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Vacuous Names and Fictional Entities*

One of the main concerns of my previous work (Kripke 1980)[1] is the semantics of proper names and natural kind terms. A classical view which Putnam mentioned, advocated by Mill, states that proper names have as their function simply to refer; they have denotation but not connotation. The alternative view, which until fairly recently has dominated the field, has been that of Frege and Russell. They hold that ordinary names

view that the consensus is largely wrong; that it is reference which is much more important here than any supposed sense.[3]

I want to discuss one aspect of this problem today, since no consideration in favor of the Frege–Russell view of proper names has seemed more conclusive than the fact that names can sometimes be empty—that, for example, they can occur in fiction. Also, even if they do in fact refer, it is intelligible to raise the question of whether the alleged referent really exists. For instance, we ask whether Moses as a historical character really existed and the like. What can we mean by this? If the function of naming were simply reference, then empty names would seem to have no semantic function at all, but plainly they do not fail to have a semantic function, as anyone who enjoys a good work of fiction can attest. And even if they do have referents, we can ask whether, say, Moses or Napoleon really existed. When we do so we are not asking whether **that person** really existed. We are not questioning **of him** whether he really existed, because if we were asking such a question, the answer should be evident. Since everyone really exists, **that** person does also. It is unintelligible, as Russell and Frege have emphasized, to ask of a person whether he really exists.

Now to this problem the Frege–Russell analysis, and its modifications, provides a neat solution. If we have a story—for example, one involving Sherlock Holmes—to say that Sherlock Holmes really exists is to say that someone or other uniquely satisfies the conditions of the story, or at any rate, most or enough of them. To say that he does not exist is to say that this is not the case. Presumably, if this is to be the analysis of the statement, it should apply to counterfactual situations also. To say, 'Sherlock Holmes would have existed (or might have existed) under certain circumstances' is to say that some person would have uniquely played the role of the detective in the Sherlock Holmes story, or might have played it under those circumstances. And to say that he would not have existed in certain circumstances is to say that the story would not have been true of any such detective under those circumstances. We can then replace the names in these sentences by existential quantifiers, replacing 'Sherlock Holmes existed' with 'There exists a man uniquely satisfying the conditions of the story'. And these are supposed to be necessary and sufficient conditions both about the actual world and about every possible world.

Some of you will know that I distinguish between the questions of what is necessary, whether something would have been true in a possible world, and the epistemological question of whether we know a priori that certain conditions

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[3] There are more recent modifications, but here I am going to lump them together with Frege and Russell: many writers—Wittgenstein (1953), Searle (1958), and others—have held that instead of a fixed list of properties forming necessary and sufficient conditions for being Napoleon or being a tiger, one should instead use a cluster of properties, most of which must roughly hold of the object. Not all of them—or at least not a lot of them—could fail. In Kripke (1980) I argued that this modification, no matter what those who made it thought, does not really overcome the most important objections to the classical view (see 31–33, 60–61, and 74–75).

must be true of the actual world. Therefore there are two questions here about the Frege–Russell analysis. First, is it true that to ask whether Moses exists in a given counterfactual situation, or whether Sherlock Holmes exists, is to ask whether the things commonly said about them would have been true in that situation? Secondly, do we know *a priori*, or with some sort of advance certainty about the actual world, that the existence of Moses or of Sherlock Holmes is materially equivalent in the actual world to the question of the existence of some unique person satisfying the conditions in the story? These questions are separable and distinct; Frege and Russell could be right on one and wrong on the other. At any rate, they seem to have a neat solution to all these problems that seems to fit into what we actually ask when we ask whether there really was a Sherlock Holmes—or so it may seem at first blush.

Those familiar with my previous work will know that I believe, from a battery of examples, that the Frege–Russell analysis is erroneous, as applied to natural language, for both cases. It is wrong in general about the counterfactual situations, and it is wrong about what we can say a priori about the actual world. Surely, for example, to ask whether under certain circumstances Moses would have existed is not to ask whether under these circumstances such-and-such events would have taken place. For, first, presumably Moses might have existed yet not gone into religion or politics, and therefore not done any of these great deeds. Nor need anyone else, of course, have done them in his place. Second, even had Moses never existed, perhaps someone of comparable stature would have come along to do exactly these great deeds. The statements (that is, one containing 'Moses' and the other containing a description typically associated with that name), which are supposed to have the same truth-value in all possible worlds, are such that neither one entails the other in a possible world. One can be true and the other false in both directions.[4] Of course, there might be certain (extremely implausible, maybe never held) views in the philosophy of history which assert that there are great individuals uniquely called forth to perform certain tasks. This should hardly be assumed simply to follow from an analysis of existential statements and of proper names. I think then that in this case the Frege–Russell analysis must be rejected. In particular, to describe a counterfactual situation as one in which Moses would or would not have existed is not to ask whether any properties would have been instantiated.[5] This is to oppose the

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[4] Note that in this case I am taking 'Moses' as the name of a real person, and even perhaps assuming the essential accuracy (if not entire accuracy) of the Pentateuchal account. I am then talking about counterfactual situations, and arguing that the existence of someone satisfying the Pentateuchal account has little to do with whether Moses would have existed in a given counterfactual situation. (The case of Moses was discussed in Kripke [1980:66–67], based on Wittgenstein's use of this example [1953:§79].)

[5] Of course, one could invent a property, 'Mosesizing', as frequently proposed by Quine. See ask wo571by

technical meaning that Frege gave to the doctrine that existence is not a predicate. An apparent singular statement of the form 'Moses exists' is **not** equivalent to any statement of the form 'Such-and-such properties are instantiated', unless you take the property of being Moses as the property in question. But if you did so, this would be written out in the form that Frege did not like. It would mean, essentially, 'There is a y, such that y is Moses'.

Russell also held that existence is not a predicate.[6] Explicitly what bothered him about this property is that it would be trivially true of everything. As Russell says, 'There is no sort of point in a predicate which could not conceivably be false. I mean,

Now turn to the actual world. The view of Frege and Russell would assert that to ask whether Sherlock Holmes really existed is to ask whether the story was substantially true of someone (uniquely); and to ask whether Moses existed is to ask whether the story was substantially true of someone. Let's first take the case where it is not a work of fiction, where historians have concluded that the characters really existed. I have discussed this case in Kripke (1980:67–68). In the case of Moses existing, does an affirmative answer imply that the story was substantially true of someone? I think that here again Frege and Russell have gone wrong, even in talking about the actual world. They fail to distinguish between a legend that is completely a tissue of whole cloth about a mythical character and a legend that grew up about an actual character. In the latter case we may say that the stories which have reached us are legendary and were true of no one, yet Moses or whoever else is mentioned in the story really existed. In fact, I quoted a biblical scholar who says exactly that about Jonah.[9]

As I have emphasized about these cases, the reason that we can say that Jonah really existed, though the stories which have reached us about him are substantially false, is that there is a historical chain of communication in which the name, with perhaps linguistic changes, has reached us, leading back to the man Jonah himself and the stories which were erroneously asserted about him.

Suppose the Sherlock Holmes stories were all true of one unique detective: does that amount to concluding that Sherlock Holmes really existed? The dust-jackets of many books of this type contradict such a thesis. The opening page may say 'The characters in this work are fictional and any resemblance to anyone living or dead is purely coincidental'. What is meant by this is that even if by some bizarre accident the stories told in this work are substantially true of some particular people, and even true of them uniquely, the resemblance is purely fortuitous and was unknown to the author. (Actually, we might be suspicious of such a claim, but surely it is not conceptually impossible.) They are not the referents of the names that occur in the story, and it is just a coincidence that the story is substantially true of them. If one of these people about whom the story was true sued in court for invasion of privacy, or perhaps slander or libel, he would not win the case **solely** on the basis of establishing that the story was

this could be true, unless the proposition 'This does in fact exist' is also true, and therefore the words

substantially true of him. The judge, if the coincidence were really established, would rule against the plaintiff and against Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Searle.[10] The reason, once again, lies in the lack of any historical connection to an actual person, even though the beliefs are substantially true of the person.

This is enough by way of softening up. If the Frege–Russell theory is wrong, then, of course, some account must be put forward in its place. But if their theory (as standardly conceived) does not give an account of the problems of existence and apparently empty names that is intuitively correct, then these problems do not, in themselves, argue in favor of their theory as opposed to one emphasizing reference rather than descriptive sense.

Let me take a stab at what a true account should be. There are really two different issues. One is what kind of proposition is expressed using an actual name, a name that really has reference: what is expressed when we make an existential statement using that name? Assume that the name 'Moses' refers to a certain man. When we say truly that Moses did exist, or if we said falsely that Moses did not exist, or counterfactually, what would have happened if Moses had not existed, we are always talking about **that man**. Existence is in this sense a predicate. Of course, if the man is around he has got to satisfy the predicate, and that makes it is a very special one. But although we could analyze this as '$(\exists y)$ $(y = Moses)$,' we shouldn't try to replace it by anything involving instantiation of properties. When we say, 'Moses might not have existed and under certain circumstances would not have existed', we are saying something about a certain person, not about whether his deeds would have been accomplished under certain circumstances. Quantified sentences, such as 'Every (actual) person might not have existed at all', make perfect sense, and existence is a predicate governed by a quantifier.

As I have warned with respect to analogous cases in Kripke (1980), it doesn't matter that if Moses had not existed, people would not have been able to make the negative existential assertion. Rather, since we can refer to Moses, we can describe a counterfactual situation in which Moses wouldn't have existed. It matters not at all that in that situation people would not have been able to say, 'Moses does not exist', at least using 'Moses' the way we are using it here. Indeed, I can describe a counterfactual situation in which I would not have existed, even though if that were the case I wouldn't be around to say it. It would be wrong to identify the language people **would have**, given that a certain situation obtained, with the language that **we use to describe how circumstances would have been** in that situation. (I have sometimes run across this confused identification, both in the published literature and in discussion.)

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[10] I have later been told that my assertion would not be true in English libel law, which is very favorable to plaintiffs, but would be true in U.S. law. I have not checked up on the matter. The conceptual point I am making is not really affected (even if English law imposes something like 'strict liability' here).

What happens in the case of a work of fiction? A work of fiction, generally speaking of course, is a pretense that what is happening in the story is really going on. To write a work of fiction is to imagine—spin a certain romance, say—that there really is a Sherlock Holmes, that the name 'Sherlock Holmes' as used in this story really refers to some man, Sherlock Holmes, and so on. It is therefore presumably part of the pretense of the story that the name 'Sherlock Holmes' is really a name and really has the ordinary semantic function of names. If one mistakenly believed the name to be non-empty rather than empty, it would be part of the mistake that this is a name having the ordinary semantic function of names. This principle I have roughly stated here, just as applied to works of fiction, we can call the pretense principle. What goes on in a work of fiction is a pretense that the actual conditions obtain.[11] A work of fiction need not even say that the names used in it are the 'real names' of the characters, the names that their parents gave them or the correct 'family name', or what their friends call them, and so on. In **Lolita** (Nabokov 1955),[12] in fact, it is stated that the names have been changed to protect the innocent. And that, too, is part of the pretense.

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[11] Many other people have held something like this. But when I gave this talk, and even the subsequent John Locke Lectures, I was simply unaware that this principle is enunciated by Frege. See the following passage:

Names that fail to fulfill the usual role of a proper name, which is to name something, may be called mock proper names [**Scheineigennamen**]. Although the tale of William Tell is a legend and not history and the name 'William Tell' is a mock proper name, we cannot deny it a sense. But the sense of the sentence 'William Tell shot an apple off his son's head'. . . I characterize . . . as fictitious.

Instead of speaking of 'fiction', we could speak of 'mock thoughts' ['**Scheingedanke**]. . . . Even the thoughts are not to be taken seriously as in the sciences: they are only mock thoughts. If Schiller's **Don Carlos** were to be regarded as a piece of history, then to a large extent the drama would be false. But a work of fiction is not meant to be taken seriously in this way at all: it is all play. Even the proper names in the drama, though they correspond to names of historical persons, are mock proper names; they are not meant to be taken seriously in the work. . . .

The logician does not have to bother with mock thoughts, just as a physicist, who sets out to investigate thunder, will not pay any attention to stage-thunder. (Frege 1897:229–30)

There are various puzzles created by this passage, but the exegesis of Frege is not the main point here. Three things, however, should be noted. First, Frege is the first author I am aware of to have emphasized that empty names in fiction, and the sentences that contain them, are pretenses. Second, were the passage I am quoting to be given in full and expounded, it would not be clear that what I am calling the 'Frege–Russell' view was really Frege's view of the senses of names in fiction. Something like it does appear to be Frege's view of names of historical characters; it also appears to be the view of certain contemporary Fregeans, such as Alonzo Church, for legend and fiction (see his remarks about 'Pegasus' in Church 1956: 7, note 18). However, the view of names in fiction one might deduce from the passage quoted will be considerably different. (There is some difficulty understanding the passage, making it self-consistent or consistent with what Frege says elsewhere.) Third, in the passage Frege says that when a historical figure appears even by name in a fictional work, the name is only a "mock proper name". If this means that it is not truly a name of the figure in question, or that it fails to refer to him or her, I don't think this is right. When in **War and Peace** Tolstoy mentions Napoleon, and has him as a character in the work, he is talking about Napoleon (See Chapter 9.)

[12] In the preface, the supposed editor of the manuscript says that the names are not real. For example, 'Humbert Humbert', the name of the narrator and main character, is a pseudonym.

If this is so, the name, of course, doesn't **really** have any referent, it is **pretended** to have a referent; and if some view like Mill's is right, and the semantic function

obvious that any theory has got to start with the fact that these pretenses in fiction are pretenses. It seems that people have worried and puzzled about empty names as if their existence is a great paradox, and that it is very hard to find a theory that can possibly account for the possibility of such things. 'If the function of naming is reference, how could we have empty names?' On the contrary, one has virtually **got** to have empty names because given any theory of reference—given **any** theory

Lots of exegetes have wondered whether the objects of the **Tractatus** were in fact

Hamlet was married—true or false?
Hamlet was indecisive—true or false?
Hamlet thought—true or false?

not, in fact, any such pagan deity, and 'Moloch' meant a type of sacrifice, like a burnt offering.[21] And 'to Moloch' should really be translated 'as a Moloch', the kind of sacrifice. So the idea that there was such a pagan deity was just a mistake. I was explaining this to someone[22] once and saying that on this account there was no such god, and he said to me, 'Of course there was not such a god. You don't believe in pagan deities, do you?' This response reveals an ambiguity in what I had said: one construal involves quantification over real gods, in which it is presumably already guaranteed that there is no such a god as Moloch; the other construal involves quantification over mythical entities, as in 'Was there such a (mythical) god?' The answer might have been 'yes', but according to this particular theory, turns out to be 'no'. The term 'god' turns out to be ambiguous. It may be used in such a way that only a pagan believer of the right kind would recognize the existence of the gods on Mount Olympus. But usually we use it otherwise—for example, when we ask, 'How many Greek gods were there?', 'Can you name any of the Greek gods?', and the like.

Phrasing the question in terms of the existence of fictional characters, the answer to the question 'Did Hamlet exist?' is affirmative, and we are not reporting on what the story says. In the same way, the answer to the question 'Was there such a deity as Moloch?' may be affirmative, contrary to Eissfeldt. One has to make sure what kind of entity one is talking about here. If one asks, 'Was there such a fictional character as Hamlet?' the answer is 'yes'. And, of course, one can ask of a fictional character referred to as A and a fictional character referred to as B A

say that no such person exists. When we say 'There was such a fictional character as Hamlet', we are not referring to a ghostly person—we are referring to a fictional character, one who really does exist, because people have written works of a certain sort. As I said, fictional characters are abstract entities of a certain kind. There are also alleged fictional characters that don't exist—Gonzago is an example. However, there can be **fictional** fictional characters, such as Gonzago. The predicate 'fictional' can be iterated, and Gonzago is a genuine fictional fictional character. There really is such a fictional fictional character, even though there is no such fictional character.[24]

The properties of fictional characters can be various. Many are not those of people (Meinongian or otherwise). Thus a fictional character can be widely popular or little read about, much discussed by literary critics, found in several Shakespeare plays, invented by Conan Doyle, and so on. On the other hand, a convention of our language allows us to elliptically[25] attribute to them properties in the works where they occur. Thus there was a fictional detective who lived on Baker Street, could draw conclusions from small details, and so on. There is a fictional character who was given a mission to kill his uncle, but there isn't one given a mission to kill his great-grandmother. (Or maybe there is; too many works have been written, and quite likely I just haven't heard about a relevant work. Still, if there is such a work, I can say with confidence that the respective fictional characters are not equally famous.)

Two sorts of things remain. First, I should mention, especially in light of the fact that Putnam emphasized these cases, my views about imaginary substances, as, for example, a magic elixir or unicorns. There, too, I would hold that one cannot intelligibly say, as is usually said in the literature, that though there are in fact no unicorns, unicorns might have existed. Why do I say that we cannot say this? Well, unicorns in the myth are supposed to refer to a certain species, a certain natural kind of animals. The term 'tiger' does not just mean 'any old animal that is yellow in color with black stripes'. An animal, whether existing in fact or only counterfactually, even though it looked just like a tiger on the outside, would not, if it were a reptile on the inside, be a tiger, as I have emphasized (Kripke 1980:119–21, and elsewhere).[26] Similarly, of course, something with a different chemical composition from water would not be water. Hence the statement 'water is H_2O' is a necessary truth.

If one is referring to an actual animal, one may of course pick it out by what Putnam calls a 'stereotype' (Putnam 1975a), without knowing what its internal structure is or how to differentiate it from other bogus things like fool's gold or

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[24] Recall (see note 16) that the example is apparently incorrect, but I have kept up the pretense that it is correct. Correct examples plainly do exist. Note that if Eissfeldt is right there is no such fictional character (god) as Moloch, but there is no such fictional fictional character either.

[25] I mean that such a phrase as 'in the relevant stories' can be, and usually is, omitted.

[26] The dictionary definition to which I refer is given there in full.

fool's tiger. David Lewis once mentioned marsupial tigers to me, which might come along. One need not be able to make the differentiation as a layperson, and one may leave it up to the scientists, who may take a long time to do so, but we can still refer to tigers. That is because tigers are around; we have historical causal connections to them in the real world by virtue of which we can refer to them. Those properties that determine their essence can be discovered empirically later; when they are discovered, we can say which possible (or actual) animals resembling tigers wouldn't have been (or are not) tigers.

The same thing, I say, holds of unicorns. If the story about unicorns had really been true, then of course the animals would really be around and we could refer to them and discover their internal structure later. But suppose the story is completely false, that there is no connection with any actual animal. Then one should not say that 'unicorn' in this story simply means (let's say this is all the story tells us) 'that animal which looks like a horse and has a single horn'. One should not say that 'unicorn' simply means **any old animal like that** because then it would not be a pretended name of a species. In fact, one might well discover a new fragment of the story that explains how sometimes people were misled by animals that looked just like unicorns and mistook them for unicorns. These fool's unicorns commanded a high price on the market until their internal structure was discovered. The story, however, does not specify the differences in internal structure. 'Unicorn' is supposed to be the name of a particular species. We are given a partial identification of them; there are other criteria that would pick them out from fool's unicorns, but we are not told what these criteria are. Nor can we say 'Well, let's wait for the biologists to find out', because biologists cannot find anything out about unicorns. Thus of no possible animal can we say that it would have been a unicorn. One can merely say that it would look the way unicorns are supposed to. If a possible world contained two very different species, both fully conforming to the aforementioned story, one could not say which of them would have been unicorns.

Speaking of the actual world, I want similarly to say that a mere discovery that there were animals that answered entirely to whatever the myth says about unicorns would not, in and of itself, constitute a discovery that unicorns really existed. The connection, unlikely though this may be, could be purely coinci-

discover a real connection between the species and the myth—at least in the case of a species that is highly biologically unspecified. If a precise biological specification of it were given, the answer might be different. A complete description of the internal structure (and perhaps a specification of its place on the evolutionary tree, genetic inheritance, and the like) might lead us to say, 'By accident it turns out that there is a species exactly like that'. But that is not what usually goes on in stories and myths. Moreover, the way I have been putting it may be too epistemic. I am not really talking about what we could 'find out'. I am giving requirements for it to be **true** that unicorns actually existed, contrary to what we normally think.[27] However, were the specifications precise in the terms that I have just mentioned, then, if a kind meeting these specifications (structure, position on the evolutionary tree, etc.) actually existed, the story might arguably be true, and genuine propositions about the kind in question might be expressed, even in the (unlikely) case that the connection is purely coincidental.

natural kind—but once again an actual abstract entity, a 'mythical beast', as I think I have seen in one dictionary.

Let me mention perhaps the stickiest point about the doctrine of pretending to express a proposition. One may feel, very strongly, 'How can the statement that unicorns exist not really express a proposition, given that it is false?' Against this, I would say first that it is not sufficient just to be able to say that it is false; one has to be able to say under what circumstances it would have been true, if any. And there seems to be no clear criterion here. Nevertheless, there remains the question of why we call this false. Why do we **say** 'unicorns don't exist'? Similarly, of course, in the case of Sherlock Holmes.

I am not entirely sure of the answer to this, but I will say what I can. First, I think the argument that 'unicorns exist' cannot express a proposition, or that 'Sherlock Holmes really exists' cannot express a proposition, is fairly conclusive. Here, when I talk about 'Sherlock Holmes really exists' I am not using 'Sherlock Holmes' to refer to the fictional character; under this interpretation the name does purport to refer to an existing entity. Nor am I using the sentence under the convention that what counts as true is what the story says.

Suppose I am using the sentence to express an alleged proposition about a detective, given to us by the story. Then I cannot say of a counterfactual situation that it is correctly describable as one in which 'Sherlock Holmes was fond of cricket', 'Sherlock Holmes was a detective', or 'Sherlock Holmes exists'. This is because when I think about them I cannot understand under what circumstances they would have been true—let alone any other propositions about Sherlock Holmes, like 'Sherlock Holmes was the best detective of all time'. Some of these statements are true and do express propositions when we are just reporting on what is said in the story, but, as I said, that is not the sort of usage in question here. (Similarly, sometimes one uses the statement just to say that the story says or implies that **p**, but that is a different sort of usage.) Nor am I talking about statements about fictional characters. These have truth-value in describing actual or counterfactual situations; in particular, such a fictional detective does in fact exist, but we can easily suppose counterfactual situations in which that detective wouldn't have existed, namely, situations where neither Doyle, nor (perhaps) anyone else, wrote or conceived such stories.[30]

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[30] It would have been very tempting to fall back on the fictional character, so that the problem of 'Sherlock Holmes' as an empty name would disappear. Moreover, statements with 'Sherlock Holmes' have multiple ambiguities, on my view. They can be evaluated according to the story, or be about the fictional character (and such a character does exist); but, as we have seen, predicates applying to people can attach to that abstract entity in a derivative way.

Nevertheless, not all empty names are also used as names of fictional characters, nor am I sure that there is always an analogous class of entities. In any event, 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' does look as if it has a usage under which it is true. Note, however, that this is a philosopher's tenseless usage. We are inclined really to say 'Sherlock Holmes never existed', similarly for 'Vulcan' (the planet). To me 'George Washington no longer exists, though he once did' seems to be a reasonably natural expression about a dead person, but I would be disinclined to put it as 'George Washington

Nevertheless, one may feel very strongly that one should truly say 'Unicorns don't exist'. I feel equally strongly, in fact, that one should say the same thing about bandersnatches, the animals Lewis Carroll mentions in 'Jabberwocky' (1872). Presumably, the bandersnatch is a fictional beast. According to the story, it is also a very dangerous one. Of course, there is no such animal as a bandersnatch; we can say 'There are no bandersnatches'. But surely no one would claim here that we can say that under certain circumstances bandersnatches would have existed—that we are just not told enough about them. They are just some dangerous sort of animal. Better get out of their way! They are also 'frumious'. But who knows what that means (though no doubt it is a dangerous or undesirable trait)? This does not prevent us from asserting 'bandersnatches don't exist and never did' or 'there are no bandersnatches'. Then the argument attempting to establish that 'unicorns exist' expresses a proposition on the basis of an intuition that the sentence is false surely cannot be conclusive. Just because we say 'unicorns don't exist', it does not follow that we can compare possible worlds with a concept of unicorns and declare that in it unicorns would have existed or not. In the case of bandersnatches, the situation is even more blatantly obvious.

Please do not say that bandersnatches would have existed if someone—even Lewis Carroll himself, say—had written this very poem about a real animal, for example, tigers, and so bandersnatches would have been tigers. This means that as language would have developed in that counterfactual situation, the sentence 'bandersnatches really existed' would have expressed something true. Of course that is the case, but that is talking about the language that Carroll **would** have used in that situation. It is not talking about Carroll's **actual** language as applied to that situation. Plainly, using 'bandersnatch' as it is used in the poem, one cannot say that this is a situation in which tigers would have been bandersnatches (or that the sentence 'tigers would have been bandersnatches' is true). Tigers would have been **called** 'bandersnatches', but one cannot say that they would have **been** bandersnatches. We cannot say when something would have been a bandersnatch any more than when some animal would have been 'frumious'.

Although we can say 'there are no bandersnatches' or 'bandersnatches don't exist', this plainly does not imply that we would know what it would be like for bandersnatches to have existed. Nor is an impossibility of the ordinary kind involved, such as the necessary nonexistence of round squares. We do say 'bandersnatches don't exist', and thus a certain sentence about bandersnatches seems to have a truth-value, but this does not mean that sentences containing 'bandersnatch' express ordinary propositions. And this I regard as a very substantial problem; perhaps the commentators will have something to say about it. They might just say that I'm wrong. David Kaplan, however, has expressed views

does not exist'. (I am taking it that here there isn't a problem of an empty name either.) I might have thought about this example after listening to a talk by Nathan Salmon.

very similar to mine at various points, and so it will be a problem for him, too. So I don't think he would be likely to say that I'm just wrong.

What can one say here? The same question arises for 'Sherlock Holmes'. We want to say, 'Sherlock Holmes doesn't exist'. One proposal might be to interpret it metalinguistically rather than as about a person. Thus, one might say that 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' should be analyzed as meaning: 'The name "Sherlock Holmes" has no referent'. Then 'Sherlock Holmes does exist' should be analyzed as meaning 'The name "Sherlock Holmes" does have a referent'. And if one has a particular theory of reference, say a historical one, one might continue the analysis further and say 'Sherlock Holmes exists' means 'The chain goes somewhere' and 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' means 'The chain goes nowhere'.

I reject this on a bunch of grounds, already stated in effect above. Let me say first what I accept. Although it may not be a priori, it is close enough to a priori for present purposes that Moses exists if and only if the name 'Moses' has a referent, and that Sherlock Holmes exists if and only if the name 'Sherlock Holmes' has a referent. That is the condition for the reference of the name. In general, relationships like these hold and the material equivalence of metalinguistic statements and corresponding statements in the 'material mode' is automatically accepted.

However, neither in the case of the name 'Moses' nor in the case of 'Sherlock Holmes' does this metalinguistic translation give an analysis that would apply to counterfactual situations also. Counterfactually speaking, Moses might have existed even though the name 'Moses' had no referent. This would be the case if neither he nor anyone else had ever been called 'Moses'. It is also true that the name 'Moses' might have had a referent, where that referent might not have been Moses.[31] However, my greatest emphasis, stated above, has been this. If we say, counterfactually, 'If Moses had not existed, then such and such . . .', or 'If his parents had never met, Moses would not have existed', or simply 'Moses might not have existed', we are speaking about **this man** and asking what might have happened to **him**.

Our problem, then, is this. If we use negative existentials, hypothetically, counterfactually, or whatever, we are normally supposing that we are talking about a referent and asking what would have happened if it had not existed. On the other hand, if we make the same statements categorically, we appear to be

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[31] When I said these things, I was really ignoring many complications. First, many people may in fact be called 'Moses', and this is irrelevant. I would have to speak more carefully of 'the referent', and say something about the referent of the name as we use it in certain discourses, or in the King James translation, or whatever. I shouldn't be implying anything about whether he was, or anyone would have been, himself called 'Moses' in the ordinary sense of 'called'. The name appears to be ancient Egyptian, and is translated into Hebrew in the biblical original. It wasn't really 'Moses', and similar adjustments are needed for a literal description of the corresponding hypothetical situations. But none of this matters very much.

repudiating the object itself and saying that the name used only purports to be a name. Nor can we tell, simply by looking at a work, whether the Pentateuch or Doyle's stories, which strategy is appropriate. But don't we wish to give the statements in question a univocal analysis?

What I have said above about fictional characters gives us some respite. A name of a fictional character has a referent. One might then suppose that the name definitely has a referent (the fictional character). It will be a matter of empirical investigation, concerning a given work, whether it is about a fictional character or a real person.

However, I find myself uneasy about invoking this as a complete solution. There is an inclination to say 'Sherlock Holmes never existed'. Atheists have often been inclined to deny the existence of God, and perhaps sometimes they mean to use it as an empty name.[32] To use the example mentioned above, there is the denial of Moloch that I quoted from Eissfeldt, but if Eissfeldt is wrong, one could imagine two ancients arguing, with one saying that he believes in Jupiter but not in Moloch (and the usage of a follower of Eissfeldt must be explained, too, denying the existence of a particular mythical being). 'The bandersnatch' stands for a genuine fictional species or kind of beast, but we are inclined to say 'there are no bandersnatches', meaning in this instance to deny the existence of the kind (even though no one can say what a bandersnatch would have been).

What gives us any right to talk that way? I wish I knew exactly what to say. But the following is a stab at it. We can sometimes appear to reject a proposition, meaning that there is no true proposition of that form, without committing ourselves to mean that what we say expresses any proposition at all. Thus, without being sure of whether Sherlock Holmes was a person, or whether we can speak of hypothetical situations under which 'Sherlock Holmes did such and such' correctly describes the situation, we can say 'none of the people in this room is Sherlock Holmes, for all are born too late, and so on'; or 'whatever bandersnatches may be, certainly there are none in Dubuque'. Here we should, strictly speaking, be able to say that there is no true proposition to the effect that there are bandersnatches in Dubuque, without committing ourselves to the existence of such a proposition at all. Then 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist', 'there are no bandersnatches', and so on, are limiting cases of the same principle, really denying that there could be propositions of a certain kind at all.

In sum, I have stressed the following:

First, existence is a real predicate of individuals. Even though it may be trivial that everything exists, many things have only contingent existence and might not

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[32] There might be some question about the term 'God' (see Kripke 1980:26–27). Here I am taking it to be a name. However, it might be taken to be a description, 'the unique divine being', and, if so, a Russellian analysis might be applied. (I am inclined to favor the first view, even if the reference is fixed by description.) There has traditionally been an uncontroversial proper name for God, but it is rarely found on the lips of ordinary speakers today.

have existed. Statements of this type should not be reduced to statements about the fulfillment of properties.

Second, whether a work is truth or fiction is not equivalent to whether existential statements asserting that some events occurring in the narrative did or did not happen (or whether some properties instantiated in the narrative did or did not get instantiated). The coincidence may be strange, but it is not impossible that things like these could have happened but had no connection with the work.

Third, when one evaluates what is true according to the story, existential statements have to be evaluated the same way as any others (not differently, as in Hintikka's case of 'Hamlet thinks' versus 'Hamlet exists' discussed above, Macbeth's dagger, etc.).

Fourth, questions of the existence of fictional characters, and other fictional objects, are empirical questions like any other, and sometimes have affirmative or negative answers. They depend on what fictional works exist. Thus, there certainly was a fictional detective, widely read about at the time he was described to exist, living on Baker Street, and so on. We have given examples, however, where the existence of various fictional or mythical objects can be dubious or controversial, and have remarked that the term 'fictional' can be iterated. We may mistakenly believe in the existence of a fictional character. Perhaps the most striking case (not mentioned above) would be a case where we took something to be a work of fiction when it was actually genuine history, written and so intended.

Finally, I had a residue of questions that appear to involve genuinely empty names and real assertions of nonexistence. These have just been discussed.[33]

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