TWO-DIMENSIONAL MODAL MEINONGIANISM
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Abstract
The aim of this paper is to show that Priest's (2005) modal Meinongianism might benefit from joining forces with two-dimensionalism. For this purpose, I propose a two-dimensional solution to a problem for modal Meinongianism that is posed by Beall (2006), Sauchelli (2012), and Milne (2013), and show that, by taking recourse to two-dimensionalism, divergent intuitions about the question of whether fictional characters might exist can be reconciled. Moreover, two-dimensionalism helps to rebut Kroon's (2012) argument to the conclusion that modal Meinongianism cannot rule out the odd claim that some non-existent objects have existence-entailing properties at the actual world.[1]

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to show that Priest's version of Meinongianism[2] might benefit from joining forces with two-dimensionalism. I will proceed as follows. After a few general remarks about Meinongianism (section 2), I reformulate a certain problem that, in my view, has not been sufficiently addressed by Priest.[3] The problem, originally posed by Beall and reshaped by Sauchelli and Milne,[4] is that Priest's version of Meinongianism – modal Meinongianism, as it is often called[5] – cannot cope with non-existent objects that are characterised with the help of what Beall calls the 'uniform actuality operator' such as the actually existent golden mountain. I propose to solve this problem by making use of insights from two-dimensional semantics (section 3).[6] Next, I highlight some consequences of my solution for Priest's concept of an object (section 4) and try to show that endorsing these consequences might help to reconcile two conflicting intuitions concerning the question of whether it is possible that fictional characters like Sherlock Holmes exist (section 5). Finally, I address an argument by Kroon[7] that purports to show that modal Meinongianism cannot rule out the odd claim

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[2] See Graham Priest, *Towards Non-Being: The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
[3] See Graham Priest, 'Against Against Nonbeing', *The Review of Symbolic Logic* 4 (2011), pp. 237–253, at pp. 250 f.
[4] See JC Beall, 'Review of Towards Non-Being', *Notre Dame Philosophy Reviews* (2006), http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=7503, accessed 18 July 2014; Andrea Sauchelli, 'Fictional Objects, Non-Existence, and the Principle of Characterisation', *Philosophical Studies* 159 (2012), pp. 139–146; and Daniel A. Milne, 'Where Does the Actually Existent Golden Mountain Actually Exist?', unpublished manuscript, 2013.
[5] Priest (*Towards Non-Being*) does not speak of 'modal Meinongianism' but prefers the label 'noneism' to characterise his version of Meinongianism. The name 'modal Meinongianism' originates with Francesco Berto, 'Modal Meinongianism for Fictional Objects', *Metaphysica* 9 (2008), pp. 205–218.
[6] Milne ('Where Does') has proposed another solution which is based on the idea of a multitude of logical universes. Though an interesting and worthwhile project, I can only mention his account here. See footnote 19 for some further details.
[7] See Frederick Kroon, 'Characterization and Existence in Modal Meinongianism', *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 86 (2012), pp. 23–34, at pp. 29–30.

that some non-existent objects have existence-entailing properties at the actual world. As it will emerge, this problem disappears once one crosses modal Meinongianism with two-dimensional semantics (section 6).

2. Meinongianism in a nutshell

At the heart of Meinongianism lies the idea that, for any condition, there is an object that satisfies it. Take, for example, the condition of being a winged horse. According to Meinongianism, there is an object that is winged and a horse – for example, Pegasus. Even though this and similar examples fit common sense, Meinongianism has been under attack since it was first proposed. Some opponents, for example, claim that 'There is an object that is winged and a horse' is simply false, because Pegasus and similar creatures do not exist. Meinongians typically rebut this objection by emphasising that, in their jargon, the phrase 'there is' must not be read as the existentially loaded quantifier of classical logic but as an existentially neutral quantifier that quantifies over all objects we can think about, whether or not they exist.

Even if one concedes that there is a neutral kind of quantification, however, Meinongianism is not off the hook. Take, for example, the condition of being a winged horse that exists. According to Meinongianism, there is an object that is not only winged and a horse, but also exists. This example does not fit common sense at all, since everybody knows that Pegasus and similar creatures do not exist. At this point, there is a division among proponents of Meinongianism. Some argue that what is needed here is a distinction between two types of properties – nuclear and extra-nuclear –,[8] while others claim that we have to acknowledge two types of predication – exemplification and encoding.[9] According to the first proposal, *existence* might be a property, but it is not a nuclear property. Since, moreover, only nuclear properties are suited for characterising an object, one is not forced to admit that winged horses exist. According to the second suggestion, there truly is an object that has the properties of being winged, being a horse, and being existent. But this object does not *exemplify* those properties; rather, it *encodes* them.

Even though these approaches to the problem might be consistent, one cannot avoid the impression that they are *ad hoc*. Worse still, nobody has ever succeeded in giving a satisfactory account of the distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear or exemplification and encoding. Thus, from the perspective of Meinongianism, it would be a good thing if the idea that an object has those properties that it is characterised as having could be saved without recourse to debatable distinctions. Recently, Graham Priest has proposed such an alternative: modal Meinongianism. According to Priest, for any characterisation whatsoever, there is an object that has the properties it is characterised as having. However, says Priest, it is not a requirement that the object has those properties at the actual world. Instead, it may have them *elsewhere*, namely, at those worlds that 'realize the way the agent represents things to be in the case at hand'.[10] Thus, according to modal Meinongianism, the solution to the problem of the

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[8] See Terence Parsons, *Nonexistent Objects* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Richard Routley, *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1980); and Dale Jacquette, *Meinongian Logic: The Semantics of Existence and Nonexistence* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1996).

[9] See Edward Zalta, *Abstract Objects. An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983).

[10] See Priest, *Towards Non-Being*, p. 85. See also Priest, 'Against', p. 240, where he puts the same point as follows: 'If one characterizes an object in a certain way (say, as a Victorian detective of acute powers

existent winged horse is astonishingly simple: 'To be sure, winged horses exist! However, they do not exist here, in the actual world, but in some non-actual worlds such as the one described in Greek mythology.'[11]

3. The problem and a two-dimensional solution

However, Priest's account is not free of difficulties either. In particular, there is a problem for modal Meinongianism that is analogous to the problem of the existent winged horse.[12] Take, for example, the condition of being an object such that, actually, it is winged, a horse, and exists. According to modal Meinongianism, there is an object which has all these properties, albeit not at the actual world, but at those worlds that realise the way the agent represents things to be, that is, at worlds at which 'Actually, winged horses exist' is true. It seems, however, *that there is no such world*. As Beall aptly explains, 'actually' is a rigid designator that refers 'back to what's going on at our base (or actual) world'.[13] This means that 'Actually, winged horses exist' is true at a world *w* if and only if 'Winged horses exist' is true at the actual world. But, obviously, 'Winged horses exist' is false at the actual world. So there simply is no non-actual world at which 'Actually, winged horses exist' is true. Consequently, no world realises the way the agent represents things to be. Therefore, there is no object that has the relevant properties, not even at some far-off non-actual world.

Priest has addressed this problem in his 'Against Against Nonbeing'. The gist of his reaction is that 'Actually, winged horses exist' might be false at all *possible* worlds, but certainly there are *impossible* worlds at which it is true – for impossible worlds 'can violate any constraint'.[14] In my view, this response is unconvincing. In order to make 'Actually, winged horses exist' true, the candidate impossible world has to be such that *it is the actual world*. But no impossible world – however crazy it might be internally structured – is the actual world. So 'Actually, winged horses exist' fails even at impossible worlds.

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of observation and deduction, etc.), one has no guarantee that the object in question really does have those properties (at the actual world). It does have those properties at some worlds, however; namely, those that realize the situation about the object envisaged (e.g., the one described in Doyle's Holmes stories)'.

[11] I have some reservations as to whether modal Meinongianism is really a version of Meinongianism: as I understand the latter, the actual world contains non-existent objects which, albeit non-existent, actually have certain ordinary garden-variety properties such as *being a horse* or *having wings* – the idea is *not* that some non-actual worlds contain objects that do not exist in the actual world. Francesco Berto and Graham Priest ('Modal Meinongianism and Characterization', *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, forthcoming) call the position envisaged by me 'literalism' and argue that any viable version of Meinongianism needs to abandon literalism. Although I am not convinced by their arguments, I will not make an attempt to vindicate literalism here as, in the context of the present paper, this is a side issue. However, I do hope to address this issue in a future paper.

[12] This problem was first formulated by Beall ('Review'). The form in which I present it here is due to Milne ('Where Does'). An anonymous referee has pointed out to me that Sauchelli ('Fictional Objects') essentially raised the same problem, in a more extended and detailed form. Sauchelli uses the example of Travis Bickle, the negative hero of Scorsese's movie *Taxi Driver*. Travis, says Sauchelli, is not only characterised as having the property of being a taxi driver, but also as having this property *at the actual world*. According to modal Meinongianism, then, there is some non-actual world where Travis has this property that Sauchelli calls being a taxi driver-at @. However, Sauchelli continues, 'having the property of *being a taxi driver-at @* at any world implies that whoever has this property also has the property of being a taxi driver at @ *simpliciter*' (142). But, obviously, Travis lacks the property of being a taxi driver at the actual world. Thus, in contrast to what modal Meinongianism predicts, there is no world where Travis has the property of *being a taxi driver-at @*.

[13] See Beall, 'Review'.

[14] See Priest, 'Against', p. 251.

Nevertheless, I think that the core idea of modal Meinongianism – that for any characterisation whatsoever there is an object that has the properties it is characterised as having at some worlds – can be saved. In addition to being a rigid designator, 'actually' is also an indexical expression: its reference shifts depending on the world an English speaker who makes use of it is in. Thus, 'actually' as used by English speakers in our actual world rigidly refers to our actual world; however, when used by English speakers in some other world, it rigidly refers to this other world.[15] To illustrate this claim, compare what is said by 'Actually, winged horses exist' uttered by me, your fellow inhabitant of the actual world @, with what is said by the same sentence uttered by an inhabitant of a non-actual world w_1 which is populated by winged horses. As it turns out, what I say is both *false* at @ and *false* at w_1, while what the inhabitant of w_1 says is both *true* at @ and *true* at w_1. The reason is, when we assess if what I say is true or not, we keep @ as the context of utterance so that 'actually' rigidly refers to @, while, when we assess what the inhabitant of w_1 says, we keep w_1 as the context of utterance so that 'actually' rigidly refers to w_1. Let us represent these findings by the following table:

	@	w_1
@	F	F
w_1	T	T

The first row shows the truth-values of what is said by 'Actually, winged horses exist', considered as uttered by an English speaker *in the actual world* – which corresponds roughly to the proposition that might be expressed by 'At @, winged horses exist'. The second row represents the truth-values of what is said by 'Actually, winged horses exist', when uttered by an English speaker *in w_1* – which corresponds roughly to the proposition that might be expressed by 'At w_1, winged horses exist'. This table provides the key to the solution of Priest's problem. Recall that the problem is that there seems to be no world that realises the way an agent, who forms the idea of an actually existent winged horse, represents things to be; there seems to be no world that both is the actual world and contains some existent winged horses. Now, this is certainly true if we model the way the agent represents things to be on what David Chalmers calls the *secondary proposition* of 'Actually, winged horses exist', that is, the proposition that is represented by the entries in the first row of the table.[16] However, it does not seem entirely appropriate to focus on the secondary proposition in order to model the way the agent represents things to be. It might be argued, for example, that when an agent forms the idea of an actually existent winged horse, she imagines a world that contains herself at centre stage, surrounded by winged horses. *This* way of representing things is included in the table, too: it corresponds to what Chalmers calls the *primary proposition* of 'Actually, winged horses exist', which is represented by the entries from the upper

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[15] Priest seems to ignore the indexicality of 'actually'. When he discusses Beall's ('Review') objection, he considers an actuality operator *A* whose truth condition simply is: '*Ap*' is true at a world if and only if *p* is true at the actual world (see Priest, 'Against', p. 250). Thus, it appears as if Priest does not think that 'actually' takes the world of utterance as an additional semantic parameter. I owe this point to an anonymous referee.

[16] For the notion of 'primary' and 'secondary proposition' see David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 56–65). Strictly speaking, it is not the proposition, but its truth-values at different worlds, that is represented by the entries. However, it is natural (albeit not uncontroversial) to identify propositions with functions from worlds to truth values. So, the entries can also be regarded as representing the proposition itself.

left to the lower right.[17] If we model the way the agent represents things to be on the primary proposition, then, the problem disappears – for the primary proposition of 'Actually, winged horses exist' is true at w_1 after all.[18] Hence, there certainly *is* a world that realises the way the agent represents things to be, namely, w_1.[19]

4. Objects, two-dimensionally conceived

Let me draw out some of the consequences of this account for the concept of an *object* – a concept that figures prominently in Priest's modal Meinongianism. According to Priest, an object, say Jefferson Davis, should not be identified with what we usually take for Jefferson Davis, namely that 'world-bound entity'[20] that actually was the first and only President of the Confederate States of America. Rather, we should conceive of objects as functions from worlds to what Priest calls *identities*.[21] Unfortunately, Priest says little about what identities are. However, it seems natural to regard the relation between an object in Priest's technical sense and its identities at worlds as analogous to the relation between a thing, ordinarily conceived, and its time-slices: as a thing has different time-slices at different times, an object may have different identities at different worlds.[22]

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[17] Here and in what follows, I rely on Chalmers (*Conscious Mind*, pp. 56–65). To be sure, there are more recent, and perhaps more thoroughgoing, introductions to two-dimensionalism such as Chalmers, 'Two-Dimensional Semantics', in E. Lepore & B. Smith (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Christian Nimtz, 'Two-Dimensional Semantics: The Basics', 2007, http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/philosophie/personen/nimtz/Papers/pbu03_Nimtz_2007_2dSemanticsLong.pdf, accessed 18 July 2014; and Laura Schroeter, 'Two-Dimensional Semantics', in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/two-dimensional-semantics, accessed 18 July 2014. However, I still find Chalmers' (*Conscious Mind*) remarks most suggestive.

[18] A similar solution applies to Sauchelli's ('Fictional Objects') case of Travis Bickle. When we – encouraged by Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* – characterize Travis as being a taxi driver at the actual world we imagine a world that not only contains Travis as he steers his taxi through the streets of New York, but that also contains *us* as we see Travis steering his taxi through the streets of New York; that is, we imagine a world that *is centred on ourselves*. So it might well be that the *secondary* proposition of 'Travis is a taxi driver at the actual world' is false at every world. But there surely are worlds at which its *primary* proposition is true.

[19] Let me take the opportunity to sketch Milne's ('Where Does') solution to the problem. Instead of making use of a framework that includes a multitude of *worlds*, Milne proposes to make use of a framework that includes a multitude of *logical universes* – where a (non-empty) logical universe is a totality of possible (and, perhaps, impossible) worlds with an actual world at its centre. As there are different possible worlds, that is, ways the actual world might have been, there likewise are different logical universes, that is, ways the whole system consisting of all possible (and, perhaps, impossible) worlds might have been. Some of these logical universes can be seen as corresponding to the different ways metaphysicians think about the actual logical universe. There are, for example, Humean logical universes which do not contain impossible worlds, there are Lewisian logical universes where possible worlds have the same ontological status as the actual world, there are actualist logical universes where possible worlds do not exist, there even are Quinean universes which do not contain a single possible world but just the actual one, etc. The crucial point is that one may use this framework to accommodate the actually existent winged horse because, undoubtedly, there is some logical universe or other that contains an actual world in which winged horses graze in the grass along the South Platte River. In my view, Milne's account is ingenious and deserves detailed consideration. However, this is a topic for another paper.

[20] See Priest, *Towards Non-Being,* p. 90.

[21] See Priest, *Towards Non-Being*, p. 43.

[22] See Priest, 'Against', p. 239.

To illustrate Priest's notion of an object, imagine a non-actual world, w_2, where the secession of the South did not occur and, therefore, Jefferson Davis remained in the US Senate until his death. Furthermore, imagine a non-actual world, w_3, where Jefferson Davis remained faithful to the Union in 1860, took command of the US troops in May 1861 and, eventually, defeated the Confederacy in 1865. Now, Priest suggests that Jefferson Davis, properly understood, is the function that maps the actual world to that particular individual within the actual world that was the first and only President of the Confederate States of America, that maps w_2 to that particular individual within w_2 that was US Senator from Mississippi from 1857–1889, and that maps w_3 to that particular individual within w_3 that took command of the US troops and defeated the South.[23]

What holds good for existent objects like Jefferson Davis, holds equally good for non-existent objects. Consider the object that is characterised as the actually existent golden mountain. Furthermore, imagine two non-actual worlds, w_4 and w_5: w_4 differs from the actual world only in that Mount Everest is golden all over, while w_5 differs from the actual world only in that Mount McKinley is golden all over. Now, try to determine which identity the actually existent golden mountain has at $@$, w_4 and w_5. I predict that you will be torn between two intuitions. Since the actual world does not answer the description 'the actually existent golden mountain', there is nothing, at least nothing *existent*, which counts as the actually existent golden mountain's identity at the actual world. Furthermore, since 'the actually existent golden mountain' refers rigidly to whatever it refers to in the actual world, it seems that the same holds for w_4 and w_5: the actually existent golden mountain has no identity there, at least no *existent* identity. However, there is a strong intuition that w_4's Mount Everest and w_5's Mount McKinley somehow fit the description at hand. At least, they fit it if we consider w_4 and w_5, respectively, as actual; that is, if we imagine that those worlds were the contexts of utterance. These intuitions are, once again, best expressed in a table:

	$@$	w_4	w_5
$@$	–	–	–
w_4	Mount Everest	Mount Everest	Mount Everest
w_5	Mount McKinley	Mount McKinley	Mount McKinley

The first row corresponds to what Chalmers would call the *secondary intension* of the description 'the actually existent golden mountain'. It shows the identities that the actually existent golden mountain has at different worlds, under the assumption that this object is characterised by an agent *in the actual world*. Here, again, we have an illustration of the problem that there seems to be no world that realises the way the agent represents things to be. Again, this problem disappears when one focuses on the entries from the upper left to the lower right, which give the identities that the actually existent golden mountain has at different worlds, under the assumption that this object is characterised by an agent *in the respective world*. These 'diagonal' entries correspond to what Chalmers would call the *primary intension* of the description 'the actually existent golden mountain'. From this perspective, there certainly *are* worlds that realise

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[23] Is this to say that Jefferson Davis's identity at $@$ is *different* from his identity at w_2 (and w_3)? In a sense, it is, in another sense, it is not. On the one hand, there is a property that Jefferson Davis's identity at $@$ has and his identities at w_2 and w_3 lack – for example, the property of being the first and only President of the Confederate States. On the other hand, the person who has this property at $@$ is the very same person who remained faithful to the Union in 1860, took command of the US troops in May 1861 and, eventually, defeated the Confederacy in 1865 at w_3. Thus, one might say that the respective identities of Jefferson Davis are *Leibniz-different*, but *transworldly identical*.

the way the agent represents things to be, namely w_4 and w_5. Thus, in order to guarantee that, for any characterisation whatsoever, there is a world which realises the way the agent represents things to be, a proponent of modal Meinongianism seems to be well-advised to adopt a picture of objects according to which they generally have two dimensions. Both dimensions can be modelled as functions from worlds to identities. The first function, however, keeps the actual world as context of utterance and takes non-actual worlds *considered as counterfactual* as arguments, while the second one takes worlds *considered as actual* as arguments.

Thus, it appears that rephrasing modal Meinongianism in terms of two-dimensionalism is not only a reasonable move in reaction to the criticism of Beall, Sauchelli, and Milne but it is also a very natural thing to do – independently of any preceding criticism. Modal Meinongianism is just made for a two-dimensional reformulation, so to speak. Recall that, according to Priest, non-existent objects do not have their characterising properties at the actual world. Instead, they are merely *represented* as having their characterising properties – they only have them in worlds that realise *the way one represents things to be*. Now, the crucial point is that, generally, there are two different manners of representing a particular state of affairs to oneself: first, one can represent a state of affairs *as actually obtaining* (as is the case when, for example, one believes that the state of affairs in question obtains) or one might represent a state of affairs *as not actually obtaining* (as is the case when, for example, one denies that the state of affairs in question obtains). In a sense, then, the two-dimensional framework reflects these different manners of representing, which seem to be so fundamental to human intentionality. Since modal Meinongianism heavily draws on the idea of agents representing things to be a certain way – a fact that might be obscured by the rather technical talk of 'characterisation' – it just seems natural to give it a two-dimensional makeover.[24]

5. Is it possible that Holmes exists?

Besides its potential to forestall problems with non-existent objects such as the actually existent golden mountain, the two-dimensional proposal at hand may help to explain two conflicting intuitions concerning certain modal properties of fictional objects. On the one hand, some philosophers claim, for example, that Sherlock Holmes *might have existed*, whereas others deny it. Sometimes even one and the same philosopher switches allegiance from one claim to the other over the course of time: Saul Kripke, for instance, writes, in 1963, that 'Holmes does not exist, but in other states of affairs, he would have existed'[25] but he rejects this claim in 1972, maintaining that 'granted that there is no Sherlock Holmes, one cannot say of any possible person that he *would have been* Sherlock Holmes, had he existed'.[26]

In order to see how those divergent intuitions might be reconciled by two-dimensionalism, let us perform a thought experiment that is similar to Putnam's well-known H_2O/XYZ case. Imagine that there is a distant planet, Twin Earth, which is exactly like Earth except for two things: first, the person who is called 'Sir Conan

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[24] Note that this is not so natural with the other versions of Meinongianism that were mentioned above as these other versions do not rest upon the idea of agents representing things to be a certain way – at least, they do not rest upon this idea in the same way as modal Meinongianism does. I owe this point to an anonymous referee.

[25] See Saul Kripke, 'Semantical Considerations on Modal Logic', in L. Linsky (ed.), *Reference and Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963/1971), p. 65.

[26] See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), p. 158.

Doyle' there did not write any story about a Victorian detective named 'Sherlock Holmes' who possesses acute powers of observation and deduction, nor is there any other work of fiction that is about such a Victorian detective; second, there actually is a Victorian detective called 'Sherlock Holmes' who has all those properties that the earthly Doyle ascribes to the main character of the Holmes stories. Twin-Holmes, then, is to Holmes what twin-water (XYZ) is to water (H_2O). Since Twin-Holmes, in contrast to Holmes, exists, he lacks some essential properties of Holmes – namely, being non-existent, being created by Doyle, being incomplete, etc. Nevertheless, Twin-Holmes superficially resembles Holmes since Twin-Holmes exemplifies all the properties the earthly Doyle ascribes to Holmes in the Holmes stories. Just as twin-water looks and tastes like water, Twin-Holmes looks and behaves as earthly Doyle characterises Holmes. Despite these similarities, it should be clear that Twin-Holmes is not identical to Holmes, as twin-water is not identical to water. So when we, the earthlings, use the name 'Sherlock Holmes' we do not refer to Twin-Holmes but to our earthly Holmes – this non-existent, Doyle-created, incomplete fictional detective. The converse holds for the twin-earthlings: when they use the name 'Sherlock Holmes' they do not refer to our, the earthly, Holmes but to their Twin-Holmes – this existent, humanly procreated, complete detective of flesh and blood.

Now, try to transpose this thought experiment into a possible world scenario. Consider two different possible worlds: firstly, our actual world @ and, secondly, a non-actual world w_6 where conditions on Earth are as on Twin-Earth. Then ask yourself whether the name 'Sherlock Holmes' as it is used by us – the inhabitants of @ – picks out any existent item[27] at @ and at w_6, respectively. Since, as we have seen above, we use 'Sherlock Holmes' as a name that rigidly refers to a fictional character – namely, that Doyle-created, incomplete and non-existent detective – you will find that, even at w_6, the name 'Sherlock Holmes' does not pick out any existent item. Finally, ask yourself whether the name 'Sherlock Holmes' picks out any existent item at @ and at w_6, under the assumption that w_6 is actual. You will find that, in this case, the name 'Sherlock Holmes' would again pick out nothing at @ but would indeed pick out something at w_6, namely Twin-Holmes – for it would be this existent, humanly procreated, complete detective of flesh and blood we would speak about by using the name 'Sherlock Holmes,' provided that w_6 were the actual world. Once again, let us condense these findings in a table:

	@	w_6
@	–	–
w_6	–	Twin-Holmes

This gives a good idea of the two dimensions that Holmes, the fictional character, has according to my proposal. The first dimension is represented by the entries in the first row. This dimension corresponds to a function that, for all possible worlds, returns nothing at all – since there is no possible world such that a fictional detective exists there.[28] The second dimension is represented by the entries from the upper left to the lower right. This dimension corresponds to a function that, for all possible worlds that

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[27] I refrain from speaking of *objects* here since Priest – due to his technical use of the term – insists that objects 'are not "at one world" or "at another"' (see Priest, *Towards Non-Being,* p. 90). According to Priest, what is at one world or another is just the respective object's identity.

[28] For impossible worlds, this might be different. There may be impossible worlds where someone both exists and does not exist. However, impossible worlds are irrelevant because the question is whether it is possible that Holmes exists: the answer to this question hinges on whether there is a *possible* world where Holmes exists – not on whether there is an impossible world where he exists.

contain a person who exemplifies all those properties by which Doyle characterises Holmes, returns this very person as value.

My two-dimensional picture of Holmes explains why we are torn between the belief that it is *impossible* that Holmes exists and the belief that it is *possible* that Holmes exists. The first belief is due to our attention to the 'horizontal' dimension of Holmes, while the second is due to our attention to the 'diagonal' dimension of Holmes. On a closer look, these beliefs hence do not contradict each other. To see the point, recall that there once was – and, at least in my courses about theories of reference, still is – a similar discussion about the question of whether water might be XYZ: some maintain, while others deny, that it is possible that water is XYZ. From the perspective of two-dimensionalism, the participants in this discussion talk past each other – for there are two different conceptions of possibility at play. Both might be construed as truth in at least one possible world, but the first conception considers non-actual possible worlds as counterfactual, while the second one considers them as actual. 'It is possible that water is XYZ', then, is false, given that the modal operator expresses the first kind of possibility, and it is true, given that the modal operator expresses the second kind of possibility. Something similar holds in the case of Holmes: if we take the modal operator to express the first kind of possibility, 'It is possible that Holmes exists' is false; if we take the modal operator to express the second kind of possibility, 'It is possible that Holmes exists' turns out to be true.

6. May Holmes have existence-entailing properties at the actual world?

A two-dimensional account of modal Meinongianism might not only settle the dispute over the question whether it is possible that Holmes (and similar fictional characters) exist, but it also has the potential to rebut an argument against modal Meinongianism that was recently put forward by Frederick Kroon. Kroon maintains that modal Meinongianism cannot rule out the odd claim that non-existent objects such as Sherlock Holmes have existence-entailing properties, and therefore exist, at the actual world. Recall that, according to Priest, Holmes exists at those worlds which realise the way we imagine the world to be when we read the Holmes stories. Put differently: at each world that realises the way we imagine the world to be when we read the Holmes stories, the function from worlds to identities that is associated with (or perhaps even identical to) Sherlock Holmes returns as value the person who, in the respective world, plays the Holmes role, that is, the person who has all the properties Doyle ascribes to the main character of his crime stories. However, says Kroon, Priest does not take any precautions to prevent such a person from being transworldly identical to some actually existing person. Thus, modal Meinongianism seems to be compatible with the absurd claim that Sherlock Holmes – or, more precisely, Sherlock Holmes's identity at the actual world – exists. Kroon writes:

> Priest's theory is designed to make sure that a fictional object like Holmes has such properties as being a detective living in 221B Baker St., London, 'at those worlds that realise the way I represent the world to be when I read the Holmes stories' (Priest 2005, 84). But the way I represent the world when I read the Holmes stories includes such claims as 'Holmes might have decided against becoming a detective and become a professional boxer'. Such a modal claim is true at worlds that realise the way I represent the world to be when I read the Holmes stories. Since the 'might have' is the 'might have' of logical possibility, we can now infer

9

that there are possible worlds in which Holmes exists but became a professional boxer rather than a detective. There is no a priori reason, however (at least no a priori reason officially sanctioned by Priest's theory), for thinking that the actual world is not one of these worlds, hence no a priori reason for ruling out as false the claim that the famous detective Sherlock Holmes was a professional boxer at the actual world (and a fortiori exists at the actual world).[29]

In order to make Kroon's argument more vivid, let us suppose that there is a man in the actual world who is transworldly identical to the man who exemplifies the properties of *being a detective*, *possessing acute powers of observation and deduction*, *living in 221B Baker St.*, etc. in w_6 (= the world that realises the way I represent the world to be when I read the Holmes stories). Suppose, furthermore, that the man who is transworldly identical to w_6's Holmes is Bob Fitzsimmons, a British professional boxer who won the Heavy Weight Championship in a fight against Jim Corbett in Carson City, Nevada, on 17 March 1897. So the claim 'Holmes might have decided against becoming a detective and become a professional boxer' is surely true at w_6 – for there is at least one possible world, namely the actual world, where the very same man who practiced as a detective in w_6 became a professional boxer. Now, if the very same man who practiced as a detective in w_6 became a professional boxer in the actual world, the claim 'Actually, Holmes was a professional boxer' seems to be true as well. Since being a professional boxer is an existence-entailing property, we arrive at the absurd conclusion that Holmes actually exists – which he manifestly does not.

Berto and Priest have reacted to this challenge by slightly changing the formulation of the principle that governs the behaviour of descriptions that are not satisfied at the actual world.[30] Originally, Priest had claimed in his *Towards Non-Being* that, if nothing satisfies a given description at the actual world, then the description picks out some object or other which satisfies it at those worlds that realise the characterisation envisaged by the person who uses the description.[31] In the face of Kroon's criticism, Berto and Priest admit that 'this seems wrong'[32] – for Priest's original formulation does not rule out that the object that is picked out by the respective description might exist at the actual world.[33] Thus, Berto and Priest propose the following improvement: if nothing satisfies a given description at the actual world, then the description picks out some *non-existent* object or other which satisfies it at those worlds that realise the characterisation envisaged by the person who uses the description – where a non-existent object is understood to be an object whose identity at the actual world does not exist. For the case at hand, this means that the man who plays the Holmes role in w_6, Bob Fitzsimmons, is *not* Sherlock Holmes's identity at w_6 – for Bob Fitzsimmons exists at the actual world. In general, nothing counts as a value of the function from worlds to identities that is associated with (or perhaps even identical to) a fictional character if it exists at the actual world. Therefore, Kroon's argument is blocked from the start: the assumption that there might be a non-actual world which is such that Holmes's identity at that world turns out to be transworldly identical to some person in the actual world is ruled out *a priori* by the improved principle.

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[29] Kroon, 'Characterization and Existence', pp. 29–30.

[30] For what follows, see Berto and Priest, 'Modal Meinongianism', pp. 11–15.

[31] Strictly speaking, it is not the *object* that satisfies a given description at a world, but the object's *identity*. However, Berto and Priest as well as Kroon indiscriminately speak of 'objects' in this context.

[32] See Berto and Priest, 'Modal Meinongianism', p. 12.

[33] Again, strictly speaking, it is not the *object* that exists at a world, but the object's *identity*.

Although I admit that the improved principle blocks Kroon's argument, I am not wholly satisfied with this solution. After all, w_6 realises the way we imagine the world to be when we read the Holmes stories: there is a particular man in w_6 who exemplifies all the properties Doyle actually ascribes to Holmes in his stories, that is, he is a detective, he possesses acute powers of observation and deduction, he lives in 221B Baker St., etc. Furthermore, note that nothing in what Doyle wrote about Holmes implies that he could not have been identical to Bob Fitzsimmons. More specifically, the claim that, according to the Holmes stories, it is impossible that Holmes is identical to Bob Fitzsimmons, is surely wrong because the question whether it is possible or not that Holmes is identical to Bob Fitzsimmons is simply left open by Doyle. Thus, in my view, there is not the slightest reason to deny that the man who plays the Holmes role at w_6, Bob Fitzsimmons, is in the range of values of the function from worlds to identities that is associated with Sherlock Holmes – except for the wish to rebut Kroon's argument. Therefore, Berto and Priest's improvement of the principle that governs the behaviour of descriptions that are not satisfied at the actual world not only seems *ad hoc*,[34] but it also leads to counterintuitive results when it comes to the question as to which identity Sherlock Holmes has at w_6.

Looking at the issue from a two-dimensionalist's standpoint, one can reject Kroon's challenge without artificially restricting the value range of the function from worlds to identities that is associated with Sherlock Holmes.[35] According to two-dimensionalism, the sentence 'Holmes might have decided against becoming a detective and become a professional boxer' expresses at least two different propositions. The first proposition amounts to what is said by the sentence *considered as uttered in w_6*, while the second proposition amounts to what is said by the sentence *considered as uttered in the actual world $@$*. Since the name 'Holmes', as it is used by inhabitants of w_6, rigidly refers to the individual who is a detective in w_6 and a professional boxer in $@$, the first proposition is certainly true, both at $@$ and at w_6. However, the second proposition is *not* true, neither at $@$ nor at w_6 – for the name 'Holmes', as it is used by us, the inhabitants of $@$, rigidly refers to our Holmes, that is, the Doyle-created, incomplete, and non-existent fictional character. Since an incomplete non-existent fictional character cannot, at the same time and in the same world, be a professional boxer, not even possibly, the second proposition that is associated with the sentence 'Holmes might have decided against becoming a detective and become a professional boxer' is plainly false. So, in order to get the argument going, the opponent of modal Meinongianism has to rely on an interpretation of 'Holmes might have decided against becoming a detective and become a professional boxer' according to which the occurrence of the name 'Holmes' rigidly refers to the individual who is a detective in w_6.

Now, consider what is happening in the second part of the argument: from the truth of 'Holmes might have decided against becoming a detective and become a professional boxer' (together with the fact that the individual who is a detective in w_6 is transworldly identical to the actual world's Bob Fitzsimmons) it is inferred that, actually, Holmes was a professional boxer. This is perfectly fine as long as the reference of 'Holmes' is held fixed – for it is certainly true that the individual who is a detective in w_6 is a professional boxer in $@$. However, this is not the conclusion that is required

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[34] Berto and Priest admit this, see their 'Modal Meinongianism', p. 13.
[35] From the perspective of two-dimensionalism, it is not quite right to speak of 'the' function from worlds to identities that is associated with Sherlock Holmes because, according to two-dimensionalism, there are two such functions associated with Sherlock Holmes: one is such that, at each world, it returns nothing existent as value; the other one is such that, at each world that contains a person who plays the Holmes role there, it returns this very person as value (see section 4).

in order to threaten modal Meinongianism. In order to threaten modal Meinongianism, *another* conclusion is needed, namely the odd claim that the Doyle-created, incomplete, and non-existent fictional character that we, the inhabitants of @, call 'Holmes' is a professional boxer in @. This latter conclusion can only be drawn if the argument starts from the proposition that is expressed by 'Holmes might have decided against becoming a detective and become a professional boxer' *considered as uttered in the actual world* – for only in this case do the respective occurrences of 'Holmes' rigidly refer to the Doyle-created, incomplete, and non-existent fictional character. However, as we have already seen, the proposition that is expressed by 'Holmes might have decided against becoming a detective and become a professional boxer', considered as uttered in the actual world, is false. So an argument that starts with the latter proposition may be valid, but certainly is not sound.

It turns out then that Kroon's modal argument is a blend of two different arguments: the first is sound, but it does not establish a conclusion that threatens modal Meinongianism; the second does establish a conclusion that threatens modal Meinongianism, but it is not sound. Let **BF** (for 'Bob Fitzsimmons') be a name that rigidly refers to the individual who is a detective in w_6 and a professional boxer in @, and let **SH** (for 'Sherlock Holmes') be a name that rigidly refers to the Doyle-created, incomplete and non-existent fictional character that we, the inhabitants of @, call 'Holmes'. The respective arguments, then, can be formulated as follows:

(1) **BF** might be a professional boxer.
(2) If (1) then there is a possible world where **BF** is a boxer, for example, the actual world.
(3) If **BF** is a boxer in the actual world then, actually, **BF** is a boxer.
(4) Thus, actually, **BF** is a boxer.
(Comment: This is sound. But (4) does not threaten modal Meinongianism.)

(1') **SH** might be a professional boxer.
(2') If (1'), then there is a possible world where **SH** is a boxer, for example, the actual world.
(3') If **SH** is a boxer in the actual world then, actually, **SH** is a boxer.
(4') Thus, actually, **SH** is a boxer.
(Comment: This is valid and (4') threatens modal Meinongianism. However, it is not sound, since (1') is false.)

It seems that Kroon's modal argument combines these arguments in the following inadmissible way:

(1'') **BF** might be a professional boxer.
(2'') If (1''), then there is a possible world where **BF** is a boxer, for example, the actual world.
(3'') If **BF** is a boxer in the actual world, then, actually, **BF** is a boxer.
(4'') Thus, actually, **SH** is a boxer.
(Comment: The premises are true and (4'') threatens modal Meinongianism. But the transition (1'')–(4'') is *not* valid.)

Thus, from the two-dimensionalist's standpoint, Kroon's objection that modal Meinongianism cannot rule out the odd claim that the Doyle-created, incomplete, and non-existent fictional character named 'Holmes' has existence-entailing properties at the actual world is guilty of the fallacy of equivocation. Kroon relies on true premises

about the individual who plays the Holmes role in the world that realises the way we represent the world to be when we read the Holmes stories; but from this he draws a conclusion about the individual who actually is Holmes. However, these individuals are *different* – so whatever might be true of the one need not be true of the other.

7. Conclusion

I have tried to show that modal Meinongianism, as it is developed by Priest, gains from being combined with two-dimensionalism: not only does this help to resolve the problem that concerns non-existent objects characterised by taking recourse to the actual world, but it also helps to untangle the question of whether it is possible that fictional characters like Sherlock Holmes exist. Moreover, two-dimensionalism helps to rebut Kroon's argument to the conclusion that Priest's version of Meinongianism cannot rule out the odd claim that some non-existent objects have existence-entailing properties at the actual world. To sum up: if modal Meinongianism and two-dimensional semantics joined forces they would make a perfect team.

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