Modal Meinongianism and Object Theory: a Reply to Bueno and Zalta

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Abstract

We reply to arguments by Otávio Bueno and Edward Zalta ('Object Theory and Modal Meinongianism', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 2017) against Modal Meinongianism, including that it presupposes, but cannot maintain, a unique denotation for names of fictional characters, and that it is not generalized to higher-order objects. We individuate the crucial difference between Modal Meinongianism and Object Theory in the former's resorting to an apparatus of worlds for the representational purposes for which the latter resorts to a distinction between two kinds of predication, *exemplification* and *encoding*. We argue that the distinction has fewer supporters than Bueno and Zalta want, and that there's a reason why the notion of encoding has been found baffling by some.

Keywords: Modal Meinongianism; Object Theory; nonexistent objects; fictional objects; encoding; impossible worlds.

1 Introduction

We discuss Otávio Bueno and Edward Zalta's (2017) 'Object Theory and Modal Meinongianism' (henceforth: B and Z), which compares the two Meinongian theories in its title (henceforth: OT and MM), aiming to show the superiority of the former. In Section 2, we briefly introduce Meinongianism, OT, and MM.

B and Z challenge MM by arguing that it presupposes, but cannot maintain, a unique denotation for names of fictional characters. In Section 3, we show that B and Z's argument relies on the idea that, for such names to uniquely denote, we need to be able to pick out the denoted object by some descriptive condition it uniquely satisfies. But modal Meinongians have argued that this is not the case.

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B and Z claim that, contrary to MM, OT has a criterion providing descriptive conditions that identify unique denotations for fictional names. The criterion requires a fixed group of properties individuating fictional characters. In Section 4, we challenge the idea that fictional characters can generally be identified by mapping them to fixed groups of properties. in Section 5 we draw some consequences for OT, in connection with the failure of such a criterion.

OT relies on a distinction between two modes of predication, *encoding* and *exemplification*, which some found obscure. B and Z try to show that such a distinction can be found in various other philosophers. We discuss the issue in Section 6. B and Z also defend the notion of encoding by drawing an interesting parallel with set membership. In Section 7, we discuss this, too. We also propose an explanation of why encoding is found baffling by some.

Finally, B and Z point out that one problem for MM may be that it has not been developed to give an account of higher-order objects, like fictional properties. In Section 8, we argue that, if one cared about this at all, one could easily generalize MM to include higher-order objects.

2 Modal Meinongianism

B and Z claim that MM is based on 'a comprehension principle that asserts the existence of objects' (p. 761), and that MM 'can't address the main problem that Meinongianism is designed to solve', 'the principal problem that Meinongianism is supposed to solve – namely, the denotation of fictional names like "Sherlock Holmes"' (pp. 761 and 762).

Just like B and Z, we take Meinongianism as the view that some objects do not exist: philosophers often get the label of 'Meinongians' when they claim just that, or something entailing that. The comprehension principle of modal Meinongians, just as that of any other Meinongian who has specified one, asserts which objects are admitted by the theory, not their existence. (We are aware that OT, as B and Z say on pp. 764-5, can be interpreted so as to have its object language quantifier express existence, and its designated predicate '$E!$', concreteness. So interpreted, OT isn't Meinongian.) We think there are reasons for claiming that the 'main problem that Meinongianism is designed/supposed to solve' is, not how the denotation of fictional names works, but what *existence* is.

Meinongians have different theories on the denotation of singular terms: descriptions, definite and indefinite, and names, not only of fictional objects. Some think that any singular term should have a denotation; others, that there can be non-denoting terms, alongside terms that denote existents, and terms that denote nonexistents. (Different Meinongian stances on denotation are described in Berto (2013), Parts II and III; Priest (2016) has proposed variants of MM where all terms denote, and variants where they don't.) But what they all have in common is this much: they all think that existence is, in quasi-Kantian jargon, a real property, that is, a property that makes a difference. Some things have it, others lack it. This, in our view, is what sets any Meinongian apart from (those we may label as) Quineans on existence: the latter believe that everything exists, as the concept of existence is captured by the quantifier.

If one takes the denotation of fictional names as 'the main problem', it seems to us, one may not focus on the core difference between OT and MM. One may think it resides in the way denotation works in the theories. It doesn't. MM could be rephrased in such a way that it mirrors the way denotation works in OT. It hasn't been formulated in this way for modal Meinongians believe, as we will see, that this would give a mistaken theory of denotation.

But even if modal Meinongians are wrong on the workings of denotation, this has little to do with the core difference between OT and MM, which is the following: OT has it that nonexistent objects encode properties. MM has it that nonexistent objects have properties at worlds. What makes MM deserve, among the various Meinongian views, the qualification of 'modal', is its using an apparatus of worlds to model the having of properties by nonexistents. There is no role for encoding in MM.

3 Arbitrary Reference

B and Z note that the Characterization Principle of MM does not guarantee the uniqueness of a thing satisfying a condition. Hence, they object, MM does not guarantee the uniqueness of a referent for names such as 'Holmes'. But MM does guarantee this. According to Priest, when Conan Doyle wrote the Holmes stories, he pointed to a non-existent object with an act of intention, baptized the thing 'Holmes', and then told the stories about this. The rest of us picked up the reference of 'Holmes', much as the causal theory or reference suggests. (See Priest (2016), 6.3, and 7.5.) The uniqueness of the reference of 'Holmes' is therefore guaranteed by the act of intentionality. Note that the notion of intentional pointing is not special to MM. Any theory according to which one can point, even physically, presupposes it. When physically pointing, any number of things may be in line with the finger: an object, a colour, a shape. Intention is required to determine what one is pointing at.

One might have a couple of issues with the thought that one can pick out a non-existent object this way. An issue is that one cannot, by definition, have causal contact with such an object. This is a lame objection, dealt with in Priest (2016), 11.3. A second issue is that the account requires one to be able to focus on an object and select it from a bunch of objects arbitrarily. In fact, as we will explain below, the notion of arbitrary pointing makes perfectly good sense. And the matter is quite independent of whether the objects in the bunch exist or not. This was already defended in Priest (2016), 11.4.

Against this background, let us examine B and Z's case. We think their argument against MM goes as follows. MM holds/presupposes (1a). However, in the framework of MM, (1b) and (1c) are not guaranteed; and this makes it unfeasible to maintain (1a):

(1) a. 'Holmes' has a unique denotation.

b. There is a condition that the unique denotation of ‘Holmes’ uniquely satisfies.

c. The user of ‘Holmes’ must be able to know which object is the unique denotation of ‘Holmes’.

B and Z’s objection goes thus:

> In CP [a Characterization Principle of MM], Priest introduced a name, c_A, to denote a characterized object. This name is indexed to the condition $A(x)$. But what guarantees that there is a unique such object satisfying the condition $A(x)$, entitling him to give it a name? If Holmes is characterized by some complex condition $A(x)$, how do we know that there is a unique such object for the name ‘Holmes’ to denote? [...] So, which theoretical object does [‘Holmes’] denote? [...] To what theoretically described object are [the modal Meinongians] referring in their paper, when they *use* the name ‘Holmes’ [...] they are referring to a particular thing – namely, Sherlock Holmes – [...] But their theory doesn’t entitle them to use the name ‘Holmes’ in this way. (Bueno and Zalta 2017, p. 762 and p. 764)

It seems clear to us that B and Z take (1a) to presuppose (1b). That they ask modal Meinongians questions, like ‘Which theoretical object does “Holmes” denote?’, or ‘To what theoretically described object are the modal Meinongians referring in their paper, when they use the name “Holmes”?’, might mean that they endorse the view that (1a) presupposes (1c) as well: for then one will be in trouble, if one does not know, or perhaps cannot know, what object is denoted by ‘Holmes’. Anyway, (1a) entails neither (1b) nor (1c), given the notion of arbitrary reference, which was already endorsed by Priest (2016), Ch. 11.

There are various theories of arbitrary reference. Breckenridge and Magidor (2012), for instance, provide, independently from Meinongian issues, one by appealing to which MM can maintain (1a). They address the problem of the semantic role of individual constants in ordinary reasoning – in particular, in Universal Generalization and Existential Instantiation. They defend the following view of arbitrary reference:

> It is possible to fix the reference of an expression arbitrarily. When we do so, the expression receives its ordinary kind of semantic value, though we do not and cannot know which value in particular it receives. (Breckenridge and Magidor 2012, p. 378)

This tracks a common phenomenon. We reason, in mathematics as well as elsewhere, via stipulations of the form ‘Let a be an arbitrary F’ (‘Let f be an arbitrary homomorphism on a group’, ‘Let Fido be an arbitrary dog’). In Existential Instantiation, one starts from the claim that something is such and so, $\exists x A(x)$, and assumes: ‘Now let it be a’, $A(x/a)$. Then one derives from the assumption some conclusion, B, not involving a, and discharges the assumption. The argument works because a is an arbitrary thing satisfying $A(x)$. There is no point in forbidding one from using 'a' unless one is in the position to tell which object a is, or to provide uniquely identifying descriptive conditions.

The notion of arbitrary reference is characterized and explored independently from MM, or from issues involving nonexistents, fictional objects, etc. E.g., it is used to explain how mathematical terms, introduced via neologicist abstraction principles, refer in a structuralist setting (Boccuni and Woods 2018; see also Woods 2014). Arbitrary reference to objects isn't *per se* reference to objects of a special kind. Fido is arbitrarily referred to, and is an arbitrary dog. One needn't say that Fido is thereby a special kind of thing, or of dog: it's just a dog, arbitrarily referred to.

Given this notion of arbitrary reference, one can claim that 'Holmes' refers to a particular object (the ordinary kind of semantic value of a proper name) among those which satisfy a condition, but we, including Conan Doyle, do not and cannot know which one is its referent. A modal Meinongian who buys the view can then maintain (1a) even though neither (1b) nor (1c) holds. B and Z should provide an argument against arbitrary reference in general, or an argument according to which MM cannot appeal to the notion of arbitrary reference. We will see, anyway, that arbitrary reference helps with another issue, which we are to explore in the next Section.

4 B and Z's Identification of Fictional Objects

B and Z claim that OT provides a theoretical principle to identify the unique reference of a fictional name. The unique denotation of 'Holmes' is

(2) $\iota x(A!x \ \& \ \forall F(xF \equiv CD \models Fh)$ (B and Z, p. 766)

that is, 'the abstract object encoding exactly the properties F such that, in the Conan Doyle novels, Holmes is F' (B and Z, p. 763). According to B and Z, a story is a situation: an 'abstract object that encodes only properties of the form $[\lambda y p]$ (being such that p), for some proposition p' (p. 765). A proposition p is true in a situation s ($s \models p$) iff s encodes $[\lambda y p]$ (in OT notation: $s \models p$ iff $s[\lambda y p]$).

For B and Z's criterion to work, we need there to be a a determinate group of features F such that, in the relevant stories, the fictional object is F – in the present case, a determinate group of Fs such that, in the Conan Doyle novels, Holmes is F. Otherwise, it will be the case that for some F it is not determined whether $CD \models Fh$, and as a result, the identity of Holmes is not determined by their criterion. It is thus crucial for OT that 'the following open formula with free variable F distinguishes a group of properties:

(B) In the Conan Doyle novels, Holmes is F'. (B and Z, p. 765)

B and Z seem to assume that there is such a group; 'given a body of data of the form "In the Conan Doyle novels, Holmes is F", the description on the right-hand side [= (2)] identifies Holmes' (B and Z, p. 766).

As noted in Zalta (1988), pp. 124-5, and also in Zalta (2000), what features a fictional object has in a story does not depend only on the propositions explicitly included in the story by its author(s), but also on a bunch of further propositions. Zalta suggests closing the explicit content under a form of relevant entailment.[1] The explicit contents of a story and those entailed by them (relevantly, or otherwise) may include both too much and too little for a good characterization of truth in fiction. On the one hand, given any logic (save perhaps that whose only valid entailment is $A \vDash A$), one can come up with a fiction that violates it. A fiction can explicitly include, for some P, that $P \wedge \neg P$ is the case, but also that P isn't the case, although mainstream relevant logics allow the inference from $P \wedge \neg P$ to P.

Zalta does not suggest taking the implicit content as consisting only of relevant entailments – and rightly so because, on the other hand, the implicit propositions may be taken from common sense views, (shared) background beliefs, presuppositions, and so on, which do not follow by logical consequence (classical or not) from the explicit. In *Wuthering Heights* Heathcliff is dressed as an 18th Century gentleman when he meets Catherine for the last time, not as a circus clown. This is not explicitly stated in the novel, nor is it entailed (relevantly or otherwise) by what is explicitly stated in the novel.

In Lewis (1978)'s classic possible worlds account of truth in fiction, the vagueness, variability, and context-dependence of the content of a story is represented by the vagueness of similarity (in his 'Analysis 1') or plausibility (in his 'Analysis 2') relations between worlds. Vagueness, variability and context-dependence can lead to there being no determinate story content. In Badura and Berto (2019), Analysis 2 is expanded by adding an apparatus of non-normal worlds and dynamic belief revision operators. It is argued that mathematical results, such as Arrow's (1950) impossibility result for social choice functions and the analogue for belief revision shown by Leitgeb and Segerberg (2007), entail that, unless one stipulates drastically simplifying assumptions on how the beliefs of the community of origin or that of interpretation of a story can be merged to integrate its explicit content, the idea of there being a determinate group of Fs such that a fictional character is F in a story, is problematic.[2]

Even if there is such a determinate content at a given time, it is questionable that there's a determinate and fixed story content across different times. Just as the Sagrada Familia, storytelling can be like a prolonged construction. It

[1]'As we read each sentence S in a manuscript or other copy of a novel, we typically conclude that the proposition p that S designates is true in the story s which is being presented by this novel [...]. However, we don't conclude only that $s \vDash p$, but also that any proposition relevantly entailed by p is also true in s. In previous work, I have suggested that the following Rule of Closure is operative:

Rule of Closure: All of the relevant consequences of propositions true in s are true in s.' (Zalta (2000). p. 12)

[2]Even the claim that there is a unique explicit story content is an idealization: unreliable narrators can explicitly state something that turns out not to be true in the fiction later on, or make claims tongue-in-cheek, etc. Thus, in the passage quoted in the previous footnote, Zalta rightly says that we only 'typically' conclude that a proposition expressed by a sentence explicitly included in a story is true in the story.

can come with dynamic expansions and revisions. Given the development of a story at a certain time, it is in general possible for the storytelling process to develop in different and incompatible directions later on. Since *Star Trek: The Original Series*, the *Star Trek* saga has been developed and is now developing. The second season of a new series, *Star Trek: Discovery*, was launched in 2017. The series contains several descriptions of Spock, one of the most famous *Star Trek* characters, such that he has an adopted sister. One may think that

(3) In the *Star Trek* saga, Spock has an adopted sister

was not true until 2016, but is true now. There is no mention of an adopted sister in the saga up to 2016; we don't believe by default that one has an adopted sister just because we lack information to the contrary; and the storytellers could have decided, around 2016, to develop the saga in such a way that Spock never had any adopted sister. Given B and Z's identification criterion, it seems that the referent of 'Spock' in 2016 (call it Spock2016) and the referent of 'Spock' in 2017 (call it Spock2017) are different objects. Spock2016 does not encode the property of having an adopted sister; Spock2017 does. According to OT's identity criterion for abstract objects, when a and b are abstract, $a = b$ iff for any property F a encodes F iff b encodes F. In the theory, objects also encode whatever properties they encode in a necessary way. So Spock2016 is different from Spock2017. As a result, by using the name 'Spock' we are now talking about a different object than the one we were talking about in 2016.

Zalta (2003), however, opens another possibility: storytelling is long-term naming. One may conjecture that, while Doyle was writing the Holmes series, 'Holmes' did not refer, since the name was not bestowed its reference. It was not until completion of the storytelling that the name 'Holmes' began to refer to an abstract object that encodes precisely the properties ascribed, explicitly or not, in the final story.[3] Given this view, one can avoid the conclusion that we keep calling different things 'Spock' as the storytelling of the *Star Trek* saga unfolds. 'Spock' does not have a reference yet. Any utterance of 'Spock' so far failed to refer to anything. This seems to be at odds with 'a realistic account of the making up of stories' (Sainsbury 2010, p. 58):

> It's an incremental process, for both reader and author. In *A Study in Scarlet*, we are first introduced to Holmes as "a fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital" and who might be in need of someone to share his digs. Details are added as the book progresses; intuitively these are details about a fictional character we have already encountered. Likewise the natural account of the creative process is that Conan Doyle thinks of his character, and then adds embellishments, adventures, a past, and so on as features of that very character. The character is fixed at an early

[3]'The act of storytelling is a kind of extended baptism, and is a speech act more similar to definition than to assertion [...] It seems illegitimate therefore, in the case of storytelling, to ask whether the author is referring when he or she uses the name of a character before the storytelling is complete' (Zalta 2003, p. 8).

> stage in the creative process. [...] The narrative unfolds through time. At later stages in the telling, our character will have been ascribed more properties than he had been ascribed at an earlier stage. [...] Conan Doyle could have written slightly different things *about Holmes*. If Holmes is individuated by the properties he is in fact ascribed, this is impossible: being ascribed different properties would amount to being a different individual. (Sainsbury 2010, pp. 58-61)

MM, together with the notion of arbitrary reference, may be able to deal with such temporal unfolding of storytelling. During Doyle's storytelling, at some (early?) moment, the referent of 'Holmes' is arbitrarily chosen from the objects that, in the worlds that realize the story so far, s_1, have the properties that s_1 describes Holmes as having. Let us call this object h. Now, for any proposition p that is new for s_1, the set of worlds that realize s_1 contains p-worlds where h has all the properties that s_1 and p attribute to him.[4] Thus we can safely hold that 'Holmes' continued to refer to h even after such expansion of the story. MM can treat the referent of 'Spock' in *Star Trek* stories in the same way.

A proponent of OT might make the following epistemological move. These considerations do not show that there is no definite group of properties that, taken together, uniquely individuate a fictional character. Rather, they only show that even though there is such a group, we need not know exactly which group it is. However, if, as B and Z claim, 'Holmes' denotes the unique abstract object x, such that x encodes exactly the relevant group of properties; and we need not know what this group is; then we needn't know what object 'Holmes' refers to. This in the vicinity of (the key controversial claim of) arbitrary reference theories (cf. Section 2). So, the epistemological move may make it difficult for them to argue against the notion of arbitrary reference.

As we have seen, by appealing to the notion of arbitrary reference MM can hold that 'Holmes' has its unique denotation while admitting that we don't know which object it is. OT cannot. If arbitrary reference is combined with OT to fix the denotation of 'Holmes', there is no guarantee that 'Holmes' denotes the object which OT takes as the denotation of 'Holmes'. According to the view under consideration, we may not know exactly which group of properties is to uniquely characterize Holmes. We may know, at best, only some of those properties. Call such a known subgroup, G. Even if only one object encodes exactly the properties in G, many objects other than Holmes encode all properties in G. By appealing to the notion of arbitrary reference, one may claim that 'Holmes' refers to a particular object, o, arbitrarily chosen from the objects that encode all properties in G, even though we do not know which object o is. However, there is no guarantee that o encodes all properties the whole group and thus, 'Holmes' may not refer to the object that OT identifies as the denotation of 'Holmes'. So, the problem raised by the epistemological move in question—how

[4] Strictly speaking, there are 'constraints imposed by facts about objects that actually exist' (Priest, 2016, p. 89).

to fix the denotation of 'Holmes' without knowing exactly which properties the denotation encodes—is not solved by OT with the notion of arbitrary reference.

5 Abstract Objects vs Possibilia

In OT, in its Meinongian reading, it is true that Holmes and the golden mountain do not exist. One may have the intuition that these things lack existence only contingently. Instead, in OT they lack existence for purely metaphysical reasons: qua abstract objects, they are necessarily nonexistent property-encoders. In Section 6 of their paper, B and Z take this as one of the concerns 'raised by the modal Meinongian' (p. 771). Modal Meinongians have, in fact, diverging views on fictional objects. E.g., Priest (2006) has some sympathy towards the view that some fictional objects may lack existence contingently, whereas Berto (2013) buys Kripke's point, according to which they exist in no possible world and thus lack existence necessarily. For the sake of discussion, we stick with the Priestian view, which complies with the aforementioned intuition.

B and Z claim that, in OT, one can account for the intuition by defining a second existence predicate, different from the original designated predicate $E!$ of the theory, in terms of encoding: '$E!_2x$', or 'exists$_2$', is to mean 'There is something y that exemplifies all of the properties that x encodes.' (p. 772). Thus:

> We defined a second, weak, sense of existence ($E!_2$) in this section, on which Holmes fails to exist – namely, in the sense that nothing exemplifies all of the properties that Holmes encodes. (p. 774)

Based on this notion of existence $_2$, B and Z claim that it is only contingent that the golden mountain, m, does not exist$_2$, since it is possible that some y exemplifies all of the properties that m encodes. In this exposition of the notion of existence$_2$, we can find two different candidates for the denotation of 'the golden mountain': the abstract object, m, that encodes the properties of being golden and being a mountain; and y, that exemplifies the properties of being golden and being a mountain (and other properties implied by them) in some appropriate worlds. B and Z claim that, based on OT, the denotation of 'the golden mountain' is m. In the same way, they claim that the referent of 'Holmes' is the unique abstract object that encodes the properties F such that in the Doyle novels Holmes is F, not a possibly existing thing which, at some appropriate worlds, exemplifies the properties F such that, in the Doyle novels, Holmes is F.

Why do B and Z prefer abstract property-encoders to possibly existing objects exemplifying properties at various worlds, as the referents of fictional names? As far as we can understand, there are two reasons, one is positive and the other is negative:

- Positive: Given the identification criterion of abstract objects, we can pick out one such object as the unique referent of 'Holmes'.

- Negative: 'there are too many possible objects that exemplify all of the properties attributed to Holmes in the stories. So, there is no way to assign a denotation to Holmes from among those objects.' (B and Z, p. 774)

However, as for the positive reason, we have argued in the previous section that OT's criterion is problematic. As for the negative reason, given arbitrary reference, we have argued two sections ago that a name can arbitrarily refer to one particular object among ones that satisfy a condition.

6 Looking for Friends

The notion of encoding has long been deemed artificial, obscure, or introduced ad hoc, by a number of authors (for instance, Routley (1980), pp. 457-70; Byrd (1986); Priest (2016), p. xxxii). B and Z try to find other philosophers who have introduced or endorsed the exemplification/encoding distinction.

According to Boolos, Frege had a distinction between *falling under* and *being in* as two different instantiation relations. B and Z (pp. 767-8) claim that there is an analogy between the distinction spotted by Boolos between *falling under* and *being in*, and the distinction between exemplification and encoding. In Boolos' terminology, a first-order concept under which exactly one object falls *is in* the natural number 1. Correspondingly, in OT's terminology, 'the natural number 1 encodes rather than exemplifies all and only the properties that are exemplified by exactly one (ordinary) object' (p. 767). Also, '[t]he very same paradoxes that Boolos discusses in connection with $G\eta x$ [read as 'G is in x'] [1987: 198] are the paradoxes of encoding that Zalta discusses' (p. 767). This may be taken as good support for the analogy between OT's encoding and Boolos' *being-in*.

How far does the analogy go? Suppose both (4a) and (4b) hold, since exactly one object falls under/exemplifies the concept/property (of being) current president of the US:

(4) a. The concept *current president of the US* is in the natural number 1.

b. The natural number 1 encodes the property of being current president of the US.

The parallel between OT's encoding and *being in* may lead to unpalatable consequences when combined with B and Z's object-theoretic claim that 'these two forms of predication [exemplification and encoding] serve to disambiguate the English copula "is"' (p. 764). Consider (5):

(5) The natural number 1 is current president of the US.

Suppose the object-theoretic claim allows (5) to be read literally as saying that the natural number 1 encodes the property of being current president of the US. According to the view under which OT's encoding corresponds to *being in*, the natural number 1 does encode the property of being current president of the US. Then (5) has a true literal reading. However, it doesn't. So even though the property (or, concept, in the Fregean sense) *being current president of the US* is in 1, it does not straightforwardly follow that 1 encodes this property.

B and Z (p. 768) consider the conjecture that Kripke 'formulated a version of the [encoding/exemplification] distinction in his Locke lectures'. Although we agree with Zalta (2006) that Kripke identifies a crucial ambiguity in statements involving fiction and fictional characters, we think it's unclear that Kripke's 'double usage of predication' is the same as the encoding/exemplification distinction.[5] Kripke claims that the predicate 'is discussed by many critics' and the predicate 'is melancholy', when they are postponed to fictional names like 'Hamlet', 'should be taken in different senses' (Kripke (2013), p. 74). B and Z claim that his distinction between the two senses is 'the same step that one would take when introducing the distinction between exemplification and encoding' (p. 768).

It can be regarded as the same step, but this doesn't mean that one who takes this step must go further in the same direction as the proponents of OT. In his exposition of the distinction, Kripke says:

> The second predicate, 'is melancholy,' has attached to it the implicit qualifier *fictionally*, or *in the story*. Whereas of course the first, 'is discussed by many critics,' does not have this implicit qualifier. (Kripke 2013, p. 74)

Kripke's distinction has to do with whether a predicate is used together with an implicit fictional qualifier like 'fictionally' or not. This distinction is not something specific to OT. It is a theory-neutral distinction in the sense that many different theories, including OT and MM (and even the abstract artifacts theory of the kind endorsed by Kripke, van Inwagen, and so on) admit it. Theorists disagree about how to formally or theoretically interpret it. OT disambiguates two senses (with/without a fictional qualifier) by using the exemplification/encoding distinction. MM does this by using worlds semantics: if a predicate is used without a(n explicit or implicit) fictional qualifier, it matters whether it is satisfied in the actual world; if a predicate is used with a(n explicit or implicit) fictional qualifier, it matters whether it is satisfied in the worlds that make the relevant fiction true. Kripke's distinction itself seems to us to be committed to neither OT's nor MM's interpretation.

B and Z also mention Peter van Inwagen. In van Inwagen (1977, 1983, 2003) a distinction is introduced between *having a property* and *holding a property*. B and Z claim that 'clearly, he has noticed the very distinction upon which the exemplification/encoding distinction is based' (p. 768). But van Inwagen

[5]Zalta expresses himself cautiously: 'Now if we take *all* of these passages into consideration, there is some question as to whether Kripke is endorsing an ambiguity in two kinds of predication or in two kinds of predicate. But, given this ambiguity in Kripke's discussion, he is subject to interpretation. Clearly, the two-modes-of-predication theory constitutes a legitimate interpretation of the view Kripke is outlining here, at least in so far as he finds that there is some kind of ambiguity in statements about fictions.' (Zalta (2006), p. 608)

is hardly an ally of OT (see Berto (2013), p. 94 and fn. 19). In *Existence, ontological Commitment, and Fictional Entities*, he claims:

> According to Zalta, there are two kinds of predication, 'exemplification' and 'encoding'. Exemplification corresponds roughly to what I call 'having' and 'encoding' to what I call 'holding'. But I do not regard having and holding as two sorts of predication. In my view having is predication – and predication is predication, full stop. I regard 'holding' as a special-purpose relation peculiar to literary discourse, a relation that happens to be expressed in ordinary speech by the words that, in their primary use, express the general logical relation of predication. (van Inwagen 2003, p. 150, fn 18)

Again, 'corresponding roughly' is not 'having the very same distinction'. Indeed, even MM can 'correspond roughly' to OT. Here's the rough correspondence: when OT claims that an object encodes a property ascribed in a story, MM claims that it exemplifies the property at the worlds where the story is true. When OT claims that an object actually exemplifies a property, MM claims the same. Thus, for OT Holmes encodes *being a detective*, and actually exemplifies *being a fictional character*. For MM, Holmes exemplifies *being a detective* at the relevant worlds, and actually exemplifies *being a fictional character*.

Van Inwagen may line up better with MM. Modal Meinongians agree with object theorists like B and Z, and are in disagreement with nuclear Meinongians such as Parsons (1980) or Jacquette (1996), on the following claim: fictional nonexistents like Holmes, in general, do not *really* instantiate the (nuclear) properties ascribed to them in fictional works (and modal Meinongians think they have good reasons for this: see Berto and Priest (2014)). The properties Holmes actually instantiates can include logical features like being self-identical, or extra-fictional properties expressed by 'literary' predicates, like the property of being a fictional character. On the other hand, according to MM, Holmes does not actually instantiate, e.g., the property of being human (why? Well, if something is a human being, s/he must be located in spacetime and have causal features – which Holmes cannot have, being an actual nonexistent). Again, 'Holmes is human' should be understood as short for a sentence having a fictional qualifier, like 'Holmes is human in the Doyle stories', that is, Holmes is *represented* as human in the Doyle stories (and by the people who think about the contents of the stories); or, the feature of being human is *ascribed* to Holmes in those stories (or, Holmes is *thought of as* human by the people who engage with those contents).[6] The worlds apparatus used in the MM theory is just a way to model this.

Now here's van Inwagen:

[6] That's of course neutral with respect to the distinction between existents and nonexistents: one can think of a very existing tree *as* a bear, or *ascribe* to the tree the feature of being a bear, or *represent* the tree as a bear, in a game of make-believe or imagination, while being well aware that there's no way the tree is or could ever really be a bear.

> [W]e must distinguish between those properties that fictional characters have and those that they hold. Fictional characters have only (a) 'logical' or 'high-category' properties like existence and self-identity, (b) properties expressed by what I have called 'literary' predicates – being a character in a novel, being introduced in chapter 6, being a comic villainess, having been created by Mark Twain, being modelled on Sancho Panza ... Properties that strictly entail the property 'being human' – being a resident of Hannibal, Missouri, being an orphan who has a mysterious benefactor, being a witch – they do not have but hold. [...] It is therefore not true in, as they say, the strict and philosophical sense that any fictional characters are witches – or that any of them are human, female, or a widow who lives in Eastwick, Rhode Island. What we should say in, as they say, the philosophy room is this: some of them hold the properties expressed by these predicates. [Footnote:] Holding, like having, is a two-place relation. In 'Creatures of Fiction' (van Inwagen 1977) I employed instead of this two-place relation the three-place relation 'ascription', a relation that holds among a character, a property, and a 'place' in a work of fiction. This is a technically more satisfactory device, since it allows us to represent the fact that one and the same character may be, say, unmarried in one 'place' (chapter 4, for example), and married in another 'place', such as the second half of chapter 6. (van Inwagen 2003, p. 146 and fn. 12)

Thus: according to van Inwagen, just as according to MM, fictional objects can really have features like being self-identical, being fictional characters, being introduced in Chapter 6, etc., and 'having is predication – and predication is predication, full stop'. And, according to van Inwagen, just as according to MM, features like being a human being, being a resident of Hannibal, Missouri, being a detective, etc., can be 'had' by fictional characters only in the sense that they are ascribed to them in fictions, or that they are represented as such in fictions, and by the people who think about the contents of those fictions. Of course, the crucial disagreement between van Inwagen and modal (or any other kind of) Meinongians lies in the latter taking fictional characters like Holmes as nonexistent, whereas van Inwagen, as a Quinean, takes them all as existent: the crucial difference between Meinongians and non-Meinongians lies, again, in how *existence* is conceptualized.

7 Obscure Encoding

The notion of encoding is, officially, a primitive of OT. One cannot object to this, but one may ask to be put in the position to understand the very concept. Reviewers like Byrd (1986) have complained that merely metaphorical expressions are used to gloss it. One who does not already get the notion may not improve by being told, e.g., that 'The number 1 encodes being identical to

1' means that '*being identical to 1* is a concept that is *in* the number 1' (B and Z, p. 767); or that 'The Circle encodes being a circle' means 'The Circle is determined by (*sein determiniert*) the property of being a circle' (B and Z, Ibid, glossing on Mally 1912).

B and Z, however, draw an interesting parallel with an authoritative primitive: set membership, '$\in$' (p. 770). When we introduce set theory to students, we elucidate it by saying that a set is a collection or an aggregate of objects, but that is no definition of the notion in set-free vocabulary. We give examples ('Take the set of yawning students in this lecture hall'; 'Now take the set of natural numbers: 0, 1, 2, ... and so on') and hope that understanding will come. We can give the axioms of, say, ZF, and claim that they, in some sense, capture the concept (there are very complex issues connected to implicit definitions here, but we needn't get into them: see e.g. Incurvati (2020)). B and Z claim (pp. 770-1) that the dual copula theorist can make just the same moves as the set theory presenter.

We find this a very fair point. We add that if some students keep saying that set-membership baffles them, the set theory presenter may at some point be entitled to reply: 'Get your understander rewired', as a discussion stopper.[7] Object theorists are perfectly entitled to do the same: what one party finds perfectly meaningful, the other party claims not to understand; supposing both are sincere, at some point there's little to debate until the latter begin to understand, or the former concede that the concept was defective after all.

The analogy with set theory, however, prompts some further discussion. It is one thing to introduce '$\in$' as the primitive of a theory of abstract objects like set theory. It is a different thing to propose that '$\in$' be used to analyse predication. The second move is more controversial than the first: scholars who have no problem with set theory would nevertheless reject the view that 'this is that' be understood as 'this is a member of the set of that's'. One who has proposed such a view has been David Lewis (1986), but to accept his proposal one needs to take on board his metaphysics of worlds as disconnected spacetimes inhabited by real talking donkeys, etc. – otherwise, one cannot tell 'this has a heart' from 'this has kidneys' set-theoretically, assuming the corresponding sets have the same actual extension. And nearly nobody has been willing to accept the Lewisian metaphysics of worlds.

Analogously, it is one thing to introduce a notion, *encoding*, that does a technical job as the primitive of a theory of abstract objects like OT. It is a different thing to propose that, when we say 'this is that' in English (or the counterparts in other natural languages), we sometimes speak of abstract objects encoding properties they may not exemplify. To the extent that object theorists want to claim the latter as well – to the extent, that is, that they want to stick to the view that 'these two forms of predication [exemplification and encoding] serve to disambiguate the English copula "is"' – they are making a

[7]Some people way more experienced than our hypothetical students *do* keep finding the notion of set membership baffling. Some, from Lesniewski to Lewis, have been worried by the 'mystery of the singleton' and have tried to resort to alternative (e.g., mereological) foundations for mathematics (see e.g. Simons 2005).

claim about the semantics of natural language, which may sound controversial even to those who grant they have come to grips with encoding.

Why is it difficult for some to come to grips with encoding? Consider some reasoning involving 'is': This is scarlet, therefore this is red, and therefore this is colored. These are obvious inferences based on the contents of everyday concepts, e.g., 'If something is red, there is no way it lacks color'. But then the 'is' cannot have the encoding reading. The facts about what features an object encodes, unlike the facts about what features an object exemplifies, seem brute: when an object encodes being red, there is no reason why it does so. It just does. We cannot say that it encodes being red because it encodes being scarlet, or some other determinate of red. It may encode no determinate of red at all.

This applies across the board. Take any arbitrary group of properties (or, almost – there's a restriction, motivated by the Rapaport paradox, we don't need to get into here): you have the object that encodes precisely them and nothing else. Thus, from the fact that x encodes F, nothing follows on whatever different G may or may not be encoded by x. There is just no logic of encoding. Given a bunch of predicates, one can pick an arbitrary subset of them, concatenate each of them with a name, and assert the result; pick the complement, concatenate each item in there with the same name, and deny the result. The same lack of logical informativeness, translated into OT vocabulary, can be found in encoding:

> Although Zalta (in particular) has developed a rich logical theory of encoding, less has been done to address the philosophical question: how does an abstract object encode, and does encoding make that which encodes like an element of a language? (Sainsbury 2010, p. 225)

> Zalta's [1983] axiomatic 'object theory' is highly informative about abstract entities, their identity criteria, and about encoding - predication, and indeed encoding creates a hyperintensional context. The theory is just not informative with respect to the *logic of properties encoded by abstract individuals*, since the framework is so general as to allow for encoded properties not to be closed logically in any way at all. (Leitgeb 2019, p. 308)

It is essential to OT to have (almost) no restriction on what groups of properties objects can encode. This is what gives the OT comprehension principle for objects its power: if we introduced constraints to the effect that encoding some Fs entails encoding some distinct Gs, we would lose all the encoding-F-but-not-G objects. But we need them, as the referents of various descriptions and for all the other purposes of OT.

MM handles this differently. It has no restriction on the worlds that can represent the having of properties by objects. Having impossible worlds that break any logical consequence (other than $A \vDash A$), one can have worlds that represent something as being F but not G, whatever distinct F and G are.

One may now claim that it is a mystery how worlds represent, but there are various answers to this, and most of them piggy-back on well-received views on the metaphysics of worlds. The modal Meinongians have taken no unique stance on this either (nor would they be forced to), e.g., Priest (2016) has taken non-actual worlds, possible or not, as nonexistent objects themselves. But one may go for a traditional ersatz route, and take worlds, possible or not, as (very existent) sets of sentences from a 'worldmaking' language. One can then assume, say, classical logic as the base logic in which the MM theory is phrased; take possible worlds to be (maximal consistent) sets of sentences from that language closed under classical logical consequence; impossible worlds as arbitrary sets built out of the same language and not so closed; and claim that worlds represent in whatever way language represents. Or, there is room for manoeuvre to endorse other positions (ersatz or not) in the metaphysics of possible worlds, and expand them to account for impossible worlds. Of course, each of these positions will have issues (a detailed discussion is in Berto and Jago, 2019, Chs. 2 and 3); but these will be issues within a well-understood debate on the metaphysics of worlds, that has been ongoing for several decades (see Divers 2002 for a masterful reconstruction).[8]

8 Fictional Properties in OT and MM

B and Z say (2017, p. 777) that 'as far as we can tell, MM isn't, or at least hasn't been, generalized' to give an account of fictional entities of higher-order, like the fictional property of *being a unicorn*. This is true, but why, if at all, should that be a desideratum? To find out why one might think so, one has to consult Zalta (2006).

Let us start with first-order fictional objects. Zalta claims that using his theory, one can prove certain claims about fictional objects advocated by Kripke (2013). In particular, one can prove that, given a fictional object, say Sherlock Holmes, h, it is not possible that it exists: $\neg\exists y(\Diamond E!y \wedge y = h)$ (Zalta 2006, p. 600). Now, it is true, though somewhat trivially so, that this can be proved in Zalta's theory. Fictional objects are (in one reading of OT) a species of abstract/non-existent object, as opposed to concrete/existent objects. And an abstract/non-existent object is defined as an object that cannot possibly be concrete/existent (Zalta 2006, p. 592).

However, this is not Kripke's view. According to him, 'Sherlock Holmes' is not a name, but a *pretend* name. And propositions about Holmes are *pretend* propositions—even ones to the effect that Holmes does not exist (Kripke 2013, Chs. 1, 6). Kripke, in fact, expresses himself with caution:

> ... is it correct to say that there might have been a Sherlock Holmes?
> Of course, there might have been a great detective who did exploits

[8]We should mention that OT comes with a rich theory of worlds – possible and impossible – in its turn: they are taken as abstract objects themselves, encoding properties of the form *being such that p*. Zalta (1997) develops this theory, and defends the view that it is no ersatz conception of worlds.

> precisely as described. That is true. Of course, on my view, if statements containing 'Sherlock Holmes' express pretend propositions—or rather, pretend to express propositions—one can't speak of a pretend proposition as possible... 'Sherlock Holmes' doesn't designate the person ... who did these things: it is supposed to be the name of a unique man. And there is no unique man being named, nor is there any possible man being named here. [...] In the case of Sherlock Holmes, there is no possible entity which we call 'Sherlock Holmes'. (Kripke 2013, pp. 40f, 73)

So what Zalta proves is separated from what Kripke claims by the difference of use and mention. Indeed, what Zalta proves is something which, by Kripke's lights, expresses no proposition at all, and so is actually inconsistent with Kripke's view. For Zalta, 'Sherlock Holmes' refers to an abstract/non-existent object. For Kripke, it has no referent at all.[9] Indeed, Zalta's view as per OT and the view of MM are closer to each other than either is to Kripke's view on this matter. For both, 'Holmes' and 'Hamlet' have a reference—the same reference in any context—though they may disagree on whether the object is abstract or concrete (Priest 2016, 7.2).

It is fair to ask why Kripke holds that fictional names do not normally refer. He does so because of his account of naming. For 'Holmes' to be a name, some object would have had to be baptized with it; and no such baptism took place. MM holds that such a baptism did indeed take place (one using the notion of arbitrary reference; see, Section 3). This is not an option for Kripke, since he is not a Meinongian. Zalta, too, holds that the name acquired a referent by a process of baptism, though one of a rather different kind (Zalta 2003, discussed in Section 4 above).

Let us now turn to fictional properties, and in particular what B and Z say about these in Section 7 of their paper. They observe that if we work in second-order logic (or, more generally, a type theory), then we can treat the values of the second order variables in exactly the same way that we treat the values of the first-order variables. We can then extend their approach to fictional objects to fictional properties, such as being a unicorn, or a hobbit. Just as there are ordinary objects which don't encode anything, and abstract (non-existent) objects which may encode things, there are ordinary properties which don't encode anything, and abstract objects, which do.

Most of the comments made above concerning the first-order case apply to the second-order case. In particular, the view endorsed is not Kripke's view. For Kripke, predicates like 'is a unicorn' do not refer to any property. They are simply pretend properties (Kripke 2013, pp. 43-53). In particular, there is no natural kind to which the term refers. To say that 'it is not possible that there

[9] We note that Kripke (2013, Ch. 3) does argue that there are true things which one can say about, e.g., Hamlet, such as: 'Hamlet is an enigmatic fictional character', 'Hamlet is not a very admirable character'. Since these are true, 'Hamlet' does refer to something in such contexts: an abstract object. And according to Kripke (personal communication) such objects are possible – indeed actual – existents.

be unicorns', therefore, expresses no proposition. One has to say instead: 'there is no possible species that we call 'unicorn'.'

And again OT and MM are closer to each other than they are to Kripke in this regard. For both take 'is a unicorn' to refer to a property. It's not clear, however, that MM has much use for B and Z's distinction between ordinary properties and abstract properties. (Indeed, we doubt that B and Z have much use for it either, once they come out from under the supposed shadow of Kripke.) In truth, this is a rather odd distinction, just because one is naturally inclined to take all properties to be the same kind of thing: abstract entities. A fictional property, in particular, is exactly the same kind of thing as a non-fictional property, like being in London. What makes it different is simply the fact that it is satisfied only by certain objects in worlds that realize the fiction in question.

Having said all this, if, for whatever reason, one wished to extend the machinery of MM to the second-order case, this could be done in an entirely straightforward manner. First, we expand the language with second-order predicate variables and second-order quantifiers (we stick to monadic second-order variables. The extension to higher adicities is straightforward). Then, an interpretation contains a set of first-order properties, D_P, as a primitive constituent, and its interpretation function δ assigns a first-order property to each first-order predicate symbol. We also assume that an interpretation has an assignment function for properties, α, which assigns an extension and anti-extension to each property with respect to each world. If t is any first order constant or variable, F is any second-order constant or variable, and s is an evaluation of the (first- and second-order) variables, the truth/false conditions of atomic sentences are then given as follows:

- $w \Vdash_s^+ Ft$ iff $\delta_s(t) \in \alpha^+(\delta_s(F), w)$, where $\alpha^+(\delta_s(F), w)$ is the extension of the property $\delta_s(F)$ in w.
- $w \Vdash_s^- Ft$ iff $\delta_s(t) \in \alpha^-(\delta_s(F), w)$, where $\alpha^-(\delta_s(F), w)$ is the anti-extension of the property $\delta_s(F)$ in w.

And for second order quantificational sentences:

- $w \Vdash_s^+ \mathfrak{A}XA$ iff for all P in D_P, $w \Vdash_{s(X/P)}^+ A$
- $w \Vdash_s^- \mathfrak{A}XA$ iff for some P in D_P, $w \Vdash_{s(X/P)}^- A$
- $w \Vdash_s^+ \mathfrak{S}XA$ iff for some P in D_P, $w \Vdash_{s(X/P)}^+ A$
- $w \Vdash_s^- \mathfrak{S}XA$ iff for all P in D_P, $w \Vdash_{s(X/P)}^- A$

Let us illustrate how this might work in the case of being a unicorn (Bueno and Zalta 2017, p. 16, n. 8). We may suppose that D_P contains the property:[10]

[10]Indeed, MM can even formulate a version of the CP for first-order properties—if one cares to do this—as follows:

- $\lambda x \mathfrak{A} x(Xx \rightarrow x$ is a white horse-like animal $\wedge\, x$ is an animal with one horn on its forehead)

Suppose the predicate U refers to this. Then if @ is the actual world:

- $@ \Vdash^{+} \neg \mathfrak{S} x U x$

But if F is some fiction about unicorns, and Ψ is the operator 'In fiction F':

- $@ \Vdash^{+} \Psi \mathfrak{S} x U x$

And so for any w such that $@ R_{\Psi} w$:

- $w \Vdash^{+} \mathfrak{S} x U x$

In particular, suppose that $u_1$and u_2 are things which satisfy U at w, we have:

- $w \Vdash^{+} U u_1 \wedge U u_2$

and so:

- $w \Vdash^{+} \mathfrak{S} X(X u_1 \wedge X u_2)$

9 Conclusion

We have seen how MM can meet the challenges raised by B and Z in their paper, ranging from reference to fictional objects to accounting for higher-order objects. We have also seen that the core difference between MM and OT consists in the former having an apparatus of worlds for the representational purposes for which the latter uses the encoding/exemplification distinction. We have tried to show that such a distinction has fewer supporters than B and Z want, and that it has been found baffling for a reason. We think these considerations, taken together, give MM the edge over OT – hence the reversal between B and Z's title and ours. Whether we are right on this or not, we wish to thank Bueno and Zalta for their challenging remarks. The development of theories of nonexistent objects at the level of sophistication reached by both MM and OT shows how flat-footed Quine's objections to Meinongianism really were.

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- Suppose that X is a first-order predicate variable. Then, for any $\phi(X)$ and an intentional operator Φ for a representation containing $\phi(X)$, for any world w, if $@ R_{\Phi} w$, then some P is such that $w \Vdash^{+}_{s(X/P)} \phi(X)$.

We can strengthen this by requiring that, not only @, but also any *closed* world w must satisfy this condition.

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