

# Commitment Without Consequences

A Carnapian Approach to Fictional Objects  
and Negative Existence Statements

by

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## Abstract

The overall aim of this thesis is to present a fresh perspective on three closely related areas of enquiry: Descriptivist theories of reference, Direct Reference theories and the Carnapian approach to questions of existence and identity. This perspective is developed and tested by a critical analysis of the work of a leading Carnapian theorist, Amie Thomasson, and by looking at some of the central problems associated with our talk of fictional objects. It concludes in an account of negative existence statements and fictional objects as possibly existing objects.

In Chapter one I set out the key elements of Carnap's approach, as that approach was developed over time and in dialogue with his colleague Quine. In Chapter two I explore the relation between the previously mentioned three areas of enquiry through an examination of Amie Thomasson's brand of Carnapian meta-ontology. In Chapters four and five I develop the view that fictional objects are objects that meet the criteria of existence and identity of at least one linguistic framework but fail to meet the criteria of another, preferred framework. This provides the basis for a neo-Carnapian account of fictional objects in terms of the relations between linguistic frameworks, a novel approach to the questions surrounding such objects. In chapter five, the concluding chapter of the thesis, I further develop my explanation of how there can be truths about fictional and non-existent objects by giving an ontological version of John MacFarlane's relativity principle. This paves the way for a neo-Carnapian analysis of true negative existence statements. Here I integrate the story I have told about fictional objects and the relations between linguistic frameworks with theories of reference and meaning. In particular, I incorporate a satisfactory concept of the rigid designation of ordinary proper names (and, potentially, of natural and artefactual

kind terms). This then leads on to an explanation of how fictional objects, *contra* Kripke and many others, may reasonably said to be possible objects that, though they don't exist, might exist under different circumstances.

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## Introduction

‘Commitment without consequences’ certainly sounds appealing – something like the kind of loving detachment we strive for in our personal relationships. In terms of our relationship with the world at large and our conception of what exists, I believe that Carnap’s approach does mark a new level – if not of detachment exactly, then of abstraction. We are committed to the objects that are internal to any linguistic or epistemological framework. This commitment can be determined in the manner set out by Quine. However, it is a commitment that has no necessary consequences for any other framework. It may suggest analogies – and these analogies may be very fruitful – but if taken to be automatic they may also be quite misleading. Distinct frameworks may have distinct ontologies. These need no justification in terms of a unified account of what exists across all frameworks. This is reflected in a principle of tolerance towards frameworks. We can, though, try to describe the common processes and methods with which we engage a plurality of frameworks. We can describe how we construct, deploy, combine, iterate and accommodate frameworks. This thesis is an attempt to make a small contribution to that description.

In some ways, Carnap’s approach can be characterised as meta-ontology as opposed to ontology. From a broader historical perspective – one which we glimpse in the first chapter – it also reflects a move away from modernist aspirations. This is the modernism that Alain Badiou (2005/2007) describes as ‘the passion for the real’, where the real is (amongst other things) a single, universal, scientific reality (p. 32 and *passim*). Carnap himself begins as a leader of this modernist project. Quine, in many ways, continues it. Even now, some seventy years later, the creative tension between the modernist approach and

an approach that seeks to surpass or deflate it is ongoing. I agree with Karen Bennett (2009) when she observes that ‘there is no obvious reason to think that all metaphysical debates are on a par’ and that ‘we need to give substantive consideration to specific disputes’, because we ‘need to do metaphysics in order to do metametaphysics’ (p. 43). Actually, this is something that a deeper understanding of the principle of tolerance entails. Accordingly, I’ve talked of ‘a Carnapian approach to ontology’, rather than ‘meta-ontology’, even when the latter kind of expression may be less clumsy. And, of course, I’ve tried to apply such an approach to some substantive metaphysical puzzles, most notably those surrounding the ontology of fictional objects. Ultimately, in the last chapter, I’ve also assayed the question that has preoccupied so many doctoral theses and which is one of the most traditional metaphysical questions of all: what does it mean to say that something doesn’t exist?

The passage from the first chapter of this thesis to the last is, however, not a systematically structured, single argument. It will come as no surprise in this context to say that it is more in the nature of an individual journey of discovery. The first chapter provides a basis for subsequent enquiry by giving a clear view of how Carnap’s deflationary project develops, both over time and in its sustained, creative dialogue with Quine’s views on ontology. This is a different approach from that adopted in most considerations of meta-ontology. The more popular approach involves making sense of Carnap’s ‘Empiricism Semantics and Ontology’ in the light of various contemporary frameworks and forming a view on what deflationism about ontology may or may not mean in these contemporary terms. I have tried to pick up some of the themes that emerge from more historically oriented accounts. An example is Carnap’s awareness that terms that have an existing meaning in one framework may be put to a new use in a new framework. As a consequence, terms don’t have just one meaning, as endowed by one framework. (That insight is also

reflected in the critique of Amie Thomasson's version of Carnap's method, as undertaken in the second chapter.)

A key question for the first chapter is 'what is a linguistic framework?' I've given a range of answers. A linguistic framework is an epistemological framework – and it is an ontological framework because Carnap is seeking to develop a scientific, naturalistic conception of existence. I've assumed that we are fairly comfortable in thinking of a Carnapian framework as the kind of large-scale scientific paradigm that Thomas Kuhn made familiar in his work – the Aristotelean, Newtonian or Einsteinian paradigms in physics, for example. At the lower limit I've adapted Quine's suggestion that clusters of observation sentences of a certain minimal form may be sufficient to have 'critical semantic mass'. I've also suggested that this fits well with a Saussurean conception of small scale linguistic systems, large enough only to define terms, at least in part, by their mutual opposition.

In between, my prime examples of Carnapian frameworks (as set out in later chapters) are fictional discourses and the ontology they bring with them. No doubt many would see this as taking the doctrine of tolerance for frameworks to an unacceptable extreme. I argue that it need only be justified on the grounds of utility – and fictions clearly have a great number of uses. In many ways, this thesis is an exploration of the ways in which utility trumps veracity – at least to the extent that veracity is thought of as correspondence to some unified, external reality.

The second chapter is a critical review of Amie Thomasson's Carnapian meta-ontology, what she comes to call 'easy ontology'. This chapter is essentially an exploration of the relations between three areas of enquiry: descriptivist theories of reference, direct reference theories and a Carnapian approach to ontological questions. Thomasson argues as follows. Direct reference theories face two well-known problems. First they have a problem



(the so called '*qua* problem') explaining how we disambiguate the reference of singular and general nominative terms, if that reference is determined in an initial moment of ostension and dubbing. Second, we refer only to actual objects. How, then, can we say truly of anything that it doesn't exist?

We must, argues Thomasson, use moderately precise, sortal concepts to disambiguate the objects we name. Those concepts may then be thought of as the application and co-application conditions of the referring terms involved. These conditions, in turn, serve as criteria of existence and identity for the objects and kinds in question. This is just as we would expect a descriptivist theory to have been included in Carnap's account of referring terms within a linguistic framework.

The difficulty for Thomasson's account, however, is that no matter whether the disambiguation of the referent in the initial moment of naming is very vague and general or very precise and specific – and no matter whether it invokes apparently essential properties, or accidental properties, or some mix of the two – it can be purely *provisional* and still serve its purposes. Names and natural/artefactual kind terms can function to return us to the site of an ongoing enquiry. The initial disambiguation of the referent is not a once and for all matter – and the historical links in name use chains keep track, over time, of the site of enquiry at the origin of those chains. As a result, Thomasson's elegant attempt to kill two birds with one stone – that is, to resolve both the *qua* problem and the problem of true negative existence claims – through Carnapian application conditions for referring terms, does not succeed.

A further criticism I have of Thomasson's approach has to do with her interpretation of Carnap. In some sense this reflects his earlier, more polemically inclined writings such as 1932's 'Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language'. For

Thomasson, referring terms risk being meaningless unless they are well-formed. That is, unless they come with determinate application conditions. If they are well-formed, we just need to attend to these application conditions, (as the only meaning these terms have), as truth conditions for existence and identity claims. Indeed, we must do this on pain of asking metaphysical questions that are unanswerable, if not downright meaningless. I argue that the plurality of frameworks should be our focus rather than the conditions under which language, as such, functions. The plurality of frameworks reflects the potentially infinite plurality of our purposes. As a result – and allowing that fictional frameworks serve many purposes – reference never fails. It is incorrigible because it will always have some initial function, no matter how abject. A referring term can only fall into disuse.

This idea of the incorrigibility of reference is closely tied to the view of fiction I advance. Fictional discourses are Carnapian frameworks. And one framework may serve under the condition of another. These are the two ideas that drive chapters three and four. Here I develop the view that fictional objects are objects that meet the criteria of existence and identity of at least one linguistic framework – even if the criteria of that framework only appeal to the say so of the fictional text. Fictional objects also, though, fail to meet the criteria of another, preferred framework. This provides a definition of fictional objects that does not include any intentional element. It can apply to both fictional objects like Sherlock Holmes and mistaken objects like the planet Vulcan. It can also, I suspect, be very usefully applied to the populous realm of socially constructed objects, although that is not an area I am able to explore in this thesis. As framework internal objects, fictional objects may be the subject of truths of many kinds and I explore the challenges in accounting consistently for all of these truths.

In the last chapter I highlight the analysis of the previous two chapters with regard to the relations between frameworks. I argue that this analysis may be further supported by appeal to MacFarlane's (2014) relativity principle, as applied to ontology. The principle that results is this: the framework of reference to an object may differ from the framework under whose criteria that object is evaluated with regard to questions of existence and identity. The intuitions of direct reference theories – in particular that names and kind terms are rigid designators that refer to the same (kinds of) object in all possible worlds, even in worlds where those objects and kinds do not exist – can then be accommodated. They are accommodated by the *independence* of the framework of reference from frameworks of evaluation. We can, now, also truthfully state that rigidly designated objects don't exist, if they fail to meet the criteria of existence of an evaluating framework. The objects referred to remain the same, but their position in relation to other frameworks varies. This is the most ambitious claim of the thesis in that it proposes a solution to what Brock calls the 'ubiquitous' problem of empty names. That problem is ubiquitous, Brock argues, because it cannot be solved by either direct reference theories or descriptivist theories that make sufficient allowance for our intuitions of rigidity in reference.

There is so much to be said about all these topics that many trade-offs have been made in exchange for the overall trajectory of the thesis and a desire to make some bold claims about some vexed issues. In the end, one is left with a sort of tip without the iceberg, hoping the tip will still float. In an attempt to allay some of these anxieties I've tied on a sea anchor in the form of an appendix. I hope this fills out the picture I develop of Carnapian frameworks a little further by expounding a Wittgenstein-style analysis of the problem of material composition, as an alternative to Thomasson's analysis. While this discussion appeals to deflationary ideas that Carnap does not himself articulate, I believe he would be

sympathetic to this account. More importantly perhaps, it shows that there may be good empirical evidence for the existence of inherited, innate linguistic frameworks – frameworks we use in a great variety of ways every day, without being fully aware that we do so.

# Chapter 1

## Commitment Without Consequences: Carnap's Deflationism about Ontology.

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The aim of this chapter is to develop an initial understanding of Carnap's deflationary approach to ontology. First, I outline Carnap's approach as that is presented in his own terms. Second, I undertake a critical evaluation of that approach based on Quine's critique of Carnap's position. Third, I draw some initial conclusions about the outcome of that evaluation. I am seeking answers to two straightforward questions. What aspects of Carnap's method remain viable? And how may those elements be reconciled with Quine's criticisms and other perspectives encountered in the exposition of Carnap's view?

In subsequent chapters I will consider in some detail Amie Thomasson's version of Carnap's deflationism and some of the wide array of other contemporary views on this topic. However, I hope the initial conclusions in this chapter will provide the foundation for an understanding of Carnap's linguistic frameworks and their uses. In the second part of the thesis I will then consider how our conception of frameworks might help explain some of the most puzzling features of literary fictions and negative existence statements.

A further breakdown of this chapter may be given as follows:

#### Section 1.

- a) I summarise, by way of introduction, Carnap's seminal article of 1950, *Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology* (ESO).
- b) I fill out the background to Carnap's thesis in ESO, considering writings both before and after that article. I am guided by two closely related questions: What is the nature, in Carnap's view, of linguistic frameworks; and how may we understand the distinction he makes between internal and external existence questions?

## **Section 2:**

- a) I set out Quine's critique and examine the points at issue between the two philosophers.**
- b) I examine Quine's attack on the analytic /synthetic distinction and the impact this may have on Carnap's approach.**
- c) I examine Carnap's response to Quine and other possible responses, with a view to crystallising some essential elements of a Carnapian deflationary approach to ontology.**

## Section 1.

### a. Introduction to Carnap's deflationism

In his seminal article of 1950, 'Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology' (ESO), Rudolf Carnap sets out to show that the new science of semantics, as a scientific philosophical method that replaces traditional metaphysics, opens up a new way of understanding abstract objects. This project is prompted by criticism, from a number of Carnap's fellow logical empiricists, of his willingness to quantify over abstract entities in his work in semantics. As Carnap puts it, they contend that reference to such entities amounts to an illegitimate hypostatization. Such reference is considered to be either meaningless or at least in need of proof that such entities 'do actually exist'.

These objections were of particular concern to Carnap because they came, not from philosophers championing traditional metaphysics but from fellow anti-metaphysical empiricists such as Ernest Nagel, W.V. Quine, Nelson Goodman, and others.<sup>1</sup> Quine and Goodman, for example, had pursued a nominalist position in their article "Steps Toward a Constructive Nominalism" published in 1947. Here they state that they 'do not believe in abstract entities.' (Goodman & Quine, 1947, p. 105). They note that this is not because they apply a spatio-temporal criterion of existence, a criterion that abstract objects fail to meet. Rather, they mean something more than this. 'We renounce them altogether... Any system that countenances abstract entities we deem unsatisfactory as a final philosophy' (Goodman & Quine, 1947, p. 105). This view is 'based on philosophical intuition that cannot be justified by appeal to anything more ultimate' (Goodman & Quine, 1947, p. 105).

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<sup>1</sup> His 'Parting of the Ways' with traditional metaphysics, and in particular Martin Heidegger, dating from around 1931, is lucidly discussed in Michael Friedman's book of that name (Friedman, 2000).



It is this kind of metaphysical approach, then, that is Carnap's target in ESO. In the early paragraphs of ESO Carnap identifies his target, stating clearly that nominalism is not a position that is sustainable on a consistent basis. We might profess it in principle but we will be bound to use abstract objects in our empirical sciences and in the logical work that analyses those sciences. In this way, if we were to deny the reality of abstract objects, we would be like a churchgoer who professes one thing on Sundays and practises another during the week. Instead, we should recognise that the traditional opposition between a Platonist and nominalist ontology is fundamentally misconceived. Using a language referring to abstract entities 'does not imply embracing a Platonic ontology but is perfectly compatible with empiricism and scientific thinking' (Carnap, 1950, p. 209).

The means by which Carnap (1947) seeks to 'overcome nominalistic scruples' (p. 206) in talking about abstract entities is to make a fundamental distinction between two kinds of question concerning the existence or reality of entities. Internal existence questions are questions asked within a linguistic framework of entities. Carnap's examples of such frameworks include various frameworks of numbers, (the natural numbers, the real numbers), the frameworks of classes, propositions and properties, the framework of things or ordinary objects with which we are familiar from an early age – and so on. In the case of the framework of things, for example, 'To recognise something as a real thing or event means to succeed in incorporating it into the framework of things at a particular space-time position so that it fits together with the other things recognised as real, according to the rules of the framework' (Carnap, 1950, p. 207).

External existence questions concern 'the existence or reality of the framework itself' (Carnap, 1950, pp. 209-10). These questions are problematic, says Carnap: 'To be real

in the scientific sense means to be an element of the framework; hence this concept cannot be meaningfully applied to the framework itself' (Carnap, 1950, pp. 210-11). That is, we cannot question the reality of elements of a framework in terms other than those of that framework – as for example, when we ask whether 'there really are entities of the kinds in question' (Carnap, 1950, p. 223). We can't refer to entities within a framework and then go on and ask a further question – do they really exist from a purported neutral perspective. Questions concerning the existence of entities asked from outside the framework in which the terms that refer to those entities were first introduced risk being pseudo-questions, 'without cognitive content' (Carnap, 1950, p. 219). There are legitimate external questions, however, and this is what those who ask such questions 'have perhaps in mind' (Carnap, 1950, p. 211). These are practical questions about 'whether or not to accept and use the forms of expression for the framework in question' (Carnap, 1950, p. 211). The practical question is a question of degree – the degree of utility of the framework and the extent to which it suits our purposes to accept it. 'The purposes for which the language is intended to be used ... will determine which factors are relevant for the decision' (Carnap, 1950, p. 23). The 'efficiency, fruitfulness and simplicity' (Carnap, 1950, p. 211) of the framework of things, for example, might be relevant criteria. More generally, a framework may be 'judged as being more or less expedient, fruitful, conducive to the aim for which the language is intended' (Carnap, 1950, p. 219) But we should never say that the utility of a framework is evidence for the reality of the entities that the framework assumes, because we would then be appealing again to a framework-external sense of 'reality'. The utility of the framework is evidence only for the view that we should accept and continue to use the framework in question.

For Carnap, then, the only external questions we might legitimately ask concern the utility of this or that framework and the entities to which it refers, with respect to a given purpose. This accords with the broader thrust of Carnap's position in ESO. Philosophy as it is newly conceived, as primarily semantic or logical analysis, (rather than as traditionally conceived, as ontology) need have no fear of abstract entities. It can go ahead and analyse linguistic frameworks that refer to abstract entities in just the same way that it analyses languages that talk about everyday things. If there are names in a framework of abstract objects then they refer to their 'designata' in just the same way that the name 'Fido' refers to the dog Fido. Carnap doesn't hesitate to bite the bullet on this issue. He notes that Gilbert Ryle has said that the "'Fido': Fido" model or theory is 'naïve' (Carnap, 1950, p. 222) or even 'grotesque' (Carnap, 1950, p. 224) because it hypostatizes a referent for every apparently referring term on the model of our naming of everyday objects. Carnap sees this objection as simply part of the ontological tradition:

Our previous discussions concerning the acceptance of frameworks enables us now to clarify the situation with respect to abstract entities as designata... generally speaking, if someone accepts a framework of entities, then he is bound to admit its entities as possible designata. (Carnap, 1950, pp. 222-3)

As we've noted, Carnap lists a number of examples of 'Frameworks of Entities'. Specifically: the world of things; the system of numbers; the framework of propositions; the framework of thing properties; the framework of integers and rational numbers; the framework of real numbers; and, the framework of a spatio-temporal coordinate system for physics. He then goes on to 'summarise the essential characteristics of situations involving the introduction of a new framework of entities...' (Carnap, 1950, p. 218) That introduction takes place within the context of our already existing language. It proposes new forms of

expression and new rules for the use of those expressions – the latter being application criteria/conditions for the forms of expression. Carnap makes it clear that it is not the introduction of constants or proper names that is essential to this process. That is because there will be some names already in use in the language before the introduction of a framework that also uses those terms. He gives the examples of terms like ‘blue’ or ‘house’. These are already in use before the introduction of the property framework. Similarly “ten”, as in “I have ten fingers” is in use ‘before the framework of numbers is introduced’ (Carnap, 1950, p. 218). The two essential steps are as follows. First, we introduce ‘a general term, a predicate of higher level, for the new kind of entities’, so that we can say of any particular entity ‘that it belongs to this kind (e.g. “red is a *property*”, “five is a *number*”)’ (Carnap, 1950, p. 218). The second step is ‘the introduction of variables of the new type. ... The new entities are values of these variables’ (Carnap, 1950, p. 218). With the help of the variables, ‘general sentences concerning the new entities can be formulated’, sentences that may be questions or answers to internal questions. Questions may be either empirical or logical. True answers may be either factually true or analytic (Carnap, 1950, p. 219). As one commentator observes, there is ‘...a two phase picture, according to which one first institutes meanings ... and then applies them...’ (Brandom, 2014, p. 14).

Here is an example Carnap gives of a purely analytic answer:

(a) “‘Five’ designates a number’.

The formulation of this statement presupposes that our language L contains the forms of expressions corresponding to what we have called the framework of numbers, in particular, numerical variables and the general term ‘number’. If L contains these forms, then the following is an analytic statement in L:

(b) ‘Five is a number’

Further, to make the statement (a) possible, L must contain an expression like 'designates' or 'is a name of' for the semantical relation of designation. If suitable rules for this term are laid down, the following is likewise analytic:

(c) "“Five” designates five' (Carnap, 1950, pp. 222-3).

Carnap (1950) notes that Quine was 'the first to recognise the importance of variables as indicating the acceptance of entities' and goes on to cite an early version of Quine's doctrine that we are ontologically committed to all and only those objects that fall within the range of values of variables in a given use of language (Carnap, 1950, pp. 218-9).<sup>2</sup>

Carnap observes that in traditional ontology we must first determine the ontological status of the referent before deciding what use can be made of a framework of such entities. Otherwise, how are we to know what truths could come from reference to these entities? 'They believe that only after making sure that there really are entities of the kinds in question are we justified in accepting the framework by incorporating the linguistic forms into our language' (Carnap, 1950, p. 223).

This, of course, is Goodman and Quine's (1947) stated motivation for trying to construct a nominalistic framework. They are unwilling to accept frameworks that entail the existence of objects that they don't believe exist – where that belief is based on some framework-prior or framework-external mode of apprehension. While they believe their nominalism is an anti-metaphysical position, we can view Carnap as arguing that they have

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<sup>2</sup> For Carnap we are committed to the existence of entities of the lowest logical type - that is names - as well as to intensional entities like predicates and extensional entities like properties. In some sense though, we are only committed to the use of names, given Carnap's substitutional theory of quantification, as exemplified in 1947's *Meaning and Necessity*. In the preface to that book he describes his method in this way: 'The method will be contrasted with various other semantical methods used in traditional philosophy or by contemporary authors. They all have one characteristic in common: They all regard an expression in a language as the name of a concrete or an abstract entity. In contradistinction, the method here proposed takes an expression not as naming anything but as possessing an intension and an extension.'

not achieved a sufficient level of abstraction in attempting to overcome metaphysics on behalf of the empirical sciences. That is, they have not done so at the level of scientific *method* rather than just at the level of substantive judgements. In this way, surprising as it seems, they remain with the framework of traditional metaphysics. From the point of view of that tradition, if we are to say that all entities referred to within linguistic frameworks are on an equal footing then we must be embracing a Platonic realism about abstract objects like numbers. But this is not the case, says Carnap. We are not making a metaphysical assertion about the nature of these entities. In some sense, the 'semantical method' does not involve a belief in the reality or unreality of abstract entities at all. On this point, Carnap notes that the Vienna Circle (of which he was a part), influenced by Wittgenstein, 'rejected both the thesis of the reality of the external world and the thesis of its irreality as pseudo-statements' (Carnap, 1950 pp. 220-1). The same was the case, he says for the thesis of the reality of abstract objects and the nominalist thesis that they are not real.

This mention of 'pseudo-statements' marks a natural point at which to conclude the preliminary exposition of Carnap's position in ESO and begin an exploration of that position in more depth. As I've noted earlier, there are two main questions that arise from Carnap's thesis. First, how are we to understand more exactly the nature of linguistic frameworks? Second, how are we to understand the internal/external distinction as a decisive distinction for the practice of metaphysical and ontological enquiry? These two questions are closely linked and I will effectively pursue them together. However, we may begin by looking into the historical background to Carnap's conception of linguistic frameworks.

## Section 1.

### b. Background to ESO

What are linguistic frameworks? For Carnap the ideal examples of linguistic frameworks are those given in what he begins by calling 'logical syntax' (as in *The Logical Syntax of Language*, 1937) but eventually comes to call 'pure semantics' (Carnap, 1955, p. 33). That is, frameworks are what we encounter in the construction and analysis of systems in symbolic logic. Linguistic frameworks are central to Carnap's philosophy because he is enrolled in Russell's broader project of transforming traditional philosophy and, in particular, metaphysics into an investigation of logical forms. These forms reveal the structure of the empirical sciences – and when applied to philosophical problems they may reveal the structure of those problems, using 'empirical facts of the matter from whatever sciences may be pertinent to the investigation' (Richardson, 1990, p. 18). In this way

...it becomes possible at last for philosophy to deal with its problems piecemeal and to obtain, as the sciences do, such partial and probably not wholly correct results as subsequent investigation can utilise while it supplements and improves them ... a scientific philosophy such as I wish to recommend will be piecemeal and tentative like the other sciences... (Russell, as cited in Richardson 1990, p. 11)

Frameworks are, then, the scientifically and logically acceptable substitute for metaphysics. They are the manifestation of a method – namely *construction theory*. And a method is what we are left with once we have eliminated traditional metaphysics (Carnap, 1932, p. 77).

The concepts of any domain be it geometry or economics, allow themselves to be so ordered that certain concepts are placed undefined at the beginning and the

remaining concepts are defined with the help of these “basic concepts” ... Such a *derivation* occurs through an *explicit definition*, i.e., through establishing that a certain new concept word is to be synonymous with an expression that consists of old words, i.e., of such have already been defined or designate the basic concepts.

(Carnap, as cited in Richardson 1990, p. 18)

This ordering or genealogy of concepts may also be called ‘explication’ – that is, the making explicit of definitions that are already implicit in the discourse under consideration.

The prime example of such a system is Carnap’s attempt to account for the external world as a logical construct of sense data (cf. Quine, 1969, p. 74). This is the legendary *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt* or ‘The Logical Structure of the World’ (1928), generally viewed as the ‘first systematic attempt to use the resources of modern logic to carry out the reduction of all scientific discourse into the terms of immediate experience’ (Richardson, 1990, p. 3). The logical resources are supplied by Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia Mathematica* (1910, 1912, 1913), (which includes the theory of types), itself an attempt to reduce mathematics to logic. These resources are, to paraphrase Quine (1980, p. 39), exploited with such ingenuity that Carnap succeeds in defining an impressive array of additional sensory (or “phenomenalistic” or “auto-psychological”) concepts on the basis of a very few primitive or undefined sensory concepts. But in the received view, the rigour and ingenuity of Carnap’s attempt at this radical reduction only serves to illustrate the impossibility of the project. If this attempt fails, then any subsequent attempt must also do so.

There are a number of ways in which this failure may be analysed and I will return to some of them shortly. But let us look first of all at the aspirations Carnap has for construction theory – the method of ‘logical’ as opposed to ‘traditional’ empiricism – and the impact this is thought to have on metaphysics. The first aspiration is empirical in a



straightforward sense. All meaningful sentences – that is, sentences which are capable of logical construction – are reducible ultimately to some form of ‘observation’ or ‘protocol’ sentence. Here is how Carnap describes this requirement in his most concerted attack on traditional metaphysics, *The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language* (EMLAL) (Carnap, 1932).

Let ‘a’ be any word and ‘S(a)’ the elementary sentence in which it occurs. Then the sufficient and necessary condition for ‘a’ being meaningful’ may be given by each of the following formulations, which ultimately say the same thing.

1. The **empirical criteria** for a are known.
2. It has been stipulated from what protocol sentences ‘S(a)’ is **deducible**
3. The **truth conditions** for ‘S(a)’ are fixed.
4. The method of **verification** of ‘S(a)’ is known.<sup>3</sup> (Carnap, 1932, p. 63)

We can understand a term like ‘arthropode’ (*sic.*) through an elementary sentence like ‘the thing x is an arthropode’, he says. ‘It has been stipulated that a sentence of this form is deducible from premises of the form “x is an animal,” “x has a segmented body,” “x has jointed legs,” and that conversely each of these sentences is deducible from the former sentence. By means of these stipulations about deducibility (and the other formulations given above) the meaning of the word ‘arthropode’ is fixed. ‘It is in this way that every word of the language is reduced to other words and finally to the words which occur in the so called “observation sentences” or “protocol sentences”. It is through this reduction that the

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<sup>3</sup> What does Carnap mean by truth conditions? I think the answer must be the rules of construction of a system, which lead to the substitutability of constants for variables and for other constants. I’m not able here to describe the difference between this conception and truth as satisfaction as in Tarski. I think this conception of truth conditions does yield an answer to the question of ‘what are the truth conditions of existential claims’ in the modern sense, provided the linguistic framework is sufficiently elaborated.

word acquires its meaning' (Carnap, 1932, p. 63). The content and form of primary or protocol sentences has yet to be settled, says Carnap. It is customary to say that they refer to 'the given' and there are a wide range of opinions as to what 'the given' entails. But this need not concern us, he says. The meaning of a word is determined by its 'criterion of application' (Carnap, 1932, p. 63) – that is those four formulations listed above. Since this is stipulated, it takes away our freedom to decide what we wish to 'mean' by a word. Nothing less – and nothing more – can be meant by the word. 'The meaning is implicitly contained in the criterion – all that remains to be done is make the meaning explicit' (Carnap, 1932, p. 63).

This logical analysis of language now allows for a new critique of metaphysics. It 'reveals the alleged statements of metaphysics to be pseudo-statements' (Carnap, 1932, p. 61). A pseudo-statement is a sequence of words that looks like a statement at first glance but, in fact, is not well formed within the logical structure of the language in question. It is, therefore, not a statement at all. Strictly speaking, it is a meaningless sequence of sounds. There are two basic kinds of pseudo-statement. 'Either they contain a word which is erroneously believed to have meaning, or the constituent words are meaningful, yet are put together in a counter-syntactical way so that they do not yield a meaningful statement' (Carnap, 1932, p. 61).

In the first case, words in our established language have an original meaning that does have an empirical basis – a meaning that has some grounding in experience. An example is the word 'principium' or principle. Originally it meant a beginning in the sense of the temporally prior. Now it has come to mean, in metaphysics, the prior in some metaphysical respect. But the criteria of application for the term in this metaphysical use are lacking. In this way the word has been deprived of its original meaning without being

given a new meaning (Carnap, 1932, p. 66). It survives on its connotations, 'an empty shell'. It looks meaningful because of the associations and feelings it evokes in us as a result of its past use (Carnap, 1932, p. 66).

Another example Carnap gives is the word 'God'. It is divested of its earlier meanings – that is, its mythological uses. In these uses it is meaningful. The word refers to physical, human-like beings with super-powers. Or perhaps it refers to spirits – but these spirits are nevertheless immanent to the physical world. Claims made using the term 'God' in this earlier sense have application criteria. These allow us to know the conditions of the verification of its reference. We can then see that claims made using the term are simply false. There is no empirical evidence of the causal efficacy of these beings. However, in its metaphysical use, 'the word "God" refers to something beyond experience' (Carnap, 1932, p. 66). It is divested of its previous meaning and not given a new one. It looks as though it has such a meaning. But on closer inspection we see that it is either used in logically illegitimate combinations of words or it defers to other terms like 'primordial basis' or 'the absolute' or 'the unconditioned' or 'the autonomous' and so on. The first requirement of logic is not met for any of these terms. That first requirement is, as we have seen above, 'to specify its syntax, i.e. the form of its occurrence in elementary sentences' (Carnap, 1932, p. 66). Such a sentence would, in this case, need to take the form 'x is a God'. But metaphysicians either reject this form entirely or 'neglect to indicate the syntactical category of the variable x' (Carnap 1932, p. 66). Syntactical categories are what Carnap will later call 'predicates of a higher sort'. That is, they represent the distinctive commitments of linguistic frameworks. The examples Carnap gives here are: material thing; property of things; relation between things; number; property of numbers; relation between numbers – and so forth (Carnap, 1932, p. 68).

In terms of sentences, rather than words, meaningless pseudo-statements are generated in a number of ways, says Carnap. The defective character of these metaphysical statements does not appear on the surface because grammatical syntax does not impose the requirements of logical syntax. But in terms of logical syntax one important kind of error that can occur is a confusion of logical types, according to Russell's theory of types. This makes some metaphysical statements akin to the artificial example, 'Caesar is a prime number'. As Carnap (1932) puts it, 'names of persons and names of numbers belong to different logical types, and so do accordingly predicates of persons (e.g. "general" [as in "Caesar is a general"]]) and predicates of numbers' (p. 75). More subtle forms of this error abound in the discourse of metaphysicians like Hegel and Heidegger, says Carnap. He takes a passage from Heidegger in which the author's questioning of the experience of Being, undertaken in a certain anxious mood, leads him to make the claim – now notorious due to its dissection by Carnap – that 'the Nothing itself nihilates' (or 'nothings', or even, 'noths' – as in 'The Nothing itself noths'). Heidegger's style of enquiry does not, of course, claim to be logical. 'The very idea of "logic" dissolves in the whirl of a more basic questioning', says Heidegger (as cited in Carnap, 1932, p. 71). But what we witness, according to Carnap, is the transition from sense to nonsense in ordinary language (Carnap, 1932, p. 70). It could count as poetry, he says, for it is about the feelings associated with words and is essentially the expression of an attitude toward life. This makes Nietzsche's explicitly poetic, (not to say parodic), style in 'Thus Spake Zarathustra' the most acceptable of these metaphysical discourses. But as philosophy it is misplaced. Metaphysicians of this kind are, he concludes, 'musicians without musical ability' (Carnap, 1932, p. 72).

Apart from this, somewhat uncharacteristic, indulgence in dialectical pleasures, Carnap does not confine himself to easy targets in illustrating the errors of logic that are characteristic of

metaphysics. It is worth noting one further example, since it has broader significance – before moving on from EMLAL to other texts.

The issue concerns the attribution of existence. This issue emerges, says Carnap, in Kant's refutation of the ontological proof of God's existence, in which he asserts that existence is not a property of objects. With the advent of modern logic Carnap (1932) says there is now 'full consistency' with this view. He continues, 'The syntactical form in which modern logic introduces the sign for existence is such that it cannot, like a predicate, be applied to signs for objects, but only to predicates' (p. 74). In this view existence is a property of properties – namely, that they are instantiated. A failure to observe this rule is apparent, says Carnap, in Descartes' dictum 'Cogito ergo sum.' For 'existence can be predicated only in conjunction with a predicate not in conjunction with a name [or indexical like 'I']. An existential statement does not have the form "a exists" (as in "I am" i.e. "I exist") but "there exists something of such and such a kind". There is a second error as well, observes Carnap, in the transition from 'I think' to 'I exist'. The only existential claim that can be deduced from a statement of the basic subject predicate form 'P(a)' concerns the predicate not the subject of that statement. As Carnap puts it, from 'I am a European', for example, we may only deduce that there is something that is a European not that 'I exist'. Similarly, from 'I think' we can only deduce that there is something that thinks (p.74).

In *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1937) this logical approach to defining pseudo-statements is developed from one based on the theory of types to one based on the closely related distinction between object-language and meta-language. Carnap writes:

The non-metaphysical logic of science, also, takes a different point of view from that of empirical science, not, however, because it assumes any metaphysical

transcendancy, but because it makes the language-forms themselves the objects of a new investigation. On this view, it is only possible to speak either *in* or *about* the sentences of this domain, and thus only object-sentences and syntactical sentences can be stated. (Carnap, as cited in Friedman, 1987, p. 540)

Pseudo-questions are the result of employing what Carnap calls the ‘material mode of speech’ (Carnap, as cited in Friedman, 1987, p. 540). Friedman (1987) describes this as ‘attempting to speak in both the object-language and the meta-language, simultaneously as it were’ (p. 540). It is important, I think, to see that the ‘domain’ in question is that of ‘language forms’. Object-sentences are found within these frameworks. ‘Syntactical sentences’ must then be understood as including sentences about language forms – their practical utility, for example, and, I will argue, the relations and structures in which language forms take part. In other words, there doesn’t seem, in principle, to be any reason to prohibit further semantic ascent, to talk about frameworks and the relations between frameworks so long as ‘language forms’ or frameworks and their contents remain in place further down the linguistic hierarchy. We may recall that meta-languages include their (relatively positioned) object-languages as a part of the meta-language (Tarski, 1944 *passim*). This is a point I discuss further, in the following chapter, with regard to later interpretations of Carnap and the framing of this object-language/meta-language distinction in terms of a use-mention distinction.

We can see now something of the scope which Carnap envisages for logical analysis. Construction theory should provide a complete replacement for traditional metaphysics. Traditional ‘metaphysical’ doctrines can be incorporated within frameworks and, in the process of this formalisation, be separated out from any pseudo-statements. More than this, though, Carnap has what might be called ‘meta-epistemological’ aspirations for

construction theory. These may not be strictly relevant to his deflationary metaphysics. However, it is worth looking a little further at these aspirations by way of providing some background to discussions in subsequent chapters.

We've discussed the straightforwardly empirical aspect of the aspirations that Carnap has for construction theory. The other aspect that needs to be considered concerns what Michael Friedman describes as Carnap's formalism – or structuralism – and his holism. This has some intriguing features. Friedman (1987) cites the following passage from the beginning of the *Aufbau*, in which both Carnap's structuralism and his holism are evident:

Now, the fundamental thesis of construction theory, which we will attempt to demonstrate in the following investigation, asserts that fundamentally there is only one object domain and that each scientific statement is about the objects in this domain. Thus, it becomes unnecessary to indicate for each statement the object domain, and the result is that each scientific statement can in principle be so transformed that it is nothing but a structure statement. But this transformation is not only possible, it is imperative. For science wants to speak about what is objective, and whatever does not belong to structure but to the material (i.e. anything that can be pointed out in a concrete ostensive definition) is, in the final analysis, subjective... (p. 521)

Carnap's structuralism is based on the idea that while phenomenal experiences are subjective (or 'auto-psychological') experiences and sensations, they have analogies of structure. He builds a system from 'unanalysed momentary cross sections of experience – "elementary experiences" – that are related to one another by a two-place relation  $R_s$  of "recollection of similarity"' (Carnap, as cited in Friedman, 1987, p. 522). Carnap claims that he will demonstrate that it is 'in principle, possible to characterise all objects through

merely structural properties (i.e. certain formal-logical properties of relation extensions or complexes of relation extensions) and thus to transform all scientific statements into purely structural statements' (as cited in Friedman, 1987, p. 526). However, he emphasises that the constructional system he creates is only one of many that are possible. In particular, while it is possible to construct a phenomenalistic system in which everything is reducible to private experience it is equally possible to construct a materialistic system in which everything – including private experience – is reducible to the objects of physics (Friedman 1987, p. 524). This structuralism entails a holism. We can see this in the passage quoted above, in its reference to 'one object domain'. Friedman (1987) explains this in more detail:

Thus, for example, while the temporal order and the spatial order on a line are 'locally' structurally identical (both are continuous linear orderings), the latter occurs as a subspace of the total three dimensional spatial order whereas the former does not; moreover, within the global space-time manifold the temporal dimension is itself formally distinguishable from the three spatial dimensions; and so on. That is why the unity of science – the unity of the object domain – is so important to Carnap. It is only if all concepts are part of a single interconnected system of concepts that we can hope to ... discriminate all concepts from one another on the basis of their purely formal or structural properties. (p. 528)

It is widely accepted, by Carnap himself amongst others, that the *Aufbau* fails in its reductionist project. 'At a crucial point – precisely where one moves from private sense experience to physical objects, in fact – the construction breaks down decisively; and, in particular, we are no longer presented with explicit definitions or translations at all' (Carnap, as cited by Friedman 1987, p. 522). As Quine (1951) notes '[the *Aufbau*] provides no indication, not even the sketchiest, of how a statement of the form "Quality *q* is at *x;y;z;t*"



could ever be translated into Carnap's initial language of sense data and logic. The connective "is at" remains an added undefined connective; the canons counsel us in its use but not in its elimination' (p. 34).

What are the consequences of this failure? That is a question that must be considered in the course of subsequent discussion, particularly regarding Quine's view of this question. What we must observe here is that the structuralist aspiration of the *Aufbau* remains for Carnap, even if it is never fully realised. For a contemporary reader, considering Gödel's results on the incompleteness of systems like that expounded in *Principia Mathematica*, it is clear that this objective *can* never be realised.

But constructability remains a criterion of legitimacy. The example that features in the *Aufbau* is the 'metaphysical' concept of reality, as it appears in the dispute between 'the epistemological schools of realism, idealism and phenomenism' (Carnap, 1928/1967, para. 175). This concept does not belong within rational science because no notion of this reality as 'independence from the cognizing consciousness' can be constructed. (Carnap, 1928/1967, para. 175) Further, Carnap is clear that he means that it cannot be constructed in *any* system, not just a phenomenalist one such as he has attempted in the *Aufbau*. As Richardson (1990) points out, while Carnap recognised a certain priority in a phenomenalist epistemology he is not wedded to Russell's epistemological principle that propositions are only comprehensible when reduced to elements with which one is directly acquainted (Richardson, 1990, p. 9). Carnap writes:

The so-called epistemological schools of realism, idealism and phenomenism agree within the field of epistemology. Construction theory represents the neutral foundation which they all have in common. They diverge only in the field of metaphysics, that is to say (if they are meant to be epistemological schools of

thought), only because of a transgression of their proper boundaries (Carnap, as cited in Friedman, 1987, p. 538).

The transgression Carnap has in mind involves asserting that the internal ontology of a framework extends beyond it, as an ontology common to all frameworks. Outside frameworks – or underlying them – there is only a method. There is a method for constructing or explicating frameworks – and there are practical judgements to be made based on that construction.

An example of the kind of transgression that must be avoided is a ‘particular kind of misinterpretation of the acceptance of abstract entities’ (Carnap, 1950, p. 225). Many philosophers in the British empiricist tradition distinguish between objects immediately given in experience and the objects that are constructed from them, he says. ‘Existence or reality is ascribed only to the data; the constructs are not real entities’ (Carnap, 1950, p. 226).

The misinterpretation in question has it that if we accept abstract entities we thereby assert or imply their occurrence as immediate data or phenomena (Carnap, 1950, p. 226). For Carnap, we may refer, within the relevant framework, to such objects as may be counted as constructions from data, like ‘space-time points, the electromagnetic field or electrons in physics’ as well as ‘complex numbers and their functions in mathematics ... or unconscious complexes in psychology or an inflationary trend in economics ... or abstract entities as designata in semantics’ (p.226). And that reference does entail the existence of the entities to which it refers. But it does not imply the assertion that entities of these kinds occur as immediate data (p. 226). The question as to ‘which kinds of entities do and which

do not occur as immediate data is entirely irrelevant for semantics' (p. 227), he argues<sup>4</sup>. This irrelevance reflects the neutrality of construction theory – and that in turn is the basis of Carnap's doctrine of tolerance.

In his Intellectual Autobiography Carnap (1963) puts it this way:

This neutral attitude toward the various forms of language based on the principle that everyone is free to use the language most suited to his purposes has remained the same throughout my life. It was formulated as 'principle of tolerance' in 'Logical Syntax' and I still hold it today ... if one proceeds from the discussion of language forms to that of the corresponding metaphysical theses about the reality or unreality of some kind of entities, he steps beyond the bounds of science. (pp. 18-19)

**Let us take stock of what we have learned so far about Carnap's conception of linguistic frameworks and the distinction between internal and external existence questions.**

Linguistic frameworks are epistemological frameworks. These may be scientific theories, including social-scientific, psychological, economic, and other theories. Or they may be simply discursive regularities that have proved their epistemological worth in everyday life – what Saussure (1959) called 'syntagms'. In every case, though, they must have been explicated and structured through logical analysis or construction theory.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Horwich interprets Wittgenstein as advocating a similar caveat. Metaphysical problems are generated by the mesmeric effect of linguistic analogy, blinding us to critical differences in meaning. Attention to variation in linguistic meaning, in the visible structure of language, can break the spell cast by false analogy or linguistic over-generalisation and dissolve or dispel the apparent problem. For example, 'we are tempted to ask the sort of questions about the things that numerals designate (i.e. numbers) that we ask about the referents of other names: Where are the numbers? What are they made of? How can we interact with them? And if we can't how can we know anything about them?' (Horwich, 2004, p. 166).

An empiricist or scientific philosophy must approach existence questions – and other metaphysical questions – through the gate, as it were, of linguistic frameworks. This basic methodological imperative imposes constraints on ontological discourse:

1. It prohibits a certain transgression of boundaries or illegitimate generalisation that can take two forms:
  - a. The generalisation of an ontology from one, favoured framework to others, whether intentionally or not, to the effect that the favoured ontology is thought to be common to or underly all other frameworks.
  - b. The assertion of ontological claims that extend beyond frameworks in the sense of being *prior to* any epistemological framework. This is exemplified in the claims that motivate Quine and Goodman's nominalist project.
2. It requires that statements about the external world be reducible, within a logical structure, to empirically verifiable statements.
3. It imposes logical requirements – requirements of constructability – through rules of logical syntax or 'pure semantics'. These include rules entailed by the theory of types and, later, under Tarski's influence, the object-language/meta-language distinction.

Let us turn now to Quine's critique of Carnap's deflationism and the responses that Carnap and others have made to that critique.

## Section 2

### a. Quine's critique

**There are two aspects of Quine's critique that I want to consider. I will set out both before going on to consider Carnap's response – and other possible responses a Carnapian might make on behalf of a deflationary approach. Then I will reflect further on what we have learned about Carnap's conception of linguistic frameworks and the distinction between internal and external claims of existence and draw some initial conclusions. These conclusions will be tested and refined in subsequent chapters.**

The first of Quine's criticisms may be said to target both elements 1 and 3 in our summary above. That is, he picks up on the thrust in Carnap's approach I've tried to capture in element 1 – or more specifically in 1a – which aims to limit generalisation in some way. Quine takes this to be a prohibition on statements that use unrestricted quantification, speaking of all *x* or some *x* in a manner that goes beyond the category or categories of a specific framework. Quine attacks element 1a through an attack on element 3 – that is, what he takes to be Carnap's justification of this prohibition in Russell's theory of types.

This line of criticism is spelt out most fully in Quine's (1951a) article 'On Carnap's Views on Ontology'. This was published soon after his (1951e) 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'. To begin, Quine establishes an important basis of agreement between Carnap and himself. For while Carnap dislikes talk of 'ontology' altogether, because of its connotations of traditional metaphysics, he accepts Quine's standard for judging ontological commitment. That is, as we've seen in our exposition of ESO, 'that a given theory accepts given alleged entities', if, once explicated, its 'variables of quantification have to include those entities in

its range of variables' (Carnap, 1950, p. 67)<sup>5</sup>. As Quine (1951a) puts it, determining what entities a given theory presupposes is one thing, however – determining 'what entities a theory *should* be allowed to presuppose, what entities there really are, is another' (p. 67). And it is in the latter connection, says Quine, that Carnap urges his distinction between internal and external questions.<sup>6</sup>

For Quine, Carnap's distinction between internal and external existence questions is a distinction between questions asked at different levels of generality. Frameworks are delimited by the predicates of a higher level that they incorporate, such as 'number', 'property' or 'physical object'. In introducing a framework we introduce a predicate of this higher level, first, and then we introduce a variable of this new type. Questions that enquire as to the existence of entities that fall under these predicates are questions that are internal to the framework – for example, 'are there black swans, or mountains higher than 9000 meters or prime numbers above a hundred?' (Quine, 1951a p. 67). Illegitimate external questions ask about the existence of the kinds of objects, named by these predicates, as

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<sup>5</sup> There is a certain apparent disagreement between Carnap and Quine, even on this point but it is not one, I suggest, that need detain us. Defending his nominalistic position Quine goes so far as to say that not only can we do away with reference to natural kind predicates like 'fish', property predicates like 'aquatic', relational predicates like 'similar' or connectives that look like nouns like 'sake' or 'kilter' but also proper names of particulars like 'Chicago' and 'Truman'. That is, we can think of them as 'admissible in sentences without claiming to name' (Quine, 1951b, p. 47). However values of variables in quantifiers do commit us to abstract entities like prime numbers. So it is just to these values that we need to look for commitment. Carnap, on the other hand, as we saw in our exposition of ESO, is prepared to accept a "Fido": Fido model of designation, generalising from the naming of particulars to reference to all kinds of entities when these also seem to be named. However, Carnap also makes it clear, in the example of the number five, that the framework will need to define the relation of designation for that model to apply. I think, then, that we can say that they agree about commitment once a theory has been explicated i.e. 'constructed' or as Quine would say, 'regimented' in logical terms. As Quine puts it, it is the variable that counts.

<sup>6</sup> This is a little clumsy. For Carnap, what a theory (once logically analysed) is committed to is unquestionably what that theory *should* be committed to. It is, equally emphatically, what we as philosophers, should be committed to. That second question that Quine distinguishes from the first, just is the pseudo-question of metaphysics. The only legitimate question in the vicinity is the practical one of whether we should adopt the theory for use: is the theory effective in achieving its aims; is it empirically successful – and so on. But, whether clumsily put or not, Quine's argument is that our questioning cannot be limited in this way. In particular, it can't be limited by the logical requirements of the theory, once properly constructed. For that logical construction does not impose the requirements that Carnap seems to imagine it does.

such. For, example are there physical objects, are there numbers – or more generally still, are there abstract objects?

Call internal questions ‘subclass’ question and external questions ‘category questions’. Quine (1951a) points out that Carnap allows category questions as internal questions ‘when these are construed as treated within an adopted language as questions having trivially analytic or contradictory answers’ (p. 69). But his main point is that there is no *logical* limit to our ability to generalise over objects. Even if we were to limit ourselves to the use of Russell’s theory of types – and Quine prefers Zermelo’s set theory as a notational system – there is nothing logically to prevent us from expanding our language or linguistic framework so that its variables may take a wider range of values. As Quine (1951a) puts it:

If our language refers to numbers through variables which also take classes other than numbers as values, then the question whether there are numbers becomes a subclass question on a par with the question whether there are primes over a hundred. This will be the situation in the language of ‘Principia Mathematica’ and in the language of all the other familiar set theories. Even the question whether there are classes or whether there are physical objects becomes a subclass question, if our language uses a single style of variables to range over both sorts of entities. (p. 69)

Russell himself adopted a convention of ‘typical ambiguity’ says Quine, abandoning the use of a distinctive style of variables for every type. It is this ‘studied ambiguity’ that all variables possess. In his article “‘Carnap’ and ‘the Polish Logician’” Peter van Inwagen (2002) presents the same argument. Here the argument is directed against Putnam’s version of Carnap’s view which has it that the term ‘object’ has ‘a multitude of different uses rather

than one absolute meaning'<sup>7</sup> (van Inwagen, 2002, p. 9). Van Inwagen argues, as Quine does elsewhere, that variables are essentially pronouns. They are the formal equivalent of the ordinary language third person singular pronoun. And setting aside irrelevant considerations of grammatical gender, 'there is only one third-person singular pronoun and it has only one meaning' (van Inwagen, 2002, p. 9). That meaning is, in effect, an unrestrictedly general one.

So Quine is arguing that there can be no logical prohibition of a certain kind of semantic or categorial ascent. That ascent renders existence questions that were external to one framework internal to another, more inclusive framework. Whatever might prohibit – or even inhibit – this ascent, it is not logical or syntactical considerations. Or not, at least, once Carnap has conceded that it is 'variables that count'. The use of a distinctive style of variable for each logical type – or predicate of a higher level – is a mere notational convenience. Yes, we may need to observe a stratification of languages. In Tarski's terms, we may need to observe that some languages are semantically richer than others and the rules which follow from this observation. But there is nothing to prevent an infinite hierarchy of languages, with those of a higher level incorporating those of a lower level as parts. That is, existence questions can be asked, within the richer language, regarding the referents of those parts – and they can be asked then as internal existence questions. As mentioned earlier, this issue of meta-language/object-language or a use/mention distinction will be considered further in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

But Quine is only getting started on his deconstruction of Carnap's internal/ external distinction. 'The basic point of contention has just emerged', as he puts it (Quine, 1951a, p.

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<sup>7</sup> The argument comes from 'The Many Faces of Realism', Hilary Putnam, 1987 pp 17-19



71). For Quine (1951b) observes that Carnap allows category questions – i.e. external questions – as internal questions ‘when these are construed as treated within an adopted language as questions having trivially analytic or contradictory answers’ (p. 69). That is, Carnap could argue that an external question like ‘Are there properties?’ could be asked within a more inclusive language – call it a framework of frameworks – and still not entail the kind of enquiry or inquisitive engagement that is characteristic of traditional ontology. For the use of the term ‘property’ in the question would presuppose that term is meaningful, and lead to trivially analytic or contradictory answers. That is, ‘there are properties’ would be analytic, ‘there are not properties’ would be contradictory. This will be the case so long as we have made the decision to embrace the framework of properties, whether we do so within a more inclusive language or not. So the basic point of contention is the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths. Quine (1951b) is able to quote Carnap in a footnote to ESO as seeming to accept this analysis (p. 71). In this footnote Carnap says that Quine does not accept his distinction between internal and external existence questions – or ‘the distinction between ontological questions and factual questions of existence’ as Quine (1951b) paraphrases it – because:

according to his general conception there are no sharp boundary lines between logical and factual truth, between questions of meaning and questions of fact, between the acceptance of a language structure and the acceptance of an assertion formulated in the language. (p. 71)

Quine then rests his case against the internal/external distinction on his case against the analytic/ synthetic distinction. That latter case is most famously set out in Quine’s ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’ of 1951, as well as in some later articles. Before considering Quine’s arguments in this respect, let us assess the impact of his critique so far.

Looking at Carnap's theses as they are enumerated above, we can see that the defence of thesis 1a, at least by means of thesis 3, has not gone well. Both Quine and Carnap believe that frameworks must be logically regimented prior to being assessed. Only Carnap thinks that process of logical construction itself entails syntactical rules that constrain ontological enquiry and give it a properly scientific character. His reasons for thinking so seem to be outpaced, however, by Quine's understanding of the contemporary situation with regard to logic and set theory. By the time of ESO, though, Carnap himself seems to have de-emphasised any constraints of the kind described in thesis 3. Instead the emphasis is on the existence of a plurality of distinct frameworks, (together with an attitude of tolerance toward frameworks), and the claim that there will be analytic – or straightforwardly empirical answers – to legitimate existence questions, once we have adopted a framework or decided to include a framework in our overall epistemological scheme. An example of a question with an analytic answer under these circumstances would be 'Are there properties?'. An example of a question with a synthetic answer would be 'is there a property of blueness?'. But this remaining logical constraint is only applicable if we have a means of distinguishing one framework from another. Quine aims to break down the boundaries between frameworks, leaving no structure that can support an analytic/synthetic distinction. The only distinction he will allow is one of degree – the degree of centrality of a given statement, or conversely, its proximity to observation and experiment – within the single, unified structure of science. As he puts it, 'Science is a unified structure, and in principle it is the structure as a whole and not its component statements one by one, that experience confirms or shows to be imperfect' (Quine, 1951a, p. 72). This principle is a kind of echo of Carnap's earlier holism and structuralism, but in negative terms. As we will see, in later writings Quine retreats from this holism quite

dramatically. In doing so he helps us define linguistic frameworks. However, this is to look ahead. In the next sub-section we will consider whether Carnap can defend thesis 1.a. by means of a defence of an analytic/synthetic distinction.

## Section 2.

### b. Quine's critique of the analytic/synthetic distinction

In what he describes as the most influential article he ever published – 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' of 1951 – Quine attacks two doctrines that have 'conditioned in large part' the logical empiricist programme. The first is the belief that there is some 'fundamental cleavage between truths which are analytic or grounded in meanings independently of matters of fact and truths which are synthetic, or grounded in fact' (Quine, 1951a, preamble). The second of these dogmas is reductionism – 'the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience.' (Quine, 1951a, preamble). Both beliefs are ill founded, says Quine – and later in the article he will claim that both beliefs are 'at root, identical'.

Quine acknowledges that Carnap has long since ceased to pursue the goal of a radical reduction of scientific discourse – the second of the two dogmas in question. Quine (1951a, preamble) argues, though, that 'a more subtle and tenuous form of this idea' remains an assumption for empiricists. But let us consider, first of all, Quine's attack on what he calls the first dogma of empiricism – the analytic/synthetic distinction.

Quine begins by distinguishing two kinds of analytic truth. The first may also be called logical truth. An example is 'No unmarried man is married'. The second may be termed, using a phrase he gains from Mill, as truth by 'essential predication'. If we use a subject-predicate sentence form and attribute a property to some object – when that object has that property essentially – then the attribution in question will be necessarily true. For example, 'No bachelor is unmarried'. 'The characteristic of such a statement', says Quine (1951e), 'is that it may be turned into a logical truth by putting synonyms for synonyms' (p.

23). So it is, for example, if we take 'bachelor' to be a synonym for 'unmarried man'. It is here that the trouble starts, says Quine.

For analyticity (of the second kind) depends upon the notion of synonymy. But synonymy depends on notions of analyticity, substitutability, semantical rules, truth by definition and so on. All of these concepts depend for their definition on each other. If not flatly circular, this inter-definability, says Quine (1951e), nevertheless has the form, figuratively speaking, of a closed curve in space (p. 29).<sup>8</sup> Synonymy is nowhere *explained*.

The explanatory input that Quine demands is an empirical – or, more specifically, a behavioural – criterion of sameness of meaning or synonymy. With the exception of the 'explicitly conventional introduction of novel notations for purposes of sheer abbreviation' (Quine, 1951e, p. 27) in constructed languages the definitions of concepts that would explain synonymy – and hence analyticity – are nowhere to be found. We can explain sameness of extensional meaning – that is the sameness in the extension of predicates like 'having a kidney' and 'having a heart' – by empirical means. That is, we can examine the members of the set of creatures with a kidney and the members of the set of creatures with a heart. But, of course, it is a matter of contingent fact that all renates are chordates and no proposition to this effect could be analytic.

Quine claims that the dogma of radical reductionism, even in its attenuated form, is intimately connected with this first dogma: that there is a cleavage between the analytic and the synthetic. Indeed, the doctrines are at root identical, he asserts. But this claim

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<sup>8</sup> Chalmers (2011) notes that 'Many philosophers have been unmoved by this worry, as it seems one finds a similar circle for all sorts of philosophically important notions: consciousness, causation, freedom, value, existence.' (p. 388) For this reason Chalmers 'sets aside' Quine's arguments from circularity for most of his article, although he remains conscious of the danger of begging the question in favour of analyticity and the *a-priori*. Ultimately he gives a Bayesian account of credence and its revision in the light of new evidence that provides a defence of the analytic/synthetic distinction on 'partly independent grounds' (p. 414).

seems much too strong. Quine is able to point to one way in which the former doctrine supports the latter: if it is possible to reduce scientific theories to individual sentences that are empirically testable, then it is possible that there will be some sentences that seem to be true independently of any empirical facts i.e. that are analytic. Quine's claim, of course, is that intensional meanings are not testable in this way – our theories face the tribunal of sense experience in a much more holistic fashion. However, a lot more is required to argue that radical reducibility entails analyticity and vice versa. Quine's main argument for this identity between the two dogmas alleges that they derive from a separation of statements into two components – a linguistic and a factual component. In the extreme case, that of analytic statements, the linguistic component is all that matters. It is this separation which is Quine's fundamental concern.

As we will see in a moment, Carnap's response may be summarised as follows: The separation with which we are concerned lies between the intensional and extensional meaning of terms; the determination of intensions may proceed very much as the determination of extensions does, by the observation of the behaviour of speakers of a language. The only difference is that in the case of intensions the application of predicates to possible objects as well as to actual objects must be tested. This is consistent with the development of definitions in a scientific language. Theories must make claims about all possible objects within a given region – and a gap may indeed open up between the intension and the extension of a term when there is 'recalcitrant' experience.

Quine's argument is a challenge to the very existence of meanings – as opposed to referents or extensions – in anything but those limited elements of artificial languages described above. In his article of 1955, 'Meaning and Synonymy in Natural Languages', Carnap responds to this challenge. A response is necessary, he says, because many

constructed languages and their 'semantical concepts' are intended as explications of the naturally developed 'language of scientists or even of the everyday language' (Carnap, 1955, p. 34). Quine's objection to these semantical concepts does not concern 'the formal correctness of the definitions ...; rather he doubts whether there are any clear and fruitful corresponding pragmatical [natural language] concepts which could serve as their *explicanda*' (Carnap, 1955, p. 35).

In Carnap's view, both the constructed language systems that the science of semantics produces and natural languages have two kinds of relation to 'what language is about' (Carnap, 1955, p. 33). These are studied by theories of extension and intension. The former deals with concepts like denoting, naming, the extension of a predicate and related concepts. The latter is concerned with concepts like intensional meaning, synonymy and analyticity. 'Two predicates are synonymous if and only if they have the same intension; a sentence is analytic if it is true by virtue of the intensions of the expression occurring in it' (Carnap, 1955, p. 34). And there is nothing to stop us learning the theory of intension for a natural language like German:

For example, in order to ascertain whether a German word denotes a given object, one must first understand the word, that is, know what is its intension, in other words, know the general condition which an object must fulfil in order to be denoted by this word, and secondly we must investigate the object in question in order to see whether it fulfils the condition or not. (Carnap, 1955, p. 34)

The determination of intensions does go beyond the determination of extensions and may be technically more difficult. But there is no obstacle in principle, *contra* Quine, to what Carnap (1955) calls the intensionalist thesis: 'the assignment of an intension is an empirical hypothesis which, like any other hypothesis in linguistics, can be tested by observations of

language' (p. 37). The extensionalist thesis, on the other hand, 'asserts that the assignment of an intension, on the basis of the previously determined extension, is not a question of fact but merely a matter of choice' (Carnap, 1955, p. 37). This difference is 'the core of the controversy' (Carnap, 1955, p. 37). According to Quine '... the linguist is free to choose any of the properties that fit to the given extension; he may be guided in his choice by considerations of simplicity ...' but, pending some definition of synonymy, there is nothing for the linguist to be right or wrong about (Carnap, 1955, p. 37).

Carnap then goes on to describe how the intension of a predicate may be empirically – indeed, operationally – determined. This is done by testing the dispositions of speakers to apply a predicate to this or that kind of thing, where the thing is presented by ostension or by pictures or by description. This process would start with instances in the extension of the predicate and then test for the variations of that instance that a speaker will admit within the range of the predicate. What is distinctive about determining intensions is that this testing must include logically possible objects as well as actual objects. Logically possible objects are those objects whose description does not entail a logical contradiction. For example, we need to test the dispositions of a speaker to apply the German predicate *Pferd* to (the picture of) a unicorn as well as to a horse. Carnap cites C.I. Lewis as having defined the intension of a predicate as the class of all possible ['consistently thinkable'] objects falling under it (Carnap, 1955, footnote 5). As Quine notes, Carnap can then define an analytic statement as one that is true in all possible cases. In determining the intension there will be zones of vagueness, notes Carnap, as well as zones in which assent to the application of the predicate is definitely given or definitely withheld (Carnap, 1955, pp. 37-43).



This scientific procedure may all seem rather makeshift. But Carnap (1955) notes that after writing 'Meaning and Synonymy', he has become aware of Arne Naess' book of 1953 which:

describes in detail various procedures for testing hypotheses concerning the synonymy of expressions with the help of questionnaires [testing responses of speakers to pairs of sentences within specified contexts] and gives examples of statistical results found with these questionnaires ... This book, both in its methodological discussions and in its reports on experience with the questionnaires seems to me to provide abundant evidence in support of the intentionalist thesis.

(footnote 6)

Carnap is able, then, to invoke methods that are reasonably similar to those currently used in experimental philosophy to justify his claim to the scientific respectability of intensional meanings. Carnap also argues that in scientific languages the intensions of terms become applicable with increasing clarity and precision, in line with the historical development of the science. In the case of chemistry for example, they indicate with increasing explicitness which properties are to be taken as 'essential or definitory for the substance' (Carnap, 1955, p. 41). Carnap speculates that this trend toward explicit rules will continue in the empirical sciences. The practical question then arises as to whether 'rules of extension are sufficient or whether it would be advisable to lay down also rules of intension?' (Carnap, 1955, p. 41). Carnap's view is that it follows from what he has argued above that rules of intension are required 'because otherwise intensional vagueness would remain and this would prevent clear mutual understanding and effective communication' (p. 41).

These last remarks seem a little understated, even assuming that Carnap is here talking about mutual understanding and communication between members of the same

research community. He surely wants to argue that the experimental process of science – the testing of theories – is in large part just about testing for matches and mismatches between the intensions and the empirically determined extensions of key predicates in the theory. Experiments would not be meaningful without clear and precise rules of intension defining the objects of study, the laws of their interaction and so on – and the purpose of this testing is to see whether the intensional concepts of the theory so defined, do indeed comprehend all possible cases. This, at least, I take to be implied by Carnap's description, quoted above, of what is involved in ascertaining whether a German word denotes a given object – remarks that are all the more applicable to the terms of a scientific language.

In his 'Revisability and Conceptual Change in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"', David Chalmers (2011) argues that Carnap's response to Quine's challenge, while 'remarkably simple', is 'underappreciated' (p. 387, p. 395). Carnap's account of intension can be fleshed out in a number of ways, argues Chalmers, and ultimately provides a plausible defence against Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic – and *a priori/a posteriori*-distinctions. Chalmers identifies Quine's direct attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction as coming in the final section of 'Two Dogmas'. The attack can be summarised as follows:

(Q1) Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system.

(Q2) No statement is immune to revision. (Chalmers, 2011, p. 389)

Chalmers begins by citing the response given by Grice and Strawson, at the end of their article of 1956, 'In Defense of a Dogma'. This addresses (Q2) in particular. Grice and Strawson argue that we (philosophers and lay people alike) distinguish between situations where the truth of a statement must be given up for reasons solely of matters of fact and

situations in which a statement must be given up at least partly as a result of a shift in the sense of the words. The quote Chalmers (2011) uses is:

Where such a shift in the sense of the words is a necessary condition of the change in truth value [from true to false], the adherent of the [analytic/synthetic] distinction will say that the form of words in question changes from expressing an analytic statement to expressing a synthetic statement... (p. 390)

Grice and Strawson make a number of strong points in support of their main contention: Quine may be right in showing that it is very difficult to give a satisfactory general account of analyticity, but this does not entail that the distinction should be rejected as illusory. Their main argument is that we have a pre-theoretical grasp of the distinction. This always allows us to make at least some sense of the distinction. We might distinguish, for example, between implausible and incomprehensible statements. An example of the former is the claim (i), made by my neighbour, that her three year old child is an expert on Russell's theory of types. An example of the latter is the claim (ii) that her three year old child is an adult. This latter claim seems contradictory – that is, analytically false.

We need to allow, I think, that statements may or may not change their analytic/synthetic status with a change in their truth value.<sup>9</sup> However, we can still say clearly

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<sup>9</sup> With regard to the passage from Chalmers quoted above it seems worth noting that the change in meanings required to render a true analytic statement false may either produce a false synthetic statement or a false analytic statement. For example, let us suppose, that the time has come when the term 'bachelorette' has gone the way of other feminised terms (like 'aviatrix' as opposed to 'aviator') and is replaced by 'bachelor'. Then the sentence 'All bachelors are unmarried men' ceases to be true. A bachelor might be an unmarried man or woman. And the statement also ceases to be analytic. It will only be false if there are, as a matter of fact, some unmarried women in the world. However, the statement 'All bachelors are unmarried men' could be false analytically – it could be a contradiction in terms and so not possibly true (leaving aside arguments for the existence of true contradictions). That would be the case if a more radical shift in the meaning of the term 'bachelor' occurred, so that, for example, *only* unmarried women counted as bachelors. In the first scenario being a man ceases to be a necessary condition of bachelorhood, in the second being a woman becomes such a condition. Similarly, we might assume that both Strawson and Grice's examples, (i) and (ii) above, are false to

that an analytic statement is one in which a change in the meaning of its terms is a necessary condition of its falsification. As Chalmers puts it, analytic sentences should be understood as those that are immune to revision (or more precisely, rejection) for so long as their meaning stays constant. Chalmers goes on to modify this analysis a little to speak of conceptual constancy and conceptual change. He does this partly to allow for changes in the propositions and concepts expressed by sentences that come with mere contextual shifts (Chalmers, 2011, p. 391, footnote 5). The question then arises as to whether a principled distinction can be made between cases of revision that involve conceptual change and those that do not. At this point Chalmers appeals to Carnap's account of intensional meaning, as I have described it above. He adopts a suggestion that he says Carnap makes elsewhere and defines an intension simply as a function from possible cases to extensions (Chalmers, 2011, p. 392). The principled distinction required then falls out of Carnap's 'operational' definition of intension:

An expression E undergoes a change in meaning between t1 and t2 iff there is a possible case such that the speaker is disposed to associate different extensions with E when presented with the case at t1 and t2 (Chalmers, 2011, p. 393).

Chalmers considers a number of worries about this account and offers some appropriate refinements. The main worries are:

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begin with but come to be evaluated as true. We could change our mind about the truth value of (i) on acquaintance with some surprising facts about child prodigies but in the case of (ii) we would require a shift in what is *meant* by the terms 'child' and 'adult'. But then (ii) – formerly a contradiction in terms – would not necessarily be true analytically. It could be true. In my neighbour's idiolect 'child' could be synonymous with 'adult'. More likely, it is a synthetic truth. That is, age has ceased to be definitive of an adult, in my neighbour's idiolect, so that being aged three no longer excludes her child from adulthood. That allows the child to exhibit some other properties of an adult. In this way (ii) becomes true without the definition of 'child' and the definition of 'adult' being such as to make the two terms synonymous and the claim analytic.

- a) The speaker in question may be less than ideal in various ways. She may make mistakes – for example, she may judge that  $36 + 27 = 73$  and she might even be disposed to judge this to be true with respect to all possible scenarios. Or, she might change her mind about a possible case without changing the meaning.
- b) The relevant intensions may be inaccessible to the speaker – for example, if externalists about meaning are right then the intension of ‘water’ picks out  $H_2O$  in all possible worlds. However, a speaker who does not know that water is  $H_2O$  will not be disposed to identify  $H_2O$  as the extension of water when presented with a possible case.
- c) ‘Possible cases’ need to be further defined (Chalmers’ renames possible cases ‘scenarios’) – and an explanation of the means by which a possible case is presented, without that presentation pre-determining or cueing the response, needs to be given. (Chalmers, 2011, pp. 395-397)

With regard to c) Chalmers is confident that the resources of two-dimensional semantics, as elaborated in particular by Frank Jackson and him, are adequate to this task (Chalmers, 2011, pp. 396 – 397). Much the same applies to b). We can always specify the primary (or ‘a-intension’) as the intension in question (as opposed to the counterfactual or ‘c-intension’). That is, we can stipulate that the speaker consider the possible cases as actual.

In dealing with a), Chalmers suggests that the speaker must be said to reason ideally. This requirement may be a little strong. Amie Thomasson (2007), for example, would say that the speaker need only be competent. As far as I can tell she never unpacks this requirement but the assumption that a (native) natural language speaker is in possession of

a reasonably accurate dictionary or ‘mental lexicon’ (including the meanings of terms) is fairly widespread in linguistics.<sup>10</sup>

These worries are worth noting – and we will need to consider some of them in more detail later in this thesis – but they need not detain us further now. Chalmers’ (2011) refined formulation of Carnap’s model ‘is something like the following’:

The (primary) intension of an expression for a subject [speaker] is a function that maps scenarios to extensions, mapping a scenario w to what the subject would judge to be the extension of E under the supposition that w is actual, were she ideally rational. (p 397)

We could also update Carnap’s account of the empirical determination of intensions by reference to recent work on natural signalling, using sender-receiver games. Brian Skyrms (2010), for example, shows how the meaning of words can arise ‘spontaneously, by chance’ using ‘a combination of modern [naturalistic] tools’ (p. 1). These include: the theory of signalling games, following Lewis in the use of these models; the mathematical theory of information, supplemented with a natural definition of informational *content*, in addition to informational *quantity*; Darwinian type theories of evolution by differential reproduction and natural variation [of signals], using models of replicator dynamics; and theories of trial and error learning (Skyrms, 2010, pp. 1-2). Skyrms notes that it is a virtue of a Lewis-type signalling system that we do not have to endow the sender and receiver with a pre-existing mental language in order to define the system (p. 7). However, ‘mental language is not precluded. The state that the sender observes might be “What I want to communicate” and the receiver’s act might be concluding “Oh, she intended to communicate that”’. Accounts

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Aitchison, Jean (2003). *Words in the Mind: An Introduction to the Mental Lexicon*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

framed in terms of mental language, or ideas or intentions can fit perfectly well within sender-receiver games' (Skrms, 2010, p. 7). Among other things, Skyrms considers situations in which there are too few signals available to communicate a range of states – that is, signalling 'bottlenecks' – and those in which there are more than enough, creating 'synonymy'.

In summary, we might return to the point made by Grice and Strawson (1956). That is, if we can make sense of the idea that the same form of words, interpreted in one way (or bearing one sense) may express something true and interpreted in another way may express something false, then we can make sense of the idea of conceptual revision. And if we can make sense of the idea of conceptual revision then we can preserve the analytic/synthetic distinction and the existence of necessities within conceptual schemes 'while conceding to Quine the revisability-in-principle of everything we say' (Grice & Strawson, 1956, pp. 157-8).

In other words, we have to recognise that analyticity belongs to synchronic or structural linguistics not diachronic linguistics. For Quine's attack on the distinction is based on diachronic considerations. This is a simple but important observation. As Ferdinand de Saussure emphasised, in the evolution over time of linguistic frameworks or systems of signs, phonemes or signifiers ('words' in Quine's parlance) are *inseparable* from their signifieds or meanings.<sup>11</sup> They are, in Saussure's well-known image, like the *recto* and *verso*

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<sup>11</sup> It is an interesting question as to the extent to which Quine is influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's 'Course in General Linguistics, first published in 1921 (1974) We might suppose that the Course would provide considerable encouragement to Quine's holism. Saussure's influence seems to be particularly evident in the scenarios concerning a visiting linguist coming to understand native speakers and terms like 'gavagai' – as well as in Quine's arguments about the indeterminacy of reference and translation. It is also evident in his observation that while the truth of a statement obviously depends on both linguistic facts about what its words mean and extralinguistic facts about their extensions, a statement's truth is not analysable into a linguistic and an extra-linguistic component. However, Quine never mentions Saussure in relation to specific texts. Here we may note that Saussure is clear that words can't be the basic unit of linguistic meaning, if only

sides of a sheet of paper. This seems to capture an underlying intuition of Quine's. We can't separate the linguistic component from the factual component in any true assertion and the idea that we can leads to the fallacy that we can separate analytic from synthetic truths.

True enough, says the Saussurean, with regard to that first point. We can't separate the linguistic and factual components. But we can still speak sensibly of language *states* (1974, p85). Within any such state, no matter how interlinked and holistically determined are its elements, some conceptual truths will obtain – for so long as that state obtains.<sup>12</sup>

There is another way in which a Saussurean conception of language states can help fill out our conception of linguistic frameworks. That concerns the role of *opposition* in the definition of the meaning of terms. I will touch on that further in a moment but before doing so we can prepare the way by returning to the question of Quine's change of stance following 'Two Dogmas'. Quine (1991) puts it this way:

Looking back on it I regret my needlessly strong statement of holism ... in later writings I have invoked not the whole of science but chunks of it, clusters of sentences just inclusive enough to have critical semantic mass. By this I mean a cluster sufficient to imply an observable effect of an observable experimental condition. (p. 268)

Quine goes on to talk about 'observation categoricals'. These are generalisations of the form 'Whenever this, that' where 'this' and 'that' are observation sentences. He says, 'A cluster of

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because prefixes, suffixes etc. also, obviously, bear meaning (1974, pp. 105-106). Further, as Saussure shows, words may be carved at any joining of individual letters during their evolution over time. That evolution is driven by changing relations of analogy with, and opposition to, other 'terms' in the system of which they are a part – and those relations involve both the meaning and the phonetic form of words or terms. Quine at times shows an awareness that words are not exactly the basic units of linguistic meaning – but perhaps because Saussure is never able satisfactorily to define such units Quine seems to imply that we will do as well to speak of words as of 'terms' as Saussure does, or of any other unit.

<sup>12</sup> In emphasising the separability of synchronic and diachronic or static linguistics Saussure observes: 'In each [language] state the mind infiltrated a given substance and breathed life into it' (1974, p.85)



sentences has semantic mass if it implies an observation categorical; and the experimental check of the cluster of sentences consists in testing the implied categorical by arranging for the fulfilment of its observable protasis [antecedent] and seeing whether the apodasis (*sic.*) [consequent] is realised' (Quine, 1991, p. 268).

Now we have a potential conception of linguistic framework that is much more congenial to a Carnapian approach. These clusters could be minimal frameworks, a kind of lower limit case of frameworks. There is a further condition these clusters must fulfil however. That condition has to do with the definition of terms by their mutual opposition. In Saussurean parlance, what Quine calls a 'cluster' may also be referred to as a 'swarm' or a 'constellation' of signs. A sign comprises a unity between a word or signifier and its meaning or signified, whether those signs occur in assertoric sentences or not. A signified, for Saussure is an idea or intension, in contrast to Quine's extensionalist concept of meaning (Saussure 1974, p.66). However, I would argue that functionally the distinction is not significant. Quine's conception of the testing of observation categoricals may be understood as testing for matches or mis-matches between intensions and extensions.

In any case, the further essential condition to which I refer above is that signs in a constellation are, at least partially, defined by relations of mutual opposition or by their use in relation to such an opposition. Those relations of opposition are often thought of as binary – usually in connection to an ideological framework – but they may be much more complex. We need only think of the key terms in a Newtonian scientific framework, for example, as those are mutually defined by various laws and equations. By way of illustration let us begin by looking at the simplest of cases.

When talking to someone, only a few years ago, about the merits of different computers I became aware that my interlocutor had not yet acquired the use of a certain

opposition within which this dialogue is usually framed. That is, he believed that 'PC' was a generic term and a Personal Computer or PC was a laptop of any kind designed for personal use. He was not aware that the term 'PC' is defined by its opposition to another term 'Mac'. That opposition, which creates a certain framework for discussion, has many worldly causes – in particular the global monopoly over operating systems exercised by two ICT companies. But relative to the literal or pre-existing meanings of the terms involved – particularly 'PC' – it also has a certain arbitrary or conventional character. Within this framework, sentences like 'There are PCs and there are Macs' and 'A PC is not a Mac' are analytic, for so long as there is no revision or change in the meaning of the terms.

Here is another, slightly more sophisticated, example. For many would say that the global 'monopoly' to which I have referred above– or the monopoly situation in New Zealand in which just two companies own all the supermarkets in the country and have roughly a half share of the market each – is not really a 'monopoly'. Strictly speaking it is a 'duopoly'. But this 'strict' form of speech obscures the existence of a much more useful discursive framework. Specifically, it obscures the basic economic framework in which the terms 'monopoly' and 'monopoly situation' are defined by their opposition to terms or phrases like 'functional market' or 'genuinely competitive situation'. In this framework, a monopoly is defined as any situation in which one, two, three or even four companies have over two thirds of the market in a certain product.<sup>13</sup> That is what 'monopoly' means in the framework, through its relations to other key terms or concepts – particularly its relations of opposition. As Saussure puts it, the term is defined most precisely by being what the other terms are not.

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<sup>13</sup> As it happens this situation also obtains in New Zealand with respect to fuel companies.

## Section 2.

### c. Crystallising elements of Carnap's linguistic frameworks.

**The foregoing discussion allows us to draw out a more developed picture of Carnapian linguistic frameworks.**

First, we can generalise from Quine's (1991) discussion of 'sentence clusters sufficient to imply an observable effect of an observable experimental condition' (p. 268), to less phenomenally oriented frameworks, which still work at a lower limit of scale. Frameworks range from this lower limit case – small units of ideology or accepted belief or working hypotheses – that involve some tests or criteria of existence and identity of objects, at a minimum, up to scientific paradigms.<sup>14</sup> Friedmann characterises these latter frameworks as comprising three main elements: an ontology, laws of nature and a mathematics.

Second, we may note that, as Carnap observes, a framework is usually built out of pre-existing terms, whose prior or 'literal' meaning is changed. Carnap gives the examples of terms like 'blue' or 'house' that are already in use before the introduction of the property framework. Similarly, 'ten', as in 'I have ten fingers' is in use before the framework of numbers is introduced (Carnap, 1950, p. 218).

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<sup>14</sup> An interesting example of a more precise framework, which utilises more specific oppositions than the everyday framework of things is brought to light by the question of whether a virus (such as Coronavirus) is a living thing. In our everyday framework of things I believe the assumption is yes. We think of viruses as microscopic organisms on a par with many others. But the answer in terms of the criteria of identity of a basic biological framework is usually no. Viruses are little more than shells of protein with some RNA and DNA inside. They evolve – but so do artefacts:

'Are viruses alive or dead? Well, we know they're not dead. Death is what happens when a living organism stops performing biological functions, and for the moment we're only interested in the active particles. So were they ever alive? Most biologists say no. Viruses are not made out of cells, they can't keep themselves in a stable state, they don't grow, and they can't make their own energy. Even though they definitely replicate and adapt to their environment, viruses are more like androids than real living

organisms. <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/mcat/cells/viruses/a/are-viruses-dead-or-alive>

Third, the criteria of application that re-define terms are constituted in a critical way by relations of opposition. Relations of analogy are also at work. In this case there is the similarity in meaning between ‘monopoly’ as used in ordinary language and ‘monopoly’ as it is used within the framework. But, as we have seen, it is relations of opposition that distinguish a term within a framework, that re-shape its definition, and give it an exact meaning.

We might summarise this by saying that, as a minimum, a Carnapian linguistic framework is:

*A cluster of sentences that is conceived synchronically, as a language state, and which has critical semantic mass. It has this semantic mass by comprising or implying observation categoricals that, in turn, exemplify criteria of existence and identity (at least, sufficient conditions) for the referents of their referring terms – and by utilising relations of opposition and analogy between terms, both internal to the framework and external to the broader language in which the framework is situated, to achieve a level of precision fit for the purpose of the framework.*

This picture is based on Quine’s model of sentence clusters with critical semantic mass. To this we have added a Saussurean dimension in the form of a key role for the definition of terms by their mutual opposition and analogy. With that role in place we can also allow for analytic truth within these frameworks without invoking the presupposition that Quine seeks to overcome – the separability of the linguistic component of a sentence from its factual component. For the definition of terms by their opposition and analogy to each other is only possible insofar as terms are inseparable their meanings.

Of course, Saussure conceives of meanings as primarily intensions, just as Carnap does (1974, p.66). The relation of intensions to extensions is another question. We have

touched on this relation at times in the foregoing discussion and we will do so again later in this thesis. The point here is that, by this account, analytic truths – the structural truths of a framework – are not a function of the conventional character of the association between a term and its meaning. They are not truths that come about by virtue of the conventionality of that association or its separability – the apparent assumption that so vexes Quine. Rather they are a function of the structural relations between terms, conceived as a unity of word and meaning, within a cluster or framework, and in some sense, between that framework and others.<sup>15</sup> Crucially those relations include the oppositions between terms. Analytic truths remain in force for as long as the framework remains in a stable state. That period will be related – that is, for as long the framework fulfils its purposes and remains accessible to users. And the synthetic truths that result from the application of a framework might be thought of as representing the extent to which experience co-operates with the purposes of that framework.<sup>16</sup>

Let us take stock again of Carnap's theses as I listed these above, and assess the impact his critical dialogue with Quine has on them. I reproduce the theses below for convenience.

An empiricist or scientific philosophy must approach existence questions – and other metaphysical questions – through the gate of linguistic frameworks. This basic methodological imperative imposes constraints on ontological discourse:

1. It prohibits a certain transgression of boundaries or illegitimate generalisation that can take two forms:

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<sup>15</sup> Here we touch on a point at which structuralist traditions that draw on Saussure's linguistics, as exemplified by the work of Levi-Strauss, differ from post-structuralists who might draw on Derrida's critique of Saussurean linguistics. This is an area which I cannot elucidate further here.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to Max Creswell's remarks for this concept of 'co-operation'.

- a. The generalisation of an ontology from one, favoured framework to others, whether intentionally or not, to the effect that the favoured ontology is thought to be common to or underly all other frameworks.
  - b. The assertion of ontological claims that extend beyond frameworks in the sense of being *prior to* any epistemological framework. This is exemplified in the claims that motivate Quine and Goodman's nominalist project.
2. It requires that statements about the external world be reducible, within a logical structure, to empirically verifiable statements.
  3. It imposes logical requirements – requirements of constructability – through rules of logical syntax or 'pure semantics'. These include rules entailed by the theory of types and, later, under Tarski's influence, the object-language/meta-language distinction.

First, I would argue that by the time of ESO Carnap has implicitly acknowledged that theses 2. and 3., as necessary conditions of a logical empiricism, are not viable. Broadly speaking, he has abandoned the hope that construction theory could provide a single overall framework into which all empirical sciences could be integrated and which would, on the other hand, exclude discourses like traditional metaphysics. Traditional metaphysics would be ruled out not because it is false about the world but because fails to engage with the world in meaningful terms – that is, in conformity to universal rules of logical structure or syntax such as the theory of types. I've called this the ambition for a 'universal meta-epistemology' in the form of an holistic structuralism.

However, the first three elements listed above remain intact. First, there is the broad imperative that ontological questions must be approached via linguistic or epistemological frameworks. Second, there are the rules against excessive generalisation, theses 1a and 1b. Further, dropping theses 2 and 3 casts these first three theses in a new light. With Carnap's

holistic structuralism off the agenda, an assumption of functional pluralism with regard to linguistic frameworks, as expressed in Carnap's principle of tolerance, is now in force. It is true that Quine's attack on the use of the theory of types to delimit frameworks comes (soon) after ESO is published – and that ESO still mentions 'predicates of a higher type' as a means of demarcating frameworks. But, I would argue, by the time of ESO Carnap's position no longer depends on theses 2. and 3. in the way that it previously did.

What do I mean by this last claim? As I've argued above, there are other ways of conceiving of discreet frameworks, based on clusters of terms that are defined by relations of analogy and mutual opposition. These conceptions of a framework preserve Carnap's view from Quine's charge that frameworks depend on the analytic/synthetic distinction – and that that distinction itself depends upon a false assumption of the separability of linguistic and extra-linguistic elements in any statement. As for the logical positivist view captured in thesis 2., I think Richardson and Friedmann are right that that view is most relevant to Carnap's holistic structuralism rather than an adherence to a phenomenalist epistemology in which sense experience has a necessary priority. Carnap accepts that the *Aufbau* does not succeed in showing that all meaningful statements, once rendered in the terms of modern logic, are reducible to either syntactical rules or observation sentences.

What we are left with, then, could be described as a radical methodological naturalism – at least insofar as Carnap's pragmatism is applied to the subject matter of natural science.<sup>17</sup> I will say more about this description shortly. But here I just want to

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<sup>17</sup> In a more recent interpretation of Carnap's method, Huw Price distinguishes between his own "subject naturalism", centred on the genealogy of our practices (it is meant to be a piece of anthropology), in opposition to "object-naturalism," which focuses on the way in which we represent the external world. (Naturalism without Mirrors, 2011, pp 190-195, as described in Tiercelin, C. No pragmatism without realism. *Metascience* **22**, 659–665 (2013).)

observe the contrast between this position and Quine's. For there are a number of ways in which Quine's position can be described as a substantive naturalism. Carnap trusts science to come up with the methods – especially the ontological assumptions – that will best lead to practical success. That success includes, but is not limited to, the empirical success that is typically defined by various criteria – novel predictions, the unification of previously unrelated phenomena and the like.

Quine, by contrast, bases his naturalism on an *a priori* ontological view. And that view ultimately rests, 'on philosophical intuition that cannot be justified by appeal to anything more ultimate' (Goodman & Quine, as cited in Alspector-Kelly, 2000, p. 102). Quine's naturalism relies on a conception of sense experience and the empirical which is *prior to specific scientific frameworks*. It is a conception of what grounds science as a whole. This conception is expressed in what he calls his 'extensionalism' as opposed to Carnap's 'intentionalism' (Quine, 1991), in his behaviourism and demand for behavioural criteria (Quine, 1951,) and in his distrust of possibilities (Quine, 1950).

This view of Quine as advocating a substantive naturalism might seem at odds with his position on ontological commitment – especially his well-known position that we are committed to the objects that are indispensable to our best scientific theories. But it is compatible with that position. It is not just that the question of what we are committed to is, as Quine says, quite distinct from the question of what we should be committed to. It is that the question of what we should be committed to may be asked in the context of science as a whole and addressed to the (knowable) world as a whole, prior to any specific scientific endeavour.

Perhaps this emphasis on Quine's substantive naturalism is too strong, however. In his article 'On Quine on Carnap on Ontology' Alspector-Kelly (2001) argues that there is



much less of a difference between the views of the two philosophers than is commonly supposed. He points out that Quine 'came sadly to the conclusion that the nominalist program cannot be completed, and that we are stuck with ontological commitment to abstract entities' (Alspector-Kelly, 2001, p. 99). Quine himself commits, albeit on a 'tentative' basis, to: 'physical objects, classes of them, classes in turn of the elements of this combined domain and so on up' (Alspector-Kelly, 2000, p. 99).

Alspector-Kelly (2001) also notes that Quine's criterion of ontological commitment is originally proposed to ensure that we own up to the ontological consequences of what we say (p. 99). That is, it aims to prevent us quantifying over abstract objects and then, as many philosophers do, 'blandly disavowing, within the paragraph, any claim that there are such objects' (Alspector-Kelly 2001, p. 99).

Nevertheless, Quine does not accept the claim that ontological commitment occurs only within distinct linguistic frameworks. As Alspector-Kelly puts (2001) it: 'The domain of the criterion of ontological commitment knows no bounds' (p. 100). From this point of view, Carnap's claim that coherent existence questions are 'internal' to frameworks is an illegitimate evasion of genuine commitment. It seeks to avoid ontological commitment to abstract entities without going to the trouble of paraphrasing them away – that is, providing an alternative account of the functions in which the entities in question feature while doing without those entities. It is a kind of 'lazy nominalism' (Alspector-Kelly, 2001, p. 99). Hence Quine's drive to dissolve the boundaries of Carnap's frameworks and assimilate them to science as a whole.<sup>18</sup> And, notes Alspector Kelly, this complaint of Quine's – that Carnap

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<sup>18</sup> To cite another example: 'Carnap's separation of questions of existence into questions of fact and question of framework was a separation of the synthetic and the analytic. Collapse this epistemological duality and you collapse the ontological duality. Sticks, stones, sets, and numbers all become, for me, denizens of the world on an equal footing. Values of variables' (Quine, 1991, p. 271).

helps himself to the Quinean criterion of commitment while avoiding the implications of such commitment – ‘is echoed repeatedly by commentators, even by those who are generally unsympathetic to Quine’s interpretation of Carnap’ (p. 101). These commentators – Alspector-Kelly cites Susan Haack, Graham Bird and Stephen Yablo (p. 101) – cannot reconcile Carnap’s claim that true internal existence statements are analytic with his claim that the decision to accept a framework ‘does not imply any assertion of reality’.<sup>19</sup>

This brings us back, then, to my claim that Carnap espouses a kind of radical methodological – as opposed to a substantive – naturalism. What do I mean by this? In answering this question I just want to tease out a little further the methodological imperative I’ve described above as the basis for Carnap’s theses 1.a. and 1.b. In Alspector-Kelly’s (2001) view, ‘the fundamental feature of external questions, and one that Carnap emphasised, is that they are posed and answered, *prior to* acceptance of the framework’ (p. 105). Carnap’s empiricist critics are keeping company with those philosophers who ‘believe that only after making sure there really is a system of entities of the kind in question are we justified in accepting the framework...’ and ‘this, Carnap insisted, puts the cart before the horse’ (Alspector-Kelly, 2001, p. 105). It is to invoke an empiricist conception of the ontology

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<sup>19</sup> In his 2001 article Alspector Kelly’s overall argument is, as noted above, that there is much less that is different in the positions of the two philosophers with regard to metaphysics than is commonly supposed – even by each other. ‘A tragic play of misunderstanding’ – based mainly on Quine’s preoccupation with the one issue that separated them, the analytic/synthetic distinction – ‘would then appear to have taken place at the centre of the transition from positivist to post-positivist analytic philosophy ...’ For example, not only does Quine later concede that the nominalist project cannot succeed but that the motivation behind his nominalism – an *a priori* metaphysical intuition about what there is – is at odds with his naturalism (Alspector-Kelly, 2001, p. 114). Further, Alspector-Kelly points out that Carnap endorses the nominalist project, absent these motivations. However, this appears to be a little overstated. In endorsing Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment Carnap endorses the principle that only necessary or indispensable entities should be values of bound variables. It is useful, then, he says, to investigate what terms for abstract objects can and cannot be translated into other terms. (Alspector-Kelly, 2001, footnote 55) In my account I have emphasised the importance of the difference between Quine’s holism and Carnap’s pluralism (which flows from Quine’s conception of the analytic/synthetic distinction) – and the way in which this tends to be reflected in the difference between a substantive and a (fully) methodological naturalism.

of science as a whole prior to enquiring into what successful empirical frameworks have committed to – and then committing only to that. For Carnap, a genuinely *a posteriori* or empiricist ontology is one that comes after the application of a scientific *method* or framework – and indeed after the decision about whether or not it is useful to apply such a framework has been made. This is what I mean by a radical methodological naturalism.

All of this is reflected, I think, in the first of Carnap's theses as I've formulated them above, when those theses are fully understood. All that remains to be done, I suggest, in expounding Carnap's approach to ontology is to emphasise thesis 1.a. in the light of a kind of corollary of Carnap's point about the right order of proceeding, as cited above. We cannot see whether a system of entities of the kind in question really exists before deciding whether to accept the use of a framework that is committed to such entities. But then, seeing that the existence of certain entities are entailed by a framework doesn't tell us anything more about the world than the framework in question tells us. It has no consequences for other frameworks. It does not 'imply the reality' of the entities in any unrestricted sense.

Immediately we must add that one framework may be suggestive of another – it may suggest structural analogies, for example, or entities from one framework may form the basis for entities in another framework. And there is nothing to prevent the critical evaluation of the entities of one framework from the point of view of another framework. Other structural relations may also hold between frameworks, with one framework invoked within another. These are all scenarios that will be explored in later chapters.

But the commitments of one framework have no necessary consequences for other frameworks – just as the existence of entities as implied by the framework of numbers has no consequences for the everyday framework of things and the entities that it implies. We

can put this principle in the form of a slogan. In the Carnapian approach we have ontological commitment without external, epistemological consequences. This 'commitment without consequences' is the central thought, I contend, in Carnap's approach to ontology. It is what keeps pushing us to see that our questioning of existence is not so much a questioning of what there is but a questioning of what we are doing. And it suggests that there is much more still to be said about what results when we rely fully on pragmatic criteria applied to specific frameworks for answers to traditional ontological questions.

# Chapter 2

## Amie Thomasson's Carnapian meta-ontology

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The aim of this chapter is to explore further the potential for a contemporary Carnapian approach to ontology by examining the work of Amie Thomasson in this area. This exploration focuses particularly on the relations between descriptivist theories of reference, direct reference theories and Carnap's approach to metaphysics. Thomasson's work presents a certain relationship between these three theoretical projects. While Carnap's work reflects the impact of the empirical sciences on metaphysics, it assumes a Russellian descriptivist theory of reference. The direct reference theories of Saul Kripke and others may be seen as registering a further impact of the empirical sciences on traditional philosophy. At the least, they advance the claims of empirical discovery and *a-posteriori* knowledge against descriptivist theories of reference, even while leaving an account of true negative existence statements unresolved. For Thomasson, Carnap's discussion of the introduction of terms within a new linguistic framework dovetails with the account that direct reference theories give of the introduction of singular nominative and natural kind terms to the language in an initial moment of dubbing or naming. The two accounts can be joined, she argues, by a hybrid theory of reference – that hybrid theory being independently motivated by the *qua* problem for direct reference theories. This move will then also resolve the problem presented by true negative existence statements for direct reference theories.

The overall aim of this thesis is to present a somewhat different constellation of these three areas of enquiry. In subsequent chapters this project is advanced through an examination of fictional discourse and how such discourse may be understood through the relations between Carnapian linguistic frameworks. The final chapter gives an account

of so called 'empty names' and true negative existence statements that displays how the key theoretical concerns may effectively be structured.

This second chapter traverses a range of issues in preparing the way for the chapters to follow.

I rely mainly on 'Ordinary Objects' (Thomasson, 2007b) and subsequent papers for an exposition of Thomasson's meta-ontology, with her prime examples being the entities of Carnap's thing-world. This exposition is supplemented as necessary by reference to more recent work, in particular her 'Ontology Made Easy' of 2015. Thomasson's analysis of just what has gone wrong in the mainstream tradition is discussed largely in the context of the objections raised to her claims and the responses she has made, or may be able to make, to those objections.

In exploring the issues Schaffer raises I make a number of arguments in partial defence of Thomasson's approach. These will serve further to develop a Carnapian view for use in the second half of the thesis.

## **Section 1.**

- a) brief introduction to Thomasson's work.
- b) outline of Thomasson's Carnapian approach to ontological questions and her incorporation of a hybrid theory of reference into that approach.
- c) How does Thomasson make Carnap's approach her own?
- d) My argument against the claim that understanding the internal/external distinction in terms of the use/mention distinction.

## Section 2:

- a) Schaffer's 2009 critique of Thomasson's *Ordinary Objects*.
- b) Response to Schaffer's challenge to Thomasson's use of the hybrid theory of reference.
- c) an argument that proper names have character as well as content - (A partial defence of Thomasson's position from Schaffer's critique).
- d) limits to the character of proper names.
- e) Examination of Thomasson's arguments in support of an epistemically accessible sortal solution to the *qua* problem

## Section 3:

- a) Thomasson's defence of the sortal solution. (I argue that while Thomasson does show that we strive to discover what kind of thing a singular or a general nominative term refers to, there is a function of naming that facilitates this very enquiry. Such knowledge is not a pre-requisite of successful reference. This a catastrophic problem for descriptivist theories – and for the descriptivist element of a hybrid theory of reference.)
- b) I argue that if a more specific categorial concept is used in reference fixing that will entail a more general concept. Such 'categorial ascent' is an equally serious problem for Thomasson's approach.
- c) I argue that Thomasson fails to provide a consistent account of extraordinary objects like mereological sums and that she overlooks the straightforward



**Carnapian response, based on specific purposes and functions, to excessively general metaphysical questions like van Inwagen's special composition question.**

- d) I consider and evaluate other criticisms of Thomasson's approach.
- i. Evnine's criticism of Thomason's minimalist account of mereological sums.
  - ii. Dodd's advocacy of Gareth Evans' alternative account of reference fixing.
  - iii. Sauchelli's criticism of Thomasson's use of the conditions of application of terms. (I argue that there is a three-way independence, not an equivalence, between reference fixing descriptions, criteria of authenticity and criteria of existence and identity).

## Section 1

### a. Introduction

Amie Thomasson's claim to be the most faithful contemporary heir to Rudolf Carnap's meta-ontology is one that has evolved steadily over time. In her first book, 'Fiction and Metaphysics', Thomasson (1999) developed a long-standing interest in phenomenology – particularly in the work of Roman Ingarden – into an artefactualist account of fictional characters. In Thomasson's view, fictional characters are abstract objects dependent on both real entities and mental states for their existence. In a careful analysis of the structure of this dependency, Thomasson argues that fictional characters share the same nature as fictional works, with the same dependencies. If, therefore, we are willing to accept fictional works into our ontology – as it seems we do without giving a second thought to the matter – we should also accept fictional characters. There could be no gain in the economy of our ontological commitments by doing otherwise.

Thomasson's artefactualist account, while elaborated in much greater detail, shares many key features with Saul Kripke's position in his John Locke lectures of 1973. This became clear when the manuscript of those lectures was finally published in 2013. Kripke (2013) argues that 'everything seems to me to favor attributing to ordinary language an ontology of fictional entities, such as fictional characters, with respect to which ordinary language has the full apparatus of quantification and identity' (pp. 69-70). In 'Fictional Characters and Literary Practices', Thomasson (2003) observes that 'Our literary practices definitively establish the existence conditions for fictional characters – that is to say, they establish what it takes in a given situation for there to be a fictional character' (p. 148). Those existence conditions are 'rather minimal' (Thomasson, 2003, p. 149). Indeed, says Thomasson, 'to accept that Austen wrote certain sentences in a novel pretending to refer to

one Emma Woodhouse (not referring back to any actual person) but deny that she created a fictional character is a mere distortion of ordinary usage' (p. 149).

By 2007, Thomasson's concerns with minimalist ontology and ordinary language practices had found a natural home in Rudolf Carnap's meta-ontology. There are, broadly speaking, two aspects of Carnap's vision of ontology that are especially hospitable to Thomasson's interests. The first is Carnap's contention that our overall language use ranges over a plurality of distinct linguistic – and logical – frameworks. Frameworks come with a certain ontology – the framework of natural numbers, for example, includes terms that refer to natural numbers. When a referring term is introduced into a framework it is accompanied by semantic rules of use that govern when it may be applied and, by implication, when it may be declined. These application conditions for any referring term are, in effect, existence conditions for the kind of object to which the term refers. Existence questions therefore become easy to answer when we attend to the terms we use in asking those questions.

The second important aspect of Carnap's overall approach for Thomasson is the exhaustive character of linguistic frameworks. While many would concede that there are dominant paradigms and specialised frameworks in use in scientific and technical contexts, Carnap's (1950) brief inventory of linguistic frameworks begins with 'the simplest framework dealt with in everyday language: the spatio-temporally ordered system of things and events' or 'thing-language' (p. 210). Appealing to this framework seems to provide a tailor-made approach to defending ordinary objects. But identifying this framework also has another effect. It forecloses any central, neutral space in which we can situate questions –

and answers – about what *really* exists.<sup>20</sup> There is no space in which philosophers might advance their own ontological framework describing the furniture of reality, beginning with the ordinary objects of everyday experience. Ordinary usage has a prior claim to defining the existence conditions of ordinary objects. Revisionary proposals need not apply, unless they offer some specialised function. In Thomasson's (2015b) view, the role of the philosopher is to make explicit the implicit rules of use in force in ordinary language, using the referring terms in question 'in the only sense they have'<sup>21</sup> – this last phrase usually being italicised (p. 41).

Carnap opens the way, then, for Thomasson (2007b) to pursue two goals in 'Ordinary Objects'. The first goal is straightforwardly ontological: to defend ordinary objects against eliminativist arguments that would deny their existence on various grounds, particularly on the grounds that they are superfluous to an alternative, more general ontology. The second goal is meta-ontological: to expand on what she calls Carnap's 'semantical' method and demonstrate its efficacy in answering existence questions of any kind.

It is this second, methodological goal that becomes the main objective in Thomasson's subsequent work. In her 'Ontology Made Easy' of 2015, she further develops her view that the Carnapian method, as she understands it, has the power to deflate most ontological debates, bringing them to an early conclusion and opening up other, more fruitful, fields of endeavour. She amplifies her rebuttal of the Quinean approach to

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<sup>20</sup> E.g. 'Finally, if "object" is being used in some other "neutral" sense without application conditions of its own and without being used in a covering sense, (I have argued (2009)) the claim "an object exists" is not well formed and not truth evaluable ...' (Thomasson, as cited in Thomasson, 2016, p. 270).

<sup>21</sup> E.g. '... *nothing more is required* for the ontological claim to really be true than for the uncontroversial claim to be true and so in committing herself to the "real content" of the claim a speaker also commits herself to the truth of the ontological claim – *in the only sense it has*.' Or: 'But then we end up in each case being realists about the questioned entities by affirming that there are properties, propositions, numbers, etc. not in some reduced or quasi-sense, but rather *in the only sense these terms have*' (Thomasson, 2016, p. 12).

metaphysics, holding it chiefly responsible for the revival in recent years of traditional ontology. She expands on the role that allied, ontologically minimalist, approaches can play in supporting her method while justifying certain distinctive elements of the Carnapian doctrine – elements that result in a ‘simple realism’ about most of the disputed objects of metaphysics.

The line of argument that appeared in Thomasson’s (2007a) article ‘Modal Normativism and the Methods of Metaphysics’ is also developed further:

claims of metaphysical necessity primarily serve the *prescriptive* function of expressing semantic rules for the terms that are used in them, or their consequences, while remaining in the object-language. (p. 136)

Explicating and utilising these rules makes the work of ontological analysis relatively easy argues Thomasson. Either that work is purely conceptual in identifying the analytic relations between applicable criteria of existence or some straightforward empirical observations are also required. On the other hand, existence questions that do not seek an answer in the rules associated with the terms in which they are framed are, *ipso facto*, illegitimate. They suppose that the terms they use may have some sense other than the sense that they actually have.

## Section 1

### b. Thomasson's Carnapian approach to ordinary objects

*'First, catch your rabbit' (English proverb)*

In her book 'Ordinary Objects' Thomasson (2007b) seeks to exemplify the Carnapian method of approaching existence questions, beginning with questions about the realm of everyday things. This is what Carnap called the 'thing world' or 'thing language'. It is the realm in which we grow up and about which, in turn, we instruct our children. Carnap describes it as the 'spatiotemporally ordered system of observable things and events'. (1950, p.210) The things about which we are instructed from an early age also include objects like numbers, but Carnap identifies a distinct framework of natural numbers and, again, a framework of integers and natural numbers and a framework of propositions. For Thomasson the expressions 'thing world' and 'ordinary objects' are more in the nature of a catch-all for frameworks, including those just mentioned, that are accepted by common sense. In 'Ontology Made Easy' these include terms as various as 'electron', 'mountain', 'debt', 'Thursday', 'public holiday', 'jury', 'fictional character', and 'symphony' (Thomasson, 2015b, p. 121). Thomasson defends a 'simple realist ontology' about the referents of these terms on the basis of a deflationary meta-ontology.

As she puts it:

The basic idea is that ontological questions must be asked and debates undertaken, using language – and that if we properly understand the rules of use for terms used in ontological debates – especially such key terms as 'exists', 'object', and the various sortal terms at issue in existence questions ('table', 'number', 'property'...) – existence questions become easy to answer. (Thomasson, 2009, p. 4)

While Thomasson begins with a defence of the existence of the objects of common sense, she goes on to claim that her semanticism or easy approach to ontology offers a unified method for dealing with all existence questions. That method hinges on the contention that language comes with semantic, as well as syntactic, rules of use. Semantic rules tell us the conditions under which a referring term may be applied to an existent object. Such application conditions are, effectively, criteria for the existence and identity of the objects to which terms refer. To answer existence questions, we need simply to recognise and elaborate these criteria, through a form of conceptual analysis, and then determine whether those criteria are actually satisfied. Determining whether criteria are satisfied may involve some very easy empirical work – looking at the world to see whether there are tables, for example. Or the objects may simply be entailed by reasoning involving those criteria, as is the case with properties and numbers. Likewise, what Thomasson means by sortal terms are kind terms ('K') – first, terms for natural kinds, like rabbits but also artefactual kinds like books and symphonies, and institutional kinds like marriages and debts. This method obviates 'serious' ontological debates about the existence of things in some unrestricted, general sense. Those questions are pre-empted by the specific criteria of existence associated with referring terms. Indeed, existence questions that use terms like 'thing' and 'object' in a generic or neutral sense, without any associated criteria of existence for their referents are, says Thomasson, unanswerable – if not downright meaningless. Thomasson's take on Carnap's deflationary metaphysics reflects more recent developments and debates in philosophical semantics, in particular the impact of direct reference theories in the 1970s. Carnap (1950) observes that:



If someone wishes to speak in his language about a new kind of entities, he has to introduce a system of new ways of speaking, subject to new rules; we shall call this procedure the construction of a *framework* for the new entities in question. (p. 210)

In describing the introduction of new terms, Thomasson relies on a hybrid theory of reference as proposed by Devitt and Sterelny (1999). This account combines a causal theory of reference with a descriptivist element, in an attempt to overcome a problem identified by Quine as part of his argument for the inscrutability of reference.<sup>22</sup> Devitt and Sterelny dubbed this the *qua*-problem for causal theories of reference (p. 90). According to the hybrid theory, as with a direct reference theory, the use of a proper name or sortal term is grounded in an initial moment of dubbing or baptising. But given the ambiguity that is possible with regard to the exact referent of such an act of naming, a categorial concept is also associated with the term, reflecting the intentions of the reference fixer. This category ensures that, for example, our term 'rabbit' refers to a rabbit and not to rabbit fur or a rabbit stage or a rabbit part, all of which might have been thought to be the object indicated in the moment of baptism. Indeed, if a baptism consisted simply of pointing at – or ostending – an object while uttering the relevant phonemes, anything at all in the field of ostension might be thought to be a rabbit.

According to the hybrid theory, any referring term, whether a proper name or a sortal term, is associated with a sortal concept which disambiguates its referent and, in so doing, sets existence and identity criteria for its referent. These criteria are best thought of as rules for the proper use of a term, says Thomasson. We acquire these rules through the

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<sup>22</sup> Fred Kroon also contributed significantly to the development of this view. See his: Kroon, F. (1987)

normal process of language acquisition and they provide sufficient conditions for the attribution of existence to an object.

Existence questions that go by way of these application conditions for referring terms are easy to answer. Those questions of existence that do not attend to the application conditions associated with the terms they use – or use terms like ‘thing’ or ‘object’ in a deliberately generic or neutral sense – generate insoluble puzzles. Puzzles of causal redundancy or collocation provide ready examples for Thomasson. These also illustrate an important consequence of her theory of reference. For if there are concepts associated with referring terms then there can be analytic relations between those concepts. Responding to Quine’s attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction, she argues that:

definitions ... should be understood as performatively establishing relations among meanings rather than reporting on pre-existing relations of synonymy. More generally, analytic interrelations other than synonymy may come to hold in virtue of various (explicitly stipulated or implicitly established) rules for proper use of terms, for example, that this term can be correctly applied only if this one applies, or is guaranteed to be applicable if that one is. (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 37)

Thomasson is then able to expose the analytic entailments that, she contends, are relevant in many ontological questions. Puzzles about how a statue *and* a lump of marble can be located at just one set of spatio-temporal co-ordinates – or puzzles about how particles arranged baseball-wise *and* a baseball could both be said to have broken a window – these break rules of use for conjunctions and referring terms. They treat analytically interdependent claims as if they referred to separate, independent objects (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 13). For if there are particles arranged baseball-wise or marble arranged statue-wise those materials satisfy the criteria of existence for a baseball or a statue. The truth of

claims about particles arranged baseball-wise or marble arranged statue wise analytically entails the truth of claims about the existence of baseball and statues. It therefore makes no sense to say that, if we admit the existence of statues and baseballs as well as marble shaped statue-wise or atoms arranged baseball-wise we have counted too many things and need to eliminate some of them from our ontology. This is like saying that I own a house on Elm Street *and* a building on Elm St, when I own just a house, argues Thomasson. Likewise, if I find a left-hand glove and a right-hand glove in the drawer then I find a pair of gloves in the drawer. The use of the conjunction 'and' suggests that there is some additional claim being made in the assertion that I own a building or a pair of gloves. That in turn suggests that there could be some rivalry or competition between the claims, when in fact there is none.<sup>23</sup>

Thomasson (2007b) quotes Quine's later position on analyticity: 'In short I recognise the notion of analyticity in its obvious and useful but epistemologically insignificant application' (p. 36), while arguing that analyticity, broadened to include analytic entailments and not just synonymies, is very significant in commonsense ontology. She also draws on work by Stephen Schiffer on 'something from nothing' inferences and on arguments advanced by Bob Hale and Crispin Wright concerning the existence of numbers. These all support Thomasson's contention that we can *deduce* the existence of a range of disputed entities like numbers, properties, events and states from undisputed predicative statements combined with linguistic rules of use. To give an example very briefly, from Hale and Wright (2001), Hume's principle states that the cups and the saucers are equinumerous iff the

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<sup>23</sup> This is quite a subtle matter in Thomasson's (2007b) account. For, as we will see, later in this chapter, these analytic entailments do not mean that it is false to say that there are two objects present, in some sense of the term 'object'. On the contrary, Thomasson is a 'two thinger' about material composition, observing that a statue, for example, is not identical to the lump of marble of which it is made. Rather it is the presupposition – invoked by the use of the conjunction 'and' – that the objects in question, and claims about them, are separate and independent that is false. That presupposition failure can be treated in different ways but in every case it explains our hesitancy in affirming claims about the colocation of the two objects (pp. 76-77).

number of cups = the number of saucers. Identity relations are existence entailing.

Therefore, if we accept Hume's principle, the right-hand side of this equivalence entails that there are numbers.<sup>24</sup>

Against Stephen Schiffer, however, Thomasson argues that the existence we establish by way of the criteria of existence and identity we associate with referring terms is not in any way, a distinctively minimal, thin or deflated kind of existence. It is on a par with any other kind of existence. Thomasson maintains a simple realist ontology (which does not include a condition of mind or language independence).<sup>25</sup> It is ontological *debates* that are deflated. This is her recipe of meta-ontological deflationism combined with ontological realism.

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<sup>24</sup> In her 'Easy Ontology and its Consequences' (2016) Thomasson writes:

'In the philosophy of mathematics, neo-Fregeans (Wright 1983, Hale 1988, Hale and Wright 2001, 2009) have argued that the existence of numbers can be inferred from an uncontroversial truth that begins by making no use of the number concept, by simply making use of a conceptual truth (Hume's principle: The number of ns=the number of ms iff the ns and the ms are equinumerous). So, for example, we may argue as follows:

Uncontroversial truth: The cups and the saucers are equinumerous

Conceptual truth: The number of ns=the number of ms iff the ns and the ms are equinumerous

Derived claim:<sup>24</sup> The number of cups=the number of saucers

But since the derived claim is a true identity claim, they hold, [and true identity relation claims entail the existence of the relata of the identity relation] we are entitled to conclude that the terms in it ('the number of cups' and 'the number of saucers') refer, and so that there are numbers. Thus we get a resolution to an ancient ontological problem by starting from an uncontroversial truth that does not make use of the disputed concept <number> or make reference to the disputed entities (numbers) at all' (pp 35-36).

<sup>25</sup> Just what Thomasson means by 'simple realism' in this context will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. But, as noted earlier, if only by reason of her phenomenological background, Thomasson has no problem affirming the reality of mind-dependent objects. At the same time, ordinary objects will be mind-independent. Thomasson is clear that nothing in Carnap's approach entails an idealism about objects generally. We only need to look at the criteria of existence and identity in any given framework to see whether they include 'being known' or 'being an intensional object' to ascertain whether they are mind independent or not. This is a useful clarification of this issue and one which I take for granted in talking of 'framework internal' objects later in this thesis. Being internal to a framework does not in any way suggest an object is an ideal entity – we must look at the criteria of existence and identity employed by the framework to determine the nature of its objects, whether they are mind-independent or not, concrete or abstract – and so on.



## Section 1.

### c. How does Thomasson make Carnap's approach her own?

Carnap argues that the only meaningful questions that can be asked about existence are those that are asked within a linguistic framework, using the application conditions that were associated with referring terms in that framework, when those terms were first introduced. These are internal existence questions. According to Thomasson, this method results in a simple, plentiful, realist ontology. She writes:

If we apply this method, then as long as we have a well-formed term the application conditions for which are fulfilled, the term refers and there are such entities. As a result, it turns out that most common sense terms speakers thought referred do so, e.g. 'person', 'chair', 'mortgage', and 'symphony' all refer, and these things exist. Moreover, any well-formed term we care to introduce will also have a referent, provided it has application conditions that are fulfilled, and so we can also conclude that mereological sums exist, van Inwagen's gollyswoggles exist, incars exist and so on. (Thomasson, 2009, p. 11)

The most distinctive feature of Thomasson's appropriation, however – at least from the point of view of this thesis, which aims to develop a Carnapian approach further – is that she doesn't in fact talk of linguistic frameworks and our choice of such frameworks as determining our ontology, as Carnap did. The text above is an example. If Carnap's 'thing world' is expanded into a common sense realm that includes objects like the parts of cars that are half parked in driveways ('incars') and half in the street ('outcars') then we would need to describe the resulting framework as a composite of other more specific frameworks – whether all the more specific frameworks could be characterised as 'common sense' or not. As we will see a little later in this chapter, that in itself might be difficult and its utility

questionable. But invoking specific frameworks, in the first instance, would seem to be the obvious Carnapian approach. Instead, however, Thomasson talks of the requirements of language use *as such* and the proper introduction of referring terms, resulting in their being semantically, (rather than syntactically), 'well formed'.

Of course, in speaking of language as such, Thomasson can, in theory, illuminate what goes on in all linguistic frameworks. Certainly, she promotes a theory of reference that holds across all linguistic frameworks. She also assumes, as we will see in a little more detail later, that there are rules of use for the term 'exists' that apply in all cases and she argues that the term 'exists' is univocal. This may be contrasted with Eli Hirsch's view of Carnap's method. Hirsch (2009) is clear that what we mean by 'exists' and related words is determined by the framework we choose (p. 231).

However, framing questions of ontological commitment within questions concerning our use of language as such has both a positive and a negative aspect, I suggest. First, there is plenty that may be said about semantic requirements generally that may be applicable to all linguistic frameworks and help us understand how these work. This is the positive aspect of Thomasson's work and we will explore this dimension further in this chapter. The negative aspect results from not considering the specificity of frameworks and how they relate to each other. Perhaps this is most apparent in her frequent but undefended assumption that referring terms have only one sense. Terms may have only one sense within one framework. But, as I will suggest below, using the example of the term 'race', a plurality of frameworks is one reason why terms have a plurality of meanings. There is also polysemy within frameworks – something that may be resolved by having a sufficiently fine-grained concept of 'linguistic frameworks', as suggested by the minimal conception of a framework advanced at the conclusion of Chapter 1.

The risk is that by not including the plurality of frameworks and the relations between them in her account, Thomasson expounds only half of the Carnapian recipe. In many ways it is this omission that leads Schaffer to argue that Thomasson is still engaged in traditional ontology, as we will see. Further, as I will argue in the second half of this thesis, it is describing the relation between frameworks that proves to be one of the most fruitful aspects of a Carnapian approach.

For now we may note that Thomasson's approach allows her to avoid the question of how we are to define and demarcate distinct linguistic frameworks. These questions loom large for others interested in the same project. Huw Price (2009), for example, sees defining logical categories on the basis of the different practical functions of different language forms – i.e. on the basis of the different jobs that different forms or frameworks do – as the main challenge in reviving a Carnapian approach. He seeks to build on Carnap's prohibition of the mixing of logical categories in developing a pragmatic ontological pluralism (Price, 2009, p. 326).

Thomasson picks up Price's suggestion, though, that Carnap's internal-external distinction may be understood in terms of the use-mention distinction. Price (2009) suggests that internal existence questions are questions about the *use* of terms such as 'number' and 'material object', he says, 'Metaphysics tries to locate this question elsewhere and in so doing commits a use-mention fallacy', and 'The only legitimate external questions simply *mention* the terms in question' (p. 324). Now a use-mention distinction applies across all languages – and a use-mention mistake is not a category mistake or a conflation of distinct linguistic frameworks. So it is not surprising that Thomasson takes this suggestion of Price's as support for her interpretation of the internal-external distinction as a use-mention distinction that is applicable across all languages.



Thomasson also underpins her generalised approach with her hybrid theory of reference. The causal element of the hybrid theory, invoking an original moment of dubbing or baptism, plays down Carnap's focus on referential frameworks and seems to rule out entirely Quine's referential holism. It is not just sentences on their own that have reference, by this account, but sortal and singular nominative terms. Further, by virtue of the descriptive element of the theory, criteria of existence and identity for the referents of these terms may be said to be *stipulated* by the person introducing the referring term, according to their intentions. In this way Thomasson is able to exploit another loophole in Quine's critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction. For Quine (1951d) makes this exception to his denial of analyticity, allowing the stipulation of definitions for terms introduced formally, for the sake of brevity, as he puts it.

Thomasson, then, uses a generalised conception of existence or reality – and a generalised conception of language. With these conceptions in hand she is able to talk about external pragmatic questions as meta-linguistic questions about the rules of use – and the rules of introduction – of referring terms, on a term by term basis. So 'the truth value of existence claims may be determined via semantic ascent', she says (Thomasson, 2009, p. 4); and when it comes to the modal properties of objects, these are 'object language reflections of (metalinguistic) rules of use for terms' (Thomasson, 2016, p. 15). If we were to assert, for example, that a house is necessarily a building, this would reflect a rule of use for the terms 'house' and 'building' – such as 'Apply "building" whenever you apply "house".'

## Section 1.

### d. Legitimate external questions

Before considering Schaffer's critique in detail, it is worth reflecting a little further on Price – and others' – analogy between a use/mention distinction and the distinction between internal and external existence questions. This has been a popular way of understanding Carnap's distinction.<sup>26</sup> For we can distinguish between using the referring terms of a linguistic framework and merely mentioning them. If we use the referring terms of a framework then it seems we are already committed to the existence of their referents, and, in most cases the answer to any question as to their existence will be answered trivially or analytically in the affirmative. Price (2009) says, external questions try to locate these questions about numbers or everyday objects 'somewhere else ... but thereby commit a use-mention fallacy' (p. 324). He continues, 'The only legitimate external questions simply *mention* the terms in question' (Price, 2009, p. 324). In Price's reading, what Carnap calls a 'theoretical' stance is external – and problematic – because 'if we step back this far we step outside the relevant game altogether and can no longer use the notions that have their home there' (p. 328). Similarly for Thomasson (2009), 'ontological debates can only take place in language' (p.4), and so those debates are constrained by the rules of use of referring terms.

The use-mention analogy gets us started on understanding Carnap's crucial distinction, but it cannot be a complete account. For in legitimate external questions – that is, practical questions about whether to accept and use a framework – we are interested in

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<sup>26</sup> This interpretation seems to appear first in Yablo (1998), it then also appears in Price (2009, p. 328) and is subsequently cited as originating with Price by Thomasson. As we saw in chapter 1 it does have its ultimate source in Carnap's writings – see, for example, what I have called thesis 3 in Chapter 1.

what those terms refer to and what the sentences containing them *say*. We are not just concerned with the orthographic or syntactical properties of referring terms but their semantic properties as well. If we are concerned with the utility of an ontological framework in relation to relevant practical (and epistemic) purposes then it seems that we must be concerned with the utility of its objects as well. More precisely, we must be concerned with the utility of the kinds of objects that are available as values of bound variables in the framework – and that concern must be able to focus on specific instances. As an earlier pragmatist put it: ‘Consider the practical effects of the objects of your conception’ (Peirce, 2016, p. 295).

There also seems to be something right about Price’s framing of the internal/external distinction, however. It seems that we must mention the terms of a framework rather than simply using them in an uncritical fashion, if we are to reflect on the utility or otherwise of those terms. There is a straightforward resolution to this puzzle, however: in legitimate external questions we mix use and mention of the terms of the framework under consideration. What do I mean by this?

The easiest way to identify the use-mention distinction is by using quotation marks. This is shown in the example given by Herman Cappelen and Ernest LePore (2017) below:

Consider (D1) and (D2):

D1. Jim went to Paris

D2. ‘Jim’ has three letters

In (D1) the word ‘Jim’ is used to talk about ...a person, i.e. Jim. ...In (D2) the word is not used in that way. Instead, ‘Jim’ is used to talk about (or signify or denote) a word, i.e. ‘Jim’, and the sentence says about that word that it has three letters. In (D1), ‘Jim’ is being *used* and in (D2) it is *mentioned*. (section 2.2 para. 1)

Cappelen and LePore (2017) note that ‘other attempts to characterize the use-mention distinction quickly run into difficulties’ (section 2.2 para. 2). If we focus on quotation as a way of making the use-mention distinction, however, we soon encounter the phenomenon of mixed quotation. According to Cappelen and LePore, mixed quotation was first highlighted by Donald Davidson in 1979. It has recently ‘taken center stage in discussions of theories of quotation’ (Cappelen & LePore, 2017, Section 2 para. 8). Given that ‘Quotation is a subject matter that brings together a rather spectacular array of linguistic and semantic issues’ (Cappelen & LePore, 2017, Section 2 para. 1) we may be wary of rushing into the detail of mixed quotation. However, there are some features of mixed quotation that seem intuitive and the most important of these is that in it quoted words are simultaneously used and mentioned. According to Cappelen and LePore (2017) the example Davidson (1979) used is:

D3. Quine said that quotation ‘has a certain anomalous feature’ (Section 2 para. 7). As Cappelen and Lepore put it, the quotation ‘is used to say what Quine said (*viz.* that quotation has a certain anomalous feature), and also to say that Quine used the words ‘has a certain anomalous feature’ in saying it’ (Section 2 para. 7). Mixed quotation is a very frequent feature – examples abound in the preceding paragraphs of this thesis – and any adequate theory of quotation must account for how such dual use and mention is possible (Cappelen & Lepore, 2017, Section 2).

Let’s look at an example of legitimate external questioning to see how this may work. In Sally Haslanger’s (2012) essay ‘A Social Constructionist Analysis of Race’, the author identifies two different epistemological frameworks within which the kind term ‘race’ may be situated. Three different positions on race are then discernible in relation to these two frameworks. Eliminativists about race accept the criteria of existence of the naturalist

framework for this natural kind. That is, if races exist then it will be because there are genuine biological features of humans in virtue of which humans have some recognizable, heritable differences in appearance. For the eliminativist however there is nothing that satisfies these criteria. There are no genuine biological features – given that these would need to be genetic features – that can be matched to the categories of biological appearance we call ‘race’.

A second position, the naturalist position, accepts the same framework and criteria of existence of race but takes a different view as to whether those criteria are satisfied. For the naturalist there is a genetic basis to the categories we call race and medical treatments can – and do – take account of these categories. The difference between these two positions, although no doubt clouded by ideology, may then roughly be characterised as empirical.

There is also a second framework available, however, which views race as a social kind. A social kind is just one that is defined by social properties – social properties (how people are viewed, the social roles they are assigned) are the properties of objects studied by the social sciences as opposed to the properties of objects studied by natural sciences. The chief question for Haslanger (2012) is pragmatic. More specifically, it is political. ‘What concept of race should we employ in order to achieve the antiracist goals we share. To answer this question I contend that we must look at the semantics of the term ‘race’ in public – specifically nonscientific – discourse, for this popular notion of race is what we use to frame our identities and political commitments’(p.298). Which framework should we use for the purposes of ‘addressing the problem of racial injustice’? (Haslanger, 2012, 309). Haslanger’s essay presents a fascinating case study in how we may evaluate frameworks in the context of a plurality of frameworks. The social constructionist framework is

sympathetic to – and compatible with – an eliminativist view, for example, but Haslanger argues that the naturalistic framework is not the one we should be employing, given the broad purposes of our enquiry.

Here I just want to look at the way in which Haslanger asks a series of legitimate external questions about the comparative utility of frameworks. Do they merely mention the terms in question or do they both use and mention those terms? She asks, ‘What does “race” mean? Is it part of the *meaning* of “race” that races are natural kinds? There are scientific/metaphysical issues: Is race real? Do races exist?’ (Haslanger, 2012, p. 301).

The second sentence in particular mentions the term ‘race’ and then uses it immediately afterward. Does it simultaneously both use and mention the term? Perhaps not. But if we consider one of my earlier sentences describing Haslanger’s questioning there does seem to be simultaneous use and mention – and this seems quite legitimate in Carnapian terms. Haslanger (2012) says, ‘There are no genuine biological features – given that these would need to be genetic features – that can be matched to the categories of biological appearance we call “race”’ (p 301).

That last quotation of the term race refers to what we use the term ‘race’ to refer to and at the same time tells us that we use the term ‘race’ to achieve this reference. So this seems to be a case of mixed quotation. But whether simultaneous or not the point is that in asking pragmatic – that is legitimate – external questions we need to both use and mention the terms in question. It is not the case that ‘if we step back this far we step outside the relevant game altogether and can no longer use the notions that have their home there’, as Price has it. Perhaps this is a surprising result – there is something plausible about Price’s contention. In a broad sense, Carnap is saying that we can’t consider the existence of objects *prior to* their appearance within epistemic or linguistic frameworks. There is no

shortcut to the objects that could by-pass the frameworks in which they have their home. But it seems we take only half a step back when we ask legitimate external questions of frameworks. We still have access to the meanings of terms within those frameworks. That seems to be the case even when we are asking whether we should use a framework under whose criteria an entity or kind like race exists or one under whose criteria it does not exist.

So it seems that we are not in any way confined, in the asking of external questions, to the consideration of frameworks as linguistic phenomena in the way that we might be when we *mention* linguistic terms as opposed to *using* them.

Perhaps it is Quine who makes this point most clearly, as described by Alspector-Kelly (2001):

First, Quine endorses (what he calls) semantic ascent from the object-language to the meta-language in order to get a clearer view of ontological disputes and not beg any questions. But he rejects ... [the] claim that the meta-linguistic rendering of an object-language assertion somehow nullifies the commitments taken on at the object level. We can ascend and descend as we see fit. But doing so does not drain the original object-language assertion of content or commitment. The sentence “‘Wombat’ is true of some creatures in Tasmania” is committed no less, Quine points out, than the sentence “There are Wombats in Tasmania” (p. 100).

In fact, not only have we argued that Carnap does not seek to nullify this commitment – he does not seek a ‘lazy nominalism’ as Quine might think – but Thomasson would also fully agree with this claim. In her view, we can ‘move up and down the semantic slide’ at will. Indeed, for Thomasson (2015b), not only does the first of these sentences entail the second but the converse is also the case. The truth of the second sentence entails that of the first – provided, of course, that the first sentence exists (p. 87).

Nevertheless, there are two points I want to highlight here, whose relevance will become clearer in subsequent discussion. The first is that there isn't a use-mention distinction that might apply to language as such and to which we might appeal in solving metaphysical puzzles – especially on the ground that our utterances are in some way meaningless if we fail to observe this distinction. To put this same point in a slightly different way, we may not talk of the meaning of referring terms as 'the only sense those terms have', without adding 'within framework F.'

Second, claims of non-existence will use terms from within one framework while applying the criteria of existence of another framework to the referents of those terms. This second point is not developed further until the later chapters of this thesis. Having noted these points, let us consider some of the criticism of Thomasson's approach, beginning with Jonathan Schaffer's article.



## Section 2.

### a. Schaffer's critique

There has often been a rhetorical, if not a polemical, dimension to Thomasson's advocacy of Carnapian deflationism. Perhaps as a result, many of the responses to her work are made as part of a response to a Carnapian view more generally. There are some critiques focussed specifically on Thomasson, however. Of these, Jonathan Schaffer's article of 2009, 'The Deflationary Metaontology of Thomasson's *Ordinary Objects*', seems to offer the most detailed engagement. Schaffer provides a broad background to a critical evaluation of Thomasson's approach. In the sub-sections that follow I consider some of his criticisms in detail – and some responses Thomasson has made or could make to those. I then broaden the discussion a little to include the views of some other authors who have written specifically on Thomasson's work.

For Schaffer (2009), the most surprising aspect of Thomasson's meta-ontological deflationism is that it serves as the basis for a plentitudinous realist ontology. That ontology is 'in tension' with such a meta-ontology, he argues. Thomasson could enhance the 'coherence and plausibility' of her view by adopting a permissive, rather than a deflationary, meta-ontology. Schaffer claims, 'She does not in practice dismiss existence questions as meaningless, but rather treats these questions as meaningful questions that receive somewhat trivial *yes* answers' (p. 156). Schaffer acknowledges that Thomasson may have an unusual route to a permissive metaphysics, 'but it is a permissive metaphysics all the same' (p. 155).

In one way Schaffer is unquestionably correct. Thomasson does not treat existence questions as meaningless in themselves – nor does she treat them, as Schaffer (2009) puts it, as unanswerable in themselves. They are only meaningless and therefore unanswerable

when approached in the wrong way. The wrong way to approach such questions is without regard to the conceptual content of the referring terms used in those questions. If we do have regard to that content – the ‘application and co-application conditions’ of the relevant referring terms – then such questions become, on the contrary, meaningful and easy to answer. It is only the methods of metaphysics that are deflated.

As we will see, the thrust of Schaffer’s (2009) critique is really that Thomasson’s ‘unusual route’ to a permissive ontology is neither compulsory nor particularly helpful. It does not tell us why we should permit most objects, both ordinary and extraordinary, full ontological status. We do not need to go via the semantics of referring terms to a defence of the reality of ordinary objects, suggests Schaffer, and, indeed, we may not be able to take this route. Further, if this method comes at the cost of a straightforward reckoning with objects and their relations as they comprise the structure of reality – the question, as Schaffer puts it, of ‘what grounds what’ – then the price of a deflationary meta-ontology is way too high. As he complains: ‘Throwing out ontology to save ordinary objects is not just throwing out the baby with the bathwater. It is throwing away the whole bathtub’ (Schaffer, 2009, p. 156).

On the other hand, Schaffer never tells us just what a permissivist meta-ontology *would* look like and why it would be superior to Thomasson’s method. He offers only that:

It grants that ontological questions about what exists are meaningful questions, while adding that the answers to these questions are in a sense trivial, and that the answers – at least in almost all of the contentious cases – are of the form “yes, those things do exist” (Schaffer, 2009, p. 154).

But that is just Thomasson’s position, minus her requirement that existence questions must be formed in a certain way in order to be answerable. When Schaffer’s reticence about a

permissivist meta-ontology is coupled to his concluding remarks, we may begin to wonder whether ultimately there is any substantive disagreement at all between the two. The differences are methodological. For in his conclusion Schaffer (2009) cites Thomasson to the effect that there is a 'legitimate role for "deep" ontology, the "deep" ontological task of determining what the basic entities are and how they relate to the others...' <sup>27</sup> (Thomasson, 2010, p. 157). This statement of Thomasson's comes in the final pages of *Ordinary Objects*, and, Thomasson (2007b) adds, that elsewhere she has 'worked on some corners of this project, trying to show how fictional characters, social objects, and the like relate to the more basic physical objects, intentions and human practices on which they depend' (p. 157). Here she is apparently thinking of her work in 'Fiction and Metaphysics' of 1999. Thomasson's point in mentioning this deep ontological project is that '... identifying entities that are in some sense "basic" gives us no reason to deny the existence of those that are not' (p. 194).

And this, too, seems to echo Schaffer's (2009) view that these two questions are quite separable. He says, 'In general one can ask *whether* a purported entity exists. If the answer is *yes*, then one can ask *how* this entity exists' (Schaffer, 2009, p. 157). Schaffer goes on, 'It may well be analytic or in some other sense trivial that Grail, Lumpail, Sumail, Eiffelnose, and ever so many other things exist, but it may still be highly nontrivial as to which things are fundamental' (p. 157).

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<sup>27</sup> Schaffer's quotation of Thomasson is really a paraphrase. She writes '...it seems to me that there certainly can be a role for distinguishing entities that are in some sense (which of course needs to be carefully specified) *basic* from those that are higher order or derivative, and for offering some kind of account of how the latter relate to the former (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 194). Thomasson's (1999) is an example of her own work in this area.

Altogether then Thomasson and Schaffer appear to agree, even at a very broad methodological level: questions about the existence of things are easily answered; and questions of existence may be separated from deep questions about which existent things are more fundamental than others and how the former relate to the latter. Indeed, Thomasson cites Schaffer as, broadly speaking, a supporter of the deflationary project on just this basis<sup>28</sup>.

However, the question is whether Thomasson's methodology has the kind of prior claim to legitimacy that she asserts. For, according to this claim, other approaches are redundant. Accordingly, Schaffer's (2009) article is taken up with his worries about the kind of deflationary route that Thomasson takes to gain supposedly analytic or otherwise trivial answers to existence questions. The central thrust is this: the appearance of a radical deflationism in Thomasson's meta-ontology is nothing more than that – an appearance. Deliberately at times – at other times perhaps unwittingly – she endorses a traditional approach to ontology. Schaffer's (2009) objections may be listed as follows:

1. Grant that there is a qua problem for causal theories of reference and that a causal theory needs to be supplemented with some account of how the reference of a term is fixed. Grant further that the hybrid theory that Thomasson endorses is plausible – namely, that 'reference is fixed, (to the extent that it is fixed) by the intentions of the reference fixer to refer to an entity of an intended sort' (Schaffer, 2009, p. 143).

There remains a problem in establishing the basis for the kind of analytic entailments

Thomasson relies on in her method. That is because the sortal concept in question

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<sup>28</sup> Later in this thesis I will argue that relations between frameworks may be structured – but only based on the democracy of objects and their frameworks, as implied by Carnap's doctrine of tolerance. A consequence of this view is that there is no room for the traditional metaphysical question of 'what grounds what?' That would also apply to Thomasson's (1999) account of fictional objects.

would usually be considered part of the meta-semantics of a referring term, giving the basis on which the term's reference was determined, rather than being part of the semantics or meaning of the referring term. Yet only the latter will yield truth in virtue of meaning – i.e. the analytic entailments – Thomasson relies on.

2. Grant that referring terms do bear analytic entailments, differing categorial descriptions may do the same job of disambiguating the reference of a term while leaving room for substantive dispute over the existence they entail. Why, asks Schaffer, suppose that the entailments flow from one description rather than another – particularly from a weaker description, over which there may not be any dispute, rather than a stronger description which may elicit disagreement?
3. Grant that the determination of reference creates referring terms that bear analytic entailments – and grant that these may be used to resolve disputes over existence – it is not clear that determinate reference is required in order to answer a wide range of ontological questions.
  - a. Determinate reference does not seem to be required to answer many identity questions, for example –
    - i. Questions concerning the relation of identity that an object bears to itself – these may be answered in the affirmative however vaguely defined is the object.
    - ii. Questions concerning the relation of identity between two objects when one object lies within the field of ostension associated with a naming process and the other lies outside that field – all admissible interpretations of the referring terms in these questions will yield a determinate answer, in the negative.

- iii. Questions concerning the identity of objects whose referring terms have a range of admissible interpretations may have answers with a range of truth values and no one determinate value. They are not, however, meaningless or unanswerable.
  - iv. In general, we may accept that there is semantic indeterminacy (although this is not entirely uncontroversial) and then simply apply our preferred means of precisification to the terms flanking identity claims when the reference of those terms is indeterminate. If that means of precisification is viable then we will have an answer. Radical conclusions about the meaningless or unanswerable character of identity claims cannot be justified.
  - v. Thomasson herself does not claim to eliminate all indeterminacy from identity statements through the use of the sortal solution. Indeed her position on identity claims seems entirely orthodox.
- b. Thomasson's requirement that reference be determinate does not have any impact on traditional ontological claims because her view of how that determination affects existential quantification is quite orthodox:
  - i. Despite some indications to the contrary, Thomasson does not want to qualify the existential quantifier along the lines described (though not endorsed) by Sider – namely, that 'the fundamental quantificational notion is a[n] ... amalgam of quantification and predication: "there is an F such that ...," where F must be replaced by a sortal' (Schaffer, 2009, p. 149).

- ii. Refusing quantifier variance or qualification by a sortal term,  
Thomasson's view reduces to a commonplace in ontology: that quantification, (and more obviously negative quantification), has an implicit, if not explicitly specified domain. For example, 'There is no beer' implies 'there is no beer in the refrigerator'. But as in this example, domain specification requires only a property – like being in the refrigerator – not a sortal property. Sortal properties will do the job but are not necessary.
- iii. Even if the domain of quantification were not expanded in this way it seems straightforward to specify an all encompassing domain, a domain of everything. Using a non-discriminating property is easiest – for example: *being an F or a non-F, being self-identical, having a property, being an entity*. But we could use the property *falling under a sortal* or if negation and disjunction are allowed, being a chair or not being a chair.
- iv. A third reason the 'domain specification move' will not work is this: substantive metaphysical questions arise even with a sortally restricted quantifier, claims Schaffer. Suppose we are confronted with three scattered drops of water in the desert – how many bodies of water can we count? One metaphysical theory, mereological nihilism will say three. Another theory, the mereological universalism, will say seven. This question – familiar from van Inwagen's (2002) 'Carnap and the Polish Logician' – arises however precise we are about the objects to be counted and unambiguous in our reference to these drops of

water. Further, according to Schaffer, Thomasson defends the latter answer provided by mereological pluralism. So she certainly does not deflate this debate simply by requiring that we specify the objects in question as drops of water.

- c. For Schaffer, Thomasson's argument leans heavily on her contention that traditional ontologists use the term 'thing' in a neutral or entirely generic way without any associated sortal concept, in this way creating unanswerable questions. Correspondingly, at the heart of Schaffer's response is the contention that there is nothing meaningless about referring to 'things' without treating the term 'thing' as a sortal term in the manner envisaged by Thomasson.

- i. First, as noted above, the ontologist need only stipulate the intended precisification of the term. 'Given the resources of existential quantification and the identity sign the precisification is ready at hand:  $a$  is a thing iff  $(\exists x) x=a$ .' (p.152). Thomasson claims that reference to individuals is 'determinate *only to the extent* that a term is associated with a certain sort or category of entity to be referred'. But, says Schaffer, she presents no argument to support her view that association with a sortal is the only possible way to determine reference – and is 'the only sense' these terms could have.

- ii. Not only will stipulation suffice to precisify the use of the term 'thing' but even if we agreed that the term 'thing' must be used in some sortal sense, there is a perfectly good sortal sense involved in generic existence questions of the kind that ontologists often ask. Thomasson



herself identifies three distinct senses of the term 'thing'. First it may be used as a sortal term in itself. In this use it refers to the medium sized dried goods of ordinary language ontology. Second, it may be used in a 'covering' sense to name a variety of specific kinds of thing mentioned elsewhere in the discourse. In other words it may be used as a proxy for one or more sortal terms. Third, it may be used in a generic or neutral sense – a use which leads to unanswerable questions. But there is a fourth sense, argues Schaffer that Thomasson does not consider – call this the most generic or 'highest sortal sense'. Given that Thomasson admits a hierarchy of sortal terms on a species-genus model it seems that she cannot deny that there is a highest or most generic sortal term or refuse it legitimacy.

iii. Thomasson might want to deny the existence of this 'highest' sortal – and such a denial might motivate her deflationary ontology – but she provides no argument in those terms. Further, even if an argument to this effect were made by Thomasson, a highly general subcategory such as 'material object' (explicitly admitted by Thomasson in her first account of the sortal solution to the qua problem would suffice to ground many ontological debates – van Inwagen's (1990) special composition question, for example.

iv. Again, the application of a lower sortal analytically entails the application of a higher sortal in the hierarchy – just as, Thomasson would say, my owning a house on Elm St. entails that I own a building on Elm St. It seems Thomasson is then committed to the application

of the highest conceivable sortal – allowing that set-theoretic paradoxes may rule out the application of any absolutely general sortal, any set of all sets. Thomasson’s own sortal solution then ensures the legitimacy of at least a very general use of the term ‘thing’.

4. Taking all these points into account, Schaffer pursues his argument that Thomasson is a full-blown participant in ontological debates of the kind she claims to deflate. His prime example is Thomasson’s endorsement of Classical Extensional Mereology (CEM). For even if we don’t view Thomasson’s defence of ordinary objects as itself being a position on the Special Composition Question, the endorsement of CEM and unrestricted composition certainly appears to be such a position. Insofar as Thomasson’s endorsement of CEM flows from her sortal solution to the *qua* problem and her concept of well-formed existence questions then, as she acknowledges, she is committed not only to ordinary objects but to extraordinary objects – like the fusion of my nose and the Eiffel Tower. This, claims Schaffer, is a permissivist, not a deflationary, meta-ontology at work. He concludes his article by advancing his view that the ‘most interesting ontological question is not the question of what exists, but is rather the question of *what is fundamental*’ (Schaffer, 2009, p. 157).

In what follows I will argue that most of Schaffer’s criticisms find their mark. That is because Thomasson’s omission of an account of the plurality of frameworks and their relations leaves us with only half of the Carnapian story. A solution to the *qua* problem and a hybrid theory of reference are not a sufficient basis, on their own, on which to deflate the methods of metaphysics. Simply: we are not supplied with ready-made criteria of existence and identity just in virtue of referring to a determinate object.

## Section 2.

### b. Responding to Schaffer's critique: The background in theories of reference

There is not the space in this project to undertake an in-depth examination of all of Schaffer's challenges. Instead, I highlight a selection, beginning with the following issue.

Schaffer (2009) describes the structure of what he takes to be the main line of argument in Thomasson's (2007a) article as follows:

First, she argues from the need for sortals in reference determination to the existence of analytic entailments for referring terms. In particular she argues that it is analytic that if there are particles arranged cupwise, then there is a cup. Second, she argues from the existence of analytic entailments for referring terms to the existence of ordinary objects. Since all sides agree that there are particles arranged cupwise, all sides are committed to cups. Third, she argues from the existence of analytic entailments for referring terms to the unanswerability of certain ontological questions. This deflationary metaontology is then used to further buttress the claim that ordinary objects exist. (p. 144)

With regard to this first issue, Schaffer is sympathetic to a sortal solution to the *qua* problem but challenges Thomasson's view of the *role* that this solution might play. He writes:

One can endorse causal constraints on reference determination without substantive analytic entailments to causal processes by regarding the causal theory as part of the meta-semantics rather than the semantics of a referring term. (Schaffer, 2009, p. 145)

Certainly, if the causal theory is understood as part of the semantics then, 'the semantic values of referring terms will involve descriptions of causal processes' (Schaffer, 2009, p. 144). Schaffer (2009) cites Kaplan:

Those who believe that a name means something like *the individual who lies at the other end of the historical chain that brought this token to me* will regard the historical chain as a part of the semantics, as *giving* the meaning rather than telling us how to discover it<sup>29</sup> (p. 144).

So, for example, in the case of a certain well-known cup to which Schaffer gives the proper name 'Grail', '*the entity at the other end of the historical chain that produced the previous token of "Grail" is here*' may analytically entail '*Grail is here*' (p. 144).

But a causal theory as meta-semantics will just explain why a given term has the referent it does and preserve a directly referential semantics, without any descriptive content. 'For example, the semantic value of "Grail" may simply be that cup ... no substantive analytic entailments will be generated. Thus, Thomasson's sortal solution to the qua problem does not require "conceptual content associated with our terms"' (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 45). Schaffer (2009) cites Kaplan to the effect that this is 'the crucial question' regarding the causal theory of reference: '[D]oes the theory state a semantic value of proper names or does it rather tell us the basis for determining a semantic value for proper names?' (p. 144). The latter, meta-semantic interpretation is the orthodox one, observes Schaffer. But he does not mean to 'insist on orthodoxy. I only mean to invite Thomasson to provide some reasons (if such there be) for preferring the semantical interpretation' (Schaffer, 2009, p. 145).

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Devitt assays such an account, arguing that 'a name's causal mode of reference is (at least one of) its meanings.' (Devitt, 2012, abstract)

Schaffer's invitation is a little disingenuous. For sitting behind his challenge to Thomasson's story is a much larger debate concerning the generalisation of Kaplan's account of indexicals. At issue is the potential for a response – if only partial – to the meaning externalist or 'direct reference' type of account of proper names and natural kind terms that came to the fore in the 1970s and 1980s. The externalist account argued, particularly by means of some telling examples, that the Frege-Russell type of internalist semantic theory that had held sway for at least fifty years 'yields an unrealistic picture of (i) semantic competence, (ii) reference determination, and (iii) epistemic access to modal facts' (Schroeter, 2017, para 3.1). Thomasson defends a more traditional view of all three of these elements of philosophy of language, to some extent or another.

The 'modal facts' – or the modal profile of the referent – are the existence and identity conditions of the referent. And these are precisely the application and co-application conditions that, according to Thomasson, come along with referring terms. For Thomasson, the sortal concept involved in the introduction of referring terms to our language – whether that introduction is by stipulation or by the dubbing of a referent – tells us in what possible worlds any individual *N* or kind *K* exists and in what possible worlds it continues to be the same *N* or *K*. We have epistemic access to these modal facts by determining the sortal concepts used in the introduction of referring terms and thereafter by subsequent users.

For the externalist, a successful language user may have only a minimal level of competence in the use of a referential term, well short of the kind of expertise Thomasson envisages. A user could just be following along with a community of users, linked into the causal network of uses for a term or deferring to experts for its exact application and co-application conditions. Further, the externalist argues that even those who are involved or

acquainted with the original dubbing of an individual or kind may successfully undertake that process – they may successfully ‘fix’ the reference of the term in question – by means of quite contingent features of the referent. That is, they may use features that are not essential to the referent and obtain in only a few of the possible worlds in which the reference fixers would want to say that the referent exists. Indeed, the attribution of these features to the referent may even turn out to be erroneous. That is, they need only function to disambiguate the referent at the level of superficial appearances. And finally, then, as a consequence of the foregoing, the language user need have no knowledge of the modal profile or true nature of the referent. Nor will she have access to such knowledge, merely in virtue of being a competent language user. In short, such conceptual content as we may, arguably, associate with a referring term will serve only to fix the reference and not give the meaning of that term.

There are a number of consequences that result from this alternative picture of meaning and reference, particularly as set out in Kripke (1972). The first is that the traditional character of necessary truths as knowable *a-priori* and contingent truths as (only) knowable *a-posteriori* ceases to apply. For example, if Hesperus, a celestial body we knew as the Evening Star, turns out to be, in reality, the planet Venus then the identity statement ‘Hesperus=Venus’ will be, like all true identity statements, a necessary truth. However, it is a truth we can only come to know through experience or empirical enquiry. It is not accessible through some conceptual content associated with the competent use of the terms ‘Hesperus’ or ‘Venus’. It seems, rather, that the sortal concept <star> which was originally used to fix the reference of ‘Hesperus’ (the Evening Star) has served the purpose of disambiguating the referent of this term – and indeed may continue to serve that purpose –

but it is not constitutive of the meaning of the term 'Hesperus'. It is not a contradiction to say that Hesperus is not, in fact, a star.

With regard to the view that contingent truths are knowable only *a-posteriori*, we may know, for example, in advance of any experience or empirical enquiry that the standard metre stick, located in a vault in Paris, is one metre long. We have stipulated that the stick in question is one metre in length. But it is nevertheless a contingent fact that this stick is the metre stick – another stick, of a somewhat different length, might have filled this role. Here then is a contingent truth knowable *a-priori* (Kripke, 1972, p. 55).

One of the implications of this view of semantics is that it seems dramatically to reduce the scope of traditional 'armchair' metaphysics – and, arguably, 'easy ontology'. For it seems that we can talk competently about a lot of things – shoes and ships and sealing wax, fictional characters and kangaroos, properties and numbers and all the rest – without thereby utilising any concepts that will, upon reflection, give us some insight into the true natures of these things.

This, then, is the background, sketched in broad terms, to Schaffer's challenge. For the moment, let us focus on just the second of the three aspects identified above: (i) semantic competence, (ii) reference determination, and (iii) epistemic access to modal facts. The thrust of this response will be that the question of whether the means used to determine the reference of a term are part of the meaning of that term is in some sense an illusory one. 'That cup' just is the cup at the other end of the name use chain that brought the token of 'Grail' to me. That is because the meta-semantics of the term 'Grail' cannot be separated from the semantics in any functional way. Quite apart from questions of semantic competence and epistemic access, we have already seen a number of arguments to the effect that we move 'up and down the semantic slide', as Thomasson puts it, from meta-

language to object-language – and therefore from meta-semantics to semantics – with ease.

There is no functional difference that can result, then, from determining this question in favour of one side as opposed to another. Consequently, we can also argue that proper names have character as well as content. And a grasp of this character, whether conscious or not, is part of our semantic competence, just as a grasp of the character of indexicals is part of such competence.

This argument still leaves open, however, the question of how reference is determined, whether by sortals or by other means. In the following paragraphs I make the argument that proper names and natural kind terms have character as well as content. I will then consider how reference is determined. The first argument supports Thomasson's approach. When it comes to the question of how reference is determined, however, I will argue that her approach runs into serious problems.



## Section 2.

- c. Responding to Schaffer's critique: Arguments for the view that proper names and natural/artefactual kind terms have character as well as content.

It is certainly plausible that there are two dimensions to our usage of proper names and natural kind terms. Just as Kaplan identified two aspects to the meaning of indexicals – what he called 'character' and 'content' – we might identify two aspects to the meaning of these other referring terms. As we will see in more detail in a moment, in the case of indexicals (expressions like 'I', 'tomorrow', 'yesterday', 'you', etc.) competent speakers grasp the character of the expression in an *a-priori* fashion – that is, just by being competent users of these expressions – while the content is filled in by the context of use of the expression. So, for example, we know in advance that 'I' always refers to the speaker of that expression. That is the character of the expression. We might say it fixes its reference. But it does not give us access to its content. That is only accessible by determining the context of use of the expression – that is to say, by determining the user of the expression in any context. Now we might argue as follows:

Perhaps our understanding of names and natural kinds is structured in a similar way: competent speakers always have a-priori access to the reference fixing criterion currently associated with the name 'Barack Obama' but they have only a posteriori access to the associated modal profile. If this suggestion is on the right track, then a generalised 2D [Kaplanian] semantic framework could be used to clarify the nature of this semantic understanding. (Schroeter 2017, para 3.1)

This seems a promising strategy from Thomasson's point of view. In the case of Frank Jackson's use of this framework, the idea is that we can analyse the reference fixing

concepts associated with our use of certain terms, Ramsify those concepts<sup>30</sup>, and then use the resulting description as a target for subsequent metaphysical explanation. In

Thomasson's less formal procedure we can distil a description of what, for example, it takes for any  $x$  to be a table. Then, if we want to answer a simple existence question about tables, we can conduct an empirical examination of likely habitats, for example restaurants, to see if there are any such objects as tables.

Worries remain, of course, even with this apparently innocuous account. If we are asked whether the Morning Star exists or not it seems that we are likely to say something to the effect that of course it does but not *qua* a star and not as distinct from the Evening Star. The Morning Star exists – but it turns out to be the Planet Venus. In the concluding part of this thesis I suggest a novel means of resolving the challenges this apparent rigidity of designation poses to any descriptivist account of existence statements – whether those descriptivist accounts are premised on the need for a solution to the *qua* problem in reference fixing, or not.

For the moment, though, we may observe that Schaffer's challenge – both specifically in terms of the meta-semantic/semantic interpretation of character and more broadly, in terms of his overall challenge to Thomasson – is situated within this wider debate.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Roughly speaking, create an existentially quantified disjunction of the property attributions and replace the proper names and kind terms with variables in those attributions.

<sup>31</sup> With regard to this question, Schaffer also refers us to Robert Stalnaker's (2003, pp. 188-215) writings on the subject. Stalnaker favours the meta-semantic interpretation. For Stalnaker, thinking of the actual character of an expression as part of its meaning gives us the wrong result when we consider other possible worlds as actual worlds. That an expression has the character that it does is a contingent matter, he argues. It should be accounted a fact that will vary in some other possible worlds conceived as the actual world. Considering the actual character of an expression in this world as part of the semantics of an expression – rather than the contingent means by which the semantics is determined – will render that character invariant. That, in turn, will yield the wrong result when we analyse necessary *a posteriori* and contingent *a priori* propositions. I want to put Stalnaker's concerns to one side for the time being until we have considered more closely what

As far as I can tell, Thomasson has not responded to Schaffer's invitation – nor, indeed, answered any of the challenges offered in Schaffer's article. She focuses instead on the points of agreement between them: we should take a permissive approach to the question of what exists; we should accept that most referents of ordinary and even extraordinary discourse (such as classical extensional mereology) exist; and we should recognise that the real questions of ontology lie elsewhere – for example in determining what objects are more basic than others, in accordance with Schaffer's conception of traditional metaphysics.<sup>32</sup>

While that response is interesting in itself – and will be discussed a little further on – let us take the opportunity here to consider what 'further argument' the defender of Thomasson's views could provide in response to this first specific challenge of Schaffer's. We may begin by looking more carefully at David Kaplan's (1989) position. Kaplan takes a reflective and even-handed look at this question in his article 'Afterthoughts'. Ultimately, his position is agnostic: he is 'quite unclear on the subject' (Kaplan, 1989, p. 573). The question is whether 'the historical chain theory (or "picture") of what determines the referent of a proper name belongs to semantics or meta-semantics' (Kaplan, 1989, p. 574). This can also be expressed as the question of whether the mechanism for determining the referent of a proper name is part of what is said in using the name or whether names are 'transparent'.

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Thomasson's version of a two dimensional semantics for proper names and natural (and other) kind terms looks like.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Footnote 4 from Fictionalism vs Deflationism (2013): "In addition to those who have directly defended easy arguments for various entities, several prominent metaphysicians suggest that we should simply accept that easy arguments like these answer standard existence questions asked in English, and that as a result the real work of ontology must move on to other territory, e.g. asking not 'what exists' but rather 'what grounds what?' (Schaffer, 2009) or 'what is there really?' (Cameron 2010) or 'what is constitutive of reality?' (Fine, 2009). I do not mean to endorse that shift, but merely point to even these serious metaphysicians as converts to the idea that standard existence questions asked in English may be easily answered".

By transparency Kaplan means that ‘only the referent itself figures in what is said’ (p. 576). Kaplan’s puzzlement centres on the mechanisms of direct reference. With regard to indexicals and demonstratives, the theory of these mechanisms – i.e. the rule that tells us how the referent varies from one context of use to another – is definitely, in Kaplan’s view, a part of the meaning or semantics of the expression. In the case, for example, of an indexical expression like ‘yesterday’ the rule that tells us that this expression always refers to *the day before the day of utterance of this token* is the ‘character’ of this expression. And character, together with the content it helps determine, is definitely part of the meaning of an indexical. If content were all there is to meaning, then the mechanisms of direct reference would belong to meta-semantics – but ‘in general it is incorrect to equate [i.e. reduce ] meaning to content and it is certainly incorrect in the case of indexicals’ (Kaplan, 1989, p. 575).

Kaplan’s reflections leave room, then, to argue that the mechanisms of direct reference associated with proper names are part of their meaning or semantics. We could argue this on the basis that: First, these mechanisms constitute the character of a proper name; second, the character of an expression, including that of a proper name, is part of its semantics.

There may be other ways to respond to Schaffer’s challenge, but this looks the most promising. I will assume for the moment that Kaplan has made sufficient arguments in favour of the second claim. That is, if we think proper names have character, as well as content, in the same way that indexicals and demonstratives do, then that character will be a part of the semantics of proper names. Let us then address the first claim: all proper names have a certain character in common. Kaplan has given one possible version of this character: *the individual who lies at the other end of the historical chain that brought this*

*token to me.* As Thomasson conceives of this character it would be something like this: *the individual object, of the kind identified at its dubbing, which lies at the other end of the name-use chain that brought this token to me.*<sup>33</sup> This is the character of an expression we use to dub an object and initiate a chain of use – as well as being the rule with which we receive and decode a token in a name use chain, claims Thomasson. This description of the character of a proper name modifies Kaplan’s rough proposal by incorporating the sortal solution to the qua problem. How do we discern the kind or sortal concept that was used at the dubbing of an object? The semantic view of character is that this is another aspect of the meaning of a referring term that we learn in acquiring competence in the use of the term. More would obviously need to be said about this aspect of the character of proper names.

We might begin a defence of this first claim by arguing, against the ‘transparency’ view, that names are not meaningless outside a particular context of use. That is to say, in Kaplan’s terms, names do not have their meaning entirely created by their use in baptising something. Or, again, that they are not empty syntactical forms ‘to which we can assign meaning by ‘dubbings, definitions and the like’ (Kaplan, 1989, p. 575). For this is what Kaplan regards as the default view of proper names. He calls proper names ‘generic names, the kind of name that all us Davids have in common’ (Kaplan, 1989, p. 574). Such names are, he implies, ‘systematically ambiguous ... having no meaning at all outside a particular context of use’ (Kaplan, 1989, p. 574).

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<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that Thomasson would say that this definite description is an object-language reflection of a meta-linguistic rule of use for names. It states in indicative form what would appear in meta-language as an imperative or subjunctive, e.g.: *Always use a proper name to refer to the individual object, of the kind identified at its dubbing, which lies at the other end of the name-use chain that brought this token to me.* This notion of an object-language reflection of a meta-linguistic rule is an important theme in Thomasson’s modal normativism. Here I haven’t felt the need to defend this theme as Kaplan assumes from the outset that a rule or linguistic mechanism could take the form of a description.

Arguing that names are not meaningless outside a particular context of use looks, at first sight, to be difficult. After all, the arbitrariness of names is notorious. We can think, for example, of Monty Python sketches in which all manner of linguistic expressions are recruited to the role of proper names. 'Mr Harquin Fim Tim Lim Bim Bus Stop Fatang Fatang Ole Biscuit Barrell' (Chapman, et al. 1970) comes to mind. This may be contrasted with an indexical like 'yesterday' or even a demonstrative like 'you' or 'that'. These seem to be specialised expressions, each with a distinctive character.

Nevertheless, there does seem room to argue that proper names are not entirely transparent but mediate our passage to their referent in a manner analogous to that of indexicals and demonstratives. For we need to know that a given expression is being used as a name before it can take us to its referent. In the example above, the honorific 'Mister' fulfils that role. It tells us that these expressions are being used as (part of) a proper name. It is only within the scope of that honorific that a common noun like 'bus stop' or an exclamation like 'Ole!' becomes a proper name.

We must acquire knowledge of the character of a proper name in the same way that we acquire other forms of linguistic competence – as children, by practising naming dolls, pets and other objects in our local environment, by playing 'I baptise you' games, and by participating in name use chains initiated by others. We may be corrected or applauded in that process. Then a context of use – the family environment, for example – enables us to trace the name back to one individual. It allows us to refer to one David, for example, as opposed to another of the many Davids in the world. That context of use – i.e. a name use chain – includes the intents and purposes of the community of users.

Likewise, it may be argued that just using an expression to name something is not sufficient for it to have the normal character of a proper name. This seems to be what is

demonstrated by a 'name' like 'Nicholas Bourbaki'. This expression was used to baptise a group of people rather than an individual – mathematicians who first gathered under this pseudonym in 1934. But it has a different character from a typical proper name despite being assigned to a referent in the same way. We assume it names an individual of an appropriate kind – i.e. a human – but its appearance is misleading. This suggests that something more than baptising – or something more than an arbitrary mapping, as these mathematicians conceived it – is involved in giving an 'empty syntactical form' its meaning as a name.

Further, we might argue, the character of names is essential to the process by which meaning is given to an otherwise empty expression. That is to say, this character is *already* employed in naming. It is already used in baptising or dubbing a referent. This pre-existing character of names is part of what gives meaning to a previously meaningless expression, by means of dubbing a referent.

It's true that Kaplan views the character of indexicals as part of their meaning partly because he thinks that they are not, like names, 'systematically ambiguous' outside a given context of use. But, we may argue, all expressions are meaningless – or systematically ambiguous – when considered outside *every* context of use. That is, they are all arbitrary. Any expression – any phoneme – can play the role of an indexical, as we may observe across different languages. The key question is whether there is a role or character that all indexicals – and names – have in common. When we recognise that an expression is playing the role of a name, we know something about its meaning, even if we don't yet know its content or referent. We know how to determine its referent. That know-how includes identifying the relevant kind or category of individual involved, says Thomasson. When we know more about its context of use – i.e. the name use chain of which it is a part – then we

can determine its referent. It seems quite natural to think of that rule for determining the reference of a name as the character of a name.

Last, but not least, we may argue that it is our understanding of the character of proper names that enables us to use them successfully while being ignorant of – or having erroneous beliefs about – any description that may be used to pick out their referent. In Kripke's picture of reference borrowing or transmission we succeed in referring to say, Richard Feynman – that is to say that we succeed in making at least some true statements about him – without any knowledge of a uniquely identifying description of the man or while wrongly believing him to be uniquely characterised in one way or another. This ignorance or error may extend, says Kripke (and *contra* Strawson), to the question of the links in the chain of transmission of the name. A speaker need not know from whom she picked up a name or she may have a false impression of how she acquired it:

A speaker who is on the far end of this chain, who has heard about, say Richard Feynman, in the marketplace or elsewhere, may be referring to Richard Feynman even though he can't remember from whom he first heard of Feynman or from whom he ever heard of Feynman. He knows that Feynman is a famous physicist. A certain passage of communication reaching ultimately to the man himself does reach the speaker. He then is referring to Feynman even though he can't identify him uniquely. ... On our view it is not how the speaker thinks he got the reference, but the actual chain of communication, which is relevant. (Kripke, 1972, pp. 91-93)



## Section 2

### d. Limits to the character of proper names

The character we have described for proper names explains our ability to refer successfully – that is to participate in a name using community – without knowledge of any uniquely identifying description of the referent.<sup>34</sup> That brings us to a certain point in defence of Thomasson's views. But equally it seems to make a further defence – specifically concerning the contention that competent users of referring terms have access to the category of object first invoked in the dubbing of the referent – all the more difficult. Arguments advanced by Kripke reinforce this limit to the character – and thereby the meaning – of proper names.

In a footnote Kripke (1972) gives a brief account of Geach's version of the sortal solution to the *qua* problem (p. 115). Indeed Geach, (1957) appears to be the first to propose such a solution (Section 16 and elsewhere). Judging by Kripke's summary of Geach's solution it is indistinguishable from that which Thomasson adopts. Kripke's objection, likewise, sounds very familiar:

even if [a speaker] picked up the name by a chain of communication leading back to an ostension, why should the sortal allegedly used in the ostension be, in any sense, part of the 'sense' of the name for them. No argument is offered here. (p. 116)

Kripke continues by offering a counter-example – admittedly an 'extreme case':

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<sup>34</sup> Direct reference theories extend their picture of the grounding – and subsequent transmission – of names to natural kind terms. The only difference would be that the moment of dubbing applies the term in question to a sample of objects rather than an individual. However, it is worth noting that a sortal solution to the *qua* problem disrupts this picture. For there is an issue of priority. If a sortal concept must be involved in the grounding of a proper name – that is, in the effective dubbing of its referent – then natural kind terms (i.e. sortals) must be established prior to proper names. Further, they must be grounded by some distinct process. Their referent would need to be constructed in some way – from the observation of common properties, for example – in the first instance.

A mathematician's wife overhears her husband muttering the name 'Nancy'. She wonders whether Nancy, the thing to which her husband referred, is a woman or a Lie group. Why isn't her use of 'Nancy' a case of naming? If it isn't, the reason is not indefiniteness of her reference. (p. 116)

Kripke's point is that referents as dissimilar in kind as a human being and a mathematical abstraction like a Lie set can still be successfully named and that name transmitted to other users. There remains something to be discovered about the referent – indeed a great deal may remain to be discovered – but the mechanism of reference by naming is still effective. We may know in advance that a name refers to the object at the far end of the name use chain of which this usage is a part. But the category of object referred to in this way is not part of the meaning of the name.

This is quite a subtle point. There is a kind of *good faith* involved in the use of a name. If I subsequently use a name I have received I must intend to use it to refer to the same object as the person I received it from – just as the mathematician's wife must use the name 'Nancy' in that way while she pursues her investigation into just what kind of thing 'Nancy' refers to. But that good faith intention doesn't entail that she must know what kind of thing the referent is. The rule of use for proper names – their character – goes just this far and no further. So Kripke (1972) can make *both* the point above about the Mathematician's wife and the ability of names to function as such even when their referent remains quite mysterious – *and* the following point, about our co-operative intentions in using proper names:

When a name is “passed from link to link”, the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he

heard it. If I hear the name “Napoleon” and decide it would be a nice name for my pet Aardvark I do not satisfy this condition. (p. 96)

There are two kinds of objection, then, that Thomasson must overcome. The first concerns the epistemic access we have to the referent in the use of names. The second concerns the determination of the referent in question – regardless of whether we have access to that determination in the use of a name or not. Later in this thesis, I will argue that a better Carnapian view of both these issues is that names do have character and that it takes the following form: *A name refers to the framework-internal object at the other end of the chain of use of which that name is a part.* This, I will argue, provides a solid position on both issues. Here, though, let us consider a little further Thomason’s arguments for her version of the Carnapian approach and the objections raised against it.

## Section 2

- e. Thomasson's arguments in support of an epistemically accessible sortal solution to the *qua* problem

On the question of epistemic access to the referent, Thomasson does touch on this issue when she defends her thesis that application conditions are semantical rules of use for terms, (while confining her discussion to sortal or kind terms), against the objection that a speaker would struggle to *state* these rules. What is at stake is mastery of these rules and their correct application, she argues (Thomasson, 2015b, p. 91). It is linguistic *competence*. As with syntactical rules, a competent speaker need not be able to *state* the rules, only to recognise incorrect examples of their use and, in turn, to correct or endorse the usage of other speakers. Thomasson (2015b) says:

The fact that competent speakers typically cannot state application conditions for most of the terms they use is no evidence at all against the idea that our terms have application conditions. (p. 92)

The challenge she is addressing here is identified in a footnote, in which she cites a passage from Kaplan just a little after those I have mentioned above (2015b, p. 52, footnote 7).

Kaplan (1989) observes:

Many users of the so-called directly referential expressions lack a real understanding of the exact mechanism or rule of reference by which the referent is determined. Though we act in conformity with some such rule, we do not invariably know the rule in the sense of being able to articulate it. (p. 577)

Kaplan, however, continues: 'If we don't know what the semantical rule is, how could it be part of what we say when we use the relevant expression?' (p. 578). This is 'a generic argument for transparency' (p. 577). Kaplan's target is a traditional descriptivist theory –

what he calls the ‘illusion that words like “I” and “Aristotle” abbreviate simple descriptions that are immediately available to introspection ... But who still thinks that nowadays?’ (p. 578). But it also extends to his own earlier position that ‘the character of pure indexicals is known to every competent speaker’ (Kaplan, 1989, footnote 26). Kaplan says he has become ‘sceptical about the competence of competent speakers and about our access to what our words mean’ (Kaplan, 1989, footnote 26).

This generic argument is not decisive, says Kaplan. That is just as well for the view I would like to advance, as well as for Thomasson’s own. And Thomasson emphasises at a number of places that she is talking about ‘knowledge-how’, not ‘knowledge-that’. A key part of her view is that conceptual analysis – or, at least, some reflective process – may be required to identify the conceptual element associated with a referring expression. We could allow that, as with so many of our activities, know-how may not be able to be explicitly stated by the person who has it. So Kaplan’s scepticism is not decisive against Thomasson’s position. There are further challenges that Thomasson must meet, however.

We may recall that Schaffer is prepared to concede that those who fix the reference of a proper name, whether by a dubbing or a definite description have some kind of object in mind – and therefore some sortal term under which the named individual is subsumed. The question is whether the description involved in the grounding of a name is part of the meaning of that name as it is used subsequently, by speakers who were not present at the grounding. Devitt and Sterelny (1999), who Thomasson cites as the main source of the hybrid theory of reference to which she appeals, are very clear that the grounding description is *not* part of the meaning of the name for reference borrowers. While a name may require an associated sortal or categorial concept in order to be grounded, a speaker:

can pick up a name on a very slender basis, wrongly inferring all sorts of things about its bearer. Perhaps it names a university yet she believes it names a person, a cat or a river. She is linked into the causal network for the name and so there seems to be no good reason to deny that she uses the name to designate a university. (Devitt & Sterelny, 1999, p. 79)

This claim is an essential part of Devitt and Sterelny's hybrid theory because, in their view, allowance must be made for the fact that, as direct reference theorists have made clear, knowledge of the referent on the part of a speaker is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of successful reference. For Devitt and Sterelny (1999) the ignorance and error that can accompany successful reference constitute a 'catastrophic' problem for description theories of reference, insofar as such theories require knowledge of the referent on the part of the speaker (p. 54).

In defence, Thomasson begins by making a bid for neutrality. Immediately following her citation of Devitt and Sterelny, as given above, she ventures:

We can remain neutral here about whether or not later speakers lacking any categorial conception, or possessing the wrong one, can still use terms to designate the relevant entities by borrowing their reference from others. (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 43).

She moves quickly, however to argue that competent speakers – those who do not 'refer purely parasitically' (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 43) – will always grasp the descriptive meaning of a term. 'We have good reason to think', she writes, 'that the frame level categorial conception must be passed on to a reasonable number of later speakers' (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 43). What are these good reasons? There are quite a number.

First, and perhaps most important, Thomasson offers a compromise on the problem, for descriptive theories, of ignorance and error. The compromise is this: reference borrowers must know the categorial or sortal concept associated with a proper name. However, such concepts are broad enough to leave plenty of room for ignorance and error about finer grained descriptions. She writes:

It is, for example, still true on this view that competent users of the name “Gödel” may be completely ignorant or mistaken about any facts about Gödel’s life, characteristics or achievements, provided they at least take the term to be a name for a person and not, for example, for a kind of undergarment or lumbering practice. (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 43)

If we do mistake the category of object referred to in this way, we will be corrected by other users of the name, even if our finer grained mistakes go unchecked or are assumed to be simply false statements about the object of reference. Contra Devitt and Sterelny (1999), then, where a category mistake is made in the use of a proper name, there *will* be good reason to deny that the speaker in their example designates a university. If the speaker’s predicative uses of a name are plainly at odds with the kind of facts we normally encounter with regard to a university then we will express bafflement or deny that the speaker’s statements make sense. Thomasson cites Strawson and Grice in support of this view (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 35). She notes that Quine also acknowledges that ‘often in talking with a foreigner we recognise some *impasse* as due to his having mis-learned an English word rather than to his having a bizarre view of the subject matter. This is a bit of practical psychology at which we are all adept’ (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 35).

A second reason Thomasson (2007b) gives for her contention that frame level categorial conceptions are passed on in association with proper names in reference

borrowing is the stability of reference. That is, reference appears to be stable just to the extent that this transmission occurs. Conversely, if a sufficient number of speakers uses a proper name in association with a different category of object from that originally associated with it, then a reference shift occurs. Thomasson's typically imaginative examples include taking 'Aleph Zero' (properly 'Aleph Null') to name a person or 'tenacity' to be a place term (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 43). Thomasson accepts that reference shifts can occur by other means. A name may shift from one person to another person, for example. Nevertheless, failure in the transmission of an associated frame level category is, she argues, a prime source of reference shifts.

Third, Thomasson (2007b) is able to use a similar argument to respond to the objection that a hybrid theory of this kind would face the same problems as description theories more generally in being able to account for rigid designation –although she doesn't discuss the problem in exactly these terms. Thomasson would argue that if, for example, Justin Bieber turned out to be a robot we would face a *decision* over whether to continue to refer to him by that name. If we decided to do so that would be, in effect, a decision to adapt the name to a new use i.e. to re-ground the name. Then the typical transmission process would follow. Predicative uses of the name in conversation that presuppose a different category of object – in this case, a human being – as the referent of that name, would provoke a rebuke or correction. Correct uses would be tacitly approved or practically rewarded – and so on. So the theory provides for what seems to be a plausible degree of rigidity – what Brock (2004) calls tenacious rigidity – while explaining why we don't appear to take names as absolutely rigid. Some critics – for example Dodd (2012) and Sauchelli (2013) – find Thomasson's arguments on this account less than entirely convincing, as we will see in a moment.



Fourth – and, perhaps, recapitulating an argument we encountered a little earlier – Thomasson argues, in effect, that this requirement for reference borrowers to know the basic category of object named does not place an excessive epistemic burden on the users of proper names. She writes:

Disambiguation requires associating the singular term with a relevant category of thing (e.g. with being the name for an animal, a nightclub or a holiday) where this involves a tacit understanding of what it takes for there to be such things and when we can properly say they are the same. (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 44)

That doesn't mean that the reference borrower or even the reference grounder needs to be able to recite the definition of that object or give an explicit analysis. Grasping a concept involves the ability to evaluate the concept's extension across various epistemic possibilities but does not require knowledge of definitions or explicit conceptual analyses. It is knowledge gained in the process of 'indoctrination' – or simply the learning – of a language and the rebukes and corrections, examples and illustrations that involves. Nor does Thomasson think that these categories need provide a complete set of necessary or sufficient conditions for the application of a singular referring term. 'Instead they may ... only involve various sufficient conditions, and may be highly incomplete' (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 44). This incompleteness turns out to be a virtue of this account, argues Thomasson, when it comes to dealing with vagueness.

Fifth – and finally, in this account – Thomasson can use the arguments of at least one of her opponents to show that, with a little conceptual analysis, we do have access to the sortal definition of our referents. In this case we are concerned with the referent of an artefactual kind term. Thomasson (2007b) writes:

you are committed to Ks [things of kind K] so long as we accept the truth of claims that ... analytically entail the existence of Ks (p. 172).

An eliminativist ontologist – one who denies the existence of ordinary objects like tables – will nevertheless accept the truth of a claim like ‘there are particles arranged tablewise’. Indeed, they need this claim to be true in order to explain our talk of tables. If we say that there are tables in the room, then we are, according to van Inwagen for example, saying something that is ‘nearly’ true. The truth is that there are particles arranged tablewise in the room. But then van Inwagen kindly supplies a perfect example of the kind of application conditions that Thomasson claims are always associated with well-formed referring terms and which we can discover by the conceptual analysis of ordinary language. ‘Arranged tablewise’ says van Inwagen means that particles are arranged (in part by the work of an artisan or factory etc. with the right sorts of intentions) in such a way that they are bonded together in a fashion that enables them to jointly perform the characteristic functions of a table, at a height to accommodate a seated person eating, and so on (van Inwagen 1990, p. 105 & p. 109, cited in Thomasson, 2016, p. 156).

### Section 3

#### a. Evaluating Thomasson's defence of the sortal solution

There is a difficulty that is shared by all these responses, however. For while Thomasson successfully argues that we will strive to discover what kind of thing a referring term like a proper name or a natural or artefactual kind term refers to, there is a function of naming that facilitates this very enquiry. A referring term of this kind can be used successfully to refer to the object at the other end of the chain of its use, *whatever that object might be*. The name use chain takes us back to the site of the relevant enquiry. We can argue, in accordance with the *qua* problem, that the referent must be defined to a reasonable extent at the time it is named – and that ostension does not do that job. But circumstantial, contingent descriptions may, like ostensions, do the job of taking us back to the origin of the name use chain, without being definitive of the referent. It is very difficult, then, to support the general proposition that knowledge of the referent is a pre-requisite to successful reference.

This is the force of Kripke's example of the Mathematician's wife and the similar examples that Devitt and Sterelny provide. The mathematician's wife knows the name Nancy refers to *something*. She may then very well experiment with predicative uses, waiting for correction or endorsement, in order to discover more about this referent, without risking a direct enquiry. She may strive for this full 'competence' – she may even feel her current uses are merely 'parasitic', as Thomasson puts it – but she can already use the name effectively for the purposes of enquiry.

Further, we may concede that other users, like the Mathematician himself, have a sortal concept firmly in mind when they use the name Nancy. The problem is that they too may have cause radically to revise that sortal concept. In that case, they will resort to using

it in a purely provisional, place-holding manner. Or they will use the term to name a hypothetical or fictional entity. As we will see below, they need only use categorial ascent to make their determination of the referent broader and more provisional, in accordance with their doubts about their previous categorisation. Schaffer would also argue that they may use other ways – distinguishing properties, for example – of disambiguating the referent to a level of precision with which they are comfortable, given the present state of their knowledge.

The ‘catastrophic’ problem of epistemic access that Devitt and Sterelny ascribe to descriptivist theories remains in force, then, for Thomasson. It remains a problem, however strongly we are motivated to overcome it by the desirability of being able to identify criteria of existence and identity for objects via the application conditions of the terms that refer to those objects.

### Section 3.

#### b. Categorical ascent and associated problems

The second main challenge that Schaffer identifies for Thomasson's ontological method is determining the sortal concept used in the grounding of referring terms. For even if we accept that such a concept is part of the semantics of a referring term, a simple question remains: 'which one?'. What is the principled basis we have for assuming that, for example, the grounding of the term 'cup' involves an arrangement of particles rather than a fusion of particles? If it is the former then the presence of particles arranged cupwise would entail the presence of a cup, in a manner upon which all sides can agree. But if the grounding concept involved a mereological fusion of particles then 'the mereological nihilist, who does not accept the existence of fusions, would not be forced to grant the existence of Grail' (Schaffer, 2009, p. 146). Unless Thomasson can tell us why the concept involved – and therefore the analytic entailment – is one which both the friend of ordinary objects and the opponent will accept, she will not be able to deflate this debate. 'Why, in general, think that the analytic entailments run from the accepted description, rather than the disputed description' (Schaffer, 2009, p. 146).

Schaffer anticipates Thomasson's response. It is because the disputed description is semantically defective. It will inevitably involve, implicitly or explicitly, the ontologist's notion of 'thing' or 'object' or 'entity'. That notion is defective because some more specific concept must have been used in the grounding of the term – and in using names or natural kind terms we refer to the kind of thing at the origin of the chain of use of that referring term. We must use these terms, then, *in the only sense they have*, Thomasson would argue.

First, I think we must consider Schaffer's argument that in maintaining a sortal solution to the qua problem – and in doing so within a genus-species hierarchy in which the

existence of a specific object *entails* the existence of the generic object of which it is a species – Thomasson brings down on her own head, as it were, the ‘highest genus’ of object that we readily associate with traditional metaphysics. This is a powerful argument, at least in its more modest form. That is, we may suppose that proper name refers to a house on Elm St, for example, but we will naturally be ready to undertake a categorial ascent to the supposition that the term refers to a building or a structure, or a physical object *of some kind*. Schaffer takes this categorial ascent to its logical conclusion.

For example, Schaffer (2009) cites Spinoza to the effect that we are ‘accustomed to refer all individuals in Nature to one genus, which is called the most general, that is, to the notion of being which pertains absolutely to all individuals in Nature’ (p. 153). On the other hand, Schaffer seems justified in asserting, as he does at several points that, ‘Thomasson’s rejection of the meaningfulness of the ontologist’s notion of “thing” turns out to bear much of the argumentative weight of *Ordinary Objects*’ (p. 152). Looking at the comprehensive summary I provided earlier, he does allow, though, that Thomasson could deny that there is such a highest sortal, (p. 154) and perhaps this is the place to start in constructing a possible response.

For despite Schaffer (2009) claiming that Thomasson is silent on this point, she addresses it directly in *Ordinary Objects*, as well as elsewhere. In *Ordinary Objects* she asks whether we can revive general questions – ‘how many things are there?’, for example – given that there is a covering use of terms like ‘object’ and ‘thing’ in ‘normal English’ on which, ‘if any sortal term applies ... that analytically entails that “thing” applies’ (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 121). Thomasson (2007b) continues: ‘On this use, then, ‘object’ and ‘thing’ are not themselves used as sortal terms, but rather are covering terms guaranteed to apply given the application of any genuine (first-order) sortal term (or at least most such terms)’ (p.

121). Thomasson allows that this covering use could be restricted so that it covered only substances and not events or processes, for example – or, we might add, material objects as in Schaffer’s example. Her point, though, is that ‘whether or not the covering term applies must be determined by way of determining whether or not the particular sortals apply: ‘if “table” or “rock” or “plant” does then “thing” does’ (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 121).

There are a lot of difficulties with this response, however. Thomasson (2007b) acknowledges that the existence of a specific object entails the existence of the generic object of which it is a species. But her formulation of this principle is a little misleading. For while the application of a species sortal does entail the application of an appropriate genus sortal – and it *suggests* such an application – it is not the *only* way we may apply an appropriate genus sortal. A genus sortal, in Thomasson’s schema, must have associated with it application and co-application conditions that are common to all the species that fall under it. These conditions may or may not apply independently of whether or not more specific conditions apply. There is not even an epistemic requirement that more specific conditions apply, let alone a metaphysical requirement. We may determine that an animal is present, for example, without being able to determine what species of animal – and likewise for more general kinds of objects such as material objects. We just have to determine whether there is anything present which complies with the application conditions for ‘material object’. It’s true that ‘from “there are ivory billed woodpeckers” we may infer “there are material objects”’ (Thomasson, 2014, p. 33). However, ‘there is a material object’ also implies ‘there are material objects’.

This simple observation makes Thomasson’s claim that whether or not the covering use of ‘thing’ or ‘object’ applies *must* be determined by way of determining whether not

particular sortals apply seem simply wishful. The same appears to be true of the claim that immediately follows. Thomasson (2007b) writes:

And since the rules for applying ‘thing’ and ‘object’ on this model are based on those for applying individual sortals, the individual sortals must be supposed to have application conditions that don’t themselves appeal to the existence of some *thing* in the relevant situation. (p. 121)

First, we may just as well say that the rules for applying ‘individual sortals’ are based on those for applying generic sortal terms as make the converse claim – and indeed, to say that the more specific are based on the more general would be more ‘normal’. We might, for example suppose that the rules for applying the sortal term ‘monotreme’ are based on the rules for applying the sortal term ‘mammal’, to which they add additional specifications. Indeed, practically speaking we tend to use the most general terms and only precisify them as necessary for our purposes. We tend, that is, to be as ‘lazy’ as possible – to obey a rule of economy of effort. In this way we ‘cover’ all contingencies – we don’t commit ourselves to more specific objects than is necessary. Second, the application conditions for ‘individual sortals’ will include those for more generic sortals, and will, in just this sense, ‘appeal to the existence of some *thing* in the relevant situation’ (p. 121).

The question then arises: if we don’t *need* to take the long way around to our most generic sortals – if we don’t need to infer the existence of a thing of the most general kind from the existence of something of a more specific kind – is there really any ‘covering’ use of ‘thing’? More exactly, is this ‘covering’ sense of thing really what we are employing in the relevant ordinary language locutions to which Thomasson appeals? Why is it not just some highly general sense of thing that is in play? Thomasson’s examples of the locutions in question include: ‘there is something in the garbage disposal’, ‘there is something standing



on one leg', 'there is something showing at the theatre', 'there is something happening on main street'. The 'something' in these fragments of ordinary language turn out to be a fork, an elephant, a movie and a protest, respectively. But we don't *need* that level of specification to make perfectly good sense of these statements. We learn that there is a material object in the garbage or standing on one leg – or that there is some kind of entertainment at the theatre or event on main street (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 121). This information may be sufficient on its own or be in need of further precisification, depending on our various pragmatic ends. But in terms of the semantics of these statements there is nothing a covering use provides that a more or less highly general use of 'thing' does not.

In the absence of any logical necessity for a 'covering' use of the of the term thing, as distinct from a highly general (and, perhaps, relatively vague) use of that term – and given that we can in practice do everything we want a covering sense of the term 'thing' to do with a highly general sense – I think we must conclude that the covering sense doesn't really exist. Postulating such a sense does not seem consistent with a successful analysis of ordinary language practice. It appears rather to be an invention of Thomasson's in response to her theoretical needs. What does she need it for?

The answer to this question, I think, is that she needs it to stand opposite the supposed generic or neutral sense of the term 'thing'. It allows her to appeal to 'first-order' sortals and put some inferential distance between these and the more general senses in which we use the term 'thing'. But if a highly general use of 'thing' really occupies the space she assigns to the 'covering' use, will the latter still fulfil its role in relation to the generic use of 'thing'? Answering this question comprehensively probably requires looking at all the instances in which Thomasson claims that a generic sense of the term 'thing' has been used to generate a spurious ontological puzzle. What we can say in the meantime, though, is that

Schaffer is right. Many ontological puzzles arise from just a highly general – rather than an absolutely general – use. In the puzzle of colocation, for example, or the question of material constitution we are concerned with material objects. How do we appear to have two material objects in one spatio-temporal location – a lump and a statue – when we might have thought that it was of the essence of a material object that it occupy one region of space-time to the exclusion of other objects? Some will argue that we have only one object – others, like Thomasson, will give the ‘two thinger’ answer. No-one, so far as I know, argues that there are three things present – the statue, the lump and the abstract object, the number two.

Another way of understanding this problem for Thomasson is to go back to Devitt and Sterelny’s (1999) original exposition of the hybrid theory of reference. For here they note that the theory will still face the problem of the lack of a principled basis for choosing amongst the descriptions that define the referent in reference fixing (p. 81). With regard to fixing the reference of natural kind terms they note:

As a result of groundings, a term refers to all objects having the same underlying nature as the objects in the sample. But *which* underlying nature? The samples share many. What makes its nature as an echidna relevant to reference rather than its nature as a mammal (a nature it shares with kangaroos and elephants)? (Devitt & Sterelny, 1999, p. 91)

It is just that this problem of the lack of a principled basis is confined, in the hybrid theory, to reference fixing, rather than extending also to reference borrowing, as it would in a full-blown descriptive theory. But, according to Thomasson, application conditions for terms – i.e. existence conditions for the referents of terms – are determined in the fixing of

reference. So Thomasson's appeal to 'particular' or 'genuine first order' sortals in the quotations above appears to lack a principled basis.

For Thomasson's deflationism to work she needs to mandate a certain level of specification of the reference of relevant terms in existence and existence related questions. The covering sense of 'thing', asserted in opposition to a generic sense, seemed to do this job. If it collapses into a highly general use, as I assert it does, what principle could take its place? And what level of specificity would that principle impose? The level we stipulate according to our pragmatic ends? That approach would lead us back toward a Carnapian account that differentiates linguistic frameworks on a pragmatic basis. Perhaps frameworks that impose local consistency requirements in this way could provide the principle of selection required. Yet Thomasson favours what we might call a 'framework transcendent' strategy. In this strategy, there are three factors at work across all frameworks: the *qua* problem; its accompanying threat of indeterminacy; and, the sortal solution to the *qua* problem. Specific frameworks do still rate a mention – usually as 'language games'. But they are secondary to these three factors at work in the use of language *as such*.

### Section 3.

- c. The need to ground a Carnapian account in the plurality of linguistic frameworks, as exemplified by Thomasson's treatment of extraordinary objects.

Thomasson (2007b) envisages 'our common sense vocabulary' expanding to include mereological sums 'once the whole language game of mereology was sufficiently introduced' (p. 184). Linguistic frameworks sit within this broader approach to deflationism, an approach based in the requirements of referential language *per se* and bearing the standard of common sense. This leads us to the third of Schaffer's criticisms.

Schaffer claims that Thomasson, rather than deflating traditional ontological debates, is a full-blown participant – as exemplified by her endorsement of Classical Extensional Mereology and the axiom of unrestricted composition. Schaffer makes this point more than once. If confronted with three drops of water in the desert, Thomasson will count seven bodies of water, he claims. This is despite her earlier claiming that the special composition question is 'ill formed and unanswerable' (Schaffer, 2009, p. 151). In a later example Schaffer points to Thomasson's defence of mereological sums and other extraordinary objects. In Thomasson's (2007b) view we must accept that there are mereological sums if a term like 'mereological sum' is properly introduced:

...in a way that (unlike "hoverball" or "wishdate") genuinely guarantees that [its] application conditions are met provided the truth of other sentences is accepted (e.g. ...there is the Eiffel Tower and my nose). Indeed, wherever we have a sortal with coherent application and co-application conditions and the application conditions are fulfilled we may then, if we use 'object' in a covering sense, say that there is an object of that sort. (pp. 184-185)

We may note from the outset that Thomasson relies on her covering sense of the term 'object' to argue for the co-existence of mereological sums and ordinary objects. If this covering sense is, as I have argued, really a highly general sense of the term, (if not an absolutely general sense), then we might suspect that Thomasson is indeed operating in the realm of traditional ontology without fully acknowledging – or, perhaps, even without being fully aware – that she is doing so. But let us see how she defends the inclusion of extraordinary objects alongside ordinary objects in a common space. By a 'common space' here I mean a space that is defined only by the requirement for coherent application conditions for referring terms and the fulfilment of those conditions.

First, she argues, in effect, that an ontology of ordinary objects and an ontology of extraordinary objects are compatible. Ordinary English doesn't *'deny'* the existence of extraordinary objects (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 184). It is indifferent to them. It doesn't have terms for them – but if such terms were introduced and their proper use was taught, '[w]ould people then say that it is just common sense that there are no such entities?' (p. Thomasson, 2007b, 183). No, they would not, she contends.

Rather, our negative reaction to such objects is due to an equivocation in our use of the term 'object' or 'thing'. As we saw earlier, for Thomasson (2007b) 'object' can be a sortal term in its own right that picks out 'cohesive, enduring, medium-sized separate physical entities (as in the birthday party game "Name the objects on the tray" when the tray is only briefly uncovered)' (p. 184). A covering use of 'object' allows us to say that there are such objects as sums, provided that the relevant parts exist. A sortal use does not – and this is what 'makes the philosophical thesis sound bad' (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 184). That is because the sortal sense of 'object' is 'associated with existence and identity conditions that would rule out the existence of a disjoint 'object' like the sum of tower and ear'

(Thomasson, 2007b, p. 184). If we allow mereological sums to be categorised as ‘objects’ in the standard sortal sense then the claim that there are such objects will not only ‘sound bad’ but will, in fact be false. If, however, we use ‘object’ in its covering sense to mean any object denoted by a sortal term that comes with coherent application and co-application conditions, then we must accept that there is such an ‘object’ as this mereological sum, provided the sortal ‘mereological sum’ is quite distinct from the standard sortal sense of ‘object’.

But there are some significant problems with this account. First, grant that the ‘standard sortal sense’ of the term ‘object’ is a well formed sortal term under the covering sense of the term ‘object’. Then grant that objects such as the Eiffel Tower and my nose will fall under that standard sortal sense. No problem so far. But now observe that, according to Thomasson, the application conditions for terms like mereological sums (and terms for other extraordinary objects) *include* the application conditions for terms like the Eiffel Tower and my nose. In fact, says Thomasson, they include nothing *more* than those application conditions, nothing in addition to them. Terms like ‘mereological sum’ may be introduced in such a way that ‘guarantees that their application conditions are met, provided the truth of other sentences [is] accepted (e.g. ... there is the Eiffel Tower and my nose)’ (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 185). For Thomasson, given these application conditions – and the rules of the mereological language game – the existence of the Eiffel Tower and my nose *entails* the existence of the mereological sum of those things. A contradiction looms. For the application conditions for these two terms *include* those for the standard sortal sense of ‘object’ – and those application conditions, according to Thomasson (2007b), ‘rule out the existence of a disjoint “object” like the sum of Tower and ear (sic)’ (p. 184). The fulfilment of

application conditions for objects like the Eiffel Tower and my nose cannot entail what they rule out.

The appropriate Carnapian position, I would argue, is simply that mereological sums – and similar objects like subsets and power sets in Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory – are objects within a framework that is developed for certain purposes. Those purposes are quite distinct from the purposes of my nose and the Eiffel Tower. The structure and function of these latter objects are broadly defined within the everyday framework of persons and things. The reason it sounds odd to say that there is a mereological sum of the Eiffel Tower and my nose is that there is clash or incompatibility of such purposes – and, with it, a clash of frameworks. We naturally seek for the everyday function that could be served by the sum of the Eiffel Tower and my nose. We cannot find one, (by contrast with the fusion of a donut and a croissant into a cronut, for example). But if we signal that we are moving out of the everyday framework into a different framework the oddness disappears. If we say, for example, that we are concerned with the set of objects in Paris on a given day in spring, and the subsets of that set, one of which comprises the Eiffel Tower and my nose, we assume there is some arcane, perhaps computational, purpose to this counting of things.

The Carnapian should certainly say then that the Special Composition question is misguided because it implies that there could be one way in which we should describe the combination of every framework internal object there is. That would imply that there is one overarching metaphysical purpose to every framework and its contents. That is the kind of onto-theological enquiry – or ‘excessive generalisation’, as I ‘ve termed it – that Carnap proscribes. Thomasson is fairly clear on this. But she does get caught up at this excessively general level in arguing that semantics *as such* – rather than semantic frameworks – will do the work of a Carnapian deflationism about metaphysics. ‘Semanticism’, may be an ‘easy’

way of doing ontology but it does not deflate all debates in the way that beginning from a plurality of frameworks seems to do. Schaffer successfully targets this weakness in Thomasson's approach, arguing that she is enrolled in the generalising project of traditional metaphysics.



### Section 3.

#### d. Other criticisms

There are a number of further issues around Thomasson's conception of analytic entailments in the service of ontology. The first is a simpler version of the problem identified above – what Simon Evnine (2016) calls 'the problem of too much content' (p. 150). Regardless of the different senses of the term 'thing' involved, the fulfilment of existence conditions for objects like the Eiffel Tower and my nose are, contra Thomasson, *not enough* to entail the existence of their sum, argues Evnine. Even if the existence and identity conditions for these objects did not *exclude* the conditions for their mereological sum they are not sufficient, he notes, to entail the existence of their sum. There is more to be said about a mereological sum than just that its parts exist, at least as those parts are conceived as ordinary objects. The sum includes itself as a part, for example, which no ordinary object does. And we would expect the sum of two ordinary objects to be itself an ordinary object. Yet mereological sums and a range of other objects are supposed, according to Thomasson, to have minimal existence conditions that are guaranteed to be met provided other 'basic' claims that we readily accept – such as 'There is the Eiffel Tower' and 'There is my nose' – are true.

A second issue concerns the explanatory use to which Thomasson puts analytic entailments in ontology. She summarises their utility in this way:

The key to seeing that there is neither problem nor profligacy ...[in accepting ordinary objects] ... lies in noting that where there are analytic interrelations among our claims, distinct ontological claims may be true without rivalry, redundancy or reduction. (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 177)

More specifically, Thomasson argues that certain ways of counting – most importantly, our use of conjunctions or conjunctive lists – *presuppose* that the objects being added or conjoined are logically independent. So, for example, ‘With that assessment in hand, we can see why the colocation problem initially *sounds* bad: if you think of colocation as saying ... “there is ... the ship and also the collection of planks”’ (Myro, as cited in Thomasson, 2007b, p. 78) or that there are ‘two numerically distinct objects sharing all their parts at some level of decomposition’ (Merricks, as cited in Thomasson, 2007b, p. 78). As we know, Thomasson argues that the existence of planks arranged shipwise logically *entails* the existence of a ship – or that a lump of matter shaped statue-wise entails the existence of a statue. We have two objects because the planks and the lump have distinct identity and persistence conditions from the objects they constitute. The lump will survive a crushing – or the planks a shipwreck – whereas the statue and the ship will not survive those events. The answer Thomasson gives in *Ordinary Objects*, is to describe the situation in ways that avoid terms like conjunctions, and the presuppositions that come with them. In this way we avoid violating the relevant presuppositions:

we can already make colocation sound less crazy and less problematic by describing it as accepting (e.g.) that there is a statue, there is a lump, the statue is not identical with the lump (in virtue of different persistence conditions etc.), and the atoms making up the statue are the same as the atoms making up the lump. (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 78)

This account poses a number of challenges. First, Thomasson seems simply to have presented the situation as if the relevant existence claims were not logically interdependent. We could insert a conjunction between ‘there is a statue, there is a lump’ instead of a comma and that impression would remain. That is because she has talked about

‘a lump’ and not ‘a lump shaped statue-wise’. If she were to talk of the latter we would be lead to question whether that lump really does have different persistence conditions from the statue. A lump shaped statue-wise would *not* survive the loss of its statue-wise shape, for example. That is, it would not survive a crushing. It would not have distinct identity and persistence conditions from the statue. And only such a lump – a lump shaped statue-wise – would entail the existence of a statue. But then we might just as well say that the lump shaped statue wise and the statue are identical – and this is something Thomason denies. Has Thomasson just overlooked the distinction between a lump and a lump shaped statue-wise – much as she seems to overlook the fact that there is more to the existence of a mereological fusion than the existence of its several parts? Well, perhaps. However, Thomasson still needs to defend her claim that counting analytically interdependent objects as numerically distinct is the right strategy.

It’s fair to say that Thomasson (2007b) is evasive on this point. In discussing the problem of causal redundancy, she considers the case of atoms arranged baseball-wise *and* a baseball both being said to shatter a window (causal claims alpha and beta respectively). Thomasson (2007b) says, ‘It is easy, she says, to see why, if causal claim alpha analytically entails causal claim beta, the two are neither additive nor rivals’ (p. 16). She continues:

Consider what is involved ... If claim alpha analytically entails claim beta then ... clearly beta requires no more of the world for its truth than alpha already required – sufficient truthmakers in the world for alpha are also sufficient truth makers in the world for beta, they just make a new claim beta true. (Thomasson, 2007b, p. 16)

But this move to truthmakers does not add anything to her account. It simply puts it in different terms. There are two truth makers present because there are two things present,

using the 'covering' sense of thing. There are two things present because within these causal claims two distinct sets of existence and identity (including persistence) conditions are satisfied, in Thomasson's view.

Taking a somewhat different tack, Dodd distinguishes two semantic theses in Thomasson, theses that correspond to the supposed two aspects of the *qua* problem. One semantic thesis is that some sortal term or category must be used to disambiguate the object in the fixing of reference. The second thesis is that reference fixing occurs 'by fit'. As Devitt and Sterelny (1999) put it: 'The grounding will fail if the cause of the perceptual experience does not fit the general categorial term used to conceptualise it' (p. 80). Dodd (2012) argues that Gareth Evans provides a solution to the *qua* problem which avoids this requirement of 'reference fixing by fit'. According to Evans, as Dodd puts it:

the item determined as the referent of a singular term is that thing that is the source – or more precisely, the dominant source – of the relevant body of information, not the item amongst those things present before the grounder that this body of information happens to fit (p. 84).

This distinction is helpful. Curiously, however, Dodd wants to allow that there could be reference failure in the process of reference fixing. Evans alerts us, he says, 'to a minimal degree of fit requirement that nonetheless falls some way short of Thomasson's [requirement]' (Dodd, 2012, p. 91). Dodd argues that it is only 'at the extreme end of the scale' that a fit requirement is operative. He cites Thomasson's 'Orky' example as an instance at this extreme (Dodd, 2012, p. 88). In this scenario Thomasson is out on a boat trip and observes what appears to be a killer whale in the water nearby. Excited, she calls for the boat to circle back and begins referring to the supposed animal as 'Orky'. Due to the caution that needs to be exercised in such an investigation various predicative uses of the name

'Orky' occur during several manoeuvres before a closer inspection reveals that 'Orky' is not a killer whale at all but a particularly felicitous clump of seaweed, producing various Orca-like phenomena in the way that it disturbs the current, gives an impression of mass and so on. In this case, 'at the extreme end of the scale', there is reference failure. In these cases Dodd agrees with Thomasson that we are justified in saying truly, 'there is no Orky' or 'Orky doesn't exist'.

In my view this approach needs modifying. In the Orky case, for example, the identification of the referent is made in error or in ignorance as to its true nature. But that doesn't prevent a naming from taking place. A lump of seaweed is named Orky. What may subsequently occur is that the use of the name 'Orky' is discontinued. In that case, it is the name use chain that ends or fails, not the reference. Use of a name usually continues for so long as we have any use for the object so named and ceases otherwise. Perhaps, for example, reference to Orky remains useful for a little while for teasing a certain over-enthusiastic whale spotter. The name 'Orky' then dies out of use or becomes available for another use. Perhaps this random lump of seaweed turns out to be a remarkable lump of seaweed of special scientific interest that a biologist on board the vessel carries triumphantly back to the lab. Then we may suppose that 'Orky' would continue to be at least one of its names. That name is made all the more resonant by its connotations of Orca – it is not disabled by those connotations. The categorial intentions of the reference fixer are not met, but a grounding nevertheless occurs. In other words, if a failure is involved it is purely pragmatic, not semantic. It concerns the interest the reference fixer and other potential users have in the object referred to, whatever that object turns out to be. It does not concern the category of the intended referent, except as that category reflects the interest of the reference fixer in certain objects whether animal, vegetable or mineral.

It may be objected, however, that the case of Orky is still a soft example and does not represent the extreme end of the scale. At an extreme it must be the case, we might argue, that reference fixing fails, when nothing at all corresponds in any way to the intended referent. Suppose that someone is prone to delusions – perhaps he is like Freud’s Ratman – and points to rats that don’t exist and names this one Reginald and that one Ronald and describes the various unsavoury activities of each as ways of picking one out from the other. But there are no rats *as such*, there is nothing there. Hasn’t reference failed in this case? Well, as Devitt and Sterelny (1999) say, a perception is a cause in terms of a casual theory of reference. Here there is only the perception of rats – they are delusionary or imaginary objects. But we may have a use for these names if we are interested in these imaginary objects. The Ratman has a use for them and so does his therapist as he attempts to track the workings of his client’s mind. And just as the Ratman is a literary as well as medical figure, so names for imaginary objects such as his rats refer, I would argue, in the same way that Thomasson thinks of names for fictional characters as referring.

Further, though, it must be observed that *even if* reference fixing were by fit in relation to categorial descriptions, as the hybrid solution contends, these descriptions would only yield criteria of *authenticity*, not criteria of existence and identity. For the distinction between authentic and inauthentic objects, like the distinctions made in reference fixing, is a distinction between objects that are assumed to exist. Criteria of authenticity may have much in common with criteria of existence and identity in terms of their *content*. Again though, like reference fixing descriptions, they appear to be quite independently motivated and determined. Consider, for example, three planets and their varying fortunes. We may recall that Kripke (1972) uses the example of the planet Neptune as a paradigm case in

which a description may be used to fix the reference of a name, prior to – or even ‘as opposed to’ – any direct acquaintance or ostension:

Neptune was hypothesised as the planet which caused such and such discrepancies in the orbit of certain other planets. If Leverrier indeed gave the name ‘Neptune’ to the planet before it was ever seen, then he fixed the reference of ‘Neptune’ by means of the description just mentioned. At that time he was unable to see the planet even through a telescope. At this stage, an *a priori* material equivalence held between the statements ‘Neptune exists’ and ‘some one planet perturbing the orbit of such and such other planets exists in such and such a position’ (Kripke, 1972, p. 79).

Now this *a priori* material equivalence is a truth of just the kind that Thomasson is interested in. She might put it this way – N exists iff the application conditions (criteria of existence and identity) associated with ‘N’ are fulfilled. This is just an expanded form of her standard equivalence: N exists iff ‘N’ refers (provided ‘N’ exists). Kripke goes on to observe that truths of this kind are not necessary truths since ‘Neptune’ was a name introduced as a name rigidly designating a certain planet – and various alternative contingencies could have applied to that planet – it might have been knocked off its course a million years ago and never caused such perturbations, for example. Yet still we could say, ‘so far, so good’ for Thomasson’s meta-ontology. For Thomasson response would be to agree that it is just the sortal term ‘planet’ which does the work of a definition in this description and whose associated criteria must be satisfied, not the other elements of the description. Indeed, while these notes of Kripke’s on Neptune are not mentioned by Thomasson or Devitt and Sterelny, we might reasonably suppose that they are part of the inspiration for the hybrid theory of reference. In a later note on the same subject Kripke (1972) goes so far as to say

that 'The case of a baptism by ostension can perhaps be subsumed under the description concept also. Thus the primary applicability of the description theory is to cases of initial baptism' (p. 96).

Consider, however, the case of the planet Pluto. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the same reference fixing process applied in the naming of Pluto as applied to Neptune. Since then of course, after much debate and deliberation, Pluto has been re-categorised as a dwarf planet. It has not cleared the neighborhood around its orbit, and so is not now considered a planet proper. Now, if someone were to say 'Pluto doesn't exist anymore' would that person be correct? By Thomasson's account they would not only be correct but they would be obliged so to assert. I would argue, however, that this is the wrong result. Even if we allow for the incorporation of the identifying category in the name – if we say, that is, 'Pluto the planet doesn't exist anymore', even then I think we are at odds with ordinary usage.

There does seem to be some sense in which we would say, 'Strictly speaking, the planet Pluto doesn't exist anymore'. There is after all now one less planet orbiting the sun. But there is also a sense in which we would never claim that the planet Pluto no longer exists. And this is precisely the sense in which the sortal term 'planet' has been used to disambiguate the object that is the referent of the name 'Pluto' from other possible referents. Those other possible referents not only include the Roman God of the underworld or Mickey Mouse's dog but other possible heavenly bodies in the vicinity that did not at that time meet the definition of a planet. But further, while it is true that Pluto has been redefined as something less than a planet – it is no longer a genuine planet – something exists to which the term 'Pluto' or 'the planet Pluto' is connected by the right kind of history or causal chain. We still feel the need to motivate a claim of non-existence



with regard to Pluto quite independently from our need to fix the reference of that proper name or determine the authenticity of its referent. For both reference fixing descriptions and criteria of authenticity distinguish things that exist, by at least one criterion, from other existing things. It is the existence of things that may or may not be planets – Pluto being a prime example – that motivates the elaboration of criteria of authenticity.

Certainly it is tempting to overlook this three-way independence of reference fixing descriptions, criteria of authenticity and criteria of existence and identity, because the content of these descriptions frequently overlap. For example, the definition of a planet includes many descriptions to which we might want to give the status of criteria of existence, along with others to which we may not want to give that status. A planet must have the appropriate spatio-temporal extension, for example, in order to be a planet – and spatio-temporal extension will very often be included in our criteria of existence. Pluto meets this criterion, and this is surely part of why we would be very reluctant to say that it doesn't exist. The planet Vulcan does not meet that criterion, on the other hand, and we have little reluctance in asserting its non-existence. But that is not because Vulcan is not a genuine planet. It is because it fails to meet certain criteria of existence.

Andrea Sauchelli (2013) makes a similar point, in his response to Thomasson, using the striking example of Japan's emperor Hirohito. In the 'so-called Humanity Declaration (Ningen-sengen)', of 1 January 1946 'Hirohito denied that he was a living god' (Sauchelli, 2013, p. 548). Up until this time Japanese emperors were considered divinities. Like Pluto, then, Hirohito suffered an ontological downgrade. In Sauchelli's view the application conditions that allowed the linguistic community to refer to the Emperor Hirohito before 1 January 1946 were loose enough to allow continued reference to him after that date, despite a change in the recognised ontological category of the referent. He concludes that:

if the conditions of application can be loose enough to allow reference then they cannot, at the same time, be strict enough to allow us to draw interesting conclusions about the sortal or category instantiated by the entity in question and/or its existence conditions. (Sauchelli, 2013, p. 549)

## Conclusions

Thomasson provides a bracing set of arguments in favour of a 'semanticist' or 'easy' approach to ontology that does, in many ways, reflect Carnap's earlier critique of metaphysics. However, she pays insufficient attention to Carnap's later emphasis on the plurality of linguistic frameworks and a doctrine of tolerance toward such frameworks. Instead she favours an appeal to general rules about the use of language and meaningful discourse, based around the need for sortal concepts in successful reference fixing. Without the specificity in these concepts that comes with specific linguistic frameworks, however, they are not able to do the job Thomasson requires of them. That is, they don't supply mandatory criteria of existence and identity for referents. General rules about language use could be relevant to understanding how specific linguistic frameworks function – but if such frameworks, (and, I will suggest, their relations) are not playing an essential role in Thomasson's method then she becomes vulnerable to Schaffer's charge that she is effectively engaged in traditional, highly general metaphysics, while promoting a particular method that is not especially compelling. In particular, without invoking specific frameworks, it seems that Thomasson is unable to make sufficient headway against the contention of direct reference theorists that reference fixing descriptions, like ostensions, are part of a purely contingent mechanism of reference that leaves the existence and identity conditions of its referents entirely open to subsequent determination by empirical or theoretical means. Those theoretical means include, of course, the methods of traditional metaphysics.

## Chapter 3

### Outline of a Carnapian approach to fictional objects.

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In this chapter I argue that works of fiction are best understood as Carnapian linguistic – perhaps it is better to say ‘discursive’ – frameworks. They share some features with the kind of Carnapian framework we have considered so far – most notably, we are ontologically committed to the objects that are said to exist within the framework. They also introduce us to some distinctive features of frameworks. The most notable of these is that other frameworks, whether in whole or in part, may be invoked within the fictional framework. In what follows I briefly introduce the Carnapian approach I envisage, setting out its key elements without offering arguments in support of them. I then defend this account by showing how it deals with some of the main puzzles in this area of ontology, particularly those concerning the relation between intra-fictional (or simply ‘fictional’) claims and extra-fictional (or ‘critical’) claims. In the following chapter I say a little more about how the Carnapian account deals with puzzles about fictional objects, such as whether they are abstract or concrete. In particular I consider the way in which other frameworks may be said to be invoked within the fictional framework. I then compare the Carnapian account with what is perhaps its most similar rival – the artefactual realist approach.

In the first section I introduce the concept of Carnapian fictional frameworks.

In the second section I consider the relation between intra-fictional and extra-fictional claims, including an introduction to negative existence claims about fictional objects.

In the third section I outline an informal definition of fictional objects, according to this Carnapian approach.

In the fourth section I consider extra-fictional claims and the Carnapian notion of an 'owning' fictional prefix.

In the fifth section I explore further challenges for the Carnapian approach outlined here in the relation between intra-fictional and extra-fictional claims

In the sixth section I consider further concerns regarding the relation between intra-fictional and extra fictional claims about real fictional objects, and briefly summarise this chapter.

## Section 1

### Carnapian fictional frameworks

*'I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories'.*

Dr Watson, of Sherlock Holmes, in 'A Study in Scarlet' (Doyle, 2003, p. 13).

As Kendall Walton (1990) observes, the notion of the fictional includes a much broader range of representations than simply literary fictions. It includes artworks of all kinds such as visual arts, performances, installations, conceptual art, design, the visual components of film and so-on. In these chapters I will use examples that come mainly from literary fictions, in the broad sense that includes drama, film, opera and dance as well as myths and legends that are a part of written or oral culture. Fictional 'objects' means fictional or mythical characters, things, properties, relations, kinds, states of affairs and events that appear in storytelling practices and with which we are acquainted by written or oral means. I will talk mainly of fictional characters, suggesting that most of what is said in this regard applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to other fictional objects.

It is also true that a theory of fiction will have at least some implications for a theory of counterfactuals. This is something that David Lewis (1978) notes in 'Truth in Fiction', a point taken up by Kim and Maslen (2006). In the latter article the authors suggest that counterfactual suppositions are analogous to very short stories. In particular, they share the characteristic with literary fictions of importing relevant facts into the world of the fiction. Leaving aside the merits of that specific analysis, we are concerned with the assertions that follow the implicit or explicit imperative use of certain verbs. These verbs include 'suppose', 'imagine', 'assume', 'say' and 'pretend'. Just what do those imperatives enjoin us to do? The basic idea is this: In complying with the imperative to imagine a man named Sherlock Holmes who lives in 19<sup>th</sup> century London and who works as a detective we deploy a

linguistic framework with certain distinctive features. Perhaps the first of these features we need to identify is its purpose. Here I defer again to Walton (1990) who argues that the separation of metaphysical and aesthetic questions about fiction is less than ideal. 'We have a right', he says, 'to demand that a convincing metaphysical treatment of the nature of the institution [of fiction], including its ontological presuppositions, make significant contact with aesthetic questions about what the point of the institution is' (Walton, 1990, p. 6).

Can any philosophical generalisation capture the vast array of purposes to which fiction has been put? Most broadly we might say that works of fiction instruct, educate and amuse. But there are as many specific purposes as there are fictional works, perhaps many more: To justify God's ways to man (Milton), for example; to arouse terror and pity (Aristotle); to create an entirely new type of human being (Lenin); to put the snows of winter into the hot mouth of spring (Wilde); to forestall one's execution (Scherezade); to tell how the laundry basket squeaked (Katherine Mansfield). In Emily Dickinson's phrase, beloved of critics, the purpose of literature is to 'tell all the truth, but tell it slant'. That is because, she says, 'success in circuit lies' (Dickinson, 1999, p. 494).

It may be possible to identify some common functions of fictional frameworks. These appear to be centred on the capacity literary fiction has to explore the implications of pre-existing frameworks through the use of merely possible objects. I don't have the space here to pursue this suggestion further, however. Here I will assume that there are, in principle, an unlimited plurality of possible purposes to which a fictional framework may be put.

The first element of the Carnapian approach to fictional objects that I wish to advance draws on the fundamental ontological principle that Carnap seeks to establish. In asking existence questions we must do one of two things. First, we may consider the contents of a



specific framework, analysing it logically and determining whether any particular object is a value of its bound variables. That is, we may consider whether an object meets the criteria of existence and identity of a given framework. Second, we may consider whether a specific framework is appropriate to our current aims and purposes.

What, then, are the criteria of existence in a fictional framework? They are *being said or implied (or presupposed or assumed) to exist* in the fictional text. Likewise the criteria of truthful predications of these objects is their *being said or implied (or presupposed or assumed) to obtain* in the relevant fiction.

We are committed to the objects that meet these criteria. Simply, they exist by the ‘say-so’ of the work of fiction. Under these conditions, we answer the ‘internal’ existence question in the affirmative, with respect to any fictional text. But that commitment does not have any necessary consequences for the ontology of other frameworks. Specific fictional frameworks are bounded by the authority of fictional texts.<sup>35</sup> Hence the slogan I’ve advanced on behalf of this approach to the ontology of fictional objects: commitment without consequences.

If we rely on the authority of a fictional text – as we must to fulfil the purposes of this framework – then, for example, Dr Watson exists but ghosts do not.<sup>36</sup> That is, Watson meets the criteria of existence and identity of a 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific framework, (including,

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<sup>35</sup> It is often thought that what is said to be the case in a fiction, either explicitly or implicitly, is a function of the intentions of the author. However, the Carnapian account is also quite consistent with more recent literary critical traditions that assume ‘the death of the author’ (Barthes, 1967). Indeed, the Carnapian account provides one explanation for this phenomenon. That is, existing linguistic frameworks, contained in the fictional framework, have a kind of pre-existing cultural force, producing meanings for readers that far exceed the intentions of the author. In what follows I will speak interchangeably of both the authority of the text and the authority (or intentions) of the author.

<sup>36</sup> In “The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire” Holmes says: “This Agency stands flat-footed upon the ground and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghost need apply”. It is perhaps worth noting that these criteria are a part of the structure of the text, not of the author’s own beliefs. Doyle seems to have believed in paranormal phenomena.

as it does, the everyday framework of persons and things), by the authority of the fictional text. Ghosts do not meet those criteria.

This brings us immediately to the second, distinctive, element of a Carnapian approach to fictional objects. In contrast to a Carnapian framework of the kind cited in earlier chapters – the framework of ordinary numbers, for example – a fictional framework contains other frameworks within it. Just how those frameworks are invoked is a question I will consider later in this chapter. But just as phenomena are structured into objects within a framework, so frameworks may be structured within frameworks. Fictional objects exist or fail to exist by the criteria of the pre-existing framework(s) being explored – but, by the further criterion, of being said (or implied) to do so in the fictional framework. Sherlock Holmes, for example, meets the criteria of the everyday framework *by the criteria* – or *by the epistemic authority* – of the fictional framework. He doesn't meet the criteria of the everyday framework when they are applied in an unqualified fashion.

In the case of fictional objects we accept the authority of the text without the need of further confirmation because it is so useful to do so. It is only from the point of view of more robust empirical criteria that Holmes does not meet the criteria of existence of the everyday framework of persons and things – and may truthfully be said not to exist. Likewise, we can have degrees of confidence in the existence of factual objects – a newly identified sub-atomic entity, for example – in proportion to the epistemic authority of the tests for existence that it has or has not passed.

There are also, of course, factual elements in fictional discourses. I will call elements that meet the criteria of a given framework – like the everyday framework of persons and things – by the kind of authority on which we rely *outside* the fictional framework, 'setting'. Breaking this down we can say that props (short for 'properties of the set') are bits of sets –

and sets (stage sets, film sets, film locations) are bits of setting.<sup>37</sup> Settings can include events, landscapes, cities, spaces, places, and times. Partially fictional objects are objects some of whose descriptions meet the criteria of a framework by the authority only of the text and some of whose descriptions meet the criteria of other epistemic authorities as well.

Here, then, is a brief introduction to this approach. Its further exposition and testing requires consideration of some of the key issues in the philosophical literature. Perhaps the most important of these issues concerns the relation between intra-fictional claims and extra-fictional claims.

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<sup>37</sup> I've used the term 'bit' here because I want, on the one hand, to avoid the implications of any mereological system and on the other hand to avoid the connotations of breakage or disruption that might accompany terms like 'fragment'.

## Section 2

The relation between intra-fictional and extra-fictional claims, including an introduction to negative existence claims about fictional objects.

Intra-fictional claims – often called simply ‘fictional claims’ – are descriptions of the content of a fiction. They may range from direct quotations (e.g. the stage direction ‘Hamlet stabs Polonius’) to descriptions of plot extracted, after a little labour, from the text of a fiction (‘Two young men, Algernon Moncrief and Jack Worthing, maintain fictitious personae in order to escape burdensome social obligations.’<sup>38</sup>). Intra-fictional claims may include what is said by the author as storyteller, by characters who are also narrators (reliable or otherwise), by dialogue, monologue, diaries, letters, documents, histories, and stage directions, as well as by other manner of proxies for the storyteller or encompassing fictional text.

Extra-fictional claims, which are often also called ‘critical claims’, include all of the claims that literary theory or literary history might make about fictional objects. These appear true without being part of the content of a fiction – as, for example, that Sherlock Holmes is the most famous detective in English fiction. This is true of Sherlock Holmes without being something that would ever be said within the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Let us consider, then, the claim that **i) Sherlock Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street and smokes a pipe**. How does a Carnapian approach analyse such a claim?

Suppose we take this claim to be true. That will be because, according to the framework in question – the Sherlock Holmes stories – it is the case that Sherlock Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street and smokes a pipe. We might be explicit about the fact that we are using this fictional framework to assess the claim. We might say, ‘according to the

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<sup>38</sup> I have adapted this description from the account of ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’ in Wikipedia.

Sherlock Holmes stories, that is true', referring to **i**). But the context might also be such that the framework in question is well understood. Our interlocutors share a common purpose, to which this framework – the Sherlock Holmes stories, or English fiction more generally – is appropriate.

Suppose we assert that this claim is false. We have been to 221B Baker St., we say, and there is not even a residence there. There is only a bank, with no sign of a pipe smoking detective. In the Carnapian view, the falsity of **i**) can only be premised on a denial that the relevant fictional framework is of any present use. We must believe that the unqualified everyday framework of persons and things is the only appropriate framework to use. We can easily imagine a context in which this would be the case. If I am suggesting that we hire Sherlock Holmes to find my child missing in London, for example, it is sensible for my interlocutor to point out that it is only according to the Sherlock Holmes stories that Sherlock Holmes exists and that he does not do so by the criteria of any framework relevant to our current intents and purposes.

If, on the other hand, I am waiting outside the entrance to an exam on 19<sup>th</sup> century detective fiction and I say to a fellow exam candidate that I would be keen to hire Sherlock Holmes to look for my child, should she be lost in London, then a serious discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the famous detective might reasonably ensue.

The intra-fictional **claim i**) is true then, then, when considered as a claim that is internal to the fictional framework. It is false when considered outside of that framework because of certain facts about 221B Baker St. in London. If it were a purely fictional claim, without that factual element, then considered outside the context of the fictional framework the situation would be a little different, but the same principles would apply. **Claim i**) would be

either false or neither true nor false, depending on how we treat presupposition failure. For the presupposition in the claim, that Sherlock Holmes exists, would be false.

It might be said, then, that the question of the existence of Sherlock Holmes has this classic Carnapian profile. It can only be answered subsequent to a specification, implicit or explicit, of the framework in relation to which his existence is questioned. And to say that Sherlock Holmes does not *really* exist is to make a pragmatic claim. It is to say that the framework by whose criteria he exists is of no use to us. There is no question as to whether Sherlock Holmes exists that can be answered in a framework-independent or framework-neutral manner.

In a later chapter we will explore the questions that arise around true negative existence statements – **ii) Sherlock Holmes does not exist**, for example - in greater detail.<sup>39</sup> Here I will note only that in declining to use a fictional framework for our present purposes we are not cut off from referring to the contents of that framework. As we saw in chapter two of this thesis, in our discussion of the use-mention distinction in relation to internal and external existence questions, we are not confined, in negative existentials, to merely *mentioning* the terms used by a framework. We are not confined to referring to the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ and saying that this name – and the framework of which it is a part – is not useful. Rather, in **claim ii)**, we refer to Sherlock Holmes himself as he is constituted in his fictional framework. We can distinguish him, by means of various truths about him, from other fictional objects. And we may still say that, while he meets the criteria of existence

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<sup>39</sup> This discussion will include those claims that use singular referring terms – also known as ‘negative existentials’.

and identity that obtain within a fictional framework, he does not meet the criteria of a preferred framework. And that is what it is to say that he does not exist.

It may be objected that this view has a paradoxical consequence: Sherlock Holmes both exists and does not exist. It may be replied, however, that he does not do both under the same criteria. And, as I will argue at greater length elsewhere, we cannot deny existence absolutely to anything to which we also want to ascribe properties. Further, it seems that we do want to ascribe properties to fictional objects, if only to distinguish one non-existent object from another, even while we also want to deny their existence. So, when properly understood, this apparent paradox has considerable explanatory power. And it remains consistent with a univocal conception of existence. In every case existence consists in conformity to the criteria of existence of a framework. It is just that there are a plurality of such frameworks.

It is not the case, of course, that all internal questions of existence will be answered in the affirmative. Claim **iii) Sherlock Holmes has a psychiatrist named Schmidt** is false for example.<sup>40</sup> Schmidt is nowhere said to exist in the Holmes stories. By the same criteria, certain predications may be said to be false. **iv) Sherlock Holmes is an aerobics instructor**, for example, is not only untrue but not possibly true. Even if we haven't read all the stories, we know this claim is anachronistic. It is necessary for the purpose of the Sherlock Holmes stories – using a 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific framework in a realistic manner – that Holmes be a man of his place and time. Aerobics instructors are not of the relevant time.

There may be other fictional frameworks in relation to which claims **iii)** and **iv)** are true, however. There may be other stories about Sherlock Holmes, other than those

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<sup>40</sup> This example is due to Amie Thomasson (2007b)

authored by Doyle, in which they are true. So some further specification of the framework in question may be required. This also raises questions about the identity conditions of fictional objects like Sherlock Holmes. What does it take for the same Sherlock Holmes to appear in different fictions? This kind of question will be considered a little later in this account. Here we may note that there is a certain *incorrigibility* to fictional objects. **Claim iii)** is an example due to Amie Thomasson of a non-existent fictional object. But that characterisation seems too broad. Schmidt is non-existent by the criteria of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. But he might also be said to be the subject of a very short fiction, with a very specific purpose – one that is enacted in Amie Thomason's work and in this thesis. So it is very difficult to posit an absolutely non-existent object or an entirely idle framework, however abject such an object or useless such a framework appears. Fictional objects – and reference to them – seem incorrigible.



## Section 3

### Defining fictional objects

It is important to note that, for this Carnapian view, there are really two criteria that define fictional objects as such. We might call one a positive, and the other a negative, criterion. The first, positive, criterion is that the object be a commitment of some discursive framework. The second, negative, criterion is that it fails to meet the criteria of existence of some other discursive framework – and that framework is preferred to the first framework. It is preferred to the first framework for present purposes – that is, for so long as we categorise an object as ‘fictional’. How does that second framework come to be privileged? I don’t think this theory needs to make any strong claim in this regard. There may be instances where we would want to argue that an object that is treated as fictional should not be so categorised because a particular framework should not be privileged. But the default situation seems to be that a framework is privileged because its use is necessary for the broad purposes of survival – that is, the production and reproduction of the means of life. Such is the case, for example, with the unqualified application of the everyday framework of persons and things. Beyond that, debates can certainly be had about the relation between frameworks and which should have the greater epistemic authority.

The simplest examples of these two criteria at work involve objects like Sherlock Holmes. These meet the criteria of the everyday framework of persons and things, insofar as that framework is situated within the authority of a fictional framework. They fail to meet the criteria of that framework when it is applied in an unqualified fashion. Hence we characterise Sherlock Holmes as fictional or ‘fictitious’.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Some authors distinguish between ‘fictional’ characters – which would include real persons in a fiction, such as Napoleon in ‘War and Peace’ – and ‘fictitious’ characters like Pierre in that novel. I categorise Napoleon as a

Of course, this ties fictionality to a relation between frameworks. It relativises it in this way. For every framework has its own purpose. We only characterise Sherlock Holmes as fictional because of the dominance in our everyday lives of the practical purposes which an unqualified application of the everyday framework serves – and the potentially disastrous impracticality of pursuing those same purposes using the framework of the Sherlock Holmes stories.<sup>42</sup>

Sherlock Holmes is fictional from the point of view of the everyday framework of persons and things. But what is fictional in relation to the criteria of one framework is factual relative to another. As the epigraph to this chapter notes, within the framework of the Sherlock Holmes stories, and without consideration of another framework, Sherlock Holmes is factual not fictional. He exists ‘outside of books’, as Dr Watson puts it. Here he is referring to the books of fiction that exist within the Sherlock Holmes stories. The objects of those books of fiction themselves meet a positive criterion, existing as commitments of their frameworks, and a negative criterion – they fail to meet the criteria of existence of the preferred – the dominant or primary – fictional framework.

A standard example of this kind of nesting is Shakespeare’s play within the play of ‘Hamlet’, the ‘Tragedy of Gonzago’.<sup>43</sup> Gonzago, the eponymous protagonist of this play, meets the criteria of existence and identity of an everyday framework of reality. After all, he

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factual element in that novel along with such objects and events as Moscow and the Battle of Borodino and treat the terms ‘fictional’ and ‘fictitious’ as synonymous.

<sup>42</sup> Confusions do arise about the role of fictional frameworks though. It is often said that Holmes is admired by many living detectives and it seems there are those who would use Holmes’ ‘deductions’, (more usually inductive inferences) guaranteed by textual fiat, as a model for their own, equally persuasive but much less secure, inferences. A recent example is Giuliano Mignini, an Italian prosecutor who has gained a number of convictions that have subsequently been overturned. They include that of American student Amanda Fox accused of murdering her flatmate despite ample evidence suggesting that the killing was the result of a home invasion. In the documentary on that case, Mignini speaks of his admiration for Sherlock Holmes, describing him as ‘the great English detective’.

<sup>43</sup> This example is first introduced into the debate by Saul Kripke in his (1973, *passim*)

is subject to the exact same murderous turn of events as Hamlet's father. He meets these criteria by the epistemic standards of the text, 'The Tragedy of Gonzago'. However, Gonzago does not meet the criteria of everyday reality by the epistemic standards of the play 'Hamlet'. The audience of fictional characters in 'Hamlet' have been enjoined, by various conventional devices, merely to imagine these events. He is, therefore, a fictional object within that fiction. One iteration up, Hamlet meets the criteria of an everyday framework by the epistemic authority of the play 'Hamlet'. But he does not do so by the epistemic standards that define our everyday reality, in relation to which he is a merely fictional object.

It is a considerable advantage of a Carnapian-style analysis that it helps clarify what we mean by the term 'fictional' and its variants. The first kind of statement which this analysis helps clarify are statements in which terms like 'fictional' (or 'mythical') appear to be used as synonyms for 'non-existent'. For the Carnapian approach, this sameness of meaning is quite legitimate and straightforward. And certainly this kind of usage is very common. We just need to observe that there is a positive criterion involved in the application of these terms as well as a negative criterion. For example: 'Despite the fact that stories about the Red Rascal abound, the legendary anti-Taliban fighter is purely fictional'<sup>44</sup> Here we note that the Red Rascal meets the positive criterion of existence of a fictional character and assert that he meets no other criterion of existence. In this case that qualifier 'purely' seems to indicate that no other criterion of existence at all is met, at least none that is relevant. This is to say that the Red Rascal does not exist. The title of a recent philosophy article asks the arresting question, 'Are contingent facts a myth?' (Cresswell & Rini, 2010).

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<sup>44</sup> The American cartoonist Gray Trudeau introduces the Red Rascal in the course of his *Doonesbury* cartoon series. I have not been able to obtain a more precise citation.

By this the authors mean to ask whether, despite the widespread and long-lived assumption of their existence in the literature, contingent facts fail to meet a well justified and accepted criterion of existence. Asking the question 'Are contingent facts a myth' just clarifies the structure of the synonymous question: 'Are contingent facts non-existent?'

This account may be generalised to all claims that attribute non-existence to the referents of singular or general referring terms, provided we drop the requirement that the qualifications 'fictional' and 'mythical' apply to the discursive practice in which an object appears. Attributions of non-existence to an object presuppose the satisfaction of at least one criterion of existence by that object – whether or not we would naturally call that criterion the criterion of a fictional or mythical framework.

A further example is Margaret Thatcher's (1987) famous claim: 'There is no such thing as society'. This claim can very successfully be glossed as 'society is a myth' or 'society is a fiction'. This is despite the fact that society has never been spoken of, by those who use the term, as a mythical or fictional object. It has always been spoken of as a (component of) known fact, to use Lewis's phrase. No doubt this is also true historically of many stories and objects we now classify as mythical.

This is one reason why it is better not to view the intentions of an author as essential to the fictional status of a discourse and to prefer a more objective account. Fundamentally, fictional objects are those that pass at least one criterion of existence and fail at least one relevant, preferred criterion – relevant, that is, to the context in which the claim of fictionality is made, and preferred in that context over the criterion or criteria the fictional object passes. The truth value of negative or positive existence claims regarding these objects depends on how we evaluate, in a pragmatic or posterior fashion, the criteria in question and the utility of the frameworks to which they belong. That posterior evaluation

includes, but is not limited to, an empirical assessment of exemplary claims made using the framework. It will also be influenced by the context of interests and purposes in which a claim of fictionality is made.

In terms of authorial intention, disclaimers that preface a text – such as clauses asserting that any resemblance to real life persons or events is purely coincidental – are certainly evidence of the author's views as to the fictional character of a discourse. But such clauses may be tendentious – even cynical – in that they aim only at protecting the author from tortious liability. Ultimately, an evaluation of the criteria which the referents of the discourse pass and those which they fail, must be made. By this account, then, fictionality is not a property that an object inherits from the discourse of which it is a subject. Rather, the converse is the case – our evaluation of the objects determines how we characterise the discourse.

Further, we will have considerable difficulty in understanding the use of terms like 'fictional' and 'mythical' as synonyms for 'non-existent' if we use a theory in which fictional objects are abstract objects. This is an issue I will discuss further in the next chapter, in relation to Kripke's artefactualist theory of fictional characters.

So much for the Carnapian analysis of fictional claims. Let us turn our attention to critical or extra-fictional claims.

## Section 4

### Extra-fictional claims and an 'owning' prefix.

By way of introduction to the Carnapian account of extra-fictional claims it is necessary to say a few things first about rival theories. A number of different theories of fiction argue that claims like **i)** above about the content of a fiction are best understood as implicitly prefixed by a 'story operator'<sup>45</sup>. Such an operator would be, for example, 'According to the Holmes stories...' Theories that posit such an operator include abstract realist or artefactualist theories of fiction (e.g. Thomasson, 1999; Kripke, 1973/2013), concrete realist theories (e.g. Lewis, 1978) and 'prefix fictionalist' irrealist theories (e.g. Brock, 2002; Sainsbury, 2010). Superficially, the Carnapian approach to fictional claims envisaged here is not too dissimilar from these approaches. At the least, the Carnapian can lay claim to the intuitive appeal that such a prefix has. It sounds natural to say, 'According to the Holmes stories, Sherlock Holmes lives at 221B Baker St. and smokes a pipe'. For the Carnapian, the story operator tells us that a fictional framework is involved in this claim, should the context of utterance fail to make this clear. Very often a prefix is not necessary – other contextual clues do the same job. But where a prefix is used or implied, that makes sense according to the Carnapian view.

However, here the similarity ends. For in the views just mentioned, this prefix is thought of as a 'disowning prefix' (Lewis 2005 p. 315). The use of the prefix relieves the speaker from commitment to the existence of any person called Sherlock Holmes. The modified claim merely tells us something about the Sherlock Holmes stories – i.e. things that do exist – and what is said or implied in them. By contrast, from the Carnapian point of view,

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<sup>45</sup> The expression seems to have originated with John Woods' *Logic of Fiction: A Philosophical Sounding of Deviant Logic* (1974)

to exist is to be an element of a framework. So this prefix, while clarifying perhaps that Sherlock Holmes does not exist by the unqualified application of the criteria of the everyday framework of persons and things, is better thought of as an 'owning prefix'. It proudly takes possession of the objects referred to in the story. Yes, it clarifies that such objects may only be said to exist by the criteria of a certain framework. But such is also the condition of every object.

Here is an example of a critical claim:

**v) Sherlock Holmes is the most popular detective in 19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction**

Critical or extra-fictional claims like **v)** have gained a lot of attention in theories of fiction, including those mentioned above, because we seem happy to affirm their truth without any prefix or story operator. Indeed, the kind of qualification that we might think attaches, either contextually or explicitly, to claims like **i)** is not appropriate in the case of critical claims. If we were to say, for example: 'According to the Sherlock Holmes stories, Sherlock Holmes is the most popular detective in 19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction', that claim would be false. The Holmes stories say nothing of this kind. Claims like **v)** are not true subject to some qualification like a disowning prefix. They seem to be true in an 'out and out' way, as Kripke puts it (1973, *passim*). As we will see, this curious relationship between fictional and critical claims has proved highly fertile – and equally difficult ground – for theories of fiction. To begin with, though, let us see how a Carnapian approach traverses the issues this relationship raises.

As we said in our initial exposition of the Carnapian approach: Fictional objects exist by the criteria of fictional frameworks. The significance of this thesis – and of understanding story operators as owning rather than disowning prefixes – is just this. Both fictional and

critical claims refer to the same one thing, unitary and indivisible. That is, the fictional object. This is best illustrated by combining claims **i)** and **v)**, in either order:

**vi) Sherlock Holmes is the most popular detective in 19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction. He lives at 221B Baker Street and smokes a pipe.**

**vii) Sherlock Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street and smokes a pipe. He is the most popular detective in 19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction.**

The anaphoric reference of the pronoun ‘he’ in the second sentence refers to the subject of the first sentence. Considering claim **v)** on its own we can see that it clarifies the context and the framework in which Sherlock Holmes exists – namely, 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction. Hence there is no need of an owning prefix with critical claims. There is often a kind of owning suffix like ‘in 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction’ in **claims vi) and vii)** – or ‘in the fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’. But one way or another, ownership of the fictional objects to which these claims refer is readily apparent. Hence they appear true without the need of a prefix. But they refer to the same fictional objects as do fictional claims.

The fact that a prefix is unnecessary with regard to critical claims does not, of course, explain why the addition of such a prefix will usually make such claims false. That is explained by the simple fact that the claim that Sherlock Holmes is the most popular detective in 19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction is not one that the Sherlock Holmes stories ever make. But further there are many truths about fictional objects other than those that are *explicitly stated* in a work of fiction.

To begin with, there are truths in fiction that are implied or entailed by the pre-existing frameworks invoked within the fiction. If Sherlock Holmes is said to tip over his cup of tea, for example, we may infer that the contents fall to the floor rather than toward the



ceiling (Kim & Maslen, 2006). That is because the description of events in the fiction will not contradict the principles of the everyday framework of persons and things.

Then there are truths implied by a work of fiction, under various interpretive theories, for which various explicit statements in the text serve as evidence. For example:

**viii) Hamlet's reactions to the death of his father are amplified by the fact that his Oedipal desire to take his father's place in his mother's affections has been so swiftly thwarted by his uncle.**

This kind of explication is a staple of critical practice and, as noted, relies on the *evidence* of what is stated in the text rather than any specific statement. But while we may reasonably assert the truth of **viii)** it would be false to say 'According to the play "Hamlet", Hamlet's distress at the death of his father is amplified by the fact that his Oedipal desire to take his father's place in his mother's affections has been so swiftly thwarted by his uncle.'

Then there are critical claims concerning the contents of the story that don't invoke any additional theory but refer to the process by which the fictional object comes to be in the fictional framework. For example:

**ix) The long-suffering landlady of 221B Baker St was never even given a first name by Doyle** (Bunsen, 2014, p. 88)

It would clearly be false to prefix this claim with 'According to the Sherlock Holmes stories...'.

Beyond this there are all the truths that arise from the comparison of one fictional object with another, from the provenance or history of fictional objects or their literary characteristics. They refer to the same object – they just ascribe properties other than those explicitly – or even implicitly – attributed in the fiction. An example, due to van Inwagen, is

that of Mrs Gamp in Charles Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit*. She is introduced in chapter 19, she is created by Charles Dickens, and she is a satiric villainess (van Inwagen, 2001, p. 49).

The 'owning prefix' may clarify, in some contexts, that we are talking about a fictional and not a real object or character. It may also clarify that we are talking about properties that character has that the author explicitly ascribes to her. But it is not the only way we have of clarifying that a character is fictional. And it may not always be the case that the properties that are truthfully ascribed to the fictional character are those explicitly ascribed in the text. But there is only one object talked about in all cases.

We may fortify this account using a strategy that by now will be familiar – analogy with talk about factual objects. Consider the following claim, for example:

**x) Napoleon's desire to unify Europe is an expression of his desire to eliminate all rivals to his mother's affections.**

It would clearly be false to prefix this claim with 'According to the historical record ...' That record – including, say Napoleon's letters to his wife Josephine – might serve as evidence for this view but it will not state it.

**xi) Neptune is the last great discovery of Newtonian cosmology.**

There are many claims about Neptune that might remain true when prefixed with a reference to the framework of Newtonian cosmology. For example, 'According to Newtonian cosmology (as applied by Urbain le Verrier) Neptune orbits the sun in the region beyond Uranus'. However it would not be true to say that 'According to Newtonian cosmology (as applied by Urbain le Verrier) Neptune is the last great discovery of Newtonian cosmology.' But no-one would dispute that we are talking about the same object, namely the planet Neptune.

As we will see in a moment when we compare this Carnapian account of critical claims with that of rival theories, there are huge advantages to recognising fictional objects as existent objects with a range of properties. Some of those properties are bestowed explicitly by the text, others come from a much broader analysis of the object, such as that which literary criticism or the history of science undertakes.

## Section 5

### Challenges in the relation between intra-fictional and extra-fictional claims

However, a number of objections may be raised to any form of realism about fictional objects. Perhaps the most challenging is as follows. Consider the following two claims, the first fictional, the second critical, both of which we are inclined to affirm as true:

**xii) Sherlock Holmes was born in 1853<sup>46</sup>**

**xiii) Sherlock Holmes was created in 1887<sup>47</sup>**

If these two claims refer to one existent object, and both claims are true, how can that object be said to come into existence at two different times?

The Carnapian response goes like this. Holmes is a specific, existent object. A part of that specification is that he was born in 1853. That is when Sherlock Holmes came into existence. His existence was first posited, identified or described in 1887. His existence was first conceived at that time – or perhaps a little earlier. But only claim **xii)** accurately describes when Sherlock Holmes came into existence.

Claim **xiii)** is, strictly, false with respect to the coming into existence of Sherlock Holmes. 1887 is when the specific framework, by whose criteria Sherlock Holmes exists, came into existence. But objects often inherit the properties of their frameworks. Such is the case in **xi) Neptune is the last great discovery of Newtonian cosmology**, for example. And such is also the case with **xiii)**. The specific fictional framework by whose authority Sherlock Holmes exists came into existence in 1887 and he inherits this property of coming into existence – or ‘being created’ – from that framework.

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<sup>46</sup> Holmes was born in 1853 or 1854 – that is, we know that he was 60 years old in ‘His Last Bow’ set in August 1914 (Bunsen, 2014, p. 10).

<sup>47</sup> The first Sherlock Holmes story to be published, ‘A Study in Scarlet’, appeared on this date (Bunsen, 2014, p. 22). Brock (2015) makes much of the vagueness regarding the time of ‘creation’ of fictional objects in artefactualist theories of fiction. That is not an issue in this account.

The analogy with Neptune is instructive. Neptune was first hypothesised by Le Verrier (and, independently, by John Couch Adams) in the period 1845 to 1846. A part of the description of Neptune is that it was created, in common with the other planets, about 4.6 billion years ago. That is when Neptune came into existence. Its existence, and the origin of that existence, was first *posited* in 1845-46.

Neptune was first observed by telescope on 23 September 1846. That is when it was found to meet empirical, rather than merely theoretical, criteria and its existence was confirmed. It is extremely unlikely, though not impossible, that there could ever be confirmation, by empirical evidence, that Sherlock Holmes existed. But prior to that point the stories of Sherlock Holmes and Neptune are analogous. Both are posited under certain frameworks, with certain factual constraints. Both have real times of origin that are a part of their description as possible objects. The ultimate intentions of the two enquiries are a little different – but a structural analogy is evident.

While fictional objects are not created in the sense of being brought into existence, we readily speak of both scientific and fictional frameworks as the result of creative and imaginative acts. We ‘come up with’ both theories and stories. We might describe both theories and stories as ‘inventive’ or ‘creative’ and as being ‘invented’ or ‘created’. It seems, then, that the objects that are posited within these frameworks inherit the properties of their frameworks, by a kind of metonymic implication. It is the Sherlock Holmes stories, the first of which was published in 1887, that came into existence at that time. Sherlock Holmes himself then inherits this property.

This mechanism in which fictional (and factual objects) inherit the properties of their frameworks seems to apply to other attributions. For example, it might be argued that claim v), **Sherlock Holmes is the most popular detective in 19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction**, also

displays this kind of metonymic implication<sup>48</sup>. It is the Sherlock Holmes *stories* that are the most popular stories about a detective in English fiction. Sherlock Holmes is the most popular detective of his time *within* the stories. But Sherlock Holmes also inherits the properties of his framework.

There is also an interesting analogy, I would suggest, with claims like the following:

**xiv) Richard Starkey was born in 1940. Ringo Starr was born in a Liverpool tavern one cold night in 1959.**

Properly speaking it is a framework – a professional persona or framing – that is conceived and comes into existence in 1959. But the one individual, whether known as Richard Starkey or Ringo Starr, inherits the properties of this framework.

In describing this mechanism by which fictional objects inherit the properties of their frameworks, we can, I suggest, also appeal to the sense in which we attribute properties to properties. This kind of iteration of properties is something with which we are so familiar that it usually goes unnoticed. We might, for example, say that the matador's cape is provocative. And this may be elliptical for the assertion that it is the redness of the matador's cape that is provocative. We attribute a provocative character to the matador's cape. But we are ready to concede that, strictly speaking, provocativeness is a property of a property of the cape – that property being the cape's redness.

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<sup>48</sup> Metonymy, as a rhetorical figure, is often thought of as the use of a part of an object to refer to the whole of an object. Sometimes it is said to be using the container for the thing contained. For example, 'We will not put boots on the ground in Iraq' meaning we will not put foot soldiers on the ground in Iraq. Or 'Do you have any wheels?' meaning 'Do you have a car?' It may be that metonymy (as a rhetorical figure, as opposed to a larger use like Jakobson's in discussing the two axes of a narrative) is about using an essential feature of an object to refer to an object. It is that form of meaning or implication that I am trying to evoke in the case of objects 'inheriting' the properties of their framework. So 'Neptune' is used in xi) to mean the hypothesis in which Neptune is posited – and 'Sherlock Holmes' in xiii) is used to mean the Sherlock Holmes stories.

We can distinguish, then, between first order properties – the matador’s cape being red, for example – and second order properties – the matador’s cape being provocative.<sup>49</sup> Being born in 1853 is a first order property of Sherlock Holmes. Being created in 1887 is a second order property Sherlock Holmes inherits, due to his being born in 1853 first being said to have occurred in 1887.

Here is an example, due to Lycan of the ambiguity that can arise with respect to talk about fictional and critical properties – an ambiguity that is resolved by an account that distinguishes between fictional and critical properties as primary and secondary properties:

**xv) Hitler admired Iago.** (Lycan, 2015, p. 34)

This could mean that Hitler admired Iago in much the way we might admire a colleague, out of respect for his work. But it could also mean that Hitler admired the *writing* of Iago: the skill with which Shakespeare endows his character with various motives and personality traits. Iago’s first order, intra-fictional properties include his remorseless aptitude in the service of malice. These intra-fictional properties themselves have the property of being skilfully blended or contrived. Such properties are Iago’s second order or extra-fictional (i.e. critical) properties. So we may be speaking of Iago or we may be speaking of the writing of Iago. We might be saying that Hitler admired Iago’s work or that Hitler admired Shakespeare’s work. But in both cases, when we say that Hitler admired Iago, there is only one subject of whom properties, either first order or second order, are predicated. There are not, for example, two uses of the name ‘Iago’ in play, the one referring to a fictional *character* and another, empty use, purportedly referring to a fictional *person*.<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the most famous second order property in this context is existence itself, in the Russell/Frege account. Existence is a property of the properties referred to in the definite description of an object – namely, the property of being instantiated. See for example, Carnap’s reference to this principle, cited above.

<sup>50</sup> I allude here to Kripke’s (1973/2013) view, which I will discuss more thoroughly in the following chapter.

ambiguity lies in which kind of property is admired by Hitler – Iago’s first order or second order properties. Of course, we would expect a context of utterance to provide the required disambiguation – or, at least, we would expect ‘context, content and common sense’ (Lewis, 1978, p. 38), to do so.

Here is another example:

**xvi) Sherlock Holmes is the first fully fledged detective in English fiction<sup>51</sup>**

The truth of the critical claim depends on the truth of the fictional claim because Sherlock Holmes can’t have the required second order properties unless he has the required first order properties to which the second order properties belong. He can’t be the first fully fledged detective in English fiction unless he is, by the criterion of what is said in the Holmes’ stories, a fully-fledged detective. Those properties, of being a fully-fledged detective, have the property of appearing for the first time in English fiction when they appear in the descriptions of Sherlock Holmes in Doyle’s stories. The second order, critical properties are, then, dependent on the first order, fictional properties. And, of course, they are inherited by the same, one fictional object.

Here is another example in which the truth of the critical claim is inseparable from fictional truths about the character in question:

**ix) The long-suffering landlady of 221B Baker St was never even given a first name by Doyle. (Bunsen, 2014, p. 88)**

Fictional claims may invoke the frameworks – or the combination of frameworks – whose properties the subjects of those claims inherit. So, for example, we may reason as follows:

By the criterion of what is said in the fiction *F*, *b* has the body of a man; and, by the criterion

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<sup>51</sup> There is considerable debate over the advent of the ‘modern’ detective in anglophone fiction. I am just taking this claim to be plausible enough for present purposes.



of what is said in *F*, *b* has the head of an ass; therefore, *b* is not a realistic fictional character. The first premise invokes a realistic framework, the second a non-realistic framework, negating the first. In the conclusion, the character inherits the properties of a non-realistic framework. This example is adapted from Diane Proudfoot (2006), in which she argues, *inter alia*, that fictional truths can entail critical truths (p. 14). In this example, truths about *b* entail truths about the fictional framework *F* in which *b* exists.

For Proudfoot, if fictional truths entail critical truths, then it is not possible to adopt a ‘divide and conquer strategy’ with regard to fictional and critical claims. That is, we can’t privilege critical claims and argue that, because they are true without the requirement for a ‘disowning prefix’, they are literally true of real abstract entities, while fictional claims can be disowned as claims made by fictional texts that are not literally true of any object. Likewise, Proudfoot’s criticism is explicitly aimed at Lewis (1978) in which he puts extra-fictional or critical claims to one side altogether, making his theory, as she puts it ‘radically incomplete’ (Proudfoot, 2006, p. 14). The Carnapian approach will clearly endorse this critique of Proudfoot’s, arguing that the properties attributed in both fictional and critical claims are bound together in some way and that they are attributed, ultimately, to a single common object.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> With regard to Proudfoot’s example we might also observe that the mechanism of accommodation has a complementary form: We not only bring a presupposition into existence if that is required to make a claim true but exclude those frameworks that would make a proposition false. In this case, the proposition that a certain character has the body of a man and the head of an ass requires the exclusion of an everyday realistic framework.

## Section 6:

Further concerns regarding the relation between intra-fictional and extra fictional claims about real fictional objects – and a summary of this chapter.

It may be objected that the case of Neptune is in fact a counter-example to the Carnapian account. For we might concede that we often endow objects with the properties of their frameworks. But still we don't say that Neptune was created. We say, rather, that Neptune was discovered around 1846. We might be vague about the date, as to whether Neptune was discovered at the time that its existence was posited or when that existence was confirmed. But, either way, discovery is quite distinct from creation.

The case of Neptune, though, can be distinguished in that the theoretical framework in question is not the *only* criterion by which Neptune is thought to exist. Neptune also meets the criteria of its framework by the epistemic authority of robust empirical tests. Those tests are still part of some larger theoretical framework, as Quine's thesis of holistic under-determination argues. But these criteria are the most settled and authoritative that we have. They *lay claim* to the object in question. The theoretical framework in which Neptune was originally posited is then seen as just facilitating its discovery. A fictional object, by contrast, is never claimed by a more authoritative framework. It remains the creature of the fictional work. And the same would apply to Neptune, were empirical confirmation never to occur. Then we would reasonably say that Neptune was the creation, or invention, of Le Verrier's.

It is certainly something we might say about Vulcan, for example. We might say that it was Le Verrier's creation. It is not, perhaps, idiomatic so to speak – but it is certainly permissible, just as it might be to say that phlogiston was an invention of certain 18<sup>th</sup> century chemists. It is not idiomatic, I would suggest, because objects like Vulcan and

phlogiston are not so useful as Sherlock Holmes. They haven't fulfilled the purpose for which they are intended – and le Verrier will not proudly claim to be the creator of Vulcan. I would argue that this is incidental to the structural analogy between these hypothesised objects and fictional objects.

But one consequence of the lack of utility of merely hypothesised objects is that the creators of the theories in which they are posited don't make such strong claims of ownership with regard to those theories. This lack of utility means that they are not valuable as intellectual property, as the Sherlock Holmes stories were, while copyright obtained. And the moral rights associated with the theory in question don't seem so worthy of protection. On the other hand, nothing asserts ownership as strongly as a claim of creation. So it is with fictional frameworks, and, by metonymic implication, the objects they posit.

Let us summarise this preliminary account of the Carnapian treatment of critical and fictional claims, before going on to compare it with other accounts.

- Critical claims refer to the same fictional object as fictional claims.
- Fictional objects – like factual objects – may truthfully be said to have many more properties than those explicitly attributed to them by their frameworks.
- One mechanism by which fictional objects may have such properties is that fictional objects (like factual objects) may inherit the properties of their frameworks.
- A particularly challenging case involves pairs of claims comprising one fictional and one critical claim that give incompatible accounts of the origin of a fictional object, while both seeming true. In this case we need to observe that the fictional object has the origin that is a part of its nature, as described in the fictional claim. It has no

other origin. The fictional claim is true with regard to the coming into existence of the fictional object. The critical claim is, strictly speaking, false.

- It is true, however, that fictional frameworks, and factual frameworks, come into being through acts of creation and invention. The mechanism described above, in which objects inherit the properties of their frameworks, may account for our tendency to attribute the date of origin of a fictional framework to a fictional object within that framework.

# Chapter 4

## Further Aspects of the Carnapian Approach

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In this chapter I consider a further significant challenge for theories of fiction: assuming fictional objects exist, what is their nature? In particular, in what sense may a fictional object be said to be concrete and in what sense abstract? Answering these questions requires a further development of the Carnapian picture I have outlined in the preceding chapter. That development concerns the structuring of frameworks within frameworks. An everyday framework of (concrete) persons and things, for example, may be invoked within a fictional framework. I explore some models that may help explain how this invocation occurs. I then consider some advantages a Carnapian approach has over its rivals and some objections those rivals may raise. This comparison focusses mainly on Kripke's artefactualist account of fictional objects. I conclude that while the terms 'fictional' and 'non-existent' are not exactly synonymous, the underlying structure of frameworks is essentially the same in both kinds of claims. I also provide a further argument for the advantages of the Carnapian account, through observing a distinction that Kripke overlooks between iterated and enframed fictions. Overall, the aim of this chapter is to develop our conception of fictional discourse further and prepare the way for the account of true negative existence claims that I set out in the following and final chapter of the thesis.

In the first section of this chapter I argue that fictional objects may be either concrete or abstract, in accordance with the frameworks within which they are situated, as those frameworks are invoked within a fictional framework.

In the second section I consider in more detail the question of how frameworks may be invoked within fictions. In particular, this involves exploring the ways in which a Lewisian mechanism of accommodation functions in this invocation.

In the third section I compare the Carnapian approach to an artefactualist approach to fictional objects, as expounded by Kripke. I focus on the differing accounts each approach gives of such idiomatic claims as 'Hamlet does not exist; Hamlet is only a fictional character'. I argue for the advantages of viewing such claims as referring to the same one object and its relations to differing criteria of existence. By contrast, for Kripke, such claims involve two different uses of the one name, one to refer to an existing fictional character or artefact and the other to fail to refer to an existing person. The view I advance enables us to use reference to fictional objects to help explain true negative existence claims, even if it does not show that the terms 'fictional' and 'non-existent' are exactly synonymous in all contexts.

In the fourth section I argue that the reality or otherwise of a fictional object does not depend on the reality of the text in which it is situated, as Kripke contends, but on the criteria of existence it does or does not meet. This becomes readily apparent, I argue, if we observe a distinction that Kripke overlooks. This is the distinction between factual and fictional texts within fictional texts. This results in a corresponding distinction between enframed and iterated fictional objects.

## Section 1:

Fictional objects: abstract or concrete? Frameworks within frameworks.

One issue immediately arises if we take works of fiction to be Carnapian linguistic frameworks and a story operator like 'According to the Holmes stories ...' to be an ontologically owning prefix. If Sherlock Holmes, Hamlet, Anna Karenina and the like all exist then it seems that a Carnapian approach is a form of realism about fictional objects. And if we are realists about fictional objects, then it seems we must decide whether these objects are concrete or abstract in kind.

The terms 'abstract' and 'concrete' are notoriously difficult to define. Lewis (1986) suggests there are four 'ways', each with different aspects, by which such a definition may be attempted. An approach that enjoys widespread acceptance is the Negative Way, according to which abstract entities 'have no spatiotemporal location; they do not enter into causal interaction' (Lewis, 1986, p. 83). Sainsbury (2010) defines 'abstract' objects as 'non-concrete' objects, for example, meaning they have just these two features. The most popular form of realism about fictional objects is artefactualism: fictional objects are abstract objects created by their authors, like many other works of art. As we will see, there are some strong considerations motivating this view. But if this is the case, how may abstract objects truthfully be said to have concrete properties? And how may they be said to interact with really existing, concrete objects? The claim that:

**xv) Hamlet stabs Polonius**

is a case in point – as also, of course, is our first fictional claim:

**i) Sherlock Holmes lives at 221B Baker St. and smokes a pipe.**

How may an abstract object live in a house and smoke a pipe – and how may two abstract objects be connected by such a tangible object as a sword? For that matter, the question



arises whenever we say that fictional characters feel emotions, think or are attributed any other property that we associate with flesh and blood persons.

There are some properties that are not obviously incompatible with being an abstract object. These are sometimes characterised as ‘representation dependent’ – as opposed to ‘existence entailing’ – properties (e.g. Crane, 2013, pp 59-63). A typical representation dependent claim is that Sherlock Holmes is famous. Being famous seems something that an abstract object can be – the representations of Sherlock Holmes are very widespread and well known. However, being a detective does not seem to be something we can truthfully predicate of Sherlock Holmes.

According to Peter van Inwagen, fictional characters, like Mrs Gamp in Charles Dickens’ *Martin Chuzzlewit*, can have only two kinds of properties. The first kind are literary properties like being introduced in chapter 19, being a theoretical entity of literary criticism, having been created by Charles Dickens, or being a satiric villainess (van Inwagen, 2001, p. 49). The second kind are ‘high category’ properties like self-identity (van Inwagen, 2001, p. 54). For van-Inwagen, fictional objects cannot have concrete properties. Or more precisely, they cannot *have* such properties. The best that we can say is that they are *ascribed* concrete properties (van Inwagen, 2001, p. 50). These distinctions between properties – and often between the way an object may have a property is a feature of

This challenge concerning the concrete or abstract nature of fictional objects doesn’t just affect a comparison between fictional objects and ordinary, real life objects, as Lewis points out in his 1978 article ‘Truth in Fiction’. It would be nice, he observes, if we could say that it is true that Sherlock Holmes lives in Baker St., smokes a pipe and is addicted to cocaine – but false that he wears a silk top hat, just as it is false to say that Richard Nixon

wears a silk top hat (Lewis, 1978, p.37).<sup>53</sup> In both these latter cases we could say that the subject of these sentences lacks the property, expressed by the predicate, of wearing a silk top hat. The only difference is that the subject terms 'Holmes' and 'Nixon' have referents of radically different sorts – one an abstract, fictional character and the other a real-life person of flesh and blood. But, says Lewis (1978):

is there not a perfectly good sense in which Holmes, like Nixon, *is* a real life person of flesh and blood? There are stories about the exploits of superheroes from other planets, hobbits ... vaporous intelligences and other non-persons. But what a mistake it would be to class the Holmes stories with these! (p. 37)

In other words, we can think of some fictional objects as abstract, in the sense of being vaporous or fantastical and others as concrete in an everyday, familiar sense.

Lewis' formulation of the problem helps to motivate, I think, the kind of solution a Carnapian approach proposes. The solution is that a variety of frameworks may be invoked within the fictional framework. In some cases these are frameworks fabricated in the fiction, in others they are pre-existing frameworks. In the former case, these frameworks may be combinations of various elements – both fantastical and physical in the case of Superman, for example. But I think they may be called frameworks in the sense that they will be rule-governed or systematic within their own terms.<sup>54</sup> Where the framework or frameworks invoked are pre-existing we will tend to characterise the work of fiction as 'realistic'. In all 'realistic' fictions the everyday framework of persons and things is invoked within the fictional framework and imposes its rules. Those rules are just those described by Carnap in

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<sup>53</sup> Lewis appears to be thinking of the popular image of Holmes as always wearing a deerstalker hat.

<sup>54</sup> Roland Barthes makes much of the surprising co-existence of system and transgression – of invention and convention – in a number of critical works but most famously perhaps in his 'Sade, Fourier, Loyola' (1989)

his account of the ‘thing world’ – objects fit together spatio-temporally, the commonly understood laws of nature apply, there is a certain unity of personhood (even if deeper questions of personal identity may be explored within the fiction) and so on. But there will be many other frameworks that may also be invoked – social, economic, scientific, psychological or forensic, for example. In what follows I will be focussing almost exclusively on the invocation of pre-existing frameworks.

The basic idea is this: Just as properties are structured into objects within a framework, so frameworks may be structured within frameworks. When we refer to Hamlet and Polonius in a statement like **xv) Hamlet stabs Polonius** we refer to objects that have the properties of concrete, flesh and blood persons. The everyday framework of person and things in which they appear is invoked within the fictional framework. That outer framework – effectively a mechanism of stipulation with which we co-operate – guarantees the application of the framework invoked within it. Hamlet has the properties of an object that conforms to the criteria of the everyday framework of persons and things, by the criterion of his being said to do so in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Interpreting fictional stories as structured in this way comes very easily to us, I suggest, because we do it with specialist frameworks – and the specialists themselves – in what has become known as ‘the division of linguistic labour.’ Here is how Putnam (1975) puts the thesis:

Every linguistic community ... possesses at least some terms whose associated ‘criteria’ are known only to a subset of the speakers who acquire the terms, and whose use by the other speakers depends upon a structured co-operation between them and the speakers in the relevant subsets. (p. 146)

We enter this kind of structured cooperation, I suggest, with fictional texts and their authors. Shakespeare is the speaker in the relevant subset – he is the specialist to whom we defer – with regard to the contents of the play *Hamlet*. In turn, Shakespeare's text defers to the authority of the everyday framework of persons and things, as that is invoked in the play. The text may also ask us to step outside that framework and accept, for example, the existence of supernatural phenomena. In *Hamlet* at least, though, this is explicitly justified in the famous discussion between Hamlet and Horatio, prompted by the appearance of Hamlet's father's ghost, in which Hamlet argues that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Horatio's philosophy.<sup>55</sup> In some sense, we take Shakespeare's word(s) for it that the criteria of a concrete object are satisfied by Hamlet, Polonius and the sword which comes between them.<sup>56</sup> This tendency at the level of referring terms is reinforced at the broader level of the implicit conversation between the author – or the text – and the reader. Here the Gricean principle of co-operation applies. The reader contributes, by way of interpretation, what is required by the accepted purpose of the conversation (Grice, 1975, pp 26–30). In order to make sense of what the author or narrator is telling us we invoke the appropriate frameworks and the expectations that come with these.

As emphasised in the previous chapter, a Carnapian approach to fictional objects has this notable feature – one that gives it an immediate, straightforward advantage over rival

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<sup>55</sup> The tragedy of *Macbeth*, on the other hand, is often interpreted as a caution, directed perhaps to the incoming Scottish King James 1, of the folly of believing in witchcraft and other superstitions.

<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it seems that this kind of structured deferral to authority may be something we undertake too easily, leading us to ignore facts and sustain myths, in the broad sense of the latter term. In an article entitled 'Why facts don't change our minds' Elizabeth Kolbert reviews three recent works of cognitive psychology which blame the adaptive pressures for hyper-sociality for our inability to respond to new facts and reasoned argument. She cites Sloman and Fernbach to the effect that 'one implication of the naturalness with which we divide cognitive labor is that there's no sharp boundary between one person's ideas and knowledge and those of other members of the group' (<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds>).

approaches. It is able to describe the inclusion of pre-existing frameworks of objects within a new, fictional framework. I argue that it does this, first, by giving the fictional framework full status, as an ontological framework – indeed, as a framework which is privileged with regard to the frameworks it subsumes. Second, in thinking of frameworks as tools or instruments that may be adopted or excluded on the basis of their utility, existing frameworks may be invoked in the service of the containing fictional framework. This allows fictional frameworks to include objects that range from the naturalistic to the supernatural, from the concrete to the abstract depending on the frameworks invoked within the fiction. The outer fictional framework need only answer, then, to utilitarian, including aesthetic, criteria – criteria which, in turn, open on to a more or less unlimited plurality of possible purposes and uses for the fictional framework.

This, then, is a preliminary Carnapian account of the truth of **ii) ‘Hamlet stabs Polonius’**. Hamlet is not an abstract object. Insofar as he exists, he does so by the criteria of the relevant fictional framework, including the criteria invoked within that framework. And by those criteria he is a concrete, flesh and blood person.

## Section 2

### How are frameworks invoked?

An essential element in this account, then, is a more detailed understanding of the way in which we invoke or call up frameworks. How do we invoke frameworks – and how do we do this within other frameworks?

It is helpful, I suggest, to think of ontological frameworks and their criteria as involving contextual presuppositions in our conversations. We can think of frameworks as consisting, as a minimum requirement, of principles and propositions that serve as criteria of existence and identity, generated, as Lewis suggests, as a component of conversational score. That includes thinking of the interpretation of fictional texts as a conversation – or a form of structured co-operation – between a reader and the authority of the text.<sup>57</sup> In this view, a rule of accommodation applies to criteria of existence and identity in just the way that it does to presuppositions generally (and arguably many other components of ‘conversational score’), according to the principle of accommodation described in Lewis’s 1979, ‘Scorekeeping in a Language Game.’

Essentially, Lewis describes a strong rule of charity at work in our interpretations of any discourse. According to Lewis, if what is said requires that appropriate presuppositions are made in in order for what is said to make sense or be acceptable then straightaway that presupposition comes into existence. Lewis (1979) states an initial, simple form of this rule of accommodation as follows:

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Sainsbury, for example, thinks of fictional truths as truth under a presupposition (2010, p. 119). This is discussed further below.

If at time  $t$  something is said that requires presupposition  $P$  to be acceptable, and if  $P$  is not presupposed just before  $t$ , then – *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits – presupposition  $P$  comes into existence at  $t$  (p. 340).

An example he gives is 'The King of France is bald'. This requires the presupposition that France has one King and one only (Lewis, 1979, p. 339). For the Carnapian, it is important to emphasise that these presuppositions will invoke frameworks of criteria of existence and identity. In Lewis' example we presuppose that such an entity exists and that he is a flesh and blood person. We take the everyday framework of persons and things to have been applied within a fictional framework that describes some alternative course of history. It is as if this sentence on its own is a very short story that has invoked these frameworks (Maslen and Kim, 2013). This is what has occurred in order for us to 'make sense' of what has been said, to make it 'acceptable' and, indeed, to make it true.

Language games differ from ordinary games like baseball most crucially, argues Lewis, through this mechanism of accommodation. If, for example, the batter in a baseball game walks to first base after only three 'balls', when it is necessary that four 'balls' are pitched for the batter to gain this advantage, Lewis (1979) argues:

his behaviour does not at all make it the case that there *are* four balls and his behaviour *is* correct. Baseball has no rule of accommodation to the effect that if a fourth ball is required to make correct the play that occurs, then that very fact suffices to change the score so that straightway there are four balls. (p. 347)

But conversational score, on the contrary, 'does tend to evolve in such a way as required in order to make whatever occurs count as correct play' (Lewis, 1979, p. 347). Lewis is careful to note that this 'rule' is not invariable but only a tendency – and that conversational score can change for other reasons as well. This happens if, for example, something occurs at the

scene of a conversation or nearby and straightway it is presupposed that it happened. Lewis articulates a general scheme for rules of accommodation which I suggest may be adapted for present purposes as follows: *If something is said within a story that in order to be true requires an object to exist, then that object does exist within the framework of that part of the story. And when something is said within a story that in order to be true requires an object to have a property, then that object does have that property within the framework of that part of the story.*<sup>58</sup>

I've talked here about 'parts of stories' to allow for complex narratives – those that include one or more unreliable narrators, for example. In these cases, presuppositions acquired in one part of the story may need to be revisited in the light of the story as a whole. An example is our initial supposition in 'The Fight Club' that the narrator's friend, Tyler Durden, whom the narrator holds responsible for much of what happens in the story, actually exists. It later becomes clear that Tyler is a kind of alter ego of the narrator, although one of which the narrator himself is unaware. Stories may, on the other hand, also be very short, so as to have only one part and one set of presuppositions: 'The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog', for example.

Lewis considers the question of how we keep score – i.e. how the scoreboard itself is constituted. He limits himself to the following assumption:

that some or other mental representations are present that play the role of a scoreboard in the following sense: what they register depends on the history of the

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<sup>58</sup> The original is as follows: If at time *t* something is said that requires component *sn* of conversational score to have a value in the range *r* if what is said is to be true, or otherwise acceptable; and if *sn* does not have a value in the range *r* just before *t*; and if such-and-such further conditions hold; then at *t* the score component of *sn* takes some value in the range *r* (p. 347).



conversation in the way that score should according to the rules (Lewis, 1979, p. 346).

One important way in which language games *do* resemble ordinary games is that correctness may depend on score. In Lewis' baseball analogy, what is correct play after two strikes differs from what is correct play after three (Lewis, 1979, p. 342). This is important in fictional discourse – so long as the structured co-operation or agreement between author and reader that constitutes that discourse lasts. Presuppositions, once invoked, bind subsequent discourse – although undermining parts of those presuppositions may also be an important aspect of the narrative. Of course, if we are in a *debate*, as opposed to a co-operative conversation, then one party may be trying to persuade the other that a different presupposition – which might include a different ontological framework – is appropriate. They are suggesting that the other party reverse or 'back up' their discourse in this way.

One theory of natural language semantics that appears to have taken Lewis' conception of accommodation to heart is Discourse Representation Theory. This theory aims to describe a 'dynamic' semantics by supplementing any model theoretic conception of semantics with an ontologically neutral representational level of interpretation which it calls the level of Discourse Representation Structures. According to Rebuschi and Renaud (2015), such a structure:

is an ordered pair  $\langle U, C \rangle$  composed of a universe  $U$ , i.e. a set of representatives (discourse referents or reference markers) and a set  $C$  of conditions, namely the properties and relations ascribed to the reference markers. During discourse interpretation, discourse referents can be added to the universe independently of there being a corresponding entity in the domain of the [underlying] interpretation model. (p. 258)

Thinking of how Discourse Representation Theory might apply to fictional discourses Rebuschi and Renauld point out that with anaphoric expressions – and the incomplete definite descriptions characteristic of fiction – a discourse referent or reference marker is introduced into the universe of the corresponding Discourse Reference Structure as an antecedent for the description or anaphoric expression. ‘In other words, the denotation of singular terms is automatically *presupposed* to exist. ... What happens when no marker has been previously introduced? Since the description cannot be resolved a mechanism of *accommodation* adequately augments the discourse context with a marker that can play the role of the antecedent (Beaver, 1997, pp. 976, 989f. in Rebuschi and Renauld 2015, p. 258). The authors argue that if a discourse referent is introduced by accommodation, it can equally well be cancelled ‘by some revision’. They give an example of the following dialogue:

A: Santa Claus is coming

B: No, he doesn’t exist (p. 259)

Effectively these are situations in which the appropriateness of presupposing one ontological framework or another is in dispute. Within a fiction such a dispute is hard to imagine. It would seem to be a disengagement with the overall fictional framework – an opting out of the relevant game. Within a fiction, claims of non-existence will relate to the criteria of frameworks that are themselves invoked within the fiction. But this is consistent with the point that Rebuschi and Renauld (2011) make when they note that the ‘dynamic turn’ in semantics focusses on the way in which ‘interpretation not only *depends* on the context, but also *creates* context’ (p. 259). Denotations are not only ‘context consumers’ but ‘context producers’, so that an utterance might consume a context produced by a preceding one (Peregrin 2000 in Rebuschi and Renauld 2015 p. 259).

We can now see a little more clearly how a framework may be invoked within another framework – how the everyday framework of persons and things may be invoked within the framework of a fiction like the Holmes stories, for example. It only requires that Sherlock Holmes be spoken of by the author (or by Watson, as the author's proxy) as a typical flesh and blood human being. The mechanism of accommodation then ensures that the everyday framework of persons and things is brought to bear on this talk so that the talk has (an existing) referent and is true within the story. The criteria of that framework may then themselves function as criteria of existence within the story, ruling in some objects and ruling out others – ruling out ghosts, for example, as noted earlier.

An interesting example of the way in which ontological frameworks are invoked is provided by John Woods. He writes:

If, in one of Conan Doyle's stories, we read the sentence "Holmes had tea with Gladstone" we seem to think that this sentence expresses a true proposition, but if we read somewhere that "Gladstone had tea with Holmes" we will take it as expressing something false. In the presuppositional approach the asymmetry is explained by the fact that the heads of sentences trigger different presuppositions.

(Woods 1974 pp. 41-42)

Intuitively, there seems to be something right about Woods' observation. It seems that we might invoke different frameworks on the basis of differing 'heads' of sentences. In the case of the first sentence, a fictional framework is invoked as dominant, because the name of the fictional character is mentioned first and brings a framework with it. The everyday framework, when it is subsequently invoked, is subservient to that fictional framework. In the second case, the everyday framework has the dominant position. In that position, Holmes, as a fictional character, fails to meet its criteria of existence.

But this interpretation is, strictly speaking, at odds with a Lewisian mechanism of accommodation. With regard to either sentence, when viewed in the context of a *conversation*, we would invoke a fictional framework, by Lewis's principle of accommodation, because it is within such a framework that the sentence expresses (or is likely to express) a true proposition. It is the fictional framework – and its criteria of existence – that registers on the scoreboard, as Lewis puts it, when we hear these sentences, whether we hear the name 'Sherlock Holmes' or 'William Gladstone' first. As a result, we would think both sentences true. In the same way, we would count as true both the sentences, (drawn from Tolstoy's 'War and Peace'), 'Pierre met with Napoleon in Moscow' and 'Napoleon met with Pierre in Moscow'. And that is just as well, since both sentences are semantically equivalent from the point of view of classical logic. The relations 'meeting with' and 'having tea with' are symmetrical relations and we wouldn't expect asymmetrical truth values to result from changing the order of the names flanking these relations.

I emphasise 'conversation', though, because I think Lewis has in mind situations where there are not pre-established contexts, or frameworks for the claims with which we are concerned. There would be such a pre-established context if, as Woods puts it, we were reading 'one of Conan Doyle's stories'. Then we would read both sentences as true. But if we were reading a history of the British parliament then, within that established context, both claims would be read as false.

The appeal of Woods' example lies, then, in the suggestion that reference markers such as proper names *produce* context. This facilitates the invoking of frameworks like an everyday framework *within* a fictional framework. It does seem, though, that a Lewisian principle of accommodation is also required, if only to preserve the classical notions of

semantic equivalence. The account given by Fontaine and Rahman of these sentences appears to reflect this kind of approach:

the semantics of fiction must be dynamic; the second sentence triggers an ontological revision: the reader thinks first that we are talking about the real Gladstone and later on revises it and places the [conjunction of the two sentences] under the scope of a fictionality operator. (2010, p. 11)

### Section 3:

#### Comparing this Carnapian approach to Kripke's artefactualism

Having developed a more robust conception of how a framework of concrete objects might be invoked within a fictional framework, let us turn now to a comparison with – and critical appraisal of – another approach to the two puzzles about fictional objects that we have considered so far. The two puzzles are:

1. Why do some claims about fictional objects (call these 'fictional' claims) need to be prefixed by a fictionality operator (sometimes called a 'disowning prefix'), like 'According to the Sherlock Holmes stories ...', in order to be judged true – while other claims about fictional objects (call these 'critical' claims) appear true without such a prefix and, indeed, false with such a prefix?
2. If we take the unprefixed, apparently literal truth of critical claims – especially claims like **xiii) Sherlock Holmes was created in 1887** – to suggest that they are literally referential, then they seem to refer to abstract entities. How, then, can these abstract entities be said to have concrete properties?

The approach I will consider, in some detail, is the artefactualist view that originated with Saul Kripke (1973/2013). This approach is also championed by Amie Thomasson.

Artefactualism is a form of abstract realism about fictional objects. Such a realism begins from the observation that critical statements like **xiii) Sherlock Holmes was created in 1887** appear to be true in an 'out and out sense' (Kripke, 1973/2013 p. 83). That is, they appear true without requiring the qualification of a story operator or fictional prefix. This strongly suggests that they must have a referent – namely the (fictional) character in question. Such a character may be contrasted with the non-existent (fictional) *person* who is, in some way or another, the subject of a fictional claim like **xii) Sherlock Holmes was born in 1853**. A

fictional character then has the same ontological status as works of fiction themselves. A fictional character is an abstract object, dependent on concrete practices of storytelling. As Kripke puts it, 'If there is such a fictional work, then there is such a fictional character' (Kripke, 1973/2013 p. 71).<sup>59</sup>

Kripke expounds this conception in a way which highlights the first problem that we encounter. The problem is that we will have difficulty in understanding the use of terms like 'fictional' and 'mythical' as synonyms for 'non-existent' if we use a theory in which fictional objects are abstract objects. This is highlighted in Kripke's discussion of cases in which we place a negative existential alongside a claim like **x**) above, as though the two had essentially the same meaning and one simply clarified the other. The result, for Kripke (1973/2013) is a contradiction:

Hamlet does not exist; Hamlet is only a fictional character,' purports, in its first half, to say that something doesn't exist. But the second half uses "Hamlet" to refer to something that does actually exist (in virtue of the existence of a certain play). It appears that "Hamlet" must be construed ambiguously here, even though the second half of the sentence purports to explain the first. (p. 149)

The ambiguity that Kripke is suggesting we identify in order to resolve the apparent contradiction lies in the use of the name 'Hamlet'. We may use 'Hamlet' to refer to a *person* – a reference that fails; or we may use 'Hamlet' to refer to a *fictional character* – a reference that succeeds. The paradigm cases of these two different uses are first, intra-fictional claims like 'Hamlet is a Prince of Denmark'. Such a claim uses 'Hamlet' to refer to a person. It is

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<sup>59</sup> I will usually talk of 'fictional characters' without distinguishing them from 'fictional persons', but at times I will speak of 'fictional persons' in order to avoid any confusion with the abstract objects posited by Kripke and other artefactual realists.

false due to attributing a property to the referent of an empty name – or perhaps neither true nor false, depending on how we treat such attributions. A claim of this kind is true, however, if taken as the expression of a pretence or if taken as implicitly prefixed with a story operator like ‘According to Shakespeare’s play...’.

The paradigm instances of the second use of a name like ‘Hamlet’ are critical or extra-fictional claims like ‘Hamlet is a fictional character’. These claims seem to us to be true without being understood as a pretence or as implicitly prefixed. As such, they provide a strong argument, says Kripke, that we have an ontology of fictional characters in our ordinary language. These fictional characters are abstract objects that exist in virtue of concrete acts of storytelling and real works of fiction. To be more precise, they exist in what he calls ‘a derivative or extended use of language’ (1973/2013, p. 81). That is because the names used for them that were originally empty are redeployed in a second use – we might think of it as a paronymous use – to refer to these abstract objects.

In saying ‘Hamlet doesn’t exist: Hamlet is merely a fictional character’ one is really saying, first, that there is no such person as Hamlet – that on that level of language there is no referent for the name. But then, just because there is no referent for the name, this work in front of us is a work of fiction; so therefore, (one is saying), there is such a fictional character as Hamlet. There is such a fictional character just because there is no such **person**, though a name purporting to refer to such a person does occur in a work of fiction. (Kripke, 1973/2013, p. 149)

One consequence of Kripke’s view is that, as he acknowledges, the ontology of fictional characters he observes in our language is of no use in understanding negative existentials (Kripke, 1973/2013, p. 149). Indeed, Kripke argues that, while it is perfectly idiomatic to say, ‘Hamlet doesn’t exist: Hamlet is merely a *fictional* character’, we are really mixing or eliding



levels of language in speaking this way. For, as he says, ‘after all it isn’t the *fictional* character that does not exist; there *is* such a fictional character’ (Kripke, 1973/2013, p. 148). He explicates those levels in the manner indicated above. The idiom is, perhaps analogous, he says, to cases of ‘the toy duck fallacy’. The toy duck fallacy is the mistaking of claims of inauthenticity for claims of non-existence. To say, ‘This is not a real duck, it is a toy duck’, for example, is not to say that the object in question is not real in the sense that it does not exist. It is only to say that it is not an authentic duck. It is fallacious to assume that we have made a claim to the effect that a certain duck does not exist. Perhaps this is what is meant here – ‘Hamlet is not a real person but a real fictional character’ (Kripke, 1973/2013, p. 148 and footnote 12, p. 149).

Kripke says he is ‘very suspicious of a view that takes denial of existence to mean “fictional” or “not real”’. The first argument he offers – and the strongest argument, in his estimation – uses a counterfactual supposition as an example: ‘Suppose Napoleon had never existed’. He says:

One doesn’t mean by this ‘Suppose Napoleon had been a mere fictional character.’

One doesn’t mean that at all. Napoleon couldn’t have been a mere fictional character, any more than he could have been a prime number (Kripke, 1973/2013, p. 149).

This is a challenging example for those who want to argue – as I will do in the next chapter – that claiming something is fictional is always to claim that thing fails some preferred criterion of existence, while passing some other criterion, however minimal. And that this is what is also involved in saying something doesn’t exist. In many contexts, I will argue, the predicates ‘(merely or purely) fictional’ and ‘non-existent’ are indeed synonymous, when properly understood. This is the basic Carnapian picture I advance.

In response to Kripke, I think we can distinguish two ways in which “suppose Napoleon had never existed” can be read. One is that we are asked to suppose that, despite there having been many stories about Napoleon, he never existed. We are asked to suppose this in just the way that we might be asked to suppose that men never landed on the moon, despite the television footage, the newspaper stories, the scenes when the astronauts returned to earth and so on. In these cases I would argue that we are, precisely, being asked to imagine that the person or the event in question is purely fictional.

The second way in which this counterfactual claim can be understood is that it is asking us to suppose that history took a different course. There was never a Napoleon – and there were never any stories about him. His parents never met, for example. No doubt this is the sense Kripke intends. I expect he would take the first interpretation as an instance of the toy duck fallacy.<sup>60</sup>

However, leaving that issue aside, the second interpretation does indeed challenge the Carnapian account. I think a response can be made but it may be viewed as only a partial response.

We are being asked to imagine a world in which Napoleon never came into existence and was never said to come into existence. Napoleon meets certain criteria of existence in our world, including being spoken of in various texts. We are asked to imagine a world in which this same Napoleon never met any of those criteria – a world from which he is missing. So we do invoke the structure of fictionality the Carnapian account describes – but,

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<sup>60</sup> I don't think the Carnapian needs to accept that criticism, however. Very briefly, all the arguments I've adduced for the Carnapian view so far reflect the assumption that existence is framework-level authenticity. That assumption is what enables us to have an ontology of fictional objects, for there to be truths about them and so on. But such an assumption does not confuse existence with object-level authenticity. Framework internal objects – or framework level authentic objects – may be authentic or inauthentic. They may be genuine or bogus, real ducks or toy ducks, for example.

in this case, that structure straddles two possible worlds. Napoleon meets certain criteria of existence (as applied) in one world – he fails them (as applied) in another. So this adjustment to our basic picture must be allowed: the two sets of criteria involved – or the two applications of one set of criteria involved – may straddle different possible worlds.

There is room to argue, however, that this scenario is not so different from the first interpretation I gave of the injunction ‘Suppose Napoleon had never existed’. That is because the Napoleon we are referring to is the framework internal individual at the origin of the name use chain of which this injunction is a part. Napoleon is a rigidly designated individual – and as we will explore further in the next chapter, he is therefore the same individual in all possible worlds, including those in which he doesn’t exist. So *in relation to* the possible world in which Napoleon doesn’t exist, Napoleon is a fictional character.

We are not, after all, being asked to imagine non-existence as such but the non-existence of Napoleon. Likewise the reference of the name ‘Napoleon’ does not become nothing – the name does not refer to nothing – when we imagine Napoleon not to exist. It is Napoleon the individual, he and no other, who is missing from this alternative course of history. That course of history may or may not include someone who is declared an Emperor and seeks to unify Europe. But it is missing a certain individual, whether that individual would ever have gone into politics or not. So I think we are justified in saying there is reference to Napoleon under criteria of existence which he meets – and there are criteria of existence, as applied in our imagined world, which he fails. In other words, we are effectively enjoined to imagine that Napoleon is a fictional object, because reference to him is unavoidable. That is consistent with imagining a possible world in which Napoleon never existed as a world in which there was never any reference to Napoleon. It is just that this

scenario *entails* that our reference to Napoleon becomes reference to a purely fictional character.<sup>6162</sup>

So I think the Carnapian should concede that there is some sense in which ‘fictional’ and ‘non-existent’ are not synonymous in all contexts. While all fictional objects may be said to be non-existent, not all non-existent objects may be directly characterised as fictional objects. However we can argue that being a fictional object is at least a necessary condition of – it is entailed by – being non-existent, in all contexts of use. Not surprisingly then, an understanding of fictional objects can be of considerable help in understanding claims of non-existence, as I hope to show in the following chapter.

Looking at some other aspects of Kripke’s account, it must be remarked that it certainly does not seem that we refer to different things when using the name Hamlet or that we use this name in two different ways in the two clauses of sentences such as those Kripke cites, (like ‘Hamlet does not exist; Hamlet is only a fictional character.’) On the contrary, our intuition is that these two clauses are equivalent – and that they refer to the same, one thing. For the Carnapian, the Hamlet referred to in the negative existential, ‘Hamlet does not exist’ is the Hamlet who meets the criterion of existence of being said (or implied or assumed) to exist in Shakespeare’s play. And this sentence says that this is the only test of existence this Hamlet passes. He is merely fictional in that he doesn’t meet any other criteria of existence – or, at least, he meets no other presently used or potentially useful criteria. But there are truths about him – he is a Prince of Denmark and not of

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<sup>61</sup> My point here is very much along the lines of Lycan’s objection to Kripke’s view on the possible existence of fictional objects (as opposed to the possible non-existence of actual objects), from Lycan (2015), that I return to in the next chapter. There Lycan replies to Kripke by arguing that we can simply stipulate which object is Sherlock Holmes in other possible worlds. Lycan’s point is also applicable to the version of Kripke’s arguments I have constructed here.

England, for example. Yes, those properties obtain to Hamlet within the fictional framework – but such, says the Carnapian, is the condition of every object. All are internal to some framework. Hamlet is one among others in this ultimate democracy of objects.

Fictional objects are of help, then, in understanding negative existentials. For, as Kripke (1973/2013) himself notes regarding negative existentials, ‘there we have the feeling that the object must exist, so that one can say of it that it doesn’t exist’ (p. 145). As unlikely as it may at first seem, the key lies in keeping our reference to one existing object and distinguishing instead between the criteria by which that object exists and does not exist – even if that means giving up any prospect of saying what does and does not exist in an absolute, framework-external sense.

We do need a conception of reference, however, such that proper names rigidly designate the framework-internal object at the other end of the chain of use in which those names are uttered. That is, “Hamlet” designates the Hamlet who happened to be a prince of Denmark, was born to Gertrude, was self-identical, has become the most famous character in English literature, had Oedipal conflicts, might have lived to a ripe old age had he stayed at university in Wittenberg and so on. In the following chapter, I will explore this conception of reference in more detail, including the way in which it allows us to solve the various problems associated with empty names.

## Section 4

### Enframed vs iterated fictions – a critical distinction

Another issue for fictional objects that was first raised – and influentially so – by Kripke (1973/2013) concerns the iteration of fictional discourses. By this we mean that fictional discourses may themselves be objects in other fictional discourses. Kripke's prime example is *The Tragedy of Gonzago*, the play within the play of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. One of the reasons Kripke is persuaded that we recognise an ontology of fictional characters in our 'ordinary discourse' is that we seem to distinguish between real fictional characters and *fictional* fictional characters – and indeed, between existent fictional characters and non-existent fictional characters (Kripke, 1973/2013, p. 76). Kripke's first example of a non-existent fictional character concerns the Pagan god Moloch, a deity sometimes worshipped by the Israelites who consumes children offered to him in sacrificial rituals. Biblical scholarship however is sceptical that there ever was such a god in the Pagan pantheon and suggests that biblical references to him have been misunderstood. 'Moloch' may have been a misspelling of 'Melech' meaning King, so that Moloch sacrifices were really sacrifices to a literal or metaphorical King, for example; or the word may have signified the manner of sacrifice involved, rather than any deity. In any case Moloch, the Pagan God, may be said to be non-existent – and the name 'Melech' an empty name – not because Pagan Gods in general do not exist as mythical beings but because, for Kripke, the discourse that refers to this God does not exist. The Bible was thought to refer to him but this is a kind of critical mistake or fiction, generated by exegetical error.

Arguably, Gonzago presents a slightly different case. In the case of Gonzago we may say that, according to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* there is a play called *The Tragedy of Gonzago* and according to that play there is a person called 'Gonzago'. But in the real world there is

no such play as *The Tragedy of Gonzago*. Kripke goes to some trouble to consult the English Department at Princeton and establish the facts in this regard. In accordance with the principle I mentioned earlier, (that fictional characters are abstracta dependent for their existence on the existence of the fictions in which they appear (Kripke 1973/2013 p. 71)), Gonzago, therefore, does not exist as a fictional character:

We can also have a pretense about a fictional character, as in the case of Gonzago.

Only in the play Hamlet ... it is said that there is such a play as The Murder of Gonzago. If so we can say there is no such fictional character as Gonzago ... There is, however, a fictional fictional character called 'Gonzago'. This is true in virtue of the existence of the play Hamlet. (pp. 72-73)

Gonzago is really a fictional fictional character, but not a real fictional character.

Moloch, perhaps – at least originally as in the Bible – isn't even a fictional fictional character. (Kripke, 1973/2013, p. 78)

This analysis seems plausible. I hope, though, to show that a Carnapian-style account does a much better job in capturing any ontology of fictional objects we have in our ordinary language. Indeed Kripke's analysis cannot support the distinction he seeks to make. That is because he fails to distinguish between iterated and enframed fictions. Further, when we do make such a distinction, it becomes apparent that we do not distinguish between existent fictional objects and non-existent fictional objects on the basis of the reality of the texts which refer to them. Rather we distinguish them on the basis of the different criteria of existence they do or do not meet. Interpreted in this way, an ordinary language ontology of fictional objects is evidence that we use a Carnapian plurality of frameworks – and a strike against any account, like Kripke's, based on a single, external or 'out and out' conception of existence.

Let us begin by assuming that we do have an ontology of fictional objects in some reasonably accessible use of ordinary language, be it extended or otherwise. We distinguish, *in some sense*, between existent fictional objects and non-existent or fictional fictional objects. I emphasise ‘in some sense’ because a fictional fictional object is nevertheless still a fictional object of some kind, by definition. But let us say we distinguish between first order and second order fictional objects. We may, in addition, distinguish many more orders of fictional object. In the film ‘Inception’ (Nolan, 2010), for example, there are dreams within dreams within dreams, to the  $n$ th order. In this film, dreams function just like fictional frameworks and might have an equivalent operator – ‘According to the dream F ...’ for example. The objects in those dreams are  $n$  order fictional objects.

What, then, is the Carnapian-style analysis of the Gonzago case? We will recall that, according to the Carnapian view, the predicate ‘fictional’ has two essential aspects. First, there must be a positive criterion of existence that Gonzago meets. In this case he meets the criterion of being said to exist in the play *The Tragedy of Gonzago*. The second leg of the double – the negative criterion – concerns the criteria of existence that Gonzago fails. Here we observe that Gonzago, like Hamlet, fails to meet the unqualified criteria of existence of the everyday framework of persons and things. Unlike Hamlet, though, he also fails to meet the criterion of being said to exist (that is, to meet the criteria of the everyday framework) in the play *Hamlet*. He fails criteria that Hamlet passes. And it is this second failure that leads us to call him a second order fictional character.

How does this account differ from Kripke’s? The difference is subtle but crucial. For Kripke’s account does not distinguish between iterated and enframed fictions. Framing devices were common in early fictions – and none more so than letters. Whole novels such as Richardson’s *Pamela*, for example, were presented as an exchange of letters – so called,



‘epistolary’ novels. But consider, as an example of a partially enframed fiction, Mary Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*. The story of Victor Frankenstein and his monster are told in a series of letters home written by (the happily named) Captain Walton who encounters Frankenstein pursuing his creation through the Arctic. The novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* is ‘real’, in Kripke’s terms – it inhabits the everyday world of persons and things. Captain Walton’s letters, by contrast are fictional objects, just like *The Tragedy of Gonzago*. They meet the criterion of being said to exist in the novel – but they fail the criteria that the novel itself passes. We won’t find these letters ‘in the real world’ as we will Mary Shelley’s novel. So the structure of the discourses in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* is congruent, in this respect, with that of *Hamlet*. Captain Walton’s letters are to the novel *Frankenstein* as *The Tragedy of Gonzago* is to the play *Hamlet*.

We are not, though, tempted to call Victor Frankenstein a *fictional* fictional character or second order fictional object. There is no sense in which he is not a real or existent fictional character, as Kripke claims with regard to Gonzago. That is because Frankenstein – and, indeed, the monster he created – meet the criteria of existence that Captain Walton and his letters meet. They all pass the test of being said (or implied) to exist in Mary Shelley’s novel. Simply, Captain Walton’s letters are factual, not fictional, discourses, according to Mary Shelley’s novel – even though they are fictional objects. Gonzago, by contrast, does not meet the criteria of existence that *Hamlet* meets. *The Tragedy of Gonzago* meets those criteria – like *Hamlet*, it is said to exist in Shakespeare’s play. But Gonzago himself does not meet those criteria. He is as non-existent for *Hamlet* as *Hamlet* is non-existent for us. And it is this that prompts us to agree with Kripke that Gonzago is not, in some way, a real fictional character – or that he is, at least, a second order fictional object

while Hamlet (and Captain Walton and Frankenstein and the other characters in that novel) are first order fictional objects.

Here is the difference, then, between an enframed narrative (and enframed, but first order, fictional characters) and an iterated fiction (and second order or *fictional* fictional characters). Captain Walton's letters are not said to be fictional, in Mary Shelley's novel, but to be true reports or works of non-fiction. That's because the things they talk about pass the reality tests of the main fiction. But Captain Walton's letters are not real in the sense that Kripke would want to argue that *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* is real. So if the distinction between first order and second order fictional characters really holds, then the existence of fictional characters does not depend on the existence, in the real world, of the discourses in which they appear.

The artefactualist can reply that Captain Walton's letters, while fictional objects, do depend for *their* existence on the 'out and out' – or framework external – existence of Mary Shelley's novel. We just need to note that there is a *chain* of dependency in the case of the objects of enframed fictions. That is a perfectly acceptable complication of the theory.

But, the Carnapian will respond, the problem remains of the nature of one of the links in this chain. Captain Walton's letters are fictional objects. And the existence of Frankenstein's monster, a first order fictional object, is dependent on their existence. If they don't exist, Frankenstein's monster doesn't exist. So, not all the links in the chain are of the same kind. And, even if the relation of dependency on a concrete practice of storytelling remains necessary for the existence of (first order) fictional objects, it is clearly no longer sufficient, at least in some cases.

This is certainly a strike against the artefactualist account. The Carnapian will also argue that it is a strike against the broader project of traditional metaphysics. That project is

reflected in the artefactualist strategy of making the existence of fictional objects dependent on the 'out and out' or framework-external existence of fictional texts. If this approach were correct, Victor Frankenstein and his monstrous creation would not be real fictional objects but, at best, second order fictional objects. And all are agreed that that is not how we view them in our ordinary language ontology. There they count as first order fictional objects.

On the other hand, such an ontology pushes us toward a Carnapian account. The existence of fictional objects depends on their meeting the criteria of existence of certain ontological frameworks, some of which may themselves be fictional objects. The (relative) non-existence or fictionality of fictional characters likewise is not determined by the failure of their fictional *frameworks* to exist – but by the failure of the fictional objects themselves to meet the existence criteria of certain of those frameworks, some of which may also be fictional.

So our intuitions around the iteration and enframing of fictions support a relativistic view of criteria of existence, not one that sheets the existence of fictional objects back to a single criterion of existence of fictional discourses. It seems like a good idea (from the point of view of traditional ontology) to make the existence of fictional objects depend on the existence of fictional discourses because it seems that we can judge the latter by the criteria of a universal, external framework. It seems we can assess the 'out and out' existence or non-existence of fictional discourses themselves – and thence of fictional objects. But in fact a discourse may exist only within another fiction – it may be enframed within another fiction – while its objects exist on a par with those of the enframing fiction. Criteria of existence for fictional objects function independently of criteria of existence for the fictions in which they are found.

Sainsbury considers the question of iterated fictions from the point of view of a Meinongian account of fictional objects. There are several varieties of Meinongian account but in all of them fictional objects are non-existent objects.<sup>63</sup> Sainsbury (2010) says:

Fiction within fiction poses a structural problem for the Meinongian. ... In *Hamlet* Hamlet is a real person whereas Gonzago is fictional. Or compare the dagger at Macbeth's belt with the dagger he hallucinated: the former is, according to the fiction, real whereas the latter is not. (p. 64)

We need three distinctions or levels, says Sainsbury:

‘reality (no Hamlet, no Macbeth), the first level of fiction (Hamlet but not Gonzago, the dagger at the belt but not the hallucinated dagger) and the second level of fiction (Gonzago, the hallucinated dagger). Meinongians distinguish between nonexistents and existents but this is just a two-way distinction and cannot do justice to the three-way distinction just mentioned. Hamlet and Gonzago, the dagger at the belt and the dagger hallucinated are all nonexistents; and Meinongian theory as such has nothing more to say’ (p. 64).

Or so argues Sainsbury. So it seems that both Meinongian and artefactualist theories are unable to handle the iteration of fictions, at least to the extent that some conception of the relativity of criteria of existence and identity is needed.

Sainsbury argues that a kind of ‘prefix fictionalism’ or irrealism about fictional objects can, however, account for this feature of fictional discourse. Simply, we can talk of

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<sup>63</sup> Meinong espouses a principle of the independence of the *sosein* of an object – its being-so or ‘whatness’ – from its *sein* – its being or ‘thatness’. Objects may have all the properties by which they are characterised in a discourse while lacking being. In some Meinongian accounts – often described as orthodox accounts (Priest, Routley) – fictional objects do not have being. In others, they are like abstract objects such as numbers that have being but do not exist. Rather, they subsist. Spatio-temporal objects, such as ordinary objects, both exist and subsist. There are many further sub-categories in the Meinongian scheme but none of them match ‘the distinctions or levels’ that Sainsbury describes below and that I have called iterations of fictions.

how things are in reality, how things are according to *Hamlet*, how things are according to 'The Tragedy of Gonzago' – and so on (Sainsbury, 2010, p. 64). For Sainsbury, the truth of a claim like 'According to *Hamlet*, Gonzago does not exist – he is merely fictional' is essentially a truth under a presupposition. It is akin to a dialogue in which one party says 'Suppose we are in the world of Hamlet. Is Gonzago real?' The other party responds: 'No he does not exist – he is merely fictional'. For Sainsbury (2010), 'the effect of the presupposition is to allow us to relativise notions of truth and sincerity. (We are not thereby required to relinquish absolute notions: they stand ready and waiting)' (p. 119). Quite what Sainsbury means by saying that 'absolute notions ... stand ready and waiting' is not clear. However, when we recall that the fictional prefix, as Sainsbury uses it, is a disowning prefix rather than one that identifies the 'owning' framework within which the objects exists, Sainsbury seems to mean something like the following: Absolutely speaking, neither Hamlet nor Gonzago exist – only the discourses that fallaciously assert their existence exist. We can make true statements about those discourses – namely, that according to them, Hamlet and Gonzago exist. In doing so we utilise absolute notions.

Sainsbury is right, I think, to argue that a prefix fictionalism can handle iterated fictions. There remains the problem for such a fictionalism, however, in explaining why some truths about fictional objects require a fictional prefix and others – what I have called 'critical' truths about fictional objects appear false when prefixed. There are responses the fictionalist or irrealist about fictional objects can make, however. See for example Stuart Brock's (2002) *Fictionalism about Fictional Characters*.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Brock's strategy is to argue that critical claims have their own, implicit, disowning prefix – 'According to the realist fiction about fictional characters, Sherlock Holmes is a (real) fictional character', for example. One possible Carnapian response is to view this meta-fictional disowning prefix as itself an owning prefix that identifies the meta-framework within which fictional frameworks exist. It conveys the same information as the

As I've noted, the idea of an iterated relativity of frameworks is congenial to a Carnapian analysis. The Carnapian can convert prefix talk about what is the case according to Hamlet (that Gonzago does not really exist, for example) to talk about what is the case by the criterion of what is said or implied to be the case in Hamlet. But absolute notions, are of course, not compatible with a Carnapian approach. To enquire about what exists absolutely, as Sainsbury (2010) puts it, in a 'presupposition-free reality' (p. 147) is to ask an 'external' question. What we take to be an absolute conception of existence will turn out to be constituted by the criteria of some historical framework or another, says the Carnapian – probably the everyday framework of persons and things, adapted as it is to our 'common sense' and everyday practical purposes. An absolute or external conception of existence will be a disguised internal conception of existence. Beyond this, in place of an external, transcendent framework, lies a more abstract conception – a framework of frameworks, of which this present discourse is an example.

To put this another way, if we convert the 'disowning' prefix of the irrealist to an 'owning' prefix, then Sainsbury's account is also how we would expect the Carnapian to account for the iteration of fictions. That conversion has consequences, though. It places the base framework or 'reality' on a par, *a priori*, with the frameworks nested within it. By '*a-priori*' here we mean prior to an estimate of its utility. The Carnapian wants to suggest that just as a fictional framework, *F1*, can provide the criteria of existence for a further fictional framework *F2* and its contents so the base framework *F0*, may, in a different context of

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claim that Sherlock Holmes meets the criteria of existence of a certain framework, a fictional framework. The Carnapian explanation of the apparent incompatibility of some critical claims and some fictional claims – such as those concerning the date of origin of a fictional character – remains intact. This Carnapian explanation – that objects often inherit the properties of their framework, as properties of their properties – is not available to the form of realism that Brock is targeting, however. His target is abstract realism about fictional characters or artefactualism, an approach which itself relies on a disowning prefix to account for the apparent truth of fictional claims.

intents and purposes, be viewed as fictional, despite its providing criteria of existence for both *F1* and *F2*. This is, for example, what occurs when a framework, like Aristotelean physics, which was previously thought to provide base criteria, is overtaken in that role by a subsequent framework and comes to be viewed as a mythical or fictional framework.

For Kripke, it is important that fictional objects are not Meinongian non-existent entities that nevertheless have being – what Meinong calls subsistent entities. They do not have a shadowy kind of existence or ‘being’, as opposed to ‘existence’, he says. But, while the Carnapian will agree that all existence is on a par in that it all consists in meeting the criteria of existence of a framework, we also need to observe the relativistic structure of frameworks. This necessity is illustrated by another problem we may identify in Kripke’s account.

Consider the characters Pyramus and Thisbe, for example, whose story is told in many other places as well as in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (*‘the Dream’*). In terms of our intuitive ontology of fictional objects these appear to be second order fictional characters in Shakespeare’s play. They are not real or first order fictional characters. But Kripke’s account implies that they would be first order fictional objects. For, he suggests, if his researches into the provenance of *The Tragedy of Gonzago* had revealed that it had an independent existence as a play – as *Pyramus and Thisbe* does – then Gonzago, along with Pyramus and Thisbe would be first order fictional characters in *Hamlet* or in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. But if they were first order fictional characters in these plays, both of the plays would be (a species of) what is now known as a ‘mash-up’. That is, fictional characters from different sources would be interacting with each other – much as they do in the film *Shrek!*, for example, or Stephen Sondheim’s *Into the Woods*. A mash-up is not the same thing as a play

that has a play within it. Pyramus and Thisbe don't pass the reality tests of the *Dream*, as Titania and Oberon do. They are second order fictional characters *in this context*.

In a similar vein, the Carnapian will have concerns about Kripke's treatment of Moloch, his other example of a non-existent, as opposed to an existent, fictional character. In this case, Kripke contends that Moloch doesn't exist at all – there is no such fictional character. The Carnapian will say that is because he fails to meet the first, positive criterion of fictionality. He is not said or implied to exist in the Pagan stories about Gods nor, by extension, in the Biblical stories that appear to make reference to him as a Pagan God. The appearance of reference to Moloch is due to a semantic or syntactical confusion. So here the positive criterion of the Carnapian analysis applies in a straightforward fashion – and Kripke seems to be right in saying that *Moloch* is a non-existent fictional character.

We have to note, though, that Moloch does exist in other fictions. For the claim is not that there is no fictional Moloch *tout court* – just that there is none in the Bible or Pagan stories. It seems correct to say that there is no such fictional object as Moloch relative to these frameworks – but we must observe that relativity. The character does meet the positive criterion of fictionality with regard to numerous fictions that refer to him. In Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, for example, Moloch personifies the military industrial complex in the United States during the Vietnam War.

Finally, there is a further, related worry about Kripke's account. It is that fictional frameworks don't seem to be any less real or existent just because they are fictional objects within a fictional framework. True, there is some sense in which there is no play in the local library entitled *The Tragedy of Gonzago*. But this is a very superficial sense. There is no volume with those words on the spine. But the play is there, in its entirety, within *Hamlet*. It could be extracted, for whatever reason, and published in its own right. It could also be



expanded by a later author. It is true that fictions within fictions are likely to be even more incomplete than their containing fiction. But they don't possess a different kind of incompleteness. A performance of the Tragedy of Gonzago would be a dull affair, just because it essentially reproduces a fragment of the main story in *Hamlet*. But a film version of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* could drop the framing and just depict the content of Captain Walton's letters. It is also true that *The Tragedy of Gonzago* appears for the first time in *Hamlet* – in accordance with the very specific purposes it must serve in that play – whereas *Pyramus and Thisbe* is already an old chestnut by the time a version of it turns up in the *Dream*. But *functionally*, these plays are the same. They are all extant stories and will serve as fictional frameworks. The circumstances and the frequency of the telling of the stories do not seem relevant considerations.

# Chapter 5

## True Negative Existence Statements

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The overall aim of this thesis is to present a fresh perspective on the Carnapian approach to ontological questions, particularly in relation to descriptivist theories of reference and direct reference theories. This perspective is developed and tested by looking at some of the central problems associated with our talk of fictional objects. It concludes in an account of negative existence statements and fictional objects as possibly existing objects.

In Chapter one I set out the key elements of Carnap's approach, as that approach developed over time. In Chapter two I explored the relation between three areas of enquiry: descriptivist theories of reference, direct reference theories and a Carnapian approach to ontological questions. This exploration is undertaken through an examination of Thomasson's brand of Carnapian meta-ontology. In Chapters three and four I developed the view that fictional objects are objects that meet the criteria of existence and identity of at least one linguistic framework but fail to meet the criteria of another, preferred framework. This provided the basis for a Carnapian account of fictional objects in terms of the relations between linguistic frameworks.

This chapter, chapter five, is the concluding chapter of the thesis. I have given a Carnapian account of how there can be truths about fictional and non-existent objects that distinguish one from another, truths that may characterise fictional objects as either abstract or concrete. This paves the way for a Carnapian analysis of true negative existence statements. The challenge here is to integrate our story about fictional objects and the relations between linguistic frameworks with theories of reference and meaning. In particular, we need to incorporate a satisfactory concept of the rigid designation of ordinary proper names (and, potentially, natural and artefactual kind terms), together with other modal considerations, into our account. Ultimately this leads to an account of

fictional objects that, contra Kripke, may reasonably said to be possible objects that, though they don't exist, might exist under different circumstances.

I begin by briefly recapitulating my own neo-Carnapian account of the preceding two chapters. I then address the issue of the relativist character of the Carnapian approach to ontology developed here. I draw on the work of David Chalmers and John MacFarlane in arguing that this is a genuinely relativist approach, by MacFarlane's account. However, as in his approach to other forms of relativism, the question of whether this relativism is self-defeating is preceded by an empirical question about our practices. That question is this: do we treat criteria used in referring to objects as separable from subsequent criteria of evaluation of their existence and identity? I argue that the previous chapters should be read as evidence, in terms of our linguistic practices, that we do.

In the third section of this chapter I set out the basic challenges for an account of true negative existence statements. I then go on to outline the particular difficulties created by the need to incorporate rigid designation in any such account. Here I draw on Stuart Brock's exploration of what he calls 'the ubiquitous problem of empty names'. The problem is ubiquitous, argues Brock, because, while a Descriptivist theory seems to provide the basis for an account of non-existence statements, (though not without some issues), it does so at the cost of our powerful intuition that designation is rigid. Efforts to adapt a descriptivist account to incorporate an acceptable level of rigidity run into the same problems as direct reference theories, argues Brock.

In the fourth section of this chapter I set out a Carnapian solution to this problem. The Carnapian solution uses a number of concepts developed through the thesis, including the relativistic principle. These concepts are enumerated at the start of the section.

In sections five and six I go on to use this solution, together with other arguments, to challenge Kripke's widely received view that given fictional objects do not actually exist, it is not true to say that they might possibly do so.

## Section 1

### The Carnapian approach to fictional objects

In the foregoing chapters I advance my own neo-Carnapian approach to ontology.

Two key principles of this approach are:

- i) Existence is conformity to the criteria of existence that constitute a linguistic framework.
- ii) Frameworks may be nested within other frameworks. In these cases the outer framework provides the criteria by which the inner framework obtains.

For example, Sherlock Holmes exists by the criterion of being said to do so in certain texts.

‘Being said to’ is the criterion of the outer framework. Further, he is a flesh and blood character. He smokes a pipe and lives at 221B Baker St. We may infer that he has a blood type and coughs in the mornings. That is, he meets the criteria of a physicalist framework – an inner framework – *by the criterion of* an outer framework. Simply, he is said to meet physical criteria of existence.

This framework-internal existence may be thought of as frame-level authenticity. Object level authenticity occurs within this higher-level authenticity. It consists in an object’s conformity to specific criteria within the more general ontological norm. Professor Moriarty may produce a counterfeit banknote, for example. This fails to meet certain criteria for the existence of a genuine banknote. But the counterfeit still exists, within the inner physicalist framework of the fiction. Put another way, there is some *x*, purporting to be a banknote, that exists within that framework. In ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’, Jack Worthing’s friend Bunbury, on the other hand, might be loosely described as a bogus or counterfeit friend. But it is more accurate to say that he is a non-existent or fictional friend. That is, he exists, with his physical ailments and social demands, by the criterion of being said to do so

by Jack Worthing. He exists by a distinct criterion, nested within the criterion by which Jack and the other characters exist. But he doesn't also meet that latter criterion. He doesn't meet the ontological norm that Jack and the other characters in the play meet.

At least, he doesn't do so in an unmediated or unqualified way. Ultimately, Bunbury along with Jack, Gwendoline, Lady Bracknell and the rest are all inventions of the sublime Wilde. But my contention is that the mediating structure of nesting must be observed and respected, not elided. So the first criterion relevant to Bunbury – and the criterion by which Bunbury exists – is his being said to do so by Jack Worthing, not by Oscar Wilde.

In some ways this account of Bunbury echoes Saul Kripke's account of Gonzago. Gonzago is the central character in the Tragedy of Gonzago, the play within a play in Shakespeare's Hamlet. For Kripke, the play Hamlet has a kind of tangible, worldly existence that the Tragedy of Gonzago does not. There are extant copies of Hamlet in the First Folio editions and there are records of its performance at the Globe Theatre, for example. The Tragedy of Gonzago has no such historical reality – or no reality independent of its place within Hamlet. As a consequence, argues Kripke, we may say that Hamlet is a real fictional character and that Gonzago is a fictional fictional character. Kripke is then able to lever off this distinction to argue for the reality of fictional characters. Hamlet is a real entity in a way that Gonzago is not.

There is a crucial difference between the account I have given above and Kripke's account, though. By Kripke's (2013) account, Hamlet doesn't meet the criteria of a physicalist framework that the play itself, the Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark, does meet (p. 73). As a result, he is an abstract entity. He cannot be said literally to scorn Ophelia or to stab Polonius because only a physical being could do such things. Hamlet does these things only by virtue of being said to do them in the play. What is the difference between

stabbing Polonius by *virtue* of being said to do so in the play Hamlet and stabbing Polonius by the *criterion* of being said to do so in the play Hamlet? The difference is that criteria of existence are inherently of equal value. Our preference for one criterion over another is pragmatic – perhaps we could say ‘external’ – in some crucial sense. There is a democratic principle – or what Carnap called a principle of tolerance – applying to criteria considered in and of themselves. This is equivalent to saying that criteria do not have any inherent position in a structure of criteria. So Hamlet doesn’t gain his reality by being sheeted home through relations of dependence – or ‘in virtue of’ relations – to a single, underlying criterion of physical existence as Kripke has it. The character Hamlet meets the criteria of a physicalist framework, nested in a discursive criterion. And meeting those physical criteria allows Hamlet and other characters in the play to generate the play within the play – that is, the further discursive criterion within which are nested the physical criteria that Gonzago fulfils.

We are at considerable liberty in our adoption and use of ontological frameworks. There are two broad motivations for adopting a framework – charity and utility. I assume these two motivations are often intertwined, given the co-operative and purposeful nature of so many of our endeavours. Further, we may be agreeable or dialectical, co-operative or combative, depending on our perception of the presence or absence of a commonality of purpose, aim or interest. We are adept at nesting frameworks, at switching or suspending frameworks – including the outermost framework – in accordance with our immediate, intermediate and ultimate purposes. Our almost unlimited, everyday ability to iterate our purposes – to set goals whose achievement serves other goals – underpins our ability to nest frameworks. We also mesh frameworks and structures of frameworks in a process that I haven’t described above but which is exemplified in what we might call ‘complex’



statements about fictional characters. Here I have in mind statements such as that Sherlock Holmes has solved more crimes than any living detective or that Sherlock Holmes would not have needed tapes to get the goods on Nixon (Lewis, 1978, p. 38). We adjust and accommodate ontological standards, I contend, in the same way that Lewis (1979) suggested we adjust our standards of precision – on the fly, in small scale improvised language games, in a process he calls ‘conversational scorekeeping’.

This, then, is a fine grained, adaptive conception of frameworks. Deflationary theories have tended to assume that a framework of existence criteria imposes an all or nothing rule – that they will simply rule some objects in and some out. I’m suggesting we are agile (or ‘nimble’, as current business jargon would have it), in our deployment of frameworks. For by this account we have at least two sets of criteria in view whenever we assert that something doesn’t exist – and a greater number of nested criteria in view in many cases of fictional discourse and discourse about fictions. In effect this means we are making ‘external’ ontological judgements, in Carnap’s sense, in all but the most preliminary positive existence assertions – in the initial assumption of a frame of reference required to get any discourse started. When we assert that something doesn’t exist we are, amongst other things, making a judgement about the utility or appropriateness of the framework within which that thing does exist. This allows us to explain, for example, how there may be truths about non-existent entities like Hamlet or Vulcan, truths that distinguish one non-existent object from another. We may say that Hamlet and Vulcan are non-existent while still maintaining that terms like ‘Hamlet’ and ‘Vulcan’ refer and that truth supervenes on

existence. This is perhaps the most distinctive and promising aspect of this version of Carnap's deflationism.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> I say that every framework is inherently of equal value to every other. It seems obvious, though, that we prefer criteria – or elect to give properties the status of criteria – based on the practical advantages those criteria offer and the cooperative means available for achieving those advantages. So, we need to be more specific. Ontological frameworks are all on a par in just the sense that none is better suited to reflect or represent reality than any other. There is no single reality to which one framework may correspond better than another. Likewise, there is no one pass or juncture at which a conceptual or linguistic framework may be said to 'hook onto' reality. Such a juncture may be said to occur at any point in the iteration of criteria I have described. It will occur at the point at which we judge reality to co-operate best with our purposes. This is an important point of coincidence between the American pragmatist tradition – a tradition that, in turn, plays a large part in deflationary ontology – and the continental critique of onto-theology. The theological element which this latter critique seeks to expunge from ontology is the assumption that there is of an underlying unity of reality. Sometimes realist metaphysics is characterised in this way, as the view that there could be one ultimate description of reality. When Stephen Hawking entertains the possibility of knowing the mind of God as the endpoint of astro-physical enquiry, for example, he invokes this conception. God is the first cause and therefore a single unifying terminus of 'because' answers to 'why' questions. As I've noted earlier in this thesis, Carnap identifies a framework of everyday objects – the thing world or thing language in which we are at home from an early age. Such a framework forecloses the conception of everyday experience as our immediate point of contact with a larger, more fundamentally unified reality. It precludes any automatic synthesis of frameworks of enquiry. In the same way, the critique of the 'domestication' of ontology vigorously pursued by Ladyman and Ross (2007) in 'Every Thing Must Go' challenges the assumption that the objects we encounter when we delve more deeply into the natural sciences will have the same essential ontological character as those we encounter on the everyday surface of experience. For Ladyman and Ross, any philosophical synthesis of frameworks is something that can only be achieved in specific projects based on analogies that scientists themselves may have overlooked.

## Section 2

### Is this relativism?

Given this brief overview of a Carnapian-style approach based on a plurality of pragmatically structured ontological frameworks, I want now to address two questions that may be raised in response. These questions need to be answered before we move on to considering the Carnapian account of true negative existence statements.

First, is this not a form of ontological relativism? It contends, surely, that the truth of ontological claims is relative to something – namely frameworks. Second, if it is a relativism, is it not, as a consequence, self-defeating?

The answers I give to these questions are yes and no respectively. Yes, this is a relativism. Specifically, I will argue that it is best understood as a form of what has become known in the literature as New Relativism. Fleshing out what that means will give us a more detailed idea of the semantics of ontological claims. That should make the answer to the second question a good deal more transparent: this relativism is not self-defeating.

Our starting point is the contextual sensitivity of indexical expressions. Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009) write:

Contemporary analytic relativists reason as follows: Lewis and Kaplan have shown that we need to relativise truth to triples of <world, time, location>... but why not exploit these strategies further? In particular by adding new and exotic parameters into the circumstances of evaluation we can allow the contents of thought and talk to be non-specific (in Kaplan's sense) along dimensions other than world, time and location (p. 10).

Perhaps the most straightforward example of this approach, using an ontological framework parameter, is David Chalmers' 'highly speculative' foray into the semantics of existence assertions for anti-realists. He motivates it in this way. In many ways it would be preferable if we could assume an absolute unrestricted existential quantifier (leaving aside problems like those surrounding negative existentials) because such a quantifier is a logical constant and it allows us to use standard semantics to determine a truth value for quantified sentences. But this standard quantifier needs a domain to quantify over and it is not at all clear that our world – 'the huge concrete reality within which we live' (Chalmers, 2009, p. 105) – comes with a built in or canonically associated domain. As Chalmers (2009) puts it:

We might say that the absolute quantifier requires an **absolute domain** for its evaluation. The ontological realist holds that the world has an associated absolute domain ... the ontological anti-realist denies [this] ... the ontological realist is committed to a very strong claim about the fundamental structure of reality. [It] involves, or at least determines, an absolute domain of entities. By contrast, the ontological anti-realist holds that the fundamental structure of reality is less rich than this ... The world may have structure of many sorts but an absolute domain is not part of that structure. (pp. 105-6)

Chalmers describes his approach as a relative of the familiar semantics whereby every quantified assertion is associated with a contextually determined domain restriction function. Here I think he has in mind a technical counterpart of the kind of domain restriction that is commonplace in our discourse. When we arrive home at the end of the day and declare, in frustration, that there is no beer, we don't, of course, mean that there is no beer in the world but only in the fridge. In Chalmers' variation on this idea we may think of a Carnapian ontological framework not as a restriction of an existing domain, but as a

contextually determined mapping or function from worlds to domains. In making any utterance in a world, the speaker endorses a framework as part of the context of that utterance. We can call this framework a furnishing function and we can call its outputs, furnished worlds. If our framework is one of unrestricted mereological composition, for example, then a world comprising two cups will map to a furnished world with two cups plus a third entity – call it a ‘cupcup’ (Chalmers, 2009, p. 78). Varying another familiar idea, we can then say that most linguistic expressions determine functions from furnished worlds to extensions. A singular term will determine a function from furnished worlds to individual entities in those furnished worlds, predicates and general terms will determine a function from furnished worlds to classes of entities and so on (Chalmers, 2009, p. 109). Chalmers goes on to point out that we can follow standard compositional semantics in saying that non-quantified sentences (or utterances) will determine a function from furnished worlds to truth values. We can then evaluate an existentially quantified sentence (or utterance) at a furnished world. A quantified sentence is true if the corresponding open sentence is true of some entity in the domain of the world. That is, it is true if the function associated with the corresponding open sentence, evaluated at a furnished world, yields a non-empty class (Chalmers, 2009, p. 109).

This is a pared down account of Chalmers’ proposed semantics. I think we can see, however, that in terms of supporting the kind of picture I sketched earlier of nested ontological frameworks inhabited by fictional objects, it has a lot of congenial features. Recall that that picture hinges on an account of negative existentials – what it means to say ‘Sherlock Holmes doesn’t exist’ and how that is compatible with there being distinctive truths about Sherlock Holmes such as that he smokes a pipe and lives at 221B Baker St. Let’s

spell out some of the features of Chalmers' (2009) proposal that could be helpful in this regard:

1. Chalmers focusses on frameworks of the kind that appear in some current ontological debates – a mereological universalist framework or a mereological nihilist framework for example. However, there seems no barrier to using these semantics to understand the use of finer grained frameworks and criteria of the kind I first described in Chapter 1, as Quinean clusters of sentences – or the catch-all discursive criterion have described as 'being said (or implied or assumed) to exist'.
2. By Chalmers' (2009) account, singular terms – indeed all expressions, not just quantified expressions – are associated with functions from furnished worlds to extensions (p. 121). Prior to the operation of that function the context of use of those expressions will include a function that takes worlds to furnished worlds. That is, it will include a furnishing function that 'corresponds to the ontological framework endorsed by the speaker in making the utterance' (Chalmers, 2009, p. 108).

Does this mean, he asks, that even proper names are context dependent? Yes and no (Chalmers, 2009, p. 122). No, because in different contexts different uses of a proper name will pick out the same item from a furnished world. The content of the expression will be the same. Yes, because a proper name may be associated with different furnished worlds – that is, with different functions from worlds to furnished worlds. This variability or context dependence, then, is not something to do with the specific semantics of names but with 'the quite general variability of ontological frameworks' (Chalmers, 2009, p. 122). This account unpacks, to some extent, the argument I made in Chapter 2 that proper names have a constant character. That is, the argument that proper names (and by extension, kind

terms) refer to the framework-internal object at the origin of the name use chain of which they are a part.

Chalmers (2009) provides us with a good start, I think, on the kind of semantics we need if we are to make precise sense of negative existential statements in the way that I've indicated. There is considerable room for subtlety in Chalmers' account and it may be possible to go further towards this goal within it. However, I think it is helpful to turn now to the New Relativism that is particularly associated with John MacFarlane. In his book of 2014, MacFarlane is concerned with the relative truth or assessment sensitivity of our 'talk about what is tasty, what people know, what will happen in the future, what might be the case, and what we ought to do' (MacFarlane, 2014, p. 305) – but not, as it happens, with talk about existence and non-existence. We will need to consider then what adjustments, if any, are necessary in adapting MacFarlane's account.

The decisive feature of MacFarlane's (2014) relativism is the use of contextually supplied criteria in two distinct roles: first as standards in the context of use that helps determine the content of an expression; second in the context of assessment of that expression that helps determine its truth value. This doubling of contexts is what we need if we are to say that an object may exist by one criterion and fail to exist by another and that both criteria are deployed in some way in negative existence statements. In Chalmers' proposal the context of use and the context of assessment are presumed always to be the same. For MacFarlane (2014) the possibility that they are distinct is what marks out relativism about truth (p. 59). MacFarlane originally described his analysis as non-indexical contextualism. The key insight is that contexts of use may not just help determine the propositional content of utterances but also, as contexts of assessment, their truth value. He describes reading a 2002 article by Nicola Kompa on the 'Context Sensitivity of

Knowledge Ascriptions'. Initially he was 'blind' as he puts it to the possibility that Kompa outlines there. He says, she writes:

an unspecific utterance [an utterance that requires further specification via its context] is true or false ... only relative to the imposed standard. The standard in turn is determined by contextual features like the speaker's and hearer's presuppositions, interests, intentions, their conversational goals etc. So a truth condition of an unspecific utterance could be roughly stated as follows, where '...is F' is an unspecific predicate: An utterance of "X is F" is true iff X meets the contextually relevant standard for F-ness. ( MacFarlane, 2014, pp. 87-88)

MacFarlane (2014) could not see, he says, that the truth values of utterances could depend on contextually supplied standards – in this case, epistemic standards – if those standards play no role in determining the propositional content of those utterances. But this blind spot was caused, he argues, by his conflating context sensitivity with indexicality. And this conflation is pervasive in the literature. In observing the parallel with non-existence claims, we might say that the implicit assumption of descriptivism – and of Thomasson's hybrid theory of reference – is that only the descriptions used to determine the reference of singular and sortal nominative terms may be used as standards for the existence and identity of their referents.

It is with some care that MacFarlane (2014) picks those two apart. Crudely, we may put the distinction as follows. Sentences containing indexicals like "I", "here", "now" etc. have their content partly determined by the context of their use. But further, in sentences like 'Socrates is sitting now' the indexical expression "now" forces the assessment of the truth value of the sentence at the time of the context of its use. The context of assessment



is not separable from the context of use (MacFarlane, 2014, p. 88). MacFarlane generalises this situation as 'Contextualist postsemantics'. He formulates it in this way:

A sentence *S* is true as used at a context *c* iff *S* is true at *c*,  $\langle w_c, s_c \rangle$  where  $w_c$  is the world of *c* and  $s_c$  is the (ontological) standard of the agent of *c*. (MacFarlane, 2014, p.88)

Contextualist postsemantics is of the same character as the relativity of truth of sentences containing "here" to the location of the speaker (MacFarlane, 2014, p. 17). If we make the standard in MacFarlane's formulation an ontological standard then I think his formulation captures Chalmers' proposal. For MacFarlane this kind of contextualism is justified, if at all, by the sort of considerations that normally support positing context sensitivity. Roughly, I think that's true of Chalmers' proposal. In particular, Chalmers' (2009) doesn't rule out a speaker endorsing what he calls a 'heavyweight' ontological criterion and assigning absolute truth values to her claims (p. 97).

The threshold of relativism is crossed, says MacFarlane – and we encounter the kind of context sensitivity, as opposed to indexicality, in which we are interested – when we give a semantically significant role to the context of assessment *in addition* to a context of use. He formulates this 'Relativist Postsemantics' as follows:

A sentence *S* is true as used at a context *c*<sub>1</sub> and assessed from a context *c*<sub>2</sub> iff *S* is true at *C*<sub>1</sub>  $\langle w_{c_1}, s_{c_2} \rangle$ , where  $w_{c_1}$  is the world of *c*<sub>1</sub> and  $s_{c_2}$  is the standard of the agent of *c*<sub>2</sub>. (MacFarlane, 2014, p.89)

MacFarlane motivates these relativist semantics by means of a semantic-pragmatic bridge principle he calls the Truth Rule. The Truth Rule is a constitutive norm governing assertion. In its reflexive form it looks like this:

An agent is permitted to assert that p at context c1 only if p is true as used at c1 and assessed at c1. (MacFarlane, 2014, p.89)

The difficulty MacFarlane (2014) faces is that 'it makes sense to privilege the context the asserter occupies when she makes an assertion as the one relative to which she should assert only truths' (p. 104). Indeed, says MacFarlane, in any situation where an assertion is being made, the context of use and the context of assessment coincide. It is on this basis that some philosophers have concluded that talk of relative truth is incoherent (MacFarlane, 2014, p. 108). How does MacFarlane give a normative role to contexts of assessment? By supplementing the Reflexive Truth Rule for assertions with a constitutive norm for

Retraction:

An agent in context c2 is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of p made at c1, if p is not true as used at c1 and assessed from c2. (MacFarlane, 2014, p. 108).

MacFarlane (2014) concludes that 'what makes relative truth intelligible is the potential difference between the context at which an assertion is made and the contexts at which challenges to it will have to be met and retractions considered' (p. 116). In a sense this understates the role of interpersonal differences in these two contexts – that is the difference between the context in which an assertion is made and the context from which that claim is disputed. It would seem that a norm of dialectic is all that is needed rather than the intra-personal norm of retraction. But that is to look ahead to an adaptation of MacFarlane's relativist post semantics to ontology.

What MacFarlane (2014) hopes to have achieved at this stage in his argument is 'a neutral framework that tells us what to look for in arguing for or against a relativist theory' (p. 117).

This section raises an empirical question about our practices. Do we give contexts of assessment an independent role from contexts of use in various sets of practices such as assertions containing the word 'ought' or in our attributions of knowledge? I will argue that we certainly do give contexts of assessment or 'frameworks of evaluation' an independent role from contexts of use, or 'frameworks of reference' in true negative existence claims. But we can maintain that there is a kind of enabling coincidence of these two in any existence or non-existence claim, in that reference to an object always occurs within some framework and in conformity to its criteria, even if that is just the discursive criterion of a fictional framework. This occurs prior to any challenge to the existence of an object or, as in a true negative existence claim, the assertion of the success of such a challenge. In other words, incorrigibility of reference – that rule that reference is unfailing – corresponds to MacFarlane's Reflexive Truth Rule. And, with MacFarlane's norm of retraction, it supports the apparently paradoxical consequence of this Carnapian view that any we always assume the existence of an object, by some criterion, in asserting its non-existence due to its failure to meet other criteria.

Let me end by asking whether, as a form of relativism, my own Carnapian approach to ontology self-defeating. I seem to face a dilemma: either I claim that my views in this thesis (in particular that the truth of internal existence claims are relative to a framework) are themselves only true relative to a metaontological framework; or I claim that my views in this thesis are external claims, not relative to a framework. I take the first horn of the dilemma.<sup>66</sup> This does raise further questions however, such as whether I have any pragmatic

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<sup>66</sup> There is a third position that is somewhat tempting here. To follow Goldfarb's interpretation of Carnap's Principle of Tolerance, that my own view in a sense cannot be said but only shown..." [See Goldfarb, 1997].)

reasons to prefer my neo-Carnapian framework over other possible alternative frameworks.<sup>67</sup>

A related challenge concerns the status of the ontological question of the existence of frameworks themselves. At first thought, the answer to the internal question might seem to be trivially true: that is, it might seem that relative to every framework, at least one framework exists. That is not quite right, however. It need not be true *within* a framework, that the framework exists; that will be true according to some frameworks and not according to others. Now consider the metaontological framework from which I am advancing my Carnapian view. Call it metaframework1. According to metaframework1, frameworks exist. Thus it seems to follow from my metaontological framework, that this one ontological question – the existence of frameworks – is not framework-relative, but rather absolute. What should I say to this? It is not clear to me that this is a mistake, but even if it is, it seems to be a relatively harmless one (Bennett, 2009).

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<sup>67</sup> There is interesting literature on how this type of criticism applies to Carnap's own view. For example, see Haug (2011).

## Section 3

### The problem of empty names

I've headed this chapter 'true negative existence statements' because I believe the solutions proposed here can apply, *mutatis mutandis* to statements about non-existent kinds of objects – unicorns and phlogiston, for example, or race – as well as to statements about particulars and individuals like Vulcan and Hamlet. While there may not be much space to argue for this, I hope that it will at least become clear that there is no obstacle to such an application. Amie Thomasson often calls these statements altogether simply 'non-existence' statements, and I will sometimes use this terminology. I will focus mainly, though, on statements that feature the names of individual objects that don't exist. This is the problem of 'empty names' and the predication of non-existence with regard to the subject of an empty name is a 'negative existential.'

The questions surrounding negative existentials are many. How can we speak truly of what is not, even if just to say of it that it does not exist? Can there be truths about non-existent objects other than their non-existence? If there are no such truths, how do we distinguish one non-existent object from another, asserting, for example, that Sherlock Holmes is a detective and not a Prince of Denmark? And why is there a difference in the information conveyed by the statement that Sherlock Holmes does not exist from the information conveyed by the claim that Hamlet does not exist? On the other hand, if there are such truths, how do we reconcile these with the principle that 'truth supervenes on reality' (Crane 2013, p 23).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Crane writes:

'The problem of non-existence is that there are genuine truths about non-existent intentional objects, but truth is dependent on how things are in reality, and reality only contains what exists' (2013, p.3) (

These puzzles around empty names depend, as most puzzles do, on our desire to maintain certain assumptions while confronting instances in which those assumptions appear to be incompatible. I've mentioned one of those assumptions immediately above – truth supervenes on existence – and the need to discover how this can be compatible with our widespread practice of making true/false claims about the likes of Holmes and Hamlet.

A second assumption of this kind is what Searle (1969) called 'The Axiom of Existence': 'whatever is referred to must exist' (p. 77). A name whose referent does not exist does not, in fact, refer. It is vacuous or empty. Yet in ordinary language we will often say that someone has referred to something that does not exist. An auxiliary assumption is that the only contribution a name can make to the meaning of a sentence is its referent. Sometimes Direct Reference theories of reference are said to hold to this view: The meaning or semantic value of a name just is its referent. That is not quite accurate. As Kripke (1973/2013) puts it, a Direct Reference theory could be 'any paradigm which made the existence of a referent essential to the semantic function of naming' (pp. 22-3). This is not equivalent to the claim that the referent exhausts the semantic function of naming. Either way though, without a referent a name has no meaning, according to this assumption.

A third assumption is captured in Quine's well-known claim that the question of what exists can be answered in one word – 'everything'. This entails that there is no meaningful existence predicate that can apply to objects or particulars. It becomes redundant to say of something that it exists. Russell puts it this way: 'As regards the actual things in the world, there is nothing at all that you can say about them. ... There is no sort of point in a predicate that could not conceivably be false' (as cited by Kripke, 2013, p. 7). According to this doctrine, we cannot divide up the objects in the world into those which exist and those which don't. As one philosopher has put it '... the thought is that

instantiating any property whatsoever *conceptually presupposes* the existence of a subject in a way that makes it incoherent to then think of existence as a further property of that thing' (Nelson, 2019, p. 3). This assumption makes positive singular existence claims problematic along with negative ones. Positive existentials might be redundant or systematically mistaken – or even, as for, Kant a kind of contradiction. For Kant, if we predicate existence of something we imply that we have added something to the concept of that thing (Nelson, 2019, p. 3; Crane, 2013, pp 33-34) – and then it cannot be that very thing conceived, and nothing else, which is said to exist. Yet, as Kripke (2013) points out, we might very well ask of someone – Napoleon, for example – if he really existed and was not purely fictional, given the fantastical nature of some of his deeds (p. 8). In that case the answer that he existed would not be redundant or meaningless.

Having identified these three assumptions – plus an auxiliary assumption, that the only contribution a name can make to the meaning of a sentence is its referent – let us consider the problem of empty names in its simplest form. This is the problem of negative existentials. If we say of something that it does not exist we seem to presuppose that that there is something with regard to which non-existence may be predicated or to which existence may be denied. Quine's description of simple predication captures the assumption behind this view:

Predication joins a general term and a singular term to form a sentence that is true accordingly as the general term is true of the object to which the singular term refers. (Quine, as cited by Crane 2013, p 21).

Likewise, a predication may be defined as 'constructed by inserting  $n$  referring expressions into an  $n$  place predicate' (Sainsbury, as cited by Crane 2013, p. 22). If the singular term in question does not refer how can a statement like 'Pegasus does not exist' be true? What are

the truth conditions for negative existentials – what, in particular, is the truth maker for this statement?

Logically there is a simple move that is open to us to deal with the problem when posed in this way. We may distinguish between wide scope and narrow scope negation. If negation is given a wide scope then the whole sentence, 'Pegasus exists' or  $\exists x(x=P)$  is negated. The claim that Pegasus doesn't exist is equivalent to the claim that it is false that Pegasus exists. In a narrow scope negation, the negation applies only to the predicate. In that case, we do seem to refer to Pegasus and predicate non-existence of that subject. If we assume that we can only refer to what exists this will amount to a contradiction. We will be saying that there exists something that doesn't exist. But if we use wide scope negation in the negative existential we are simply saying that there is nothing that is Pegasus. If we have some lingering concern that we are still speaking of something that doesn't exist in this way, we can dispel this concern by pointing out that saying there is nothing that is Pegasus is equivalent to saying of everything that it is not Pegasus. In symbolic terms, we are entitled to 'push' the negation sign 'through' the existential quantifier and change the quantifier to a universal one. Now, if we need a truth maker for negative existentials, we have one. That is, we can maintain our first assumption – that truth supervenes on existence. For in this case, the whole world – or, at least, the universe of our discourse – is the truth maker for the claim that Pegasus doesn't exist. Everything is such that it is not Pegasus. The claim that Pegasus does not exist is true in a straightforward fashion.

There is a little more to say about this account. It required a premise at the outset that effectively breached the auxiliary assumption I identified above. This is the assumption that names must refer in order to be significant, or to make a contribution to the meaning of a sentence. If we stick strictly to this assumption then it will indeed be difficult to make



sense of negative existentials. They will be meaningless. As Crane (2013) notes, Quine's original response (Quine, 1948) to this issue was to make do solely with quantifier expressions that use variables and eliminate names altogether from his canonical notation (Crane 2013, p. 53). But that is not helpful in an account of ordinary language. A more practicable solution, argues Crane, is provided by Free Logics (p.54).

In accordance with the assumption that names must refer to play any role in the meaning of a sentence, we have classical rules for the introduction and elimination of names. From a non-mentioned occurrence of a name in a predication we may infer that the predication is true of *something*. That is, we infer that there is some  $x$  such that the predicate applies to it. This is the rule of Existential Generalisation. The mere occurrence of a name in a predication is enough to imply that there is some  $x$  of which the predication is true or false. A free logic is so-called because it is free of the assumption that the named object exists. It requires that an additional premise be true before the inference of Existential Generalisation (or Universal Elimination) goes through. This additional premise is simply that there is indeed something identical to the named object  $a$  – i.e. there is some  $x$  such that  $x=a$ . We can then determine the truth of this existential claim in the additional premise and its wide scope negation, as above. It must be noted, though, that the name in question has made a contribution to the meaning – and the truth – of the negative existential sentence, despite its lack of reference. It seems there must be some description associated with the name in question – a description to which nothing conforms.

With this caveat, then, a Free Logic seems to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of negative existentials. Other approaches, which I will discuss shortly, also do a good job on this front. There remains, though, the wider problem of empty names. For it really seems that there are truths about non-existent objects other than their non-

existence. I've mentioned the need we feel to distinguish one non-existent object from another and to do so by means of the differing properties of those things. But even the attribution of abstract – perhaps universal – properties is problematic.<sup>69</sup>

Some Free Logics – positive Free Logics – allow that some properties may truthfully be attributed to the subjects of empty names. Sometimes these properties are called 'higher order' properties. They are properties we might suppose that everything has. For example, being self-identical, being either human or not human, (assuming the law of excluded middle) and being such that  $2+2=4$ . But if we think that everything is not Pegasus it is hard to see why Pegasus should have the properties that everything has.<sup>70</sup> So it seems that a negative free logic is preferable as a solution to the problem of negative existentials. But such a logic makes every claim about non-existents, other than that they are non-existent, false.

Even prefixed predications are problematic, if we are to maintain all the foregoing assumptions initially identified above. For example, some versions of the negative free logic described above seem to allow us to make true claims like:

(1) 'According to the novel, a Christmas Carol, Ebenezer Scrooge exists'.

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<sup>69</sup> There are also contexts in which we have meaningful debates about the properties of fictional objects in just the same way that we would debate the properties of existing objects. Examples are easily found. The abstract for a philosophy paper that has turned up on my e-mail as I write this is entitled 'An empirical solution to the puzzle of Macbeth's dagger'. It states: 'The puzzle of Macbeth's dagger is the question of whether, when Macbeth hallucinates a dagger, there is also something that he sees.' (D'Ambrosio, 2018). While we may conclude that our ordinary usage of intensional transitive verbs is such that there is nothing that Macbeth sees, that is not because his dagger is fictitious. Nor is it because of anything that is true 'according to the story' of Macbeth. The situation with the dagger is described and then considered as we would consider any other situation. The existence or otherwise of Macbeth's dagger is entirely on a par with that of any other object that is the subject of an hallucination, whether in fiction or not. But even leaving cases like this aside, we can observe that much more modest claims about the properties of non-existent objects are also problematic in logical terms, even using a Free Logic approach.

<sup>70</sup> This view is not shared by everyone, even if I find these claims inconsistent. Kripke (1973/2013) remarks parenthetically, 'Here I assume that something is self-identical even with respect to counterfactual situations where it would not exist' (p. 38).

(2) 'According to the Conan Doyle stories, Sherlock Holmes is a detective'.

That is because the fictional (or story) operator (or prefix) – 'According to the ... story/fiction/novel' – is not truth functional (Brock, 2004, p. 281) The truth of the prefixed claim is independent of the truth (or falsity) of the unprefixed claim within it. In discussing these cases, however, Brock (2004) argues that they present real problems for anyone who maintains that auxiliary assumption identified above – the assumption of Direct Reference. In what follows I review Brock's argument.

As we've noted, the principle of the compositionality of meaning requires that a sentence has meaning – that is, expresses a proposition – only if each of its parts has some meaning. An empty name, however, whose meaning is solely its referent cannot meet this requirement. It seems then that sentences like negative existentials and (1) and (2) above express no proposition at all. However, the direct reference theorist may 'stipulate that a simple subject/predicate sentence will be true if and only if the subject expression refers to an object (or objects) that has (or have) the property expressed by the predicate; it will be false otherwise' (Brock, 2004, p. 281). This gives us the kind of solution to the problem of negative existentials I have sketched above, with the negative existential being the wide scope negation of a positive existence claim to the effect, say, that Sherlock Holmes exists. It is, arguably, also consistent with the principle of compositionality. The proposition expressed by a negative existential or a positive existential that uses an empty name – or sentences (1) and (2) above – 'is a function of the semantic values, *or lack thereof*, of the constituents of that sentence' (Brock, 2004, p. 281).

Brock (2004) notes that, in accordance with this view, we can argue that declarative sentences using empty names express a special kind of singular proposition: a gappy

proposition. He says, ‘A gappy proposition has a propositional structure like any other singular proposition, but one of the positions is left unfilled’ (Brock, 2004, p. 281). This gives us the right truth values for a sentence like ‘Ebenezer Scrooge exists’ and ‘Sherlock Holmes is a detective’. They are simply false. But if we have a gap in the subject position then, any two simple sentences differing only with respect to the empty name they contain express the exact same proposition. Likewise substituting one empty name for another will preserve the truth value of those sentences. That might seem acceptable in cases like ‘Sherlock Holmes does not exist’ or ‘Ebenezer Scrooge does not exist’. Indeed for some, Frege’s logical expedient of having every empty name refer to the same thing – the empty set – makes good sense for ordinary language too (Crane, 2013, pp.53, 57). But consider the situation in which such sentences are embedded under a fictional operator – or as I have termed it, an ‘owning prefix’. For example, ‘According to the novel, *A Christmas Carol* Ebenezer Scrooge exists’ (Brock, 2004, p. 280).<sup>71</sup> As Brock observes, this operator is not truth functional, so that while the embedded sentence in (1) – ‘Ebenezer Scrooge exists’ – is false, the whole complex sentence may be true. And in ordinary discourse we usually do want to affirm the truth of this example. Now, though, if we swap one empty name – one gap – for another in (1) and (2) we get:

(1a) ‘According to the novel, a Christmas Carol, Sherlock Holmes exists’

(2a) ‘According to the Conan Doyle stories, Ebenezer Scrooge is a detective’

(Brock, 2004, p. 282)

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<sup>71</sup> The difference between the two is that an owning prefix, unlike a fictionality prefix, is not interpreted as disavowing ontological commitment to the objects within its scope but as simply clarifying or making explicit the framework in which those objects do exist and the fictional positive existence claim is true. Logically they function in just the same way.

According to the gappy proposition theory (1a) expresses the very same proposition as that expressed by (1). And (2a) expresses the same proposition as that expressed by (2). But, of course, we also want to assert that the propositions in these pairs have opposite truth values. Brock (2004) maintains that ‘this is the main difficulty empty names present for the direct reference theorist’ (p. 283).

To put this problem in even starker terms, information is conveyed in a statement to the effect that Sherlock Holmes does not exist that is distinct from the information conveyed by the statement that Ebenezer Scrooge does not exist. If the meaning of a name or other singular referring term is just its referent then it is very difficult to see what account can be given of that difference in the meaning or informative content of straightforward negative existentials.

This poses an apparently insuperable problem for Direct Reference theories. In his lectures of 1973 recently published under the title ‘Reference and Existence’ (Kripke, 2013) Kripke’s strategy is to argue that when we refer to fictional objects we refer to objects that we pretend to exist – and, therefore, the propositions that so refer are themselves only pretend propositions. But this approach only seems to compound the problems faced by the Direct Reference theory and Kripke himself is doubtful that any advance has been made.

Brock’s overall argument, however, is that those who subscribe to a descriptivist theory of reference have equal difficulty in dealing with empty names. That is because of the force of Kripke’s (1972) argument that ordinary proper names are rigid designators. That is, proper names and other singular referring terms refer to the same object in all possible worlds. This requires some modification of the descriptivist theory, which otherwise treats names as ‘flaccid’ designators. Flaccid designators refer to whatever individual object satisfies a given description, even if that is a different object in different possible worlds.

However, any modification of the descriptivist theory aimed at satisfying our intuition that names are rigid designators – that is, any rigidification of names as descriptions – will, ‘somewhere along the line’, lead to trouble for the descriptivist, argues Brock.<sup>72</sup>

One of Brock’s prime examples concerns the rigidification of descriptions through indexing them to one possible world. This would remove the unwanted necessity that comes with identifying a name like ‘Santa Claus’ with a description like ‘The unique jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole, has flying reindeer etc.’ For it is true in every possible world that the unique jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole, has flying reindeer etc. is a unique jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole, has flying reindeer etc. But this is not true of Santa Claus. In common with any other person, he is not necessarily jolly or fat. There should be possible worlds in which Santa Claus has gone on a diet or lost his sense of humour. We want this description of Santa Claus to be ‘reference fixing’ only – a description that merely picks out this individual by means of his accidental properties. Santa Claus can then have different properties in different possible worlds, while remaining his essential self. The easiest way to do this is to say that the name ‘Santa Claus’ refers to the *actual* jolly fat man who lives at the South Pole, has flying reindeer etc. As Brock (2004) notes, this has been a popular strategy for rigidifying descriptions (p. 291).

When it comes to fictional or empty names, however, this strategy removes a certain advantage descriptivism has over Direct Reference theories. The advantage in question

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<sup>72</sup> Chalmers’ account of negative existentials is essentially a more sophisticated descriptivist account. It involves translating the claim that Sherlock Holmes does not exist to a corresponding open sentence to the effect that there is no object in the furnished world that satisfies the description of Sherlock Holmes:  $\sim\exists(x)w: SH(x)$ , where the  $w$  subscript signifies the furnished world in question (Chalmers, 2009, p. 122). This presents us with a dilemma. If we take our furnished world to be a function of one of the criteria by which Sherlock Holmes does exist, then it is not true to say that there is no such entity. That option is easy to eliminate. But if, on the other hand, we take our furnished world to be such that this negative existential quantification is true then we need to locate the property of Sherlock Holmesness. Where does this property exist?

concerns our strong intuition that not only might Santa Claus have lost weight and his sense of humour, while remaining himself, but that there are also possible worlds in which he exists. We know that he doesn't exist in the actual world but, (ignoring the difficulty presented by flying reindeer), we feel that, like Hamlet and Holmes, he might have existed, had circumstances been otherwise. This intuition is readily accommodated by a descriptivist theory of names. In the actual world, nothing instantiates the properties of being a jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole etc. But there are other possible worlds in which those properties are instantiated. In those worlds, Santa Claus exists. But now suppose we make 'Santa Claus' synonymous with the definite description 'The *actual* jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole etc.' If the referent of this name doesn't exist in the *actual* world then there will be no world in which the property of being the *actual* jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole etc is instantiated. Therefore, there will be no possible world at which it is true that a jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole exists in the actual world. A jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole etc. could exist in other possible worlds. There could be an individual satisfying that description in another world. But such an individual would not be the *actual* jolly fat man who lives at the North Pole.

This is a consequence of any theory of reference that views names as rigid designators, including the Direct Reference theory: Hamlet, Holmes, Santa and the rest not only do not exist but could not possibly exist. Kripke defends this 'somewhat surprising' view, tentatively in 'Naming and Necessity' but then quite determinedly in 'Reference and Existence'. I will consider that view in some detail later in this chapter, where I will also argue that it is mistaken. Suffice to say here that there is ample motivation for seeking to rebut Kripke's view. That motivation may be found, for example, in our critical practices. For in all such practices, whether in the most elevated or the most banal, we have the idea that

fictional characters must be plausible, realistic or convincing in order to fulfil many of the functions of fiction. And the plausibility of a fictional character seems inseparable from its possibility. A plausible character is one we believe could exist, even while knowing she does not.

There are, of course, a number of other ways of dealing with this consequence of defining names as rigid designators – other than biting the bullet as Kripke does. One that is mentioned by Brock is a kind of hybrid Descriptivist/Direct Reference view. Names with a referent are rigid designators. But when it comes to fictional or empty proper names we can tolerate these being non-rigid or ‘flaccid’. These names have no actual referents, after all, and so it doesn’t make much sense to say those referents could have properties other than those with which they are described. A slim, severe Santa Claus would not be the Santa Claus of popular fiction. But the properties associated with the name Santa Claus in popular fiction – being a unique jolly fat man etc. – could be instantiated by an individual in some possible world. In that case we would want to say that Santa Claus exists in that world. For example, David Lewis (1978) suggests that the names of fictional characters have a highly non-rigid sense. They refer to whoever fills the description of the fictional character, as given in the fictional work, provided that the possible worlds in which this occurs are limited to those in which the fiction is told as known fact. He says, ‘Kripke’s causal picture of the contagion of meaning ... will do as well for non-rigid senses as for rigid ones’ (Lewis, 1978, p. 41).

This has also been a popular strategy. However, there is at least one obvious drawback. It seems we use names to refer in the same way whether we know that the name is empty or not. That is, we expect them to function in the same way. When we first used the name Vulcan, for example, we were unaware that it was definitely not a referring name.



So it seems that a hybrid theory of this kind will struggle to identify what theory of reference applies when we use names in a mistaken fashion.

There are other forms of hybrid theory. In chapter 2 we considered the hybrid theory of Thomasson and others that views all names (and kind terms) as having a hybrid character. Certainly, a theory that is uniform over both empty and referring names will have the advantage that it can cope with uses of names that occur in ignorance – or in a temporarily suspended judgement – as to whether the name refers or not. However, I have argued earlier that the hybrid theory faces some serious objections in terms of accommodating a direct reference theory.

As we have noted, Kripke argues that no possible individual could be the actual Santa Claus. The actual Santa Claus would also be possible, were he to actually exist, of course. But given that there is no actual Santa Claus, there is nothing that can be said about his being in other possible worlds, claims Kripke. But this, it can be countered, is only true if we assume that Santa Claus can only be involved in *de re* or narrow scope modal contexts. In those contexts, we assume the existence of the subject and then assert the possibility of some predicate applying to it – that is, we assert the possibility that the subject has different properties in different possible worlds. But a possibility operator need not make the prior assumption of the existence of its subject. It can take wide scope – or apply *de dicto*. That is, it can apply to the whole statement that there exists a Santa Claus and he has the property of being jolly and fat in the possible worlds of the Santa Claus story. Simply, a statement that falls in its entirety within the scope of a modal operator can say that possibly Santa Claus exists and he is jolly and fat etc., rather than that Santa Claus exists and possibly he is jolly and fat etc. And this wide scope claim seems, intuitively, to be a perfectly legitimate claim to make.

As it is with modal operators such as those of possibility and necessity, so it is with a fictionality operator or prefix. In reading a fiction, for example, we interpret some claims as *de re* fictional and some as *de dicto*. With regard to what we usually call ‘the setting’ of a fiction, we assume that there is place called Cuernavaca, for example, there is a volcano called Popocatepetl, there is a Mexican Day of the Dead and, according to the fiction ‘Under the Volcano’, certain events occurred in Cuernavaca on the Mexican Day of the Dead. Other aspects of the story are *de dicto* fictional in the sense that they are that ‘cut from whole cloth’, as we say. For example, according to the fiction ‘Under the Volcano’, there is an individual called Geoffrey Firmin who is the British Consul in Cuernavaca and an alcoholic consumed with guilt about a wartime incident.

We could argue, then, as Dummett (cited by Kripke, 1972, p. 11) does, that names are just referring terms that always require a modal operator to take wide, rather than narrow, scope. Kripke’s (2013) response to this argument is to say yes, there is the possibility of ‘the existentially quantified story’ (p. 42). There is the possibility that there is some individual who is a British Consul in Cuernavaca, who drinks aftershave in the bathroom and does all the things that Geoffrey Firmin does. But still this is not the possibility that Geoffrey Firmin should exist. This is the consequence Kripke draws from his argument about the rigidity of proper names. For it is certain he contends, that proper names cannot be abbreviations for definite descriptions – and therefore that the existentially quantified possibility described above cannot stand for the possibility of the existence of a named individual. ‘Geoffrey Firmin’ cannot be substituted for ‘the x who is the British Consul in Cuernavaca etc.’ That is because, as Brock (2004) puts it, scope distinctions are, arguably, irrelevant to the fundamental modal argument (p. 287).

Assuming, for the moment, that Geoffrey Firmin exists, the fundamental modal argument

goes like this: 1. 'The British Consul in Cuernavaca is the British Consul in Cuernavaca' is true in every possible world in which there is a unique British Consul in Cuernavaca. 2. If 'Geoffrey Firmin' were used to mean 'The British Consul in Cuernavaca' then 'Geoffrey Firmin is the British Consul in Cuernavaca' would also be true in every possible world in which there is a unique British Consul in Cuernavaca. But it is clearly not the case that 'Geoffrey Firmin is the British Consul in Cuernavaca' is true in every possible world in which there is a unique British Consul in Cuernavaca.

## Section 4

### A Carnapian solution

How does the Carnapian approach I've advocated in this thesis solve the problem of empty names? As noted earlier, the problem lies in reconciling various intuitions and principles we hold dear with the truth of negative existentials. Let us review those.

First, we assumed that there are truths about non-existent objects. These allow us to distinguish one non-existent object from another, as it seems we must do. 'Pegasus is distinct from Cerberus, since one is a horse and the other a dog; and mermaids are different from unicorns' (Crane 2013 Chap. 3 p. 7). That is, there must be truths about the objects that are the subjects of true negative existentials – including the truth that such objects do not exist – and truth, in John Bigelow's (1996) well-known phrase, 'supervenes on being' (p. 38).

Second, we assumed an axiom of existence. This may also be captured in the principle that Chalmers calls Tarski's thesis: 'if an utterance of the form " $F(a)$ " is true, where " $a$ " is a singular term, there must be an entity that the utterance of  $a$  refers to' (Chalmers, 2009, p. 122). An auxiliary assumption we identified is that the referent exhausts the semantic function of naming. We have considered this issue at some length in Chapter 2. The Carnapian view is that the function of a proper name is to refer to the framework-internal object at the origin of the chain of use of which the utterance of a proper name is a part. Names have this character. What they contribute to a sentence is this function.

Third was an assumption that existence is not a predicate. This is a debatable claim. Satisfactory accounts of existence as a predicate can be constructed. But there does seem to be some valid intuition behind it. In the Carnapian account this intuition is accommodated: To attribute existence to an object is to say that at least one of its properties has the status

of a criterion of existence. This does not add a property to the object – although arguably it adds a property to one or more of the properties of the object.

The picture I've developed above in the discussion of fictional objects, supported by the kind of relativism that MacFarlane advocates, provides a basis for accommodating all these intuitions, to some extent, in its account of negative existentials. Very briefly, there are truths about fictional objects like Sherlock Holmes and non-existent objects like Vulcan, because they are internal to at least one framework and exist by its criteria. They are non-existent because they fail, whether intentionally or not, to meet the criteria of another, contextually preferred, framework.

Arguing, as this view does, that there are no empty names because reference is incorrigible, provides a good start to solving the problem of empty names. But it is not enough. We need to elaborate on this basis if we are to understand how this picture plays out in theories of reference, especially direct reference theories that, as Kripke (1972) says, take into account modal considerations and the role of proper names as rigid designators (p. 14).

What tools do we have available? Let us set out some of the relevant theses proposed or included in the Carnapian account I have advanced.

1. Names refer to the framework-internal object at the origin of the name use chain of which a given utterance of a name is a part. We say the object is framework-internal because it will exist by some criteria and because a Carnapian ontology admits only frameworks (which use certain properties and concepts as criteria of existence and identity) and framework-internal objects and excludes framework transcendent objects.

2. This reference or designation is incorrigible or unfailing. That is, the object at the origin of a name use chain need not be the subject of a veridical perception or a non-fictional or non-hypothetical discourse. The framework in which its designation occurs may be entirely provisional. But the object will, in all cases be internal to at least one framework, the fictional framework, whose criteria are merely being said (or implied or assumed) to exist, in some discourse or another. The object will be in this position if only by virtue of being at the origin of a name use chain.
3. An actual object is one which conforms to the criteria of existence and identity of a *preferred* framework. By this I also mean to include the criteria of a preferred *application* of a framework – an unqualified application, or an application under optimal, rather than sub-optimal, conditions. The time taken by a satellite to orbit the earth, for example, may be said to be one ‘actual’ value, calculated using a Newtonian framework, or another ‘actual’ value if we use an Einsteinian framework. We can prefer either for practical reasons. There is no framework transcendent actuality – and the actual world is not indexically determined in relation to a referring subject.
4. In particular, being at the origin of a name use chain, is not a criterion of existence that is necessarily a criterion of actuality. Nor is being the subject of some ostensive or indexical reference fixing process or description a privileged criterion of actuality. Fictional, non-actual objects can be at the origin of a name use chain. As we’ve seen earlier, in discussing the fictional character Gonzago, this mechanism is pervasively relative. An object may be an actual fictional object as opposed to a non-actual fictional object, depending on our relative preferences.

5. Designation is rigid. Indeed, what Brock calls ‘obstinate’ rigidity is maintained in this account. How an object turns out to be – and what it turns out to be – will depend on its position as a framework-internal object relative to other frameworks, whether preferred or otherwise. But, in every possible scenario it will be the same framework-internal object, including those scenarios in which it doesn’t exist because it fails to meet the criteria of a preferred framework. That is because the process or description by which its reference is fixed (and the referent disambiguated) may be entirely contingent and so unaffected by varying determinations of that object’s essential nature. The original referent remains – as the site of an enquiry.
6. As we saw with the example of Orky, (the clump of seaweed that was first identified as a killer whale), the referent of a name may be just the object that was first encountered in the contingent circumstances of its naming. Those circumstances are recorded in the logbook that this scientific expedition kept, for example. It is *that* object, no matter how contingent the means of its disambiguation – and no matter how distinct it turns out to be from its first identification – that remains the referent of the name ‘Orky’.
7. The same applies to the referents of fictional names. The anonymous Mrs Bridges, for example, in the Sherlock Holmes’ stories, might decide to emigrate to New Zealand and start a dairy farm (Lycan 2015). Even fictional objects, argues Lycan, have this *haecceity*, to which rigid designators refer.
8. Contrary to a descriptivist theory of reference, the framework of evaluation of an object’s identity and existence need not be the same framework as the framework under which a referent is originally disambiguated. Reference fixing descriptions may

be purely contingent, referring to properties that were thought to be essential to a certain kind of object at the time of naming but which subsequently are determined to be accidental. Properties may be so determined due to the application of the criteria of a different linguistic framework – or due to the better, more optimal, application of the previous framework. Orky exists as the same object as was rigidly designated at the outset. But in the process, some of his observed properties that were thought to be essential to a whale will have been demoted to being accidental properties of a piece of seaweed. Some properties that were thought to be accidental to a whale will have been promoted to being essential to a piece of seaweed. Some properties – some aspects of Orky's appearance – may be demoted and then, in our extended story in which Orky turns out to be a particularly interesting piece of seaweed, promoted again to essential status. This would be the case if, for example, Orky turns out to be the first discovered example of a new species of seaweed called 'whale weed' – a species characterised, say, by an unusual dorsal fin-like outgrowth.

We can see from the above that the relativistic principle is doing a lot of the work in this account of the rigidity of designation. But the incorrigibility of reference also plays a role. Reference is incorrigible because being at the origin of a name use chain may itself be a criterion of existence. Incorrigibility extends rigid designation to (relatively) fictional and non-actual objects.

With these conceptions in hand, then, let us see how they may be applied to one of the challenges that Kripke sets us in his account of reference and existence. How may a non-actual object be said possibly to exist? By this Carnapian account it is certainly possible for a fictional object like Sherlock Holmes to exist. The circumstances in which he would exist are



the circumstances in which he meets the criteria of existence and identity of the everyday framework of persons and things in an unqualified fashion, not just under the condition of his being said to do so. But a good deal more needs to be said if we are to contend adequately with Kripke's arguments to the contrary.

## Section 5

### Fictional objects as possible objects

It is helpful, I think, to begin with David Lewis's conception of fictional objects as possible objects, a conception developed in dialogue with Kripke's views. Lewis's (1978) goal in his 'Truth in Fiction' is to treat fictional objects as possible objects. He says:

What is true in the Sherlock Holmes stories would then be what is true at all those possible worlds where there are characters who have the attributes, stand in the relations and do the deeds that are ascribed in the stories to Holmes, Watson and the rest. (Lewis, 1978, p. 39)

Lewis then identifies two immediate problems. The first is that this analysis may not be very informative. That is because we may need to know already what is true in a fiction in order to say in which possible worlds the fiction is true. However, this does not bear directly on the question of whether fictional objects are possibilia. The second problem, says Lewis, is due to some observations by Saul Kripke.

In *Naming and Necessity* Kripke (1972) argues against his earlier view that 'Holmes does not exist but, in other states of affairs, he would have existed' (p. 158). This earlier view of Kripke's is, I will argue, both a commonsense view and the correct view from the Carnapian point of view. Fictional objects are good examples of possible objects, even while it may also be quite true to say that they don't exist or are in some way non-actual. Yet Kripke's view that fictional characters do not exist in any possible world has been very influential.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Lycan (2015, p. 29) notes that this position is also taken by Kaplan (1973, Appendix XI), Donellan (1974), Plantinga (1974) and Fine (1984) – to which we may add Sainsbury (2010, pp. 82-87). Lycan quotes Salmon (2011, p. 56) to the effect that this view has carried the day: 'Contemporary philosophy has uncovered that ... a name from fiction does not even designate a merely possible object'.

Kripke's position accords with his view of a fiction as an act of pretence. The pretence is not only ontological but semantic. We pretend that there are fictional objects like Sherlock Holmes – and, as a consequence, also pretend that there are names that refer to these objects and propositions that attribute properties and relations to the objects so named. This gives rise to two different, though related, arguments. First, there is a semantic argument. Pretended propositions cannot be true of any hypothetical world: 'for there are no propositions to be true of this hypothetical world' (Kripke, 2013, p. 42). Second, there is a metaphysical problem with plurality. The proper name of a person like Sherlock Holmes, as it is introduced in this pretence, names a particular man – not just any old man who does what Holmes did or otherwise matches his description. The pretence is that this is the name of a unique man. Now, there might be many people, in the appropriate time period, who performed the deeds ascribed to Holmes in the Holmes stories, says Kripke. There may be many who filled the Holmes role – but there is no saying which of these is the unique man of the Holmes stories. Therefore, 'None of these people would have been Sherlock Holmes' (Kripke, 2013, p. 41). As Lycan (2015) says, 'To put the thesis shockingly, it is not and was never possible for Holmes to have existed' (p. 29).

Let us state the first argument a little more fully. A genuine proposition requires a genuine referent as its subject. That, in turn, requires a causal chain from the referent to the user of the referring expression in the proposition. The referent must actually exist to ground such a chain of use. If not, there is no connection between our use of a proper name in this actual world and the referent – say, Sherlock Holmes – in a possible world in which he performs his signature exploits. We can contrast this with a possible world in which Aristotle never goes into pedagogy. In this case there is a referent for our proposition about Aristotle's modal properties. In the case of Sherlock Holmes there is no referent. Therefore,

in the case of Sherlock Holmes, there are no genuine propositions about that referent, only pretended propositions. There is only the pretence of using a name and expressing a proposition. There is no causal connection between our pretending use of the name in this world and a 'possible-but-not-actual person' (Kripke, 1972, p. 158). Our pretending use of the name refers to nothing.

To put this slightly differently, reference for Kripke is within one world. Reference does not take place between two possible worlds, since there could be no causal chain between those worlds. They are, as Lewis emphasises, causally isolated. Famously, when a name does refer, it refers to the same object in all possible worlds. But it is the object that traverses possible worlds, dragging its name use chain with it. Without a referent there is no such traverse.

The contention in Kripke's second argument, his metaphysical argument, is that a realm of pretence cannot be a possible world – it is not a way the actual world could be. That is because, for a state of affairs to be possible, we must be able to describe the counterfactual situation in which it obtains in an appropriately specific and determinate fashion. We can't do this with fictional objects, says Kripke (1972):

granted that there is no Sherlock Holmes, one cannot say of any possible person that he *would have been* Sherlock Holmes, had he existed. Several distinct possible people, and even actual ones such as Darwin or Jack the Ripper might have performed the exploits of Holmes, but there is none of whom we can say that he *would have been* Holmes had he performed these exploits. For if so, which one?' (p. 158).

There may be many possible individuals who did the things that Holmes did, as Kripke (2013) says, 'Certainly someone might have done the deeds ascribed to Holmes in the stories' (p. 41). Nevertheless, for Kripke, a fatal indeterminacy is also present.

Here is another presentation of Kripke's view:

Suppose that there is a proposition about a particular fictional person in a work of fiction. It makes no sense to ask whether that proposition would be true under various counterfactual conditions, since the fictional entities in the fiction have no essential features that could be used to determine whether they are indeed objects in the counterfactual situation. What criterion would we be able to use to pick out a fictional character in a given counterfactual situation? (Buechner, 2011, p. 58)

Kripke asserts that fictional persons have no essence – that 'the descriptions used to introduce them do not produce or determine essences' (Lycan 2015, p. 24). Perhaps another way to put this argument is to say that fictional objects don't have identity conditions – we don't have criteria of identity for them.

Kripke's doctrine must be approached with caution. Kripke (1972) affirms that, in other possible worlds 'some actually existing individuals may be absent while new individuals ... may appear' (p. 158). This substantive point remains, he says, 'independent of any linguistic theory of the status of names in fiction' (Kripke, 1972, p. 158). Further, he also argues that within the pretense of a fiction, the name refers. He says, '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 a name' (Kripke, 2011, p. 58). Likewise, he says, 'when one writes a work of fiction, it is part of the pretense of that fiction that the criteria for naming, whatever they are ... Millian or Russellian or what have you – are satisfied. That is part of the pretense of the fiction' (Kripke, 1973, p. 23).

At the same time, it is an error to suppose that ‘a fictional name such as “Holmes” names a particular possible-but-not-actual individual’ (Kripke, 1972, p. 158). The apparent bottom line, then, is that we can’t pick out any Holmes in a possible world and we can’t speak of him either. Lycan (2015) reasons that Kripke’s arguments to this effect would also apply to impossible worlds (p. 29). In Kripke’s (1973) words, ‘There is only ... the possibility of the existentially quantified story – the possibility that there should have been a person *x* who did these things. This, however, is not the possibility that Sherlock Holmes existed’ (p. 42).

As Lewis (1978) puts it, if Conan Doyle really did not know anything about any actual Sherlock Holmes and was not, unbeknownst to us, writing non-fiction, then the name Sherlock Holmes, ‘*as used in the stories*’ can never name a possible individual (p. 39). That is because there is no causal chain linking the use of a name like ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in the pretence of the fiction with any use of that name in the actual world.

There are a number of ways in which we might think these arguments have gone awry. Some of these are described by Bill Lycan (2015). I will consider some of his points in what follows, while also using arguments from other sources, before tackling Kripke’s position from the distinctive Carnapian viewpoint I am seeking to develop.

Taking the metaphysical argument first, the simplest challenge to Kripke’s position may be directed at his assumption that there can only be *one* possible world in which a fictional person like Sherlock Holmes exists and performs his exploits. For there could be many such worlds. In each of these, as Kripke says, a different person – even different actual people – would be Sherlock Holmes and do the things he is said to have done. They couldn’t all have done these things in *one* world. That would be impossible since they would all have to occupy the same spatio-temporal co-ordinates. But in different worlds, different persons could be Sherlock Holmes. And each of those persons would be a unique, particular

individual. This is critical for Kripke (2013), as he says, ‘So Sherlock Holmes doesn’t designate the person – any old person – who did these things. It is supposed to be a name of a unique man’ (p. 41). But that doesn’t require that there be a single, unique *world* in which the Sherlock Holmes stories take place. In every world in which the stories are enacted he is a unique man – he is someone who meets the criteria of the everyday framework of persons and things. There is only one of him in each world of the fiction – unless an as yet undiscovered Holmes story tells us that he was cloned, for example.

This point about the plurality of the worlds of a fiction is made clearly enough by Lewis in considering the incompleteness or indeterminacy of fictional objects. For Lewis, the ‘*According to the fiction F ...*’ prefix is an intensional operator that delimits a set of possible worlds. Lewis notes that we have a tendency to speak in ordinary usage of ‘*the world of Sherlock Holmes*’. But when we consider questions like those concerning Inspector Lestrade’s blood type, or whether Sherlock Holmes has an odd or even number of hairs on his head when he first meets Watson, there is no answer in terms of one possible world. He says:

The best explanation ... is that the worlds of Sherlock Holmes are plural and the[se] questions have different answers at different ones. ... What is true throughout them [these worlds] is true in the stories; what is false throughout them is what is false in the stories; what is true at some and false at others is neither true nor false in the stories. (Lewis, 1978, pp. 42-3)

Many individuals, many states of affairs may be incomplete. If we say that it is warm today there a number of ways in which this claim could be true. The temperature outdoors could be 18 or 19 or 20 degrees Celsius – and so on. One way of defining the meaning of

such a claim is as the set of possible worlds at which it is true.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, this seems to be a perfectly reasonable way of understanding claims about Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes is incomplete but every world in which he exists is complete, each in a different way. There is a set of possible worlds in which he exists and performs his exploits.

To be sure, Sherlock Holmes' essence is not fully specified. That is to say, if we were to adopt Kripke's biological essentialism, (as part of our everyday framework of persons and things), that his DNA is not fully specified. But we do know that he has an essence. So we can allow that in one possible world his DNA is this, and in another possible world, it is that. Following Lewis we might say that it is neither true nor false in the stories that Sherlock Holmes has DNA of specification XYZ. But it is true in all the stories that he is a unique individual with DNA of some specification. And that is what Holmes has in every possible world in which he exists.

We don't need to accept Kripke's plurality argument for the metaphysical impossibility of fictional objects, then. We just need to clarify that there is a plurality of possible worlds in which a fictional object like Sherlock Holmes might exist. I would add that this result is just as well from the point of view of common sense. For it seems to be agreed by all, including Kripke, for example, that Aristotle might never have gone into pedagogy but might have become an architect instead. But by parity of reasoning with Kripke's plurality argument, that could not have occurred. For if Aristotle had gone into architecture he would have needed a teacher. Several distinct possible people and even actual ones like [insert names of ancient Greek architects here] might have done the job of being the teacher of

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<sup>74</sup> I'm indebted to Max Cresswell for this observation.



Aristotle. But there is none of whom we can say that she would have been *the* teacher of Aristotle, even if she had taught him all he knew about architecture. For if so, which one?

Lycan (2015) takes a slightly different line against Kripke's plurality argument, although I think it concludes in a position very close to the one I have set out above. Lycan (2015) emphasises that, in accordance with Kripke's 'seemingly justified penchant for stipulation of the identities of inhabitants at other worlds' (p. 29), as demonstrated in Kripke's (1972) *Naming and Necessity*, we stipulate the relevant inhabitant of each of the possible worlds in which, say, Aristotle has an architecture teacher. Lycan notes that:

In this Kripke goes against the 'telescope' view widely attributed to Lewis (1986) – the idea that to identify an individual at another possible world we should have to look at that world as through a telescope and accomplish our identification solely on the basis of the qualitative properties we detect there. (p. 30)

However, according to Lycan, Kripke (1972) reverts to the error for which he criticises Lewis – the 'telescope' view. This is the view Kripke adopts, argues Lycan, in his plurality argument:

Kripke further objects, 'None of these situations, I think, has a special title to be called "the situation in which Sherlock Holmes would have existed."' From the telescope point of view, that is so, but I think only from the telescope point of view ... no special title is needed so long as a proper stipulation can distinguish the (two) possibilities at the outset. (p. 30)

## Section 6

### A Carnapian response

In considering a distinctively Carnapian response to Kripke's arguments, I want to make two main points. One point focuses on the suggestion in Kripke's thinking – we might speculate that it is a kind of underlying motive – that if we can't have reference under a description in the sense endorsed by descriptivism then we can't have identity under a description. There is no description – that is, no definition of Holmes – under which an actual person, meeting the same definition, could be said to be identical to Holmes. I will argue that ruling out descriptivism does not entail ruling out identity under a description.

Further, two objects that are identical need not have a single name use chain attached to them. Such was not the case with Hesperus and Phosphorous, for example and the same may apply to a fictional object and an actual object. There may be an epistemological deficit with regard to the information available about the fictional object – but its identity with an actual object is not a metaphysical impossibility. There are a number of ways in which the Carnapian account shows that we can reject descriptivism without rejecting identity under a description. Perhaps the most obvious is via the relativistic principle – simply, the descriptions under which we refer to an object need not be the same as the criteria under which the existence and identity of that referent are evaluated, contrary to the descriptivist account. The descriptions under which we refer to objects may be purely contingent, reference fixing descriptions and, accordingly, our designation of the object may be rigid. We may, however, assess the existence and identity of an object using the criteria of our preferred framework – and that may establish the identity, under a definition that involves a description of essential properties, of the referent with another, apparently distinct object.

The other point I want to explore is Kripke's view that epistemic possibility does not entail metaphysical possibility. Kripke has other arguments for this contention, particularly his argument that some contingent truths may be known *a-priori*. For if this is true, then there are some truths that hold in every knowable world that don't hold in every metaphysically possible world. I think there are arguments to be made against this position as well. Here, however, I just want to present the case that fictional objects are possibly existing objects – and that this goes along with our intuition that epistemic possibility is a sufficient condition of metaphysical possibility. It is not possible to know that something is the case without its being possibly the case.<sup>75</sup> Further, I will suggest that acceptance that

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<sup>75</sup> It is worth considering one argument Kripke presents for the claim that contingent truths may be known *a-priori*. The argument is that the contingent *a-priori* falls out of rigid designation. I can use an accidental property *F* of an object to fix the reference of a term of a rigid designator *a* to that object. Thereafter I will know in advance of experience that *Fa*, even though this is a contingent fact (Kripke, 1972, p. 14). Kripke provides the example of the standard metre stick and our *a-priori* knowledge of the contingent fact that it is a metre long. Kripke points out that the standard metre stick is used to fix the reference of the term 'metre'. Grant that this is the case, Kripke argues that it is an accidental property of the metre that the stick to which it is identical in length is a metre long:

He uses it [the standard metre stick] to fix a reference. There is a certain length which he wants to mark out. He marks it out by an accidental property, namely that there is a stick of that length. Someone else might mark out the same reference by another accidental property. But in any case, even though he uses this to fix the reference of his standard of length, a metre, he can still say 'if heat had been applied to this stick *S* at *t*<sub>0</sub> then, at *t*<sub>0</sub> stick *S* would not have been a metre long.' It is not a necessary truth, then, that the standard metre stick is a metre long – yet it is a truth we can know *a-priori* (Kripke, 1972, p. 55).

A Carnapian should argue, I suggest, that Kripke has overlooked the construction of a distinct linguistic framework in this situation, while recalling that such a construction often puts an existing reference to a new use. In our everyday framework it is an accidental property of the metre (an abstract object), that it is the same length as this or that stick. But reference fixing descriptions *can* involve the ascription of essential properties, especially in the construction of a framework or, as in this case, the fragment of a framework. That is what is occurring here. Insofar as the stick in question is to be the standard metre stick (and not just any old stick or even a metre *measuring* stick) it is an essential property, not an accidental property of the metre (the referent of the term 'metre') that its length is identical to the length of the standard metre stick. And, it is an essential property of the standard metre stick, *qua* standard metre stick, that its length is identical to the length of the metre. So that we would say that even if the standard metre stick was a different length at *t*<sub>0</sub> due to being a different temperature, still it would have been a metre long. After *t*<sub>0</sub> the metre stick could be said to have possibly been a different length at *t*<sub>0</sub> than it actually was – but that would mean that a metre would be a different length and the standard metre stick would still have been, at *t*<sub>0</sub>, exactly one metre long. The only exception to this situation would be if it were possible that *t*<sub>0</sub> could occur twice. For it is of the essence of both the length of the standard metre stick *qua* standard metre stick and the metre that they are identical at *t*<sub>0</sub>. What is an accidental property of this metre stick in another context or framework is promoted to the status of an essential property in the (construction of) the framework in which it is the standard metre stick. And that standard metre stick is a metre long at *t*<sub>0</sub> in all possible worlds.

some states of affairs may be epistemically possible without being metaphysically possible is a very high price to pay for acceptance of Kripke's view.

Let us begin with this second point first. In what follows I assume that metaphysical possibility is simply the absence of any contradiction, within a given framework, in the definition of an object. Unicorns are metaphysically possible, for example, because there is nothing in our current Darwinian framework that rules out the co-existence of a horse-like body and large midline structure in the form of a horn, in one creature. Many weirder organisms have come to light at different stages of Earth's evolutionary history. On the other hand, a winged horse does appear to involve such a contradiction. I would contend that this view is consistent with our ordinary use of linguistic frameworks. But this contention could be tested empirically, in much the way that Carnap envisages in his defence of intensional meanings as discussed in Chapter 1.

With regard to unicorns, there may be no evidence of their existence of any kind. In particular, there may be no evidence of the existence of name use chains that could have their origins in such animals. The probability of their existence may be, for all intents and purposes, zero, so that we would say there is no epistemic possibility of their existence. But that does not entail their metaphysical impossibility.

Concerning both these issues – that is: the relation of identity under a description to our theory of reference; and the relation between metaphysical and epistemic possibility, Kripke (2013) writes:

Part of the source of confusion lies in what I have inveighed against in N&N: the identification of metaphysics with epistemology. Here I am talking about what we would say of various counterfactual situations. A source of the belief that Sherlock Holmes might have existed might be that after all it could turn out that Sherlock

Homes really does exist. Well, it could turn out: that is an epistemic question. If it turns out that Sherlock Holmes really exists, then my supposition that the name is fictional is wrong. ... But if I am not mistaken as to the status of these alleged propositions—and I don't think there are any such propositions—then I am also not mistaken in saying that one cannot say that they would have been true of a certain hypothetical world: for there are no propositions to be true of this hypothetical world. There is only, in place of the possibility of such propositions, the possibility of the existentially quantified story—the possibility that there should have been a person *x* who did these things. (pp. 41–2)

Kripke 'inveighs' against 'the confusion of epistemic and metaphysical possibility'. Let us take a moment, however, to elucidate the relationship of implication we normally think of as holding between the two. For while the two forms of possibility are not identical – and nor are they equivalent – we ordinarily suppose that they have an evident and straightforward, one-way relationship of classical entailment.

Epistemic possibility entails metaphysical possibility but not vice-versa. With regard to claims concerning the possible existence of an object, the epistemic possibility of the existence of, say, Sherlock Holmes entails the metaphysical possibility of his existence. That is, if it could 'turn out' that Sherlock Holmes exists – that is, if we could discover or know that Sherlock Holmes exists – then, necessarily, it is metaphysically possible that he should exist. It is difficult to provide an argument for this contention, because we use modal concepts to describe entailment. All we can do is state the contrapositive and plead that its truth is self-evident: It is not possible for us to know that Sherlock Holmes exists if it is metaphysically impossible that he exist.

The epistemic possibility of Sherlock Holmes is a sufficient condition of his metaphysical possibility. It is not, of course, a necessary condition. He could exist without our knowing it. Likewise, the metaphysical possibility of Sherlock Holmes' existence is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of the epistemic possibility of his existence. It must be possible for him to exist in order for it to be possible for him to be known to exist. And it is possible for him to exist without his being known to exist.

As we've seen, Kripke readily admits the epistemic possibility of Sherlock Holmes' existence. It could turn out, he says, that unbeknownst to us, Doyle wrote his stories as factual documents. But, he says, that epistemic possibility is not the same as the metaphysical possibility of Sherlock Holmes' existence. Well, let us grant that it is not *same* – but to deny that this epistemic possibility entails the metaphysical possibility is radically at odds with our normal intuitions. Doyle could not have written his stories as known fact unless it is possible that Sherlock Holmes' existence were a fact. And that fact remains a possibility, whether Doyle wrote his stories as fact, mistakenly as fiction, or never wrote his stories at all.

We can imagine Kripke's reply. If Sherlock Holmes exists in the actual world then that changes everything. There is a non-pretending use of his name that has its source in an actual object. But the pretending use of Sherlock Holmes name refers only to a description without an essence. And that is a description of a being that cannot be essentially the same as any actual being.

Yet, we must reply, in conceding the epistemic possibility of Holmes' existence, Kripke has already conceded everything and any logical framework of possible worlds must reflect this. The actual world is also a possible world – and we have talked of the actual existence of Sherlock Holmes the unique individual, not Santa Claus or Hercule Poirrot. It

seems there can be no question then that the existence of Sherlock Holmes could happen to be the case. The only question is how?

Lewis's account is more in accord with our ordinary view, but not entirely. Holmes does exist in some possible worlds, he says. But only in those in which the Sherlock Holmes stories are told as known fact (Lewis, 1978, p. 39). So epistemic possibility is acknowledged as a sufficient condition of metaphysical possibility. But it is also said to be a necessary condition. This requirement appears to have few consequences for Lewis's approach more generally. But, nevertheless, we want to say that the possible worlds in which Holmes exists are those in which it is a fact that he exists, regardless of whether that fact is ever told or not.

How, then, does it happen, if Sherlock Holmes exists or if he is discovered to exist? Here is the Carnapian view of reference for which I have argued: An utterance of a name refers to the unique, framework-internal object at the origin of the name use chain of which this utterance is a part. What do we mean by a 'unique, framework-internal object'? Consider a name used in a realistic fiction, for example. The referent of the name 'Sherlock Holmes' is the person that conforms to the criteria of existence and identity of the everyday framework of persons and things, as that framework is invoked within a fictional framework – the latter being the Sherlock Holmes stories. That fictional or outer framework sets a certain standard for the application of the everyday framework invoked within it. The outer framework just requires that the text (or the author) say or imply that it is the case that Sherlock Holmes fulfil all the criteria of the everyday framework for him to then exist, to live somewhere, to take cocaine, to ignore the first name of his landlady and so on. This is sufficient for the internal existence question regarding Sherlock Holmes existence to be

answered in the positive. We accept that he exists, on the authority of the text. We do that because it serves so many of our purposes to do so.

Here is another example: The name of my friend Jorge refers to a person who fulfils the criteria of the everyday framework of persons and things by all the normal empirical tests. He is the unique framework-internal object at the origin of the chain of use that brought a token of his name to me – a chain I now continue here. Are these two ordinary proper names rigid designators? Yes, I say, they refer to the same object in all possible worlds. That includes worlds in which they don't exist as well as possible worlds in which they do, earning them the status of 'obstinately' rigid designators. Consider Sherlock Holmes, for example. He does exist, as an everyday person or thing, by the criterion of being said to do so in the Sherlock Holmes stories. He does not exist if we apply the normal empirical standards for the fulfilment of the criteria of the everyday framework. But we can imagine circumstances in which he did. In that possible world, he exists. In both possible worlds – the possible world in which there is ample empirical evidence of his existence and the actual world in which there is no such evidence, Sherlock Holmes is the same framework-internal object. Much the same story can be told about Jorge. If it were discovered – and/or, if it were to be the case – that he is a very cleverly designed robot, (like the automatons that Descartes imagined crossing the courtyard outside his window), he would be in an analogous structural position to Sherlock Holmes. He would meet the criteria of the everyday framework of persons and things – he would be internal to that framework – but he would meet those criteria only by a certain standard. In this case, that standard is not the authority of a text but of a superficial acquaintance or observation. But, again, Jorge remains the unique object internal to that inner framework. In other examples of this non-global or *de re* sceptical scenario, (as distinct from a global or *de dicto* sceptical scenario) we



may discover that an object we refer to has quite different essential properties from those we originally defined it as having, because the application of empirical criteria took place under less than ideal conditions. In Kripke's example, the appearance that tigers have four legs rather than three turns out to be due to a trick of the light in that part of the world in which tigers have been observed and named.

In other words, the referent of a name is internal to a framework. But that framework itself may be internal to other frameworks. So it doesn't matter what a referent may 'turn out' or be revealed to be – or what it may possibly be, metaphysically speaking – a name refers to the same, existing object in all cases. The same, I expect, holds *mutatis mutandis* for natural and artefactual kind terms. The referent remains internal to the framework in which it was originally named, and it remains the same object. But its position *relative to* the criteria of other frameworks changes, as those other frameworks are preferred and brought to bear. And, because a fiction may be constructed on anyone's say so, names are incorrigibly referential. They refer to the same thing in all possible worlds – and that thing always exists, by one criterion or another. There are no absolutely empty names.

A principle of relativity applies: The criteria by which the existence and identity of the referent are subsequently evaluated need not be the same as those under which it is originally referenced. In fact, if this form of ontological or referential relativity is analogous to the epistemic relativity describes then the contexts of utterance of propositions containing rigid designators are only the same as contexts of assessment when those propositions include indexicals. Allowing the separation of criteria of reference from criteria of evaluation unlocks the relation between rigid designation and negative existentials: A referent always exists by the criteria of at least one framework; That same referent fails to

meet the criteria of existence of at least one other framework; If that second framework is preferred or privileged for one purpose or another, then the referent may truthfully be said not to exist.

Kripke argues that we cannot infer from the existence of some  $x$  such that  $x$  conforms to the description or definition of an individual  $N$  that  $N$ , as originally named, exists. That is because the person so described and the person so named will never be identical. This is true if we assume that the individual we have described has been referred to under a description – *and* might not exist, by that *same* description. For that is to say that, in some possible worlds, the individual referred to does not meet the description under which we referred to it. In these possible worlds no individual meets that description or a different individual meets it. So our proper name does not refer to the same object in all possible worlds. How can that object – the referent of a non-rigid or flaccid designation – ever be identical to a referent that is the same in all possible worlds? For there will necessarily be some possible worlds in which the two are not identical. Yet we take identity to obtain necessarily. We expect an object to be the same as itself in all possible worlds. So a relation of identity cannot obtain between the referent of a rigid designator and the referent of a flaccid designator.

But that doesn't entail that there cannot be identity under a description, between two rigidly designated referents. Kripke identifies a gulf between an object referred to under a description – as is the object in an existentially quantified story – and a directly and rigidly designated object. They can never be identical. But now let us suppose that we have a different way of rigidifying reference to an object under a description (bearing in mind that a unique, framework internal object is so referenced). Let us suppose that we rigidify this reference by requiring that the framework under which the referent's existence and

identity are subsequently evaluated is distinct from the framework under which it is originally referenced. Now the directly referenced object and the object referred to under a description are on the same footing.

We can ask of any two objects referred to in this way whether they are identical under some description. We may ask, for example, whether the fictional object Sherlock Holmes – originally referred to in the framework of a fiction – is identical to a real individual. In conducting this evaluation we would likely appeal to the criteria of the everyday framework of persons and things. What are the criteria of personal existence and identity of this framework? I think they are fairly basic in some respects, fairly superficial in others. Two persons cannot occupy the same spatio-temporal location, for example, and one person may not occupy two spatio-temporal locations. A person must be a biological human being rather than a mechanical entity, suggests Kripke. In the future, we might disagree about this.

But beyond these basic criteria of personal identity, we enter disputed territory. Two persons may be identical if they have the same body, for example or if they have the same mind, or if their mental states are *r*-related in the same way or they have the same memories – and not otherwise. All the theories of personal identity we learn about in freshman philosophy courses are applicable. What is certain in all cases is that any theory of personal identity will be translatable into a form that says that  $x = y$  if and only if  $x$  is  $F$  and  $y$  is  $F$ , where  $F$  is some description of a person that provides necessary and sufficient conditions of identity. Those conditions may be fulfilled by a fictional (or hypothetical entity) and an actual entity, provided both are rigidly designated.

There may be practical difficulties. There may be an epistemic deficit with regard to the information available with which to determine identity in accordance with the theory in

question, especially with regard to the fictional object. But that does not does not defeat the metaphysical possibility of identity. For if, as often supposed, fictional objects are incomplete, they are only epistemically incomplete. It is just that the only access we have to information about Sherlock Holmes comes from the Sherlock Holmes stories. So we are unable to discover whether he had a third nipple or a Rhesus negative blood type, if these are not mentioned in the stories, because the stories are no longer being written. But there may be sufficient information available from the existing stories, of the kind needed by our theory of identity, to establish that a real person is identical to the fictional Sherlock Holmes. We may establish that, at least to the extent that we are confident that the planet described by Le Verrier as Neptune is identical to the planet we observe through our telescopes. For these two must be identified under a description. Or, again, we may be as confident that the real and the fictional Sherlock Holmes are the same person as we are that the friend we encounter today is the same friend we met with last year. Those levels of confidence in a relation of identity may change if further information becomes available. But whatever level of confidence we are able to establish, the metaphysical possibility of identity remains undiminished.

The theory of identity used – both in the relation of fictional to fictional, and fictional to actual, persons and things – will depend on the interpretive framework applied to the fictions and/or the actual world. It will serve those purposes. That means that characters that are identical under the criteria of one framework may not be so under another. The interpretive framework – a Freudian framework, for example – will count some properties as essential and others as accidental, and this selection will not be the same in another theory. Two fictional characters may be the same under one interpretative theory and not another. But if we are talking about two fictional characters – Cervantes' Don Quixote, for

example, and Pierre Menard's Don Quixote (actually, a fictional fictional character in a story by Jorge Luis Borges) – where one story is reproduced word for word in the other – then, contrary to a surprisingly popular belief, (Lewis, 1978; Thomasson, 1999), the two characters must be identical under any set of criteria. For whatever we take to be the description that establishes identity, it will apply to both characters. That the two characters are identical is the only conclusion we can reach on the evidence. If the two stories were to diverge in future, only then may that judgement be revised.

The clarity of this conclusion is a distinct advantage, I suggest, of this Carnapian approach over those theories that ground the identity of fictional characters in the intentions of their authors. By Thomasson's account, for example, Pierre Menard's Don Quixote and Miguel Cervantes' Don Quixote are two distinct characters on the grounds that they are not *intended* by their authors to be the same character.<sup>76</sup>

What cannot count as criteria of identity is the attachment of one or other name use chain to an object. Not only may the same object have a number of different names, but it may have a number of different, independent name use chains originating in it. Such is the case with Tully and Cicero, for example, or Hesperus and Phosphorous. There is the suggestion in Kripke's writing that the fictional Sherlock Holmes can never be identical to a real Sherlock Holmes because the name use chain for the fictional Sherlock Holmes does not originate with the real individual. It never connects to him. It may indeed be true that the name use chain of the fictional Sherlock Holmes is never connected to the name use chain of the real Sherlock Holmes. But we need to be clear that a name use chain need not be an

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<sup>76</sup> In Thomasson's version of this puzzle, Fred Jones' Pamela is not the same character as Richardson's Pamela, despite appearing in a text that is, quite coincidentally, word for word the same as Richardson's novel. On the other hand, Fielding's Pamela is the same character as Richardson's due to Fielding's intention, albeit a parodic one, to refer to Richardson's Pamela (Thomasson, 1999)

essential property of an individual any more than having a specific name need be. We generally view these as accidental properties, although tracing the same name use chain back to two apparently distinct objects may be good evidence in support of their identity. That's true of other contingent properties they might have in common. But the presence or absence of such evidence can never be decisive. It affects only the epistemic question. It affects the probability or otherwise of the identity of the two objects, not the metaphysical question of their identity.

## Appendix

### A Carnapian Solution to the Puzzle of Material Constitution with a side of Wittgensteinian Deflationism

Although I originally intended this as an *amuse bouche* – a short chapter after chapter two and prior to the chapters on my substantial approach to fictional objects – I eventually decided that it is better set aside as an appendix. This appendix does showcase my deflationary theory by applying it to the problem of material constitution – and so in that way it is central to the argument of the rest of my PhD thesis. However, the discussion of Wittgenstein and Horwich is, of necessity, short – mainly enabling me to pull out some choice tidbits to complement my own deflationary approach.

This appendix has several related aims. I begin by providing some insight into Carnap's deflationary approach by appealing to some views of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Carnap's colleague in the Vienna school prior to the Second World War. To this end, I consider Horwich's interpretation of Wittgenstein – call the result 'Wittgenstich's' view, if you will. Next, I present my favoured deflationary solution to the traditional ontological puzzle of material constitution, motivated by a Wittgensteinian or Wittgenstichian way of looking at the puzzle. I also argue that this solution (my favoured solution to the problem of material constitution) is one that is well supported by empirical evidence from cognitive science. Finally, I suggest that this empirical evidence favours a Carnapian approach that focusses primarily on the commitments of distinct linguistic frameworks as opposed to an approach which focusses on language as such, although the latter is compatible with the former.

**In the first section I set out Horwich's reading of Wittgenstein's 'hyper-deflationary' insight.**

**In the second section I propose a deflationary solution to the traditional ontological puzzle of material constitution, beginning in a Wittgenstich inspired approach.**

**In the third section I consider the empirical support this solution has and the ways in which this favours a more Carnapian style of deflationism about ontological problems.**



## Section 1

### Horwich on Wittgenstein

In his influential work of 2004, 'From a Deflationary Point of View', Paul Horwich (2004) begins with the best known example of the deflationary approach, that concerning truth, noting that all rival theories 'make the mistake of trying to go beyond the obvious' (p. 2). What constitutes the obvious for deflationism is linguistic behaviour. Linguistic behaviour is the surface on which philosophical puzzles such as those concerning the nature of truth are generated, argues Horwich. That is because certain kinds of linguistic behaviour create the illusion that there are hidden, underlying, deep or substantial issues involved. Often deflationism is defined purely in terms of its denial that there are such issues, particularly with regard to ontology. Implicitly, however, it seems that there is always some thesis in play about the nature of language and the ways in which this may be misunderstood.

Horwich (2004) looks to Wittgenstein as the presiding spirit of deflationism and he gives an elegant account of Wittgenstein's meta-philosophy, from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* as 'improving expressions of one and the same hyper-deflationary insight' (p. 171). Common to both the early and late views is the contention that, as Horwich puts it, 'Philosophical confusions originate in misunderstandings about language' (p. 164). In the early Wittgenstein these confusions are thought to arise because of the 'considerable distance' between the superficial grammatical form of certain propositions and their underlying logical form as analysed by, say, Russell's logical atomism. Analysis that shows this form comprising logical primitives allows us to see the emptiness of metaphysical questioning. However, argues Horwich, this display of a hidden form provided by a sophisticated theory of language is at odds with Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical or anti-

philosophical position. The tension involved is, as Horwich puts it, that 'Wittgenstein prohibits philosophical theorising on the basis of a philosophical theory' (p. 163).

The changes evident in the approach of the later Wittgenstein resolve this tension. Wittgenstein comes to see that our 'linguogenic misunderstanding' comes from 'something with no theoretical presuppositions: namely our tendency to be mesmerised by linguistic analogies' (Horwich, 2004, p. 165). Horwich (2004) summarises Wittgenstein's later view in a way that highlights several key elements of the deflationary approach:

Philosophical confusion resides in the tendency to over-stretch analogies in the uses of words, to be unnecessarily perplexed by the conceptual tensions that result and to wrongly feel that an *a priori* theory of the phenomenon in question is needed to demystify it. (p. 165)

Horwich emphasises the 'exaggeration of linguistic analogies' (p. 166) or 'overgeneralisation' (p. 167) or 'insufficient attention to linguistic variation' (p. 168); the bewilderment that follows; and the range of *a priori* theoretical responses typical of philosophy. For example, numerals function in many ways like names of physical objects – however we tend to overlook the differences between this smaller class of phenomena and the larger class of physical objects and raise questions about the former couched in terms of the latter. He says we:

ask the sort of questions about the things that numerals designate (i.e. numbers) that we ask about the [physical] referents of other names: Where are the numbers? What are they made of? How can we interact with them? And if we can't, how is it possible to know anything about them? (Horwich, 2004, p. 166)

Wittgenstein, says Horwich, believes that 'no *theory*' can deliver us from the puzzlement generated in this way. Such theories will typically take one of four forms:

1. Skeptical – e.g. Fictionalism: ‘numbers don’t exist, although it is useful to pretend that they do’.
2. Revisionist – e.g. Constructivism: ‘Mathematical reality can’t be the way it is naively conceived to be, as existing independently of human thought’.
3. Systematic – e.g. Logicism: ‘Mathematical facts may be derived from logical facts’.
4. Metaphysical – e.g. Platonist: ‘Numbers are not in space and time but are nonetheless REAL objects’ (Horwich, 2004, p. 166).

Horwich reads Wittgenstein as claiming that a principled objection may be made to all these responses. They are ‘vitiating’, says Horwich, ‘by the over-stretched analogies on which they rely’. At least, this may be said of categories 1 and 2. ‘On the other hand’, says Horwich, ‘if the questions are abandoned, then our continued demand for a substantive *a priori* theory (designed to rationalise their illegitimacy) will yield either a systematisation of intuitions that has no explanatory value, or even worse, a senseless metaphysical inflation of truisms’ (p. 166). These last two diagnoses may be said to apply to categories 3 and 4 respectively.

Just what unified principle this critique could rely on – and whether any such principles are possible – are questions we will come to consider in due course. The diagnoses above, particularly in the last two cases, are too rhetorical and compressed to give us any indication one way or another on this question. For now, though, we may note a couple of features of Horwich’s (2004) account of Wittgenstein’s hyper-deflationism. First, both the confusions generated by language and their clarifications remain on the surface of language, open to view to everyone. We only need ‘well-chosen hints, illustrations and alterations of perspective’ (Horwich, 2004, p. 167) or ‘pertinent reminders’ (Horwich, 2004, p. 168) to have our attention drawn back to the fact that ‘various words in a language are used in extremely different ways.’ (Horwich, 2004, p. 168) In this way Wittgenstein seeks to

avoid the contradiction involved in denouncing philosophical theorising on the basis of a philosophical theory, argues Horwich. And certainly the passage from Wittgenstein's 'Investigations' that Horwich cites seems very clear on this point:

if we too in these investigations are trying to understand the essence of language – its function, its structure – yet *this* is not what those [Tractatus] questions have in view. For they see in the essence, not something that lies open to view and that becomes surveyable by rearrangement, but something that lies *beneath* the surface. Something that lies within, which we see when we look *into* the thing and which an analysis digs out. (Horwich, 2004, footnote 4)

Second, the 'huge emphasis' that Wittgenstein puts on 'the divergent ways that terms are actually deployed' (Horwich, 2004, p. 169) is driven by his meta-philosophy not by the use conception of meaning. It is a grave mistake to suppose, argues Horwich (2004) that 'Wittgenstein's objection to traditional philosophy as "language on holiday" stems precisely from the idea that meaning consists in (and is therefore confined by) ordinary usage' (p. 169). It does not follow from the slogan that meaning is use that any deployment of a word beyond its ordinary usage would be meaningless (Horwich, 2004, p. 169). Such a view would be far more radical than Wittgenstein could have intended, argues Horwich.

For one thing 'it must be possible to discover that certain common uses of words are in fact mistaken' (Horwich, 2004, p. 170). Such is the case when we discover that 'the sun' does not refer to an object that revolves around the earth, for example. It is possible that 'philosophy is amongst those disciplines that enable us to discover errors in accepted usage' (Horwich, 2004, p. 170).

For another thing, 'an everyday word may be deployed in a novel way' (Horwich, 2004, p. 170). Science presses familiar words (e.g. 'energy', 'fish', 'language') into the service

of its explanations and in so doing gives them new, technical meanings (Horwich, 2004, p. 170). Horwich goes so far as to claim that this may occur in philosophy as well. In Horwich's (2004) view, Wittgenstein 'need not and should not' claim that philosophical theories proposed as solutions to inappropriate philosophical questions are meaningless (p. 171).

Let us summarise the features of what we may call, following Horwich, 'hyper-deflationism':

1. Metaphysical problems are generated by the mesmeric effect of linguistic analogy, blinding us to critical differences in meaning.
2. Attention to variation in linguistic meaning, in the visible structure of language, can break the spell cast by false analogy and dissolve or dispel the apparent problem.

This seems a useful preliminary formulation from which we might pass to Carnap's deflationary approach to ontology. Carnap's method is more elaborate than Wittgenstein's (at least as the latter is presented by Horwich) but it is quite compatible with it. In Carnapian terms, for example, language is comprised of linguistic frameworks. The example of false linguistic analogy given above – i.e. asking of numbers how they are to be understood as physical objects – is also consonant with Carnap's examples of 'the number language' and the 'thing language' and the problems that arise from failing to distinguish these frameworks. But before continuing to develop the Carnapian version of deflationism, it might be instructive to see how Wittgenstein's approach can assist us – and the point at which it leads naturally into a discussion of distinct linguistic frameworks. Further, I think the example used in this chapter shows that recourse to frameworks is not only theoretically useful but has strong empirical appeal. That is especially the case when the framework in question appears to be grounded in evolutionary history.

## Section 2:

### A deflationary solution to the problem of material constitution

The example I have in mind is the problem of material constitution. Karen Bennett (2009) sets this problem out in a manner that reflects its familiarity:

On the table before me sits a clay statue. But the statue (Goliath) and the lump of clay from which it is made (Lumpl) appear to have different properties. Lumpl was on a shelf in my garage on Tuesday, but Goliath was not; I did not make Goliath until Thursday. And even if I create and destroy Lumpl and Goliath simultaneously (Gibbard 1975), they still have different modal properties. If I had squashed the statue into a ball while the clay was still wet, I would have destroyed the statue but not the clay. In short, Lumpl and Goliath certainly appear to have different persistence conditions, and thus Leibniz's law apparently entails that they are distinct objects. But how could that be? Surely two distinct objects cannot be in the same place at the same time. (p. 44)

The problem is often just expressed as the problem of colocation. How can two numerically distinct objects, such as a statue and a lump of clay be said to occupy the same location at the same time? But, as Thomasson (2004) observes:

since some alleged cases of colocation (e.g. of a space-time region and a material object) might not be as problematic as the statue/lump case, the colocation problem is now more often put in mereological rather than spatial terms. That is, it is now most often posed as the problem that accepting such objects violates the principle that at a given time "no two physical objects could be composed of exactly the same parts at some level of decomposition" (p. 74)

Bennett notes that responses are divided along roughly two lines. On one side, there are those who 'reject the possibility of colocation and make one of the various available moves to get out of the Leibniz Law argument' (Bennett, 2009, p. 44). In common with many other commentators, Bennett calls these the 'one thingers'. On the other side are those who don't find the idea of colocation outrageous – 'multi-thingers' or 'believers in colocation' in Bennett's terminology.

How then would we apply the Wittgensteinian or 'hyper deflationary' approach to this problem? Here is one suggestion.

In the problem of material constitution, as exemplified by the relation between a statue and the lump of clay from which it is made, we are told that at the outset there are two physical objects – two 'things' involved. Immediately we may note, however, that one of these objects – the statue *Goliath*, for example – is the referent of a count noun, namely *statue*. The other such object – the referent of *Lumpl* – is the referent, at least in part, of a mass noun, *clay*. Examples of count nouns include *horse*, *futon*, *army*, *codicil*, *proposition*, *galaxy* and *statue*. Examples of mass nouns include *nitrogen*, *porridge*, *trash*, *china*, *traffic*, *data*, *shade*, *music*, *furniture*, *clay* and *matter*. As the term suggests, count nouns refer to objects that can be counted, that are enumerable. As Steen (2016) says, 'Only count nouns can be prefaced unqualifiedly by numerals or the indefinite article, and be pluralised without a category shift' (p. 2). The referents of mass nouns, on the other hand can be measured but not counted – unless the noun is qualified by a quantity or kind expression or is 'packaged' in some way. We may speak of 5 kilograms of concrete, one lump of clay, several kinds of liquid. As Steen says:

Mass nouns act differently in relation to quantifiers and non-logical determiners.

Count nouns but not mass nouns (when not used in the kind sense), can be prefaced

*by each, every, few, fewer, many and a*. Mass nouns but not count nouns can be prefaced by *much, little, a lot of, less, more, a quantity of* and so on. Both mass and count nouns take *most, all, some, no, none of the, any, hardly any and a little*. (p. 2)

The referents of mass nouns, in contrast to those of count nouns, are generally said to be cumulative and disjunctive. Two blobs of porridge when brought into contact with each other make up one blob of porridge with the two previous blobs as parts. On the other hand, two horses remain two distinct horses no matter how they are pressed together – they do not make up one horse. Likewise, if we put wood through a chipper and scatter it about, it remains wood. That is not the case if we divide a futon.

Further, in line with these properties, the referents of mass and count nouns have different properties with regard to their shape. The referents of mass nouns survive all changes in shape. The referents of count nouns, by contrast, must retain the shape by which they are identified, which marks them off from other things and without which they could not be immediately enumerated. What mass nouns refer to, we might say, is stuff as opposed to things – especially when things are thought of as everyday, discrete, medium-sized, independently mobile objects.

Now, there are many borderline cases and there is much ambiguity with regard to the distinction between mass and count nouns. As Quine (1960) noted ‘Mary had a little lamb’ could mean she owned one or ate some (p. 91). It could be that there are only count and mass *expressions* or that context is required to distinguish whether a common noun is used in a mass or a count sense. There are also mass nouns like *furniture* whose reference is perhaps cumulative but not disjunctive. As Steen (2016) puts it, the distinction between nouns used in the count and mass sense points to ‘a ubiquitous but elusive distinction



between stuff and things' (p. 3). Nevertheless, I will suggest that none of these caveats affect the deflationary account one can give of this problem, in the Wittgensteinian style.

For, at the outset, we are presented with a 'false analogy'. We have, it is said, two distinct *things*, rather than a lump of stuff and a thing. We have a lump of clay (in Gibbard's example, this lump is comprised of two halves of the statue joined together, so that the lump and the statue come into being simultaneously and go out of it in the same way) and a statue. The former is given the proper name of *Lumpl* and the latter *Goliath*. This assignment of proper names reinforces the impression that we are dealing with two *things* in some one sense of this very general term. We have, it is said, two things that differ only in certain properties – that is their modal properties. For example, the clay *can* or *could* survive sculpting or squashing, whereas Goliath could not.

This false analogy makes *Lumpl* quite ambiguous as to whether it refers to some stuff or whether it refers to a thing. At crucial times it seems to refer to both at once. Its referent is plastic, cumulative and dissective, without a specific, defined shape, and only measurable rather than enumerable, like all matter referred to by a mass noun. Its referent is also enumerable, independently mobile, and has a definite, if aesthetically uninteresting, shape – that of a lump.

Are we mesmerised by this false analogy? If we don't carefully observe the distinct meanings of the terms involved then we are certainly confused. We want to say that there is only one thing constituted by the clay, namely the statue Goliath. But then what are we to make of *Lumpl*, which pre-dated its being sculpted into Goliath and which could survive the demise of Goliath by squashing? *Lumpl* seems to be a thing too and one which is clearly not identical to Goliath, just because it has these distinctive modal properties.

But, of course, we can insist that *Lumpl* name either a thing or some stuff but not both. If we go the first way – supposing *Lumpl* to be a thing that can be enumerated along with Goliath – it cannot also have its distinctive modal properties. For these properties are precisely what disqualify *Lumpl* from being a thing and mark it out as stuff. It cannot be cumulative and dissective, it cannot survive being reshaped in some identifiably different way *and* be a thing. Consequently, as a *thing*, *Lumpl* cannot survive being sculpted into Goliath. It loses the property that, *qua* thing, distinguished it from Goliath – namely, its lumpy shape.

If we go the second way, *Lumpl* retains its modal properties – but, as has been said, those modal properties disqualify it from being a thing. *Lumpl*, as a quantity of clay, constitutes a lump for some time. Call that lump, having, say, a distinctive pear shape, LUMP. When LUMP is shaped into Goliath, LUMP goes out of existence. *Lumpl* persists as a quantity of clay. When Goliath is squashed, *Lumpl* persists. We might identify that last shape too and call the thing that has it LUMP2. But in this case we are just repeating the process, for the third time, of material constitution. *Lumpl*, *qua* a certain mass of clay, constituted LUMP, then Goliath, then LUMP2, each in turn.

Do we have a problem, then, in having ‘two distinct objects ... in the same place at the same time’ (Bennett, 2009, p. 44)? No, there is just one object. Either our lump of clay is identified by some measure of its mass and referred to in that way, as stuff – or it is partly defined by the outline it makes in space-time and referred to as an enumerable object. In the latter case, the lump of clay does not survive being sculpted into Goliath. There are not two objects present when Goliath is present, only one. That object is a material object, as are LUMP and LUMP2 and many others. More generally, we could say that it is only *as* an object that matter, like more specific kinds of stuff, is specified in terms of its spatio-

temporal location. And it is only in being constituted of matter that objects may be said to occupy space-time. The properties of the clay and of the statue are in this sense not only compatible but complementary. Perhaps we can be more precise about this: there is at least one property – shape – that is essential to one referent (the statue) and not to the other (the clay). The addition of this property, as an essential property, to stuff allows stuff to constitute a thing. The distinction in the reference of count and mass nouns makes this relationship transparent. In general, we might say, material constitution is a relationship between the reference of a mass noun and the reference of a count noun.

### Section 3

#### Empirical support

Support for this view may be found in the more than one quarter. It is a view taken by Laycock, for example, who holds that there is definite reference of mass expressions, such as 'that water' or 'the water in the tub' but that this reference is not singular reference. 'This water' on a demonstrative occasion, refers, but "*this water*, unlike this or that drop is not a particular object" (Laycock, as cited in Steen, 2016). Laycock defends a 'stuff ontology' that allows that 'we can and do think of stuff as having an *independent* reality' from the reality of things (Laycock, as cited in Steen, 2016). Burke continues Laycock's argument in terms of the ontological puzzle of the statue and the material that constitutes it: 'Of course this explanation concedes that the statue ... shares its place with *something*, namely the copper. So am I not allowing coinciding objects after all? No I am not since I deny that the copper is a single object' (Burke, as cited in Steen, 2016).

Support of a different kind may be found in some of the work done in cognitive science. This work also raises more general questions about how we are to think of 'the visible structure of language' in any deflationary approach to ontological questions. A notable example is empirical work (Soja et al, 1991) studying language acquisition in young children with regard to object terms and substance terms. The study addresses the question that is familiar to philosophers, in a somewhat different form, from Quine's *qua* problem. How do young children acquire new vocabulary at the rate of eight to ten items every day, when, at the early stages of word learning, at least, word meanings are 'radically underdetermined by the evidence available to the child' (Soja et al, 1991, p. 180). Soja et al elaborates on this underdetermination at greater length than Quine, who emphasises the

possibility that ostended objects are interpreted as undetached parts or time slices of the intended referent. However, their point is the same:

When a child hears a word (say 'George') while attending to an object (say a man), the word could refer to the individual (i.e. George himself) , the type of object (e.g. person or man), an action involving the object (e.g. eating), a part of the object (e.g. ear) , a property of the object (e.g. dirty), the substance of which the object is composed (e.g. skin) , an abstraction the object embodies (e.g. virtue), among countless other options. (Soja et al, 1991, p. 180)

The question is, says Soja et al, how do young children find their way through these myriad possibilities to master the meaning of words?

Soja et al (1991) assesses a conjecture due to Quine (1960, 1969), among others, that:

the ontology underlying natural languages is induced in the course of language learning rather than constraining learning from the beginning. Specifically, we assessed whether the ontological distinction between objects and non-solid substances conditions projections of word meanings prior to the child's mastery of count/mass syntax. (p. 179)

Quine's view is that 'early words function most like mass nouns in the child's conceptual system. For example, "book" refers to a portion of book experience, "mama" to a portion of mama experience and so on' (Soja et al, 1991, p. 180). This usage has been characterised as 'complexive' and many psychologists have argued that children's earliest word meanings are complexive in this sense – that is, they 'extend words to new referents on the basis of any of the salient perceptual properties of the original referent' (Soja et al, 1991, p. 184). However Soja et al claims that previous studies have not adduced evidence in support of either the

Quinean conjecture or a rival view (that ontological categories are pre-linguistic). That is because, on the one hand, they have not been clear that complexive uses are actually attempts to name objects (or substances) and are not other speech acts. On the other hand, experiments that show children generalising words to new objects that we would describe as whole individual objects, in preference to other options, did not use children young enough to still be in the single word phase of language learning, before the acquisition of syntax could have an effect. It was also not possible to rule out the hypothesis that shape was the overriding factor (Soja et al, 1991, p. 184).

Soja et al claim to have avoided these factors in their experiments. They define solid objects for human infants, in line with Spelke as 'bodies that are cohesive, bounded, spatiotemporally continuous, and solid or substantial; they move as connected wholes, independently of one another, on connected paths through unoccupied space' (Soja et al, 1991, p. 183). There is, says Soja et al, no research on infants' perception of non-solid substances in terms of the same parameters that define objects for infants but they define them for the purposes of her experiments as 'spatio-temporally continuous and substantial but not cohesive or bounded; they do not retain either their internal connectedness or their external boundaries as they move and contact one another' (Soja et al, 1991, p. 183).

Soja et al (1991) claim to have achieved a clear result:

Experiments contrasted unfamiliar objects with unfamiliar substances in a word learning context and found that two year old's projection of new words to new objects 'respected the shape and number of the original referent' while 'the projection of new words for non-solid substances ignored shape and number'. (p. 3)

A further experiment succeeded in eliminating the possibility that a simple preference for objects or substances amongst two-year olds, in the absence of a word learning context, was responsible for the strong empirical results obtained.

The study concludes that ontological categories *guide* young children's induction of word meaning rather than being *acquired* in the process of acquiring linguistic competence – particularly competence in the 'syntax of quantification: determiners, plurals and quantifiers such as "three", "some" and "another"', as Quine had conjectured' (Soja et al, 1991, p. 180).

Now, clearly this kind of result from experimental cognitive science raises some issues for a deflationary approach to philosophical ontology – and indeed for philosophical ontology more generally. Let us begin though by considering its implications for our specific example. Recall that we isolated two key features of what Horwich called Wittgenstein's hyper-deflationary approach:

1. Metaphysical problems are generated by the mesmeric effect of linguistic analogy, blinding us to critical differences in meaning.
2. Attention to variation in linguistic meaning, in the visible structure of language, can break the spell cast by false analogy and dissolve or dispel the apparent problem.

We identified a false analogy between some stuff (the clay that constitutes the statue Goliath) and an object, (the statue Goliath). This resulted in us treating both as objects and then being puzzled by the way in which, together, they broke the normal rules for objects. This analysis was in accordance with the first of these key features. Then in accordance with the second feature, we attended to the visible structure of our language – namely, the distinction between mass and count nouns. That led us to distinguish between the referents of these nouns and unravel the false analogy that created the puzzle in the first place.

But now we learn that the visible structure of our language only reflects a distinction generated by some other mechanism. We might think this mechanism is a conceptual – or perhaps a perceptual – evolutionary module that kicks in at an early stage of development and underpins our acquisition and subsequent use of language. The possibility that some reasonably sophisticated linguistic frameworks may be products of innate, inherited concepts of ontology is further evidence, I suggest, for the validity of the Carnapian approach to ontology advocated here. First, it suggests that there is empirical evidence for the existence of distinct Carnapian frameworks and that pointers to this evidence may need to be uncovered in our ordinary use of language. Second, it provides a further, favourable point of contrast between this approach and those of Thomasson and Wittgenstein (in Horwich’s interpretation). Those latter approaches appeal primarily to properties of language and language use *as such* rather than focussing on our deployment of a plurality of specific, distinct frameworks. As I’ve noted, focussing on language as such is compatible with the Carnapian approach I’m advocating.<sup>77</sup> However I think the foregoing solution to the puzzle of material constitution – as well as the chapters to follow – help demonstrate the benefits of paying adequate attention to the plurality of linguistic frameworks and the relations between them.

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<sup>77</sup> Thomasson (2015) says she is interested in: “the sense of ‘thing’ or ‘object’ that plausibly is conceptually basic [It] is the sortal sense of ‘object’ studied by cognitive psychologists (e.g., Spelke 1990; Carey 2009; Xu 1999 as cited in Thomasson, 2015). Carey (as cited in Thomasson, 2015) argues that this sortal concept of ‘object’ (along with ‘number’, ‘agent’, and ‘cause’) is part of ‘core cognition’: those basic concepts possessed by prelinguistic infants, shared with other animals (who share our evolutionary ancestry) such as cottontop tamarins and rhesus macaques, and remaining intact in adult cognition’ (pp 109-110).



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