the sense that they do not *spatiotemporally* exist. Unlike (Im)possibilists, however, Artefactualists also satisfy 4). For them, *ficta* are creations of human mind, insofar as they depend for their own existence on the existence of some mental activity of their authors. Yet with respect to the remaining *desiderata*, Artefactualists are more or less in the same boat as (Im)possibilists. *Qua* abstract artefacts, *ficta* do not actually possess the properties by means of which they are characterized, they only possess such properties according to the relevant stories, or, which is the same, in the worlds where such stories are true. A fortiori, it is only vacuously the case that ascriptions of such properties are not revisable; obviously, moreover, they do not possess such properties necessarily. Furthermore, *ficta* are not incomplete, for again, quite simply, they actually lack all such properties. Yet the incompleteness *desideratum* can nonetheless be accommodated by the artefactualist: a *fictum* is such that for certain properties *P*, according to the relevant story it is neither the case that such a *fictum* has *P* nor it is the case that it fails to have *P*.<sup>20</sup>

Neo-Meinongians appear to be in a better position than the other metaphysicians with respect to the above *desiderata*, for they satisfy 1), 2), 3), 5), 6), and 7). For all Neo-Meinongians, *ficta* do not exist, (at least not spatiotemporally). As a result, they are causally inefficacious. They are also incomplete in a properly *objectual* sense, in that for a couple of properties *P* and its complement *non-P*, a *fictum* fails to possess them because neither property either figures in the relevant set (orthodox Neo-Meinongians) or characterizes the role *viz.* the Platonic attribute that *fictum* consists in (unorthodox Neo-Meinongians). Yet *ficta* actually possess the properties by means

<sup>18</sup> As Sainsbury (2009: 82–7) has convincingly shown, this raises some doubts as to whether for Lewis (1978) *ficta* are really *possibilia*. For Lewis deals with *ficta*'s incompleteness by saying that there is some property *P* such that according to the relevant story, it is not the case that a certain *fictum* has *P*, and it is not even the case that such a *fictum* fails to have *P*. But this implies that there are possible worlds in which that *fictum* neither has *P* nor fails to have *P*, which lets it hardly be a possible entity.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Priest (2005: 119–20, 142).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. e.g. Thomasson (1999: 36–7, 107–8).



of which they are characterized in the relevant stories, because such properties either belong to the sets to which they are correlated (orthodox Neo-Meinongians) or characterize the role viz. the Platonic attribute they consist in (unorthodox Neo-Meinongians). For these reasons, moreover, they also possess such properties necessarily. Finally, for the same reasons, once it turns out that a *factum* possesses one such property, it turns out that way once and for all; no ascription revision is allowed. Yet, as has already been stressed, Neo-Meinongians of any kind cannot satisfy the creation *desideratum*. *Ficta* are at most selected by an author among entities in a Platonic realm of Meinongian objects, existing before the author herself came into existence.

Syncretism, unlike the alternative theories considered so far, accounts for all of the above *desiderata*. First of all, since for a Syncretist a *factum* does not spatiotemporally exist, the nonexistence *desideratum* is accommodated. As a consequence, a *factum* possesses no causal power. Since a *factum* is a correlate of a property set, it is i) objectually incomplete, ii) an actual possessor of the properties by means of which it is characterized in the relevant story, and iii) a necessary possessor of such properties, in the very same sense as for an orthodox Neo-Meinongian. Moreover, for the same reason, no ascription revision of such properties is allowed. Yet unlike all Neo-Meinongians and like Artefactualists, the creation *desideratum* is also satisfied. For a *factum* comes into (non-spatiotemporal) existence only once a reflexive stance concerning the non-committal make-believe process that lies behind its generation takes place. In this reflexive stance, that process is seen as concerning a certain property set, which is pretended to be a (typically concrete) individual.

### 3. Objections and Replies

Its conciliatory character notwithstanding, there are at least three problems that arise for a Syncretistic metaphysics of fictional entities. First, to conceive of *ficta* as hybrid entities made of a certain make-believe process type and of a certain set of properties sounds rather counterintuitive. Second, insofar as Syncretism is in its turn a hybrid metaphysics attempting to combine the virtues of Neo-Meinongianism and Artefactualism, it seems nevertheless to inherit some of the drawbacks that stem from those very virtues, notably, on the one hand, an unnecessary proliferation of fictional entities and, on the other hand, an inability to explain how *ficta* can really be created entities. Let me address these three problems—counterintuitivity; ontological overpopulation; indigestible creationism—in turn.

As to counterintuitivity, the Syncretist should bite the bullet. The fact that it is better for a theory to accommodate intuitive data by no means entails that the theory itself must be intuitive. Common sense data require no commonsensical theory, but rather a theory that satisfactorily accommodates our *pretheoretic* intuitions.<sup>21</sup> In this

<sup>21</sup> Artefactualists sometimes claim that their metaphysics is commonsensical for it is just a way of resuming commonsensical uncontroversial intuitions (cf. Thomasson, 2003). But this sounds like a sort of

respect, one is free to develop a counterintuitive metaphysics provided that it is explanatorily fruitful. Compare Frege's metaphysics of natural numbers as classes of classes. No man in the street would think that, say, three is the class of triples. Yet insofar as it prompted Frege to allegedly derive arithmetic from logic, such a metaphysical programme was very fecund. In our case, if conceiving of *ficta* as the hybrid entities Syncretism claims they are enables one to accommodate all the relevant data concerning such entities, this is an indisputable merit of the theory.

What's the main drawback of Neo-Meinongianism that Syncretism inherits from its very virtues? Given the rigid identity conditions it posits for fictional entities, it breaks ontological parsimony. Because, for Syncretism, a *fictum* is a correlate of a set of properties, as Orthodox Neo-Meinongianism holds, then if one merely changes, subtracts or adds one property to the set in question, even a particularly unimportant one, you get an utterly different fictional entity. For you get a different set. This sounds rather implausible—if Doyle had written that Holmes lived at 221c rather than 221b Baker St, or that Holmes also had another flat one floor upstairs, or even if Doyle had simply forgotten to specify Holmes's residential address, the resulting story would be about *another* character. A fortiori, moreover, no new story about a *particular* fictional entity can be produced. For if in her narration an author mobilizes further properties over and above those mobilized in a previous narration, a new *fictum* comes to the fore. This seems rather implausible as well—we speak of the *success* of a *certain* fictional character insofar as *that* character engages in new adventures over and above the original one written by a certain author. This point may be presented in even more problematic terms. I've just said that the main merit of Syncretism is to accommodate all intuitions about fictional entities. Yet isn't the idea that such entities *persist* through changes across stories another intuition that Syncretism, unlike other theories,<sup>22</sup> is unable to account for?

Once again, the Syncretist should bite the bullet. This time, however, she should do so by dismantling the conviction that fictional characters persist across different stories and even across different versions of the same story.<sup>23</sup> It may well be the case that both different stories and different versions of the same story present *character fissions* or *character fusions*. Character fission occurs when one and the same fictional character in a story (or a version of it) corresponds to different fictional characters in another story (or another version of the same story). Character fusion is the inverse phenomenon, when different fictional characters in a story (or in a version of it) are

rhetorical trick. For, as we have seen, Artefactualism accommodates certain commonsensical data while at the same time rejecting some other commonsensical data.

<sup>22</sup> Artefactualism tries to account for the 'persistence'-intuition by providing at least necessary conditions for cross-fictional identity of a fictional character. Cf. Thomasson (1999: 68).

<sup>23</sup> Because for a Syncretist, stories are sets of propositions and so are story-versions, there is no deep metaphysical distinction between stories and versions. We tend to call a set of propositions a new version of a story rather than an utterly new story for pragmatic reasons (for instance, because the relevant author intends not to write another story, but just to refine a previously written one).

matched by one and the same fictional character in another story (or another version of the same story).<sup>24</sup> These phenomena clearly threaten fictional characters' identity across stories (or versions).<sup>25</sup> To be sure, this does not mean that the 'persistence'-conviction is completely misguided, but that it has to be reinterpreted.

First of all, that conviction can be utterly accounted for in its purportedly intuitive value not at the level of fictional characters, but at the level of the non-committal make-believe processes along with their own 'protagonists'. As I said before, in telling a tale, an author typically makes believe that there is a certain individual having certain properties. As is well known,<sup>26</sup> this is an utterly antirealist pretence, since there is nothing at all having such properties. Now, nothing prevents such an author, or even a different author, from later resuming or better protracting that very non-committal make-believe process to the effect that *the very individual* that was originally pretended to have some properties has further properties. So, the level of non-committal make-believe, which really involves no individual at all, not even a fictional character, may well allow for the persistence of an 'individual'. In a nutshell, a storyteller first makes believe that there is an individual having certain properties and later she, or even a different author, makes believe that that very individual has further properties. This is a case of *intentional identity* to be grounded not on the existence of an individual, for there aren't any, but on the identity conditions of a make-believe process along with its protraction.<sup>27</sup>

Now, out of such make-believe protractions—once the proper reflexive stances take place—different fictional characters will arise; a new character for any such protraction. So, in writing *Orlando Enraged*, Ludovico Ariosto protracts a make-believe game to the effect that there is the same individual named 'Orlando' having certain properties that, in writing *Orlando in Love*, Matteo Maria Boiardo originally made believe to have other properties. Such a protracted make-believe process really involves no individual. Yet out of its original part along with its protraction two different fictional characters arise: Boiardo's Orlando and Ariosto's Orlando.

Clearly enough, as the previous case involving different Orlandos shows, Syncretism commits itself to a plurality of *ficta* that other metaphysical theories of fictional entities do not buy into. Yet this overpopulation of *ficta* is not unconstrained. All the fictional characters that stem from different versions of the same story, or from utterly different stories whose underlying make-believe processes are however suitably connected, are linked by a relation weaker than identity, what I have called

<sup>24</sup> For concrete cases of character fission and character fusion, see my Voltolini (2012).

<sup>25</sup> It is hard to rule out such cases as marginal ones by appealing to something like authors' intentions to split or to fuse fictional characters. For such intentions can be obviously overruled. For instance, in writing a new version of a certain story, an author may simply want to ascribe a certain character a double personality. Yet readers of that story may not grasp that intention and simply take those two personalities as amounting to two different fictional characters. In such a case a character fission would have occurred, the author's contrary intentions notwithstanding.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. e.g. Evans (1982), Walton (1990).

<sup>27</sup> Typically, intentional identity occurs in intentional discourse, as Geach (1982) has famously shown.

*transfictional sameness*. Fictional characters  $F$  and  $F^*$  are transfictionally the same iff  $F^*$ 's make-believe component is a protraction of  $F$ 's make-believe component. Moreover, this move enables a Syncretist to have a *fictum* that remains constant across all the relevant stories stemming from the protractions of the original make-believe process, namely the *general character* of all such stories. A general character therefore is a surrogate of what other theorists would like to have as a single *fictum* persisting throughout all the relevant stories. For it is what all the particular *ficta* linked by transfictional sameness share and to which each of them is respectively connected by a further relation again weaker than identity, *transfictional inclusion*. A *fictum*  $F$  is transfictionally included in a general character  $G$  iff both  $F$ 's make-believe component and  $F$ 's set-theoretical component are respectively constitutive of  $G$ 's make-believe component and  $G$ 's set-theoretical component ( $G$ 's set has all the properties  $F$ 's set contains). So, we are entitled to speak not only of the general Orlando (the Orlando of all so-called mock-heroic compositions), but also of the general Holmes (the Holmes of all Doyle's stories plus the Holmes stories of other authors, such as e.g. Jô Soares' *A Samba for Sherlock*), the general Faust (the one encompassing Marlowe's Faust, Lessing's Faust, Goethe's Faust etc.), and so on. Incidentally, insofar as Syncretism inherits the best of Artefactualism, this is how it should be. Compare institutions. Granted, the Western Roman Empire, the Carolingian Empire, and the Holy Roman Empire were numerically different institutions. Yet a family likeness surrounds all of them, which enables one to say that in some sense they were the same general empire.

Nonetheless, the link between Syncretism and Artefactualism is problematic. For Syncretism has also to face the main difficulty of explaining how a *fictum* can really be a *created* entity. As many Artefactualists admit, what lurks behind the creation of a fictional entity is a make-believe process basically consisting of a pretended reference to an individual.<sup>28</sup> Yet it is not clear at all how a *fictum* can stem from that pretended reference. Since the make-believe process in question is non-committal, the pretended reference in question is no reference at all: by pretending to refer to something, one makes believe that there is an individual one is referring to, when in actual fact there is no such individual. So, as some have pointed out,<sup>29</sup> the first act of pretended reference to something, say by means of the very first sentence of a tale told by an author, does not suffice in order for a *fictum* to be created. If in writing the very first sentence of *Pinocchio*, namely 'How it happened that Mastro Cherry, carpenter, found a piece of wood that wept and laughed like a child', Collodi pretends to refer by 'Mastro Cherry' to the carpenter that fabricated Pinocchio and took him as his putative son, no reference to a concrete individual has been so performed; a fortiori, no reference to a fictional individual occurs. On behalf of Artefactualism, one may say that the creation of a fictional entity via pretended reference occurs only at

<sup>28</sup> Cf. e.g. Schiffer (1996, 2003), Thomasson (2003).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e.g. Brock (2010: 357–9), Yagisawa (2001: 155).

the *end* of the relevant make-believe process, let's say once the author ends telling a story that her audience has fully understood.<sup>30</sup> Yet it remains unclear why ending the make-believe process should produce the ontological miracle that the very beginning of that process failed to produce. Nor do other tricks, such as appealing to authors' creative intentions or the like, seem to fare any better.<sup>31</sup>

In order to find a way out of this problem, I should be clear at the very outset that, *pace* what Artefactualists sometimes say, speaking of 'creation' here is just a metaphor, at least if 'to create' means 'to bring something into spatiotemporal existence'. An author does not create a *fictum* in the very same sense in which a carpenter creates a table, or a puppet for that matter. In the latter case, a causal process occurs that brings something into spatiotemporal existence by transforming some piece of matter—some chunks of wood, say—into another concrete thing. Since Artefactualists agree that *ficta* are abstract entities, as regards them nothing of that kind can happen; abstract entities are devoid of causal powers.

A natural conjecture, in light of these observations, is that 'creation' of a fictional entity turns out to be no real creation at all, or at most an altogether different form of creation, namely, some sort of stipulation.<sup>32</sup> In point of fact, as some Artefactualists—Thomasson above all—emphasize, such generation must be analogous to the 'creation' that brings an institutional entity—say, a nation—into (non-spatiotemporal) existence. Now, institutional entities have *normative* force; what brings an institutional entity into existence is the fact that something like Searle's *constitutive rules*, namely, rules that constitute the phenomenon they rule, play a role here. For abiding by such rules is what prompts institutional states of affairs to subsist.<sup>33</sup>

Somewhat confusingly, some Artefactualists have appealed to the constitutive role of such rules for *ficta*. To be sure, what they literally say is that it is a conceptual truth that by pretending to refer to something (in a complete make-believe process) there is a fictional individual one refers to. In other more pompous terms, according to them, once one grasps the *essence* of a fictional entity, namely something that is mobilized

<sup>30</sup> As Thomasson (1999: 7,140 *n.* 3) puts it, the creation process may be *diffuse*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. again Brock (2010). For other arguments against creationism cf. Kroon (2011, 2013). Thomasson seems to provide an alternative explanation when she posits a *creative* form of intentionality and holds that the first thought entertained by an author is creatively directed upon a fictional character (1999: 90). Yet as I emphasized in Voltolini (2006: 74), if there is anything like creative intentionality, it can only be directed upon an intentional object, which is not yet a fictional entity by Thomasson's own lights. For her, it may only turn out to be so once the appropriate copies of an author's work are complete. So Thomasson still owes us an explanation as to how an entity that is originally intended via a certain creative thought may *later* turn out to be a fictional character.

<sup>32</sup> As Deutsch (1991) first envisaged. Brock (2010: 343) points out that, *qua* stipulation, Deutschian creation is no real creation. Since I believe that whenever *abstracta* are at stake nothing like real creation can be in play, I utterly agree with him on his conclusion. Yet one should also add that Deutsch's stipulation is no real stipulation either, at least if a stipulation has ontological import only insofar as it has normative force, a performative value. Whereas Deutsch's stipulation has no such import: in stipulating that certain fiction-involving sentences are true, an author matches a pre-existent reality already having the stipulated features.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Searle (1969, 1995).

by acts of pretended reference, one thereby grasps its *existence*.<sup>34</sup> However, as those Artefactualists immediately point out, the generation in question here is quite analogous to the one involving institutional entities, e.g. the one that brings a marriage into existence by uttering certain words in the appropriate conditions.<sup>35</sup> Thus, this analogy makes immediately clear that what prompts all such ontological generations is not an Anselmian move from essence to existence, but rather the fact that the relevant conceptual truths express certain constitutive rules. It is conceptually the case that uttering certain words in the appropriate conditions counts as a marriage, because such an uttering is the correct way of applying certain constitutive rules. Analogously, an artefactualist should say that it is conceptually the case that pretending reference in a make-believe game counts as a *fictum*, for that *fictum* comes into existence by correctly playing that game.

Yet even once one so reframes the artefactualist's point, the main problem with this way of putting things is that as far as *ficta* are concerned, there can be no such conceptual truth. For pretending to refer to something (in a complete make-believe process) is not even factually sufficient in order for a fictional entity to be generated.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the purported constitutive rule to the effect that by correctly pretending to refer to something one refers to a *fictum* is no constitutive rule at all.

In order to see that this is so, compare pretended reference with a very similar phenomenon, *oneiric* reference.<sup>37</sup> In dreaming, it may well be the case that one refers to something, typically a concrete individual. Yet this again is a mere imaginary non-committal reference, insofar as there is no such individual one is really referring to. The process of imaginary reference in dream does not make it the case that there is an abstract-like entity, an *oneiric entity* (let me call it) that one is really referring to. I may well dream of a dreadful monster that in the dream I name 'Scary' even if there is no individual I am really referring to. The fact that in my dream I have imaginatively referred to something does not make it the case that there is an oneiric entity named 'Scary' that I'm now referring to. As such, there can be no conceptual truth to

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Schiffer (1996, 2003), Thomasson (2003). <sup>35</sup> Cf. Thomasson (2003: 151).

<sup>36</sup> That the inference from pretended reference to *ficta* is no conceptual truth at all should already be clear by the fact that, as Everett (2013:132) has also pointed out, pretence antirealists about *ficta* certainly share our very notion of a fictional entity and yet they believe that pretended reference has no such ontological import. As I have said elsewhere (Voltolini, 2006: 100 n. 24), I think that Artefactualists are here led astray by erroneously assimilating the above inference to the so-called 'something-from-nothing' transformations, i.e., necessarily a priori true biconditionals e.g. of the form 'N is F iff N has the property F'. (Cf. again Schiffer, 1996, 2003; Thomasson, 2003). Such biconditionals may be legitimately conceived as conceptual truths committing us to the existence of certain entities, properties in the above case. For in a biconditional, if its right-hand side is committal, so is its left-hand side.

<sup>37</sup> For an early comparison between make-believing and dreaming, see Walton (1990: 43–50). That comparison is particularly strong from the semantical point of view, for both make-believe and dream involve context-shift for the relevant expressions (terms that in reality refer to nothing refer to something in the context of make-believe or in the context of dreaming). The difference between such phenomena is psychological: unlike standard dreams at least, make-believe involve a meta-representational awareness. For details on that, cf. Meini and Voltolini (2010).

the effect that by imaginatively referring to something in a dream, there is an oneiric entity one is really referring to. A fortiori, no constitutive rule grounding the generation of such an entity has been thereby expressed. If this is the (negative) case as regards dreams, why should the analogous case of make-believe be treated any differently? Granted, make-believe involves meta-representational awareness, in a nutshell: the knowledge that certain representations are just representations of an imaginary world. Yet dreams may involve the same kind of awareness, as happens in lucid dreams (i.e., dreams in which one knows that one is dreaming). Lucid dreams are as ontologically non-committal as standard, non-lucid dreams. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds of make-believe. It is not in this way that make-believe leads to commitment to fictional entities.

Here Syncretism comes into play. Artefactualists are quite right to maintain that the 'creation' of a fictional entity is akin to the generation of an institutional entity via the appropriate constitutive rules. They are nonetheless wrong about where and how such rules are supposed to act. In actual fact, those rules do not involve the relevant make-believe process as such, but rather *the reflexive stance* that allows one to take that process as involving a certain property set. By seeing a certain make-believe process as involving a certain property set, a certain fictional entity is eo ipso generated. *Seeing the process in this way amounts to having a fictional entity at one's disposal* is the relevant conceptual truth expressing a constitutive rule for *ficta*. As I have said before, seeing a certain make-believe process as involving a certain property set allows one not only to focus on the two components a *fictum* is made of: a certain property set and a certain make-believe process. But it also allows us to see that that very process enables the set to be correlated with a certain fictional individual. Seeing the process in this way *is* to grasp that fictional individual. Such a seeing shows itself in uttering an ontologically committing true sentence like 'F is a fictional entity'. In other words, even if one is not aware of so seeing a certain make-believe process, that way of seeing manifests itself in that very uttering. Such a true uttering is the manifestation of that very reflection. This reflexive stance is thus utterly different from the meta-representational awareness a make-believe process involves. As we have seen before, that awareness is ontologically non-committal just as dreams are non-committal. For it is about the representations that characterize the relevant make-believe process: it says that a representation of the pretend world is not a representation of the real world.<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, the reflexive stance is a conceptual pondering on the fact that the make-believe process is a bridge that connects a certain property set with the fictional individual that is its correlate.

This is the point of the difference that explains why, unlike make-believe, dreams do not result in any new ontological commitment. Indeed, no such reflexive stance occurs in the case of dreams, which is why we don't have oneiric individuals. No way

<sup>38</sup> Cf. again Meini-Voltolini (2010).

of seeing the imaginary process occurring in dreaming as involving a certain set of properties takes place in such a case. A fortiori, there is no *correct* way of seeing that process that leads to the generation of an oneiric individual. As a result of dreaming, therefore, there is no oneiric individual at our disposal, as is shown by the fact that no ontologically committing true sentence like ‘O is an oneiric entity’ is ever uttered.

If I were asked for an explanation as to why there is an ontological asymmetry between the case of dream and the case of fiction, I would be tempted to reply that dreaming is a private matter involving the dreamer only, whereas fiction is publically available. Insofar as this is the case, fiction but not dream allows for constitutive rules to act. For in order for rules to display their normative force, they must be in principle publicly followed, as Wittgenstein (1953) taught us. In point of fact, it does not matter at all whether the utterer of an ontologically committing true sentence like ‘F is a fictional entity’ is either the storyteller lurking behind F’s generation or someone in her audience. Anyone can see the relevant make-believe process as involving a certain property set. As a result, anyone can follow the constitutive rule to the effect that, by so seeing that make-believe process, a certain *fictum* comes into being. In a nutshell, *ficta* are the outcome of *correctly* seeing the relevant make-believe process.

To be sure, one might still wonder whether such a reflexive stance really has ontological import. There definitely are second-order forms of pretence in which one makes believe that there are *fictional* entities. Thus, truly saying that F is a fictional entity cannot be a mark of genuine ontological commitment. I disagree. In a second-order pretence of that kind, ‘F is a fictional entity’ is not true, it is merely fictionally true, that is, true in the world of such a pretence. In point of fact, in such cases no *real* reflexive stance occurs, only the *pretence* of one. In such a second-order pretence, one is merely mimicking what one does by means of a genuine reflexive stance, that is, stepping outside pretence itself.<sup>39, 40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Granted, we can even step outside the second-order pretence, by thus making ‘F is a fictional entity’ really true, not just fictionally true. Only then by ‘F’ we will refer to a fictional entity. For within that second-order pretence ‘F’ still refers to nothing, it just make-believedly refers to a (fictional) entity. Cf. Voltolini (2009).

<sup>40</sup> For more about all this cf. Voltolini (2009). I thank Carola Barbero, Harry Deutsch, as well as an anonymous referee for their important comments on a previous version of this chapter.



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