Two Interpretations of "According to a Story"

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I

The general topic of this paper is the ontological commitment to so-called "fictitious objects", that is, things and characters of fictional stories, like Sherlock Holmes and Pegasus.

Discourse about fiction seems to entail an ontological commitment to fictitious entities, a commitment that is often deemed inconsistent with empirical facts. Consider, for instance, the following sentence:

(1) Pegasus is a flying horse.

This seems to be a true sentence about a character of Greek mythology. In case you are reluctant to accept it as true, compare the following:

(2) Pegasus is a flying dog.

Probably most people (even those who have a certain inclination to raise doubts about the truth of the first sentence) share the intuition that the first sentence is closer to the truth than the second. Given the principle of bivalence, the most obvious way to do justice to this intuition is to say that the former sentence is true while the latter is false.

According to the principle of existential generalization,

(EG) Fa → There is at least one F.

the sentence

(1) Pegasus is a flying horse.

implies

(3) There is at least one flying horse.

Furthermore, according to a principle that one might call the "predication principle",

(PP) Fa → a exists.

(1) implies that there is something that is identical with Pegasus, or

(4) Pegasus exists,

for short.

Thus it seems that a person who accepts the sentence (1) cannot consistently deny that Pegasus exists and that there is at least one flying horse. Yet most people who are inclined to accept (1) as true at the same time believe that there are no flying horses and that Pegasus does not exist and never existed.

This is, in a nutshell, the problem of discourse about fiction. Basically, the problem consists in the fact that a system of beliefs seems to be inconsistent.

Three strategies to get rid of this inconsistency suggest themselves:

1. One might change one's overall system of beliefs to the effect that sentences like (1) are rejected as false – at least if they are taken at face value. (See Ryle 1933[1].)

2. One might change one's logic to the effect that the principle of existential generalization and the predication principle are rejected as invalid. (See Leonard 1956, Hintikka 1959, Leblanc/Hailperin 1959, Rescher 1959, Lambert 1983.)

3. One might change one's ontology to the effect that one accepts that flying horses in general, and Pegasus in particular, exist. (See in particular van Inwagen 1977, Thomasson 1999.)

In this paper, I want to discuss two solutions that have been proposed and discussed in the literature. The first one is a special case of the first strategy, that is, it amounts to rejecting sentences like (1) as false, at least if they are taken at face value. This solution is called the "story-operator strategy". It consists in paraphrasing sentences like "Pegasus is a flying horse" by means of the expression "according to a story" or "according to the story s" (or some synonym to these expressions)[2] such that, for instance, (1) is interpreted as an elliptic formulation of

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[1] Ryle argues that sentences that seem to be sentences about fictitious objects are in fact either "about" nothing at all (and neither true nor false) or about (allegedly) metaphysically innocuous entities like books, sentences or names.

[2] "According to a story" is an *indeterminate* story operator ("according *to some story or other*"), in contrast to the *determinate* story operator "According to the

(1a) According to a story, Pegasus is a flying horse.

(For a story-operator strategy see Künne 1990 and 1995.) I shall argue that the story-operator strategy is unsatisfactory.

The second solution to be discussed here falls under the third strategy, that is, it is assumed that Pegasus and other fictitious objects exist. I shall argue in favour of this solution, and I shall spell it out in some detail.

The realist ontology of fictitious objects that will be defended here is not entirely new. The uncommon aspect is, however, that in order to explicate it, I make use of the story operator, but I use it in a way that is quite different from its use within the so-called "story-operator strategy"[3].

Within the story-operator strategy, the story operator is supposed to block the inference from

(1) Pegasus is a flying horse.

to

(3) There are flying horses.

and to

(4) Pegasus exists.

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story s", where "s" stands for some particular story, for instance the Greek mythology. Both sorts of operators are used in the literature. Whether one of them is preferable to the other (and if so, which one) depends on the particular context. In this paper, I use the indeterminate operator throughout. The main reason for this decision is that the interpretation of the story operator that I am going to propose works more smoothly for the indeterminate operator – though, in principle, it can be applied to determinate operators as well (see note 9).

[3] One may interpret Kit Fine's distinction between a "literal" and a "story-relative copula" as an expression of a similar idea. The story-relative copula is said to hold "between an object, property and story when the object has the property in the story" (Fine 1982, 108). However, Fine's aim is not a re-interpretation of the story operator and he does not endorse a realist ontology of fiction at all (at least not in this paper). Furthermore, there are differences between Fine's interpretation of the "non-literal" copula and my own: I do not interpret it as expressing a relation between an object, a property, and a story. (More will be said on the "non-literal" copula below in sections IV and V.)

From

(1a) According to a story, Pegasus is a flying horse.

we cannot infer that there are flying horses; neither can we infer that there is something that is identical with Pegasus. At most, we can infer the following:

(3a) According to a story, there are flying horses.

and

(4a) According to a story, Pegasus exists.

This, however, does not contradict the empirical fact that Pegasus does not ("really") exist and that there are no flying horses ("in reality"). Therefore, a person who accepts the sentence (1a) as true is not bound to accept the existence of flying horses in general and Pegasus in particular. Thus, the ontological commitment to flying horses in general and Pegasus in particular is avoided. Or so it is argued.

There is, however, an ambiguity in the story operator that usually goes unnoticed. In principle, the story operator can be interpreted in two ways: either as a *sentence operator* or as a *predicate operator*. If it is used as a sentence operator, the sentence *as a whole* is within its scope. According to this interpretation, the sentence (1a) has the logical structure "**S** (Fa)",

(1a^{s}) According to a story [Pegasus/is a flying horse],

i.e., the structure of a predication within the scope of an operator. (The slash indicates a way in which the bracketed sentence may be "cut up" into its logical parts.) If, however, the story operator is interpreted as a predicate operator, the sentence has the structure "Fa",

(1a^{p}) Pegasus/is according to a story a flying horse,

i.e., the structure of a predication. In this case, the story operator functions as a "predicate modifier". The rendition (1a^{p}) makes it explicit that the expression "according to a story" belongs to the predicate[4].

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[4] In the remainder of the paper, I shall use renditions of the kind of (1a^{s}) and (1a^{p}) whenever I wish to make it explicit that the story operator should be interpreted as a sentence operator or as a predicate modifier, respectively. In some cases,

Usually, the story operator is interpreted as a *sentence operator*, for it is in this interpretation only that it can block the two unwelcome inferences. For if

(1) Pegasus is a flying horse.

implies that Pegasus exists, then (1a^{p}) also implies that Pegasus exists. The greater complexity of the predicate in the latter sentence does not, of course, prevent this inference. Nevertheless, in what follows I shall argue that the story operator should be interpreted as a predicate modifier. My argument is twofold:

1. As a sentence operator, the story operator does not fulfil its intended task, that is: contrary to what has been said so far, the story-operator strategy does not help to avoid the ontological commitment to fictitious objects.

2. As a predicate modifier, the story operator can play an important role within a consistent and plausible realist ontology of fiction.

II

Why does the story operator as a sentence operator fail to prevent the ontological commitment to fictitious objects? The reason is that the story-operator strategy works well for some cases but it does not work at all for others. Consider the following sentence:

(5) Pegasus is a character from Greek mythology.

If we put a story operator in front of this, we get:

(5a) According to a story [Pegasus is a character from Greek mythology].

Unfortunately, this story-operator paraphrase is not truth preserving. Given that Greek mythology is the only story in which Pegasus occurs, (5a) is false, despite the truth of (5). For according to Greek mythology, Pegasus is not a character, but an animal of flesh and blood; and there is no Greek mythology within Greek mythology.

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however, I shall not commit myself to one interpretation or the other but leave the story operator intentionally ambiguous. In these cases, I use the standard formulation “According to a story, …”.

Greek mythology is the "truthmaker" of sentence (5), but it is not the truthmaker of (5a)[5].

Similarly, while it is true that

(6) Miss Marple has been impersonated by Margaret Rutherford,

it is (probably) not true that

(6a) According to a story [Miss Marple has been impersonated by Margaret Rutherford][6].

And while it may be true that

(7) Sherlock Holmes is more famous than Hercule Poirot,

it is (to my knowledge at least) not true that

(7a) According to a story [Sherlock Holmes is more famous than Hercule Poirot][7].

We may distinguish two kinds of sentences about fictitious objects: *internal* and *external* ones. Internal sentences about fictitious objects are true "within" or "according to" a story.

(1) Pegasus is a flying horse.

is an internal sentence. External sentences about fictitious objects are straightforwardly and literally true (if they are true). Examples of external sentences are:

(5) Pegasus is a character from Greek mythology.
(6) Miss Marple has been impersonated by Margaret Rutherford.
(7) Sherlock Holmes is more famous than Hercule Poirot.

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[5] It is, of course, possible that there is a story *s* (and *s* may even be a fictional story) such that, according to *s*, there is something called "Pegasus" which is a character from Greek mythology, in which case the Greek mythology would be a story within a story and (5a) would be true. But this is, evidently, not sufficient to make (5a) an adequate paraphrase of (5).

[6] (6a) is not true unless there is a story *s* such that it is part of *s* that there is an actress named "Margaret Rutherford" and a fictitious character named "Miss Marple" and that the former has impersonated the latter.

[7] That is, to my knowledge, there is no story in which both Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot occur.

Thus, we may say that the story-operator strategy, as a strategy to avoid ontological commitment to fictitious entities, works for internal sentences only; it does not work for external sentences. Unfortunately, for a proponent of the story-operator strategy, it cannot be enough to have a good paraphrase for internal sentences only. For the acceptance of external sentences too entails an ontological commitment to fictitious entities. According to the predication principle,

(5) Pegasus is a character from Greek mythology,

implies that Pegasus exists;

(6) Miss Marple has been impersonated by Margaret Rutherford,

implies that Miss Marple exists; and

(7) Sherlock Holmes is more famous than Hercule Poirot,

implies that both Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot exist.

Proponents of the story-operator strategy must either simply declare all external sentences about fictitious objects to be false (which is an extremely implausible move), or they have to find some *ad hoc* paraphrase strategies for them (which is not much better). Thus, the story operator fails as a means to avoid the ontological commitment to fictitious entities.

III

Here is an alternative proposal: There is no satisfactory way to avoid the ontological commitment to fictitious entities. But this is not a reason to worry, since there is no compelling reason to search for a way to avoid the ontological commitment to fictitious entities. To the contrary, there are good reasons to accept the ontological commitment to fictitious entities. The good reasons are provided by the fact that reference to and quantification over fictitious entities is a part of both everyday and scientific and even of juridical discourse. Talk about fictitious objects is not only part of literary theory and film criticism, but even part of copyright. (Fictitious characters are explicitly protected by particular copyright regulations, just like novels, paintings, and film works.)

Thus, the existence of fictitious objects can and should be accepted as an empirical fact. It is an empirical fact that there are fictitious

characters of novels and plays, fairy tale princes, and movie heroes, since it is an empirical fact that there are fictional novels and plays, fairy tales and fictional movies in which these characters occur.

Outside philosophical circles this fact is generally accepted. But many philosophers find it hard or even impossible to accept the existence of fictitious objects. This calls for an explanation.

Often (though not always) the reason for the denial of the existence of fictitious objects is a sort of category mistake. This category mistake consists in the (often tacit) assumption that fictitious objects, if they existed, would be spatio-temporal objects. If Pegasus existed, the reasoning goes, it would be a material object, a living being of flesh and blood, an object that is accessible to the senses and located in space. As a matter of fact, there is no living being which has all (or most) of the properties ascribed to Pegasus in the relevant story. Thus, Pegasus does not exist.

But this reasoning is mistaken. Fictitious objects are not spatio-temporal objects. They belong to the same category as novels, plays, and fairy tales. Just like novels, plays, and fairy tales, they owe their existence to particular mental processes of authors. They are products of human imagination, "mental creations", to use a term taken from copyright. Just like novels, plays, and fairy tales, they are contingent abstract objects, that is, they are neither physical nor mental, neither accessible to the senses and located in space nor dependent on particular acts of consciousness, once they have been created, though, they have been brought into being through particular acts of consciousness. Fictitious objects are part of our cultural reality, just like novels, symphonies and scientific theories.

Thus, acceptance of the existence of fictitious objects is not a symptom of a dramatic loss of sense of reality. The belief that there is a fictitious flying horse called "Pegasus" does not entail the belief that Pegasus (or at least remnants of it) could be discovered, in principle, by a zoologist or an archaeologist. The belief that there is a fictitious detective called "Sherlock Holmes" does not entail the belief that it is or was possible at any time to shake hands with "him". Fictitious objects are just not the kind of objects to be discovered by archaeological research or to meet and shake hands with. But a fictitious object can be famous, it can be a character from a particular story, and it can be impersonated by an actress. Therefore, the sentences

(5) Pegasus is a character from Greek mythology,

(6) Miss Marple has been impersonated by Margaret Rutherford,

and

(7) Sherlock Holmes is more famous than Hercule Poirot,

can be literally true. Note that some predicates, like "being a character from Greek mythology" and "having been impersonated by somebody", that are applied to fictitious objects in discourse about fiction apply to abstract objects only. Others, like "is famous", "came into being in the year 1899", "is the subject of a doctoral thesis" apply both to abstract and to concrete objects. At any rate, "the abstractness theory" (as one might call it) is consistent with all external sentences about fictitious objects.

However, there is a serious objection against the abstractness theory, namely: It works well for external sentences about fiction, but it seems that it does not work for most internal sentences. Consider again:

(1) Pegasus is a flying horse.

Horses (flying or not) are not abstract objects but living beings located in space. In other words, the predicate "is a flying horse" can be truthfully applied to physical objects only. An abstract object cannot be a horse, let alone a flying horse. Thus, the abstractness theory seems to fail, since it does not provide an explanation for the truth of internal sentences like (1). Similar considerations hold for

(8) Hamlet hates his stepfather.

To hate somebody is a mental property; and whatever the correct metaphysics of mental properties looks like, it is clear that abstract objects are not the kind of objects that can exemplify mental properties.

There are two possible reactions to this: one might, in the light of this objection, reject the abstractness theory; or one might reject the assumption that internal sentences like (1) and (8) are true. I opt for the second alternative.

At this point, one might object that the apparent truth of (1) was the starting point of this paper. I have argued that there is an intuitive difference between

(1) Pegasus is a flying horse,

and

(2) Pegasus is a flying dog.

If the assumption that (1) is true is rejected, one has to find an alternative explanation for this intuitive difference. To explain this difference, one may use the story operator:

(1a) According to a story, Pegasus is a flying horse,

is true, while

(2a) According to a story, Pegasus is a flying dog,

is false.

Generally speaking, the explanation is as follows: external sentences about fiction are literally true. Internal sentences, by contrast, are literally false. We may, however, interpret internal sentences as elliptical renderings of "according to a story" sentences. Indeed, this is the usual understanding of such sentences in discourse about fiction.

Now the question arises: how shall we interpret the story operator in this context? Is it to be interpreted as a sentence operator or as a predicate operator? I opt for the second alternative. I would like to put forward two arguments for this proposal. The starting point of the first argument is the fact that

(1a^{p}) Pegasus/is according to a story a flying horse.

implies that Pegasus exists. Furthermore, it implies that there is at least one entity that is according to a story a flying horse. By contrast,

(1a^{s}) According to a story [Pegasus is a flying horse].

neither implies that Pegasus exists nor does it imply that there is an entity that is according to a story a flying horse.

The question is: is it desirable that we can derive that Pegasus exists and that there is something that is according to a story a flying horse from our paraphrase of

(1) Pegasus is a flying horse,

or is it not desirable that we can derive these things?

I would like to argue that a theory that allows us to do this is preferable to a theory that does not: intuitively, (1) is a sentence *about*

Pegasus, a sentence that is used to *describe* Pegasus in a certain way, to express that Pegasus *has a certain property* (if we want to talk in terms of properties)[8]. The predicate operator interpretation does full justice to this fact, while the sentence operator interpretation does not. To avoid a possible misunderstanding, it should be noted that the property that is ascribed (truthfully) to Pegasus is, of course, *not* the property of *being a flying horse*, but rather the property of *being a flying horse according to a story*. An abstract object cannot exemplify the property of *being a flying horse*, but it can exemplify the property of *being a flying horse according to a story*. Moreover, properties like *being a flying horse according to a story* or *being a detective according to a story* etc. can be exemplified by abstract objects only. The sentence

(1a^{p}) Pegasus/is according to a story a flying horse.

is an external sentence about Pegasus. It is literally true that Pegasus has the property of *being a flying horse according to a story*. One may call sentences like this "quasi-internal sentences" in order to distinguish them from those external sentences that do not contain a story operator, and one may call the latter "purely external sentences". Quasi-internal sentences play a crucial role for the description of fictitious objects. Intuitively, there is no reason to deny that quasi-internal sentences are "about" their subjects in exactly the same sense in which "purely external sentences" are about their subjects. For instance, intuitively (1a^{p}) is a sentence about Pegasus in exactly the same sense in which

(5) Pegasus/is a character from Greek mythology.

is a sentence about Pegasus. Thus, if the rules of logic allow us to derive that Pegasus exists from (5) then we should also be allowed to derive that Pegasus exists from (1a^{p}). Therefore, I opt for the predicate-modifier interpretation of the story operator.

For a second argument to the same conclusion, consider the following two sentences:

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[8] For explanatory purposes, I put aside my reservations against an ontological commitment to properties in this and the following section, though, in principle, I strive to avoid it (see note 11).

(9) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

(10) Hercule Poirot is a detective.

Intuitively, from these two sentences, taken together, it follows:

(11) There is something that Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot have in common (... namely that each of them is a detective).

In a half-formal way, this may be rendered as follows:

(11') $\exists F$ (Sherlock Holmes is F & Hercule Poirot is F).

The "F" in this sentence is a predicate variable, that is, a variable that stands for predicates, not for singular terms; here it stands for "is a detective". Those who have animadversions against predicate variables may instead quantify over properties:

(11") $\exists x$ (Sherlock Holmes exemplifies x & Hercule Poirot exemplifies x).

The variable "x" stands here for the abstract singular term "the property of being a detective".

As has been argued earlier, the sentences

(9) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

(10) Hercule Poirot is a detective.

are both false, if taken literally. Only their story-operator paraphrases are true. But the inference from these story-operator paraphrases to the sentence

(11) There is something that Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot have in common.

is valid only if the story operator is interpreted as a predicate modifier. To see this, consider:

(9a^s) According to a story [Sherlock Holmes is a detective].

(10a^s) According to a story [Hercule Poirot is a detective].

From these, we *cannot* derive

(11a^s) According to a story [There is something that Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot have in common],

for this would be true only if there were a story in which both Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot occur, which does not follow from the

claims that Sherlock Holmes is a detective and that Hercule Poirot is a detective.

Consider, by contrast:

(9a^{p}) Sherlock Holmes/is according to a story a detective.

(10a^{p}) Hercule Poirot/is according to a story a detective.

From *these*, we *can* derive

(11') ∃*F* (Sherlock Holmes is *F* & Hercule Poirot is *F*),

where the predicate variable "*F*" here stands for the predicate "is according to a story a detective"[9].

IV

The basic point of the predicate-modifier interpretation of the story operator is that for discourse about fictitious objects *two kinds of predicates* are needed. Most realist ontologies of fictitious objects involve a modes-of-predication distinction, although these distinctions come in different varieties.

Most modes-of-predication distinctions fall into one of two categories. I call them *property-modifier theories* and *relation-modifier theories*, respectively. Property-modifier theories and relation-modifier theories have two things in common: First, all of them use some sort of predicate modifier; and second, all of them involve quantification

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[9] At this point, my decision to use an *indeterminate* story operator instead of determinate ones becomes relevant. If determinate story operators were used, the predicate in (9a^{p}) would be different from the one in (10a^{p}), since Holmes and Poirot originate in different stories. In this case, the paraphrases would be (9a$^{p'}$) "Sherlock Holmes/is according to the story s_1 a detective" and (10a$^{p'}$) "Hercule Poirot/is according to the story s_2 a detective". These two sentences do not imply (11'). However, in principle the point of the argument can be made with determinate operators as well: One may interpret (9a$^{p'}$) and (10a$^{p'}$) as expressing relations between fictitious characters and stories, and this allows to derive (11''') "∃*G* (*G*hs_1 & *G*ps_2)", where "*G*" stands for the *two-place* predicate "_is a detective according to the story_", "h" stands for "Holmes", and "p" stands for "Poirot".

over properties. The main difference between *property-modifier theories* and *relation-modifier theories* concerns the question of what exactly the predicate modifier is used to modify. Consider:

(1b) Pegasus exemplifies the property of being a horse.

A predicate modifier can be used to modify either the relation term "exemplify" or the abstract singular term "the property of being a horse". The difference can be illustrated by means of the story operator:

(1b^{pm}) Pegasus/exemplifies according to a story/the property of being a horse.

(1b^{rm}) Pegasus/exemplifies/the property of being a horse according to a story.

The former sentence, (1b^{pm}), expresses that Pegasus stands in a particular relation to the property of being a horse, namely in the relation of *exemplifying according to a story*. The latter sentence, (1b^{rm}), expresses that Pegasus stands in the usual exemplification relation to a particular property, namely to the property of *being a horse according to a story*.

The standard version of the property-modifier theory in the literature involves a distinction between so-called *nuclear* and *extranuclear* properties. Thus, one might say:

Pegasus has the *nuclear* property of being a horse.
But: Pegasus has the *extranuclear* property of being a fictitious object. (See Findlay 1963, Meinong 1972, Parsons 1975 and 1980, Routley 1979 and 1980, Jacquette 1996.)

The relation-modifier theory can be found in the literature in a number of varieties, among others in the following ones (for the sake of simplicity, I use the standard Pegasus-example for all cases):

Pegasus *is determined by* the property of being a horse.
But: Pegasus *satisfies* the property of being a fictitious object. (See Mally 1912.)

The property of being a horse *is ascribed to* Pegasus.
But: Pegasus *has* the property of being a fictitious object. (See van Inwagen 1977.)

Pegasus *encodes* the property of being a horse.
But: Pegasus *exemplifies* the property of being a fictitious object. (See Zalta 1983 and 1988.)

Structurally similar are Nicholas Wolterstorff's distinction between *having a property essentially within* and *having a property* (see Wolterstorff 1980), Hector-Neri Castañeda's distinction between *consociation* and *consubstantiation* (see Castañeda 1979 and 1990), Kit Fine's distinction between the *story-relative copula* and the *literal copula* (see Fine 1982, 108f., and 1984) as well as Roman Ingarden's distinction between *having a property assigned* and *inherently containing a property*[10] (see Ingarden 1960, § 20).

The common insight behind most versions of predicate-modifier theories is that discourse about fiction involves two kinds of assertions, "internal" and "external" ones (and even if some predicate-modifier theorists do not make this distinction explicitly, one nevertheless may use their theories in order to make this distinction explicit). All versions of predicate-modifier theories help to resolve certain paradoxes that would arise without them and would provide serious reasons to reject the ontological commitment to fictitious objects.

The most common objection against all kinds of predicate-modifier theories is that their distinctions are neither intuitively clear nor defined. Often, the critics suspect that predicate-modifier theories are just a formal trick, consisting in the introduction of an artificial terminology that is applied on an *ad hoc* basis in order to avoid contradictions.

Although this criticism is wrong, it is (at least in some cases) understandable that predicate-modifier theories arouse this impression. Terms like "nuclear" and "extranuclear", "consubstantiation" and "consociation", "encoding" and "being determined by" are either wholly artificial or used in a more or less unfamiliar way. Unfortunately, it seems to be impossible to provide definitions for them. It is not surprising, then, that many people are suspicious and rather try to "paraphrase away" the reference to fictitious objects instead of accepting an ontology that is based on mysterious distinctions.

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[10] Ingarden's 1960 is written in German. The translations of the two technical terms mentioned here are mine.

But most people, even those who claim that they are unable to understand terms like "encoding", "consociation", "being determined by", and so forth, seem to have an intuitive understanding of the locution "according to a story". Thus, the story operator may serve as a tool to introduce the modes-of-predication distinction in a way that is intuitively easily acceptable.

V

In this final section of the paper I shall show how the modes-of-predication distinction resolves (or better: prevents from arising) a number of paradoxes that would arise without this distinction.

Paradox I: "The incompatibility paradox"

The point of this paradox is that fictitious objects seem to have properties that are incompatible with their ontological status as abstract objects. Instances of this paradox have already been mentioned before, among others:

1. Pegasus is a horse.
2. Horses are located in space.
3. Thus, Pegasus is located in space. (1,2)
4. Pegasus is an abstract object.
5. Abstract objects are not located in space.
6. Thus, Pegasus is not located in space. (4,5)

The solution is clear: Premise 1. is false. However, it is true that

1'. Pegasus/is according to a story a horse.[11]

From this and the premise that horses are located in space, it does not follow, however, that Pegasus is located in space. Therefore, the paradox does not arise.

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[11] Note that this sort of predicate modification, in contrast to the ones mentioned in the foregoing section, does not involve reference to or quantification over properties.

Paradox II: "The incompleteness paradox"

The point of this paradox is that fictitious objects seem to violate the principle of excluded middle, since a story never determines all of the properties of a fictitious object. Here is an instance of this paradox:

1. Either "Pegasus' eyes are blue" or "It is not the case that Pegasus' eyes are blue" is true. (This is an instance of the principle of excluded middle).
2. "Pegasus' eyes are blue" is not true (since there is no passage in the relevant story that implies that Pegasus' eyes are blue).
3. "It is not the case that Pegasus' eyes are blue" is not true (since there is no passage in the relevant story that implies that Pegasus' eyes are not blue).
4. Thus, neither "Pegasus' eyes are blue" nor "It is not the case that Pegasus' eyes are blue" is true. (2,3)

Solution: The third premise is false. It is indeed true that it is not the case that Pegasus' eyes are blue, because Pegasus is an abstract object, and abstract objects don't have eyes.

However, the following two sentences are true:

2'. "Pegasus' eyes are according to a story blue" is not true.

3'. "Pegasus' eyes are according to a story not blue" is not true.

But since the latter sentence is not the negation of the former, this does not violate the principle of excluded middle.

Paradox III: "The contradiction paradox"

The point of this paradox is that it seems that fictitious objects may have contradictory properties and thus may violate the law of contradiction. Imagine a fictional story that implies the following two sentences:

(12) John once owned a red car.

(13) It is not the case that John once owned a red car.

(Suppose that the author simply made a mistake, or that she wanted to test the reader's attentiveness.)

The solution is: The second sentence is true. It is indeed not the case that John ever owned a red car, since the fictitious object John is an abstract object, and abstract objects are not the kind of things that can own cars.

However, the following two sentences are both true:

(12a^{p}) John/according to a story once owned a red car.

(13a^{p}) John/according to a story never owned a red car.

But since the latter sentence is not the negation of the former, this does not violate the law of contradiction.

Summary and conclusion: Story operators are ambiguous. They may be interpreted either as sentence operators or as predicate modifiers. As sentence operators, they may be used to block the inference from internal predications about fictitious objects to existential sentences about fictitious objects. However, external sentences about fictitious objects cannot be paraphrased by means of story operators; and thus story operators as sentence operators do not rid us from the ontological commitment to fictitious objects, if we take discourse about fiction seriously. I opt for a realist ontology of fictitious objects. If the story operator is used to modify "internal predicates" of fictitious objects, the assumption that fictitious objects exist can be consistent with logical as well as with basic metaphysical principles and with empirical facts*.

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