**The pragmatic approach to fictive utterances and its consequences for mental fictionalism**

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**Introduction**

The essence of fictionalism about a given discourse is the thesis that in speaking about a certain type of entities one usually makes fictive utterances rather than serious ones. In connection with this thesis, the question naturally arises: what is the difference between fictive and serious utterances? What kind of properties distinguish them? It seems to us that most fictionalists tend to see the difference as lying not in the semantic properties of the uttered sentences of the relevant discourse, but rather in the pragmatic properties of these utterances. Notice the following passages:

Fictionalism about a given discourse holds that its sentences express propositions that:

(i) have representational content;

(ii) are semantically evaluable at face value, nonreductively, i.e., they mean what they literally mean;

(iii) are not directed at stating truths about the putative field of inquiry. (Demeter 2013, p. 497)

If a discourse is interpreted in a fictionalist way then its real content is different from the fictional (semantic) content of its propositions. (Demeter 2013, p. 498)

The difference between assertion and quasi-assertion is, at least in part, a difference in what is asserted. The content of the quasi-assertion is distinct from the proposition expressed. If an utterance is an assertion, then it normally asserts the proposition expressed. If, however, an utterance is a quasi-assertion, then it normally does not. (Kalderon 2005, p. 120)

HF [hermeneutic fictionalism] is not a semantic theory in the sense […] in which Davidson advocates one kind of semantic theory and Montague another. HF is a strategy aimed at particular constructions. There is or need be no general program of understanding things in HF terms. […] One does not expect a compositional semantics for hyperbole, metonymy, or irony; one does not expect a compositional semantics for speech governed by shifting presupposition. Somehow, though, we understand. This suggests that HF-style analyses directed at kinds of speech that resemble hyperbole, metonymy, or etc. should not be held to the standard of strong-systematicity-or-bust. (Yablo 2001, pp. 29-30)

[Y]ou are a use fictionalist about the discourse if you think that when we use such sentences to report on a fiction they continue to have exactly the semantics they would have if they were used in perfectly serious discourse about the world […]. In short, for the use fictionalist about a region of discourse the linguistic phenomena that compel us to embrace fictionalism should be explained as part of a theory of the pragmatics, or use, of the language, not its semantics. […] We take use fictionalism to be the default kind of fictionalism. (Kroon – Brock – Mckeown-Green 2019, pp. 112-113)

Although the aims and perspectives of the quoted authors are quite different, and so their focus is on different conceptual distinctions, these theorists tend to be committed to the view that when someone utters a sentence in a discourse interpreted in a fictionalist way, the literal semantic meaning of the uttered sentence is the same as if it were uttered seriously. Moreover, they also tend to be committed – implicitly or explicitly, sometimes a bit vaguely – to the thesis that the relevant difference comes from the pragmatics of the utterances made in the use of the discourse. Now, if two different types of utterances do not differ semantically, it is quite natural to think that they differ pragmatically. Consequently, if one accepts this approach to fictive utterances then one takes fictionalism about a given discourse to be a pragmatic theory. It is not concerned with the meanings of the sentences of the discourse, but rather with how the speakers of the discourse use them, what they really make with them.

In what follows, firstly, we will elaborate the pragmatic approach to fictionalism. By evoking some classical pragmatic theories of fictive utterances, we will give an account of the kind of pragmatic properties responsible for the difference in question, and explain their occurrence in fictive utterances. Secondly, we will investigate some consequences of the results for fictionalist theories in general, and thirdly for mental fictionalism in particular. At the end of the paper, we will argue that once the pragmatic approach is applied to mental fictionalism, the well-known problem of cognitive suicide becomes especially nagging.

1. **Fictive vs. serious utterances**

In his seminal paper from 1979, John Searle starts his account of fictive utterances with the observation that it seems prima facie plausible to take the meaning of the same sentence in a serious and in a fictive utterance to be exactly the same. A sentence does not seem to have another meaning due to its being part of a fictional work, since in this case one would have to learn new word-meanings on each occasion one reads or hears a new fiction.

Given this intuition, the problem of fictive utterances for him is the following: “how can it be both the case that words and other elements in a fictional story have their ordinary meanings and yet the rules that attach to those words and other elements […] are not complied with” (Searle 1979b, p. 58).

Therefore, we can agree with Searle that “the conventions of fictional discourse […] do not alter or change the meanings of any of the words or other elements of the language. What they do rather is enable the speaker to use words with their literal meanings without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by those meanings.” (Searle 1979b, pp. 65-66) So, the Searlean solution to the above problem consists in appealing to the phenomenon of *pretense*. In fictive utterances one does not perform any illocutionary or other genuine speech act – one does not assert or refer to, nor predicate anything. One just intentionally pretends to do these things, and so the necessary conditions of performing these acts fail to be satisfied in fictive utterances. For example, in the case of fictive assertions, the essential rule of assertive acts, namely that the speaker commits herself to the truth of the expressed proposition, and the sincerity rule, i. e. that the speaker commits herself to a belief in the truth of the expressed proposition, are surely not in force. In short, the difference between serious and fictive utterances lies not in the meaning of the sentences uttered, but in the pragmatic acts the utterer performs with the same words. Moreover – and in what follows, this point will be of the utmost importance to us –, all this depends on the utterer’s intentions:

Now *pretend* is an intentional verb: that is, it is one of those verbs which contain the concept of intention built into it. One cannot truly be said to have pretended to do something unless one intended to pretend to do it. So our first conclusion leads immediately to our second conclusion: the identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of necessity lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author. (Searle 1979b, p. 65, italics in original)

Searle endorses this pretense-based theory of fictive utterances partly because he does not consider it possible that there is a special fictional illocutionary act. His reason for it is his firm conviction that the (broadly understood) semantic properties of an utterance and the illocutionary act we make with it systematically correspond to each other, therefore one cannot make a totally different kind of illocutionary act with the same sentence.[[1]](#footnote-1) By contrast, Gregory Currie (Currie 1985; 1986) presents exactly such a theory, since he considers the semantic features as just one among the factors determining the illocutionary force of an utterance (Currie 1985, pp. 386-387). Currie defines this special, fictional illocutionary act by alluding to some complex Gricean intentions:

Following the program of Strawson and Grice, I believe that the different kinds of speech acts are to be individuated in terms of the utterer's intentions. The intention of the one who asserts is to get a certain kind of response; perhaps to get the audience to believe the proposition asserted. […] And in all these cases the utterer intends to get the response partly as a result of the audience's recognition of that very intention. (This is the familiar Gricean mechanism.) The utterer of fiction, on the other hand, wants to get the audience to *make-believe* the proposition uttered. Thus we have an act structurally similar to paradigmatic speech acts, […] but differing from these others with respect to the content of the utterer's intention. Let us call such an act a *fictive* illocutionary act. (Currie 1986, pp. 304-305, italics in original)

Notwithstanding this difference, Searle and Currie both regard the mark of fictive utterances as being illocutionary, and therefore pragmatic in nature. They also believe that at bottom, it is the utterer’s intentions that create this difference – for Searle, they are the illocutionary intentions, whereas for Currie the Gricean communicative intentions of the speaker. In a 2012 paper, Stacey Friend refers to solutions appealing to Gricean intentions as “the currently standard account of fiction” (Friend 2012, p. 182).

The appeal to Gricean complex communicative intentions gives us the opportunity to treat the difference between serious and fictive utterances as akin to that between sentence meaning and utterer’s meaning. After all, Grice originally used these intentions to define the utterer’s occasional meaning. At least in most cases of fictive utterances, in uttering a sentence with fictional intentions, the speaker does not convey its conventional meaning, since she does not want the hearer to believe the proposition expressed by the sentence conventionally, or – to use a Gricean amendment of his original definition –to believe that she believes it. Rather, she conveys something else**,** because she utters the sentence with the intention to get the hearer to *make-believe* this proposition, or to believe that she wants to get her to make believe it**.**

So, in the course of a fictive utterance, the speaker utters a sentence with a conventional meaning *p*, and thereby means that *q*. This formulation very much resembles the usual (but oversimplified) one of conversational implicatures. However, we do not wish to suggest that the real content of a fictive utterance is an implicature of its fictive, conventional content. And thereby we do not wish to suggest that the meant real content would somehow depend or supervene on the unmeant fictive content.[[2]](#footnote-2) Fortunately, for Grice, conversational implicatures are not the only examples of those cases where utterer’s meaning and sentence meaning come apart. Let’s consider this Gricean example:

The proprietor of a shop full of knickknacks for tourists is standing in his doorway in Port Said, sees a British visitor, and in dulcet tones and with an alluring smile says to him the Arabic for “You pig of an Englishmen”. I should be quite inclined to say that he had meant that the visitor was to come in, or something of the sort. I would not, of course, be in the least inclined to say that he had meant by the *words which he uttered* that the visitor was to come in […]. (Grice 1989b, pp. 101-102, italics in original)

We think it should be obvious that the merchant does not implicate “Come in to my shop” by uttering the words “You pig of an Englishmen”, since for Grice, implicature is always indirect meaning, i. e. in real cases of conversational implicatures, the presence of the implicated proposition must be worked out with the help of another one (see Grice 1989a, pp. 30-31). But in this example, the tourist cannot work out the intended meaning of the merchant’s utterance through grasping the literal meaning of his/her words – she probably cannot grasp it (since she does not speak Arabic), but she also does not need to grasp it in order to understand what the merchant meant.

One may wonder whether the utterers of a serious and a fictive utterance of the same sentence say something different or not, in the Gricean technical sense of the term. For if they do, it would undermine the pragmatic approach to some extent because “what is said” surely belongs to the semantic features of the utterance. Grice does not offer an explicit, concise definition of what it takes for someone to say something, however he makes it clear that it has to do with the conventional, compositional meaning of uttered sentences. As Stephen Neale notes: “On Grice’s account, what is said is to be found in the area where sentence meaning and utterer’s meaning overlap.” (Neale 1992, p. 40) So, when the two come apart, the speaker does not say anything, just, at least in some cases, *makes as if she is saying* something. The best-known instance of this latter phenomenon is Grice’s treatment of irony – when someone speaks ironically, she does not want the audience to believe the proposition expressed by the sentence she utters (or to believe that she believes it), so she does not mean, therefore does not say it.[[3]](#footnote-3)

We think that the situation is the same in the cases of fictive utterances. On uttering a sentence with fictional intentions, one also does not say anything in the Gricean sense of the word, since one does not want the audience to believe (or to believe that one believes) the proposition it expresses. Therefore, two utterers who utter the same sentence with different – serious assertive and fictional – intentions do not say something different. The latter one does not say anything, just makes as if she is saying something. This does not mean, of course, that fictive utterances had no serious effects or consequences. Although the proposition the uttered sentence literally expresses is not meant by the speaker, so it is not said in the highly technical Gricean sense of the word, there is (or at least could be) another proposition, the real content, which is indeed meant, even indirectly asserted by the speaker.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In sum, we think that according to the pragmatic approach to fictive utterances, in the course of a fictive utterance, the speaker

* is performing an illocutionary act which differs from the one performed in serious utterances;
* does not mean the conventional content of the sentence uttered;
* in some cases, she is performing an additional illocutionary act;
* in some cases, she means something else;
* does not say anything, just makes as if she is saying the proposition which is conventionally expressed by the sentence uttered.

Furthermore, the above results show that in the framework of the pragmatic approach, fictive utterances differ from serious ones due to the utterer’s communicative intentions.

Now, let’s see how this approach to fictive utterances could be applied to fictionalism in general. As already noted, fictionalism is the view that, in a given discourse, the participants’ utterances should be taken as fictive ones, that is, beside pretending to assert the fictive content of the utterance, one is also doing something else. According to what is this something else, one can distinguish, following Yablo (2001), between some varieties of fictionalism.

1. *Instrumentalism*: the speaker is not really asserting anything, only pretending to do so. Meanwhile she is making other kind of acts, in some cases other speech acts with other kind of illocutionary force, for instance, evaluating her fellows’ behavior, expressing emotions etc. It could also happen that one cannot characterize positively what kind of act she is really making in addition to pretend to assert a proposition.
2. *Meta-fictionalism*: the speaker is *quasi-asserting* the proposition conventionally expressed by the uttered sentence of her utterance, that is, quasi-asserting that “the X is so and so”, and by this she is *really asserting* another proposition, namely that “according to a certain fiction, the X is so and so”. So the *real content* of her utterance is about a fiction, which gives correctness conditions to this content, while the quasi-asserted proposition we call the *fictive content* of the utterance.
3. *Object-fictionalism*: the speaker is quasi-asserting the fictive content of her utterance (that the X is so and so), and by it she is really asserting that the world is in a certain condition, namely, in the one that makes it true that in the relevant fiction the X is so and so. In this version of fictionalism, the relevant fiction functions not as an object of the real assertion, as in meta-fictionalism, but as a *medium*: a system of rules that connects the fictive content with those real-world facts which make the former true in the relevant fiction. We can think about them as involving Walton’s “principles of generation”. Relying on these rules, the speaker can talk about these real-world state of affairs as the real content of her utterance.
4. *Figuralism*: the speaker is using some *representational aids* to speak figuratively, and by it she is really asserting that the real world is in a certain condition, the one that makes it correct to use figuratively the representational aids in question. Sometimes, one and the same thing can be the representational aid and the represented object. The real content of the fictive utterance will be the one that is represented by the figurative use of the representational aids.

In what follows, we will discuss object fictionalism and figuralism together, because both ascribe roughly the same structure and the same kind of real content to fictive utterances. Furthermore, following Richard Joyce (Joyce 2013, pp. 521-523), the latter three versions of fictionalism can be called *cognitivist fictionalism*, given that under these theories, one can assert something truly by uttering a sentence of the discourse in question. Instrumentalism, in turn, can be called *noncognitivist fictionalism*, since here the speaker does not assert anything truly.[[5]](#footnote-5)

At first glance, one could perhaps take the difference between serious and fictive utterances to be semantic in the cases of cognitivist fictionalism, and pragmatic in the noncognitivist cases. After all, in the former the difference lies in the content of the utterances, while in the latter in the illocutionary act we perform (if any). Contrary to this consideration, however, we think that the pragmatic approach can be applied smoothly in every above-mentioned variety of fictionalism.In all versions the speaker, in the course of her particular utterance, does not mean the conventional content of the uttered sentence. In the cognitivist cases she means some other proposition – about the fiction or about the real world. In the noncognitivist instrumentalist cases, she does not mean any other proposition, although perhaps means something non-propositionally, or maybe it remains unclear whether she means anything at all by the sentence uttered. Hence, the pragmatic approach is not an additional kind of fictionalism, and so, not an alternative to the current theories, but a way of interpreting them. According to it, one can posit any kind of real content of fictive utterances, be it one with a Lewisian fictional operator or a content with figurative representational aids, just they have to be taken not as a – deep or context-sensitive – semantic content of the utterance, but a pragmatic one.

1. **Some consequences of the pragmatic approach to fictionalist theories in general**

There are some well-known objections against fictionalist interpretation of any kind of discourse, that, in our opinion, become especially salient in the light of the pragmatic approach just presented. Before turning to them, we need to distinguish, following Stanley (2001), between *hermeneutic* and *revolutionary* fictionalism. The former takes the actual practice of the users of a given discourse to be fictional, while the latter only suggests it for the future. So, the former is a descriptive theory, while the latter is a normative one. The following objections are usually raised to hermeneutic fictionalism.

1. Prima facie, it seems to be very strange to take whole discourses as fictional (see Szabó 2001; Eklund 2019).

Fictive utterances manifest a certain divergence from standard serious ones. Even in cases where a nonstandard usage of an expression becomes standard, the meaning it conveys also becomes the literal meaning of the expression, as can be seen in the case of dead metaphors: ”Mary lived at the foot of the hill” (Szabó 2001, p. 305) is a literally true sentence(if it is true). If one totally separates the conventional meaning of sentences from their meaning in standard, typical usage, one cannot account for the divergence from standard usage. As Eklund (2019) puts it:

First, even setting radical use theories to the side, many philosophers have supposed that the semantic content of a sentence is somehow determined, at least largely, by what the sentence is customarily used to express. This would seem to entail that there must be a close connection between the semantic content of a sentence and how the sentence is customarily used.

This objection becomes more convincing if one applies the pragmatic approach. According to it, fictive utterances are always intentional deviations from standard conventional meaning. Consequently, to put it in the above Gricean terminology, if the occasional utterer’s meaning were always the standard conventional one, we could not account for those cases where plausibly more than one element of signification is present in an utterance, namely the conventional semantic one and that which is meant by the utterer. So, it seems to be hardly conceivable that one could take the standard usage to be fictional.

1. Hermeneutic fictionalism goes against our everyday conception of first-person authority over our conscious mental states (see Stanley 2001; Brock 2014; Eklund 2019).

The main motivation for choosing hermeneutic over revolutionary fictionalism is the intention not to attribute massive error to the users of the discourse. According to revolutionary fictionalism, they are always wrong when they utter some sentence in this discourse, because they undertake the commitment to believe a false or at least questionable propositional content. In other words, the speakers of the discourse undertake shaky metaphysical commitments. In the case of hermeneutic fictionalism, the users have never undertaken these kind of commitment, for they have always used the sentences at issue in a fictional way. However, as several theorists stressed, it does not seem to the actual users that they would speak fictionally. This is the so-called „phenomenological objection” to hermeneutic fictionalism. As Jason Stanley puts it:

[T]he hermeneutic fictionalist must maintain that the fact that the language user is pretending is not accessible to her, even in principle. Now, pretense is unquestionably a psychological attitude one bears to a content; it is in the same family of attitudes as belief. The advocate of hermeneutic fictionalism is therefore committed to the thesis that there is a (non-factive) psychological attitude that x can bear to a proposition, even though it is inaccessible to x that x bears that attitude (as opposed to some other in the family) to that proposition. […T]his introduces a novel and quite drastic form of failure of first-person authority over one’s own mental states. (Stanley 2001, pp. 46-47)

Stanley also gives an example of this strange situation (Stanley 2001, p. 51). Suppose that the best semantic theory for adverbs is that of Davidson’s, according to which in using adverbs, one tacitly refers to events. So, by asserting sentences with adverbs, one commits herself to the existence of events. However, someone who has not heard of Davidsonian semantics could sincerely deny that she is committed to the existence of events by uttering such sentences. In this kind of situation, it would be very odd to attribute some kind of pretense or make-believing to such a person – and even more to someone who died before the development of this semantic theory.

In response to this objection, Steven Yablo (Yablo 2001, p. 90; pp. 99-100) stresses that the hermeneutic fictionalist should consider pretense and make-believe not as conscious intentional acts, but as nonintentional simulations. Simulation is not a conscious activity for Yablo, and so sometimes one realizes only later, reflexively, that she has simulated to believe in a proposition, just like in the case of false perceptions, which could be even a great surprise to her. Furthermore, he stresses in his objection to Stanley’ example is that it is only the sentences of the discourse, or rather the semantic theory of them that bring in commitments automatically, and not the speaker. The speaker can commit herself to the theses of the semantic theory in question, but she can also avoid to do so, even without consciously pretending to undertake the commitment. As Yablo says it explicitly, “[t]here may be no deliberate act [of pretending]: just a finding on reflection that the acceptance was not so wholehearted as to count as belief” (Yablo 2001, p. 99).

Whether or not this answer seems to be convincing in general, it does not seem towork if we accept the pragmatic approach. The reason is that according to it, pretense-involving fictive utterances are to be accounted for in terms of the utterer’s communicative intentions, that is, what kind of illocutionary act she intends to perform, and what content she intends to convey by uttering a sentence in a fictive way. The latter also depends on what kind of reaction the speaker expects from the audience. Consequently, one intentionally commits herself to some non-fictive content during performing a fictive utterance. In other words, according to the pragmatic approach, whether or not a commitment is present in an utterance depends on what the utterer means by the utterance – one cannot speak fictionally inadvertently.

There is a further consequence of this consideration. We saw that it would be very implausible to think that the users of a given discourse have immersed themselves in fictional usage without realizing it. It is much more plausible to suppose that they consider the utterances they make as serious, nonfictional ones. Consequently, in attributing inadvertent fictional utterances to them, hermeneutic fictionalist philosophers still attribute to them a massive error. So, hermeneutic fictionalism is indeed an error theory, just like revolutionary fictionalism – although not a metaphysical, but a pragmatic one.[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. **The cognitive suicide case against mental fictionalism from the viewpoint of the pragmatic approach**

While the formerly discussed objections were raised to the fictionalist interpretation of any kind of discourse, there is a special objection which is explicitly against fictionalism about folk-psychology, namely the case of cognitive suicide (see esp. Joyce 2013; Parent 2013; Wallace 2016).

It is important to notice that this kind of self-defeat has been attributed not just to mental fictionalism but also to eliminative materialism. Against the latter, the case is that the eliminativist cannot believe her theory to be true, since according to her, there are no such states as beliefs. And if even she herself does not believe in her theory, why should we do? However, we think that this objection fails. In the case of the eliminativist, there is no real threat of self-defeat. This is because in formulating her theory, she does not need to present it in folk-psychological terms, so she does not necessarily contradict herself. What does make some trouble to her is that she surely uses these terms in her everyday talk, for example when she speaks about whether she believes in eliminative materialism. But even the latter does not form a part of the theory. She could respond to this challenge in different ways, one of which would be that in everyday conversation she uses folk psychological sentences in a fictional manner – at least until the advent of a new neurophysiological parlance.

However, the mental fictionalist seems to be in a bigger trouble, since, in contrast to eliminativism, folk psychological terms are already there in the formulation of her theory. Mental fictionalism states that speakers do not *aim* at truth with their utterances, that they *make-believe* that a fiction they *believe* to exist is true, etc. How can a mental fictionalist answer this objection, in the light of the fact that in formulating a theory, one makes assertions aiming at truth, i.e. real assertive illocutionary acts?

As a first step, she has to decide whether she will use folk psychological sentences seriously or fictionally in the course of formulating her theory. Choosing the first option, maybe she can say that sometimes even fictionalists could seriously utter the sentences of the relevant discourse. Now, in order to evaluate this answer, it is useful to distinguish between antirealist and agnostic mental fictionalism.[[7]](#footnote-7) While the former is committed to ontological eliminativism concerning mental states, and so to the falsity of folk psychological sentences, the latter is not. We think that the best reconstruction of the motivations of agnostic mental fictionalist is that she considers the truth values of folk psychological sentences as irrelevant to her communicative goals. In other words, she commits herself to the claim that the normal uses of folk psychological sentences are not assertive, i. e. these utterances do not aim at the truth, while the propositions expressed by the uttered sentences could be either true or false.

It is easy to see that the antirealistfictionalist cannot seriously use folk psychological sentences in formulating her theory, because in attempting to do so she would have to commit herself to the falsity of the sentences of the theory. Thus, she could not avoid the case of cognitive suicide – she would make assertions without one of their necessary conditions, namely the sincerity condition.

The agnostic mental fictionalist, on the other hand, also cannot claim that she uses folk psychological sentences to make serious utterances while formulating her theory, because it commits her to taking utterances of folk psychological sentences as not aiming at truth, that is, as not being genuine assertions. It would be an *ad hoc* move if she considered the formulation of her theory as an exception to this.

Consequently, we can say that in formulating her theory, the mental fictionalist uses folk psychological sentences fictionally. But what kind of fictive utterances does she make?

She surely cannot be an instrumentalist, since, as we saw, according to this type of fictionalism, the speaker does not assert anything, just pretends to assert the fictive content of the uttered sentences. This is incompatible with the assumption that one asserts propositions in the course of formulating a theory. Furthermore, she cannot be a metafictionalist, either, since this would amount to the assumption that while uttering folk psychological sentences in the formulation of her theory, she really asserts that according to the fiction of folk psychology, such-and-such is the case. However, this interpretation of the utterances at issue presupposes that folk psychology is indeed (or can be viewed as) a fiction; that is, it presupposes the truth of the theory under formulation. This move obviously begs the question, for in this case the understanding of the theory would presuppose its truth.

Nevertheless, she can be an object-fictionalist or a figuralist. Recall that under these conceptions, speakers assert something about the real world by quasi-asserting the fictive content of a folk psychological sentence, or just by using its words in a figurative way as representational aids. After all, why could the mental fictionalist not say that when she utters folk psychological sentences in the course of theory-formulation, she uses them fictionally and thereby asserts something truly about the world which, in turn, makes the uttered sentences true in the fiction of folk psychology? That is, she could address the problem of cognitive suicide in a way very similar to the eliminativist**’**s response, As Richard Joyce puts it:

Instead of recommending that we make-believe rather than believe propositions of the form “Mary believes that p”, the fictionalist recommends that we adopt brain state M rather than brain state B toward such propositions. Instead of analyzing propositions of the form “Mary believes that p” as “According to folk psychology Mary believes that p”, and then claiming that the latter maybe truly believed, the fictionalist can say that instead of taking brain state B toward the proposition “Mary believes that p” we should take brain state B toward the proposition “According to folk psychology Mary believes that p”. (Joyce 2013, p. 534)

In these passage Joyce shows how to interpret a metafictionalist mental fictionalist standpoint in an object-fictionalist way.

In brief, if our analysis of cognitive suicide is more or less correct, we can claim that the only tenable way of preventing this from being the case is to say that in the course of formulating her theory, the mental fictionalist is speaking in an object-fictionalist (or figuralist) way. Nevertheless, if we interpret fictive utterances in the spirit of the pragmatic approach, the position of the mental fictionalist becomes more complicated. The assumption that fictive utterances differ from normal serious ones in their pragmatic features gives rise to a bunch of new problems. After all, the object-fictionalist’s answer above explicitly states that when uttering folk-psychological sentences in the course of formulating mental fictionalism, the speaker just quasi-asserts the folk psychological fictive content of these sentences and really asserts some facts about brain states. However, we saw that if one accepts the pragmatic approach, this difference becomes equivalent to that between meaning the conventional content of the sentence uttered and meaning some other, occasional meaning of it. There will be also a difference between the kinds of illocutionary acts she performs in uttering these sentences. And, lastly, we saw that fictional uses make a difference to whether the speaker is saying or just makes as if she is saying something by an utterance, at least according to the pragmatic approach. All these differences, in turn, are – at least partly – determined by the intentions of the speaker. These intentions concern the kind of reaction the utterer expects from the hearer – and these reactions are also mental states belonging to the domain of folk psychology. In short, the main concepts of pragmatics are defined in folk-psychological terms. So, if the mental fictionalist claims that she uses folk psychological sentences fictionally in the formulation of her theory, she owes us a redefinition of these concepts, given that a viable mental fictionalist theory should contain an account of what it takes to make fictive utterances.

In other words, if one sticks to the pragmatic approach, it is not enough for the mental fictionalist to claim that instead of saying that “We make-believe rather than believe propositions of the form »Mary believes that *p*«” one should say that “We adopt brain state M rather than brain state B toward such propositions.” She also has to give us some reinterpretation of sentences such as “The utterer intends the hearer to believe, or make believe that *p*”; “The speaker does not commit herself to a belief in the truth of the expressed proposition”; or “The speaker intends or does not intend to follow the conventional usage of the relevant terms” etc. In other words, she is required to explain the difference between

* asserting and quasi-asserting a proposition;
* making an assertoric speech act and making another, perhaps explicitly fictive speech act;
* saying something and just making as if to say something;
* meaning the conventional content of the uttered sentence and meaning occasionally some other content by uttering it.

In short, the mental fictionalist has to account for the difference between fictive and serious utterances without using standard folk psychological terms. This would be an enormously difficult, almost impossible task. One can wonder whether it is worth paying this price instead of choosing another theory of folk psychological discourse, be it a realist or an eliminativist one.[[8]](#footnote-8)

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1. For Searle, the semantic features of a sentence go far beyond the compositional sum of the words it contains. „The principle that the meaning of a sentence is entirely determined by the meanings of its meaningful parts I take as obviously true; what is not so obviously true, however, is that these include more than words (or morphemes) and surface word order. The meaningful components of a sentence include also its deep syntactic structure and the stress and intonation contour of its utterance.” (Searle 1968, p. 416) The inclusion of features of the utterance of a sentence into its semantic features is, of course, a highly questionable and idiosyncratic move by Searle. Nevertheless, it would be far from his intentions if one acknowledged the presence of some semantic markers of fictive utterances. This move would lead us to the acknowledgement of occasional sentence meanings and semantic ambiguity – exactly those things from which Searle kept himself away (see his 1969 Ch. 6; 1979a). Anyway, in this paper by semantic features and properties we mean only the features and properties of the sentence as abstract object, independently of its various utterances. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We think this is also true to the majority of Gricean conversational implicatures, since any kind of implicated content could be attached to a sentence meaning, given the appropriate context of utterance. Only the so-called generalized conversational implicatures are tied tightly to some semantically individuated expressions, but they are attached just to a few expressions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. However, she wants the hearer to grasp the proposition expressed by the uttered sentence (*p*), and through grasping this, to grasp the other meant one (*q*). That is why, in the case of irony, although the speaker is not saying that *p*, she nevertheless makes as if she is saying that *p*, and thereby implicating that *q*. These conditions are not satisfied in the example of the Arab merchant, so there is no proposition uttered as if he has said it, and there is no implicature either. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Moreover, one should not forget that not all utterances appear in a fictional work – in a roman, or a play – has to be taken as a fictive utterance. As, for example Searle also stresses: “Sometimes the author of a fictional story will insert utterances in the story which are not fictional and not part of the story. To take a famous example, Tolstoy begins Anna Karenina with the sentence ’Happy families are all happy in the same way, unhappy families unhappy in their separate, different ways.’ That, I take it, is not a fictional but a serious utterance. It is a genuine assertion. It is part of the novel but not part of the fictional story.” (Searle 1979b, pp. 73-74) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This distinction can be viewed as corresponding to that of Eklund’s between content and force fictionalism (Eklund 2019). He thinks that the two can even be combined: “A fictionalist can hold both that in an (ordinary) utterance of sentence of *D* [the relevant discourse], the literal content of the sentence is conveyed but not asserted, and that some content other than the literal content is asserted.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Perhaps there are differences in the extent of the attributed error as a function of the discourse interpreted in a hermeneutic fictionalist way. For example, it does not seem to us absolutely implausible that users of the discourse of possible worlds may more or less intentionally pretend to believe the propositions containing reference to possible worlds. Maybe, after some reflection, they can see their utterances as fictional ones. By contrast, hermeneutic fictionalism about, say, the discourse of ordinary physical objects seems to be an error theory to a greater extent. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This distinction is similar to a remark made by Ted Parent (Parent 2013, p. 617, fn. 6), only we speak about “antirealist” rather than “eliminativist” fictionalism in order to avoid the possible confusion with eliminative materialism. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. We are grateful to Tibor Bárány, Boldizsár Eszes, Meg Wallace and Zsófia Zvolenszky for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay. We are indebted to the audience at the conference entitled „Mental Fictionalism”, Budapest 2019. The research leading to this paper was supported by NKFI (Hungarian Scientific Research Fund), grant no. K123839 and grant no. K132911. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)