

IV. CREATURES OF FICTION

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I

SOME philosophers say there are things that do not exist. In saying this, they mean to assert more than the obvious truth that, on some occasions, sentences like "Mr. Pickwick does not exist" can be used as vehicles of true assertions: They mean to assert that there *are*, there really *are*, certain objects that have, among their other attributes (such as jollity and rotundity), the attribute of non-existence. Let us call such philosophers Meinongians and their doctrine Meinongianism.¹ One argument for Meinongianism proceeds by examples drawn from fiction, or so the Meinongian would say. A typical *anti*-Meinongian, however, would probably want to describe a typical application of this method as follows: "My Meinongian friend uttered 'Mr. Pickwick does not exist' assertively. Then he described what he had done in uttering these words as his having 'given an example of a non-existent object.'" Our typical anti-Meinongian has an obvious reason for so describing the Meinongian's argument. For he is, of course, going to go on to say something like: "But his description of what he did was incorrect; for even if the sentence he uttered was or expressed a truth, its subject-term, 'Mr. Pickwick,' does not denote anything. Therefore, he did not, in uttering this sentence, succeed in giving an example of *anything*, much less of something non-existent."

So the Meinongian thinks that "Mr. Pickwick" is a name for something and that what it names is

non-existent.² The typical anti-Meinongian thinks that "Mr. Pickwick" is not a name for anything. It will be noticed that their positions are contraries, not contradictories. It would also be at least formally possible to maintain that "Mr. Pickwick" is a name for something and that what it names exists. In this paper, I wish to defend just this thesis. More generally, I shall defend the thesis that there are things I shall call "creatures of fiction," and that every single one of them exists.

I shall show that this thesis has certain advantages over both the Meinongian and what I have called the "typical anti-Meinongian" theories of the ontology of fiction. Its advantage over the Meinongian theory is this: Meinongianism *either* involves a bit of technical terminology that has never been given a satisfactory explanation, *or else* necessitates an abandonment of what are commonly called "the laws of logic." And the theory I shall present does not have this drawback. Consider the Meinongian's claim that there are things that don't exist. If *I* were asked to render this claim into the quantifier-variable idiom, I would write

$$(\exists x) \sim (\exists y)(x = y).$$

But the result of prefixing a tilde to this formula is a theorem of logic. Now the Meinongian will probably think my translation wrong-headed. I would expect him to say something like, "Either '($\exists x$)' means 'there is an x ' or it means 'there exists an x .' You can't have it both ways. Let's say it means the latter. Then you need to introduce a

¹ This is merely a convenient label. It is a nice question whether Meinong himself was a "Meinongian" in the present sense. Meinong would certainly say that the English sentence "There are things that do not exist" expressed a truth. But this truth it expressed would be about "*ideale Gegenstände*," ideal objects, such as Platonic forms and numbers. These subsist [*bestehen*] but do not exist [*existieren*], since there *are* such things, but they are not spatio-temporal objects. (On this matter, see note 5 to the present essay.) The proposition *I* mean to express by "There are things that do not exist" is, I think, that which Meinong expresses by the words, "There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects" ["... *es gibt Gegenstände, von denen gilt, dass es dergleichen Gegenstände nicht gibt* . . ."] ("*Über Gegenstandstheorie*," *Alexius Meinong Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Rudolf Haller and Rudolf Kindiger, in collaboration with Roderick M. Chisholm [Graz, 1969-1973] Vol. II, p. 490). But it is not clear how seriously he meant these words to be taken, since he prefaced them with "One who was fond of paradoxical modes of expression could . . . say." On this topic, see R. M. Chisholm's very enlightening paper (from which most of the points made in this footnote are drawn), "Beyond Being and Nonbeing" in *New Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Herbert Feigl, Wilfrid Sellars, and Keith Lehrer (New York, 1972), pp. 15-22.

² There is, of course, a good deal more to Meinongianism than its treatment of the referents of names like "Mr. Pickwick" and "Hamlet." Even if the theory presented in the present paper, which treats *only* of names drawn from works of fiction, is true, it might yet be the case that the Meinongian is right in thinking that "the golden mountain," "Pegasus," "the round square," and so on, denote certain objects and that these objects do not exist.

new piece of notation for the former—say, ‘ (Ix) .’
Then symbolize my general claim as

$$(Ix) \sim (\exists y)(x=y).$$

I must confess I do not understand the words I have put into the Meinongian’s mouth. I do not see any important difference between “there is” and “there exists,” and, therefore, I do not see how it is I am supposed to use “ (Ix) ” and “ $(\exists x)$.” Nor is this the end of the Meinongian’s difficulties with the usual “laws of logic.” For if the Meinongian is asked, “About your Mr. Pickwick—has he an even number of hairs on his head?,” he will answer (Dickens having been noncommittal on this matter), “He neither has nor lacks the property of having an even number of hairs on his head; he is therefore what I call an *incomplete object*.” And to say this, I would say, is to say that some instances of

$$(\forall x)(Fx \vee \sim Fx)$$

are false or express falsehoods, though this formula is a theorem of logic. Of course the Meinongian will again find my symbolic formula ambiguous. He will perhaps insist that I choose between two universal quantifiers, one corresponding to “ $\sim (Ix)\sim$,” and the other to “ $\sim (\exists x)\sim$,” and will claim that he assents to the invalidity only of “ $\sim (Ix)\sim (Fx \vee \sim Fx)$.” But this does not make the distinction between “ $(\exists x)$ ” and “ (Ix) ” any easier to understand.

These difficulties make the typical anti-Meinongian’s position look very attractive by comparison. This philosopher will admit that sentences like “Mr. Pickwick does not exist” and “Mr. Pickwick is jolly” may, in certain contexts (correcting someone who takes *The Pickwick Papers* for history; giving a summary of the plot of that novel), be used by their utterers to express truths. But, he will insist, the utterer of such sentences does not (except in a Pickwickian sense) refer to anyone or anything when he utters them. Or, if our anti-Meinongian does not mind talking about such sentences “out of context” (this is how we represented him earlier), he may say that their subject-term does not denote anything, or that they are not subject to existential generalization.

Of course our anti-Meinongian must be able to explain how it is we are able to use a declarative sentence having “Mr. Pickwick” as its grammatical subject to express a truth when “Mr. Pickwick” is not a name for anything. Usually, when such an explanation is demanded, the anti-Meinongian will produce a *paraphrase* of the “Pickwick”-sentence; that is, he will devise a sentence he claims “really

says the same thing as” the “Pickwick”-sentence, in which “Mr. Pickwick” does not even *seem* to function as a name. For example, the anti-Meinongian might offer as a paraphrase of “Mr. Pickwick is jolly” the sentence “If *The Pickwick Papers* were not a novel but a true record of events, then there *would have been* a jolly man called ‘Mr. Pickwick.’” I do not say this would be a *good* paraphrase. Some philosophers might argue that it fails as a paraphrase because it contains a reference to a novel, which the original does not, and, moreover, contains a reference to the words “Mr. Pickwick,” which the original does not. (Of course, it would be possible to reply that the original makes a *covert* reference to both these things, which the paraphrase has the virtue of making explicit.) Whether or not this is a good paraphrase, however, it is a good *example* of the sort of thing I mean by “paraphrase.”

Well, what is wrong with “typical anti-Meinongianism”? Or perhaps we should ask, What is wrong with adopting it as a *program*?, since, at least as I have presented it, it is not an ontological doctrine, but rather a proposal to stick to a certain rather vaguely defined method in dealing with a certain class of ontological problems. I have no particular *a priori* objection to anti-Meinongianism, which has the advantages of leaving the laws of logic unviolated and of requiring no mysterious terminology. And perhaps it appeals to a “robust sense of reality,” or, at least, appeals to those philosophers who like to describe themselves as having such a sense. But I am not sure the program it proposes can be carried out. I have no knock-down argument for this, though I shall in the sequel display some sentences that, at the very least, are going to force the typical anti-Meinongian to produce very messy paraphrases. But I am not, in this paper, primarily interested in refuting either “typical anti-Meinongianism” or Meinongianism. I wish only to present, in a very sketchy way, the *prima facie* cases against the way these theories deal with those of our assertions and beliefs that are “about fictional entities,” in order to present a *prima facie* case for the rival theory I shall presently propose.

II

At this point I am reluctantly going to abandon Mr. Pickwick, despite the fact that, like that old war horse, Pegasus, he has a good claim to tenure in the office of Exemplary Nonentity. I turn

instead to Mrs. Gamp. I do this because I have been able to find sentences "about her" that serve my purposes better than any sentences I know of "about Pickwick." Here are three of them:

- (1) She was a fat old woman, this Mrs. Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up, and only showing the white of it (*Martin Chuzzlewit*, XIX)
- (2) Mrs. Sarah Gamp was, four-and-twenty years ago, a fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness (From Dickens's preface to an 1867 edition of *Martin Chuzzlewit*)
- (3) Mrs. Gamp . . . is the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels (Sylvia Bank Manning, *Dickens as Satirist* [New Haven, 1971] p. 79).

Now a very naive Meinongian might describe what the authors of these sentences were doing in writing them as follows. "There is a certain non-existent woman, Mrs. Gamp, and both Dickens and Professor Manning wrote about her. In writing (2), Dickens asserted that, in 1843, she was a fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness; in writing (1), he asserted of her that she was [in 1843?] fat, old, husky-voiced, and so on, while, in writing (3), Professor Manning asserted of her that she was [in 1971?] the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels."

Now whatever else may be wrong with the naive Meinongian's description of what the writers of these sentences were doing, surely he is wrong in so assimilating the writing of (1) to the writing of (2) and (3). Sentences (2) and (3) were used by their authors as the vehicles of assertions; (1) was not. It would make sense to say that the authors of (2) and (3), in writing these sentences, wrote something true or wrote something false. If the average "hired attendant on the poor in sickness" in 1843 was rather like the popular picture of Florence Nightingale, then Dickens, in writing (2), wrote something *false* in the same sense as that in which he would have written something false if he had

written that he had composed *Martin Chuzzlewit* while living in China. But if someone had been looking over Dickens's shoulder when Dickens was writing (1), and had said to him, "No, no, you've got her all wrong. She is quite thin, about twenty-four, and her voice is melodious," this would simply have made no sense.

Thus, there is a certain sense in which the fact that novelists do things like writing sentence (1) is not directly relevant to questions about the ontology of fictional entities. There is no point in debating what sort of thing Dickens was writing about when he wrote (1) or debating what sort of fact or proposition he was asserting, since he was not writing about anything and was asserting nothing.³ Sentence (1) does not represent an *attempt* at reference or description.⁴

Sentences (2) and (3), however, do represent assertions: their authors in writing them are expressing propositions of some sort, and these propositions *seem* to be about Mrs. Gamp. A more sophisticated Meinongian will say that *these* sentences, at any rate, are about a non-existent entity, even if (1) is not. Like this Meinongian, I suggest we take Dickens's and Manning's uses of sentences (2) and (3) at face value: as assertions about a certain entity called "Mrs. Gamp." Unlike him, however, I suggest that what Dickens's and Manning's assertions are about exists. In Part III, I shall attempt to answer certain questions that must be answered by anyone who takes these suggestions seriously.

III

Question: Why should we take (2) and (3) as being *about* Mrs. Gamp, in any sense except the uninteresting sense in which "The average American owns 1.02 cars" is "about the average American"? *Answer:* Because, while "the average American" is not a name for anything, "Mrs. Gamp" *is* a name for something—or, if you prefer, there is such a thing as Mrs. Gamp—and if there is such a thing as Mrs. Gamp, then *obviously* (2) and (3) are about her. *Question:* But why do you say there *is* such a thing as Mrs. Gamp? *Answer:* Because there *are* such things as characters in novels. And if there are such things as characters in novels,

³ This is a very important point. The reader who does not concede it will get very little out of reading further. The argument in the text of the present paper is not sufficient to establish it. For arguments that are sufficient, see Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, 1974) Ch. VIII, pp. 153–163 especially, and J. O. Urmson, "Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 13 (1976), pp. 153–157.

⁴ This is true despite the fact that (1) is what is called a "descriptive" sentence by literary critics. This term is applied to sentences of fiction that would be descriptive sentences in a literal sense if the works of fiction in which they occurred were historical records.

then Mrs. Gamp is one of them. Anyone who said there were such things as characters in novels, and went on to say that there was no such thing as Mrs. Gamp would simply be factually ignorant. He would be like someone who said that there were such things as irrational numbers, but no such thing as π . *Question*: But why do you say there are such things as characters in novels? *Answer*: Consider sentences like the following:

- (4) There are characters in some 19th-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any 18th-century novel
- (5) Some characters in novels are closely modeled on actual people, while others are wholly products of the literary imagination, and it is usually impossible to tell which characters fall into which of these categories by textual analysis alone
- (6) Since 19th-century English novelists were, for the most part, conventional Englishmen, we might expect most novels of the period to contain stereotyped comic Frenchmen or Italians; but very few such characters exist.

These sentences, or the propositions expressed by them, certainly *seem* to assert that there are things of a certain sort: if anyone were to utter one of these sentences assertively, it would *seem* that what he would say could be true only if there were such things as characters in novels. Take (4), for instance. If I were asked to render this sentence into the quantifier-variable idiom, I would produce something like:

- (4)* $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a character in a 19th-century novel} \ \& \ (\forall y) [y \text{ is a character in an 18th-century novel} \ \supset \ x \text{ is presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is } y])$.

And, by the rules of formal logic, (4)* yields:

- (7) $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a character in a 19th-century novel})$.

Therefore, since (4) is true, or expresses a true proposition, or is such that if it were uttered in appropriate circumstances its utterer would say something true, and since (4)* is a correct translation of (4) into the regimented idiom of formal logic, and since the rules of formal logic are truth-preserving, and since "There are such things as characters in 19th-century novels" is a correct translation of (7)

into ordinary English, it follows that there are such things as characters in 19th-century novels. And from this it follows that there are such things as characters in novels.

Question: There are several premises in that argument that one might want to look at rather carefully. But let's grant for the sake of argument that there are such things as characters in novels; What do you mean by saying they *exist*? *Answer*: Just what you granted and no more. "There is no cure for cancer," "There is no such thing as a cure for cancer," "A cure for cancer does not exist," and "There exists no cure for cancer" all mean more or less the same thing. Some of them might be slightly more appropriate things to say in certain contexts of utterance than others, but it is not possible that anyone should utter one of these sentences and thereby say something true, and someone else simultaneously utter another of them and thereby say something false. And the same point applies whether we are talking about cures, cabbages, countries, cylindrical algebras, or characters in novels. There is (or exists) a tendency in some quarters to think that "there are" is a harmless and rather empty expression, while "exist" is such an important word that anyone who uses it takes on a great weight of ontological responsibility. But "exist" in (6) above, and "there are" in (4), and, for that matter, "some" in (5), have just exactly the same sort of import. And this is *always* the case, no matter what sort of thing we are talking about.⁵

Question: But if Mrs. Gamp really existed, couldn't I, if I had been alive in 1843, have gone and talked with her? *Answer*: Obviously not, since she did exist then (she exists *now*, in fact) and you couldn't have. But now you are touching on matters I will deal with in Part IV. *Question*: But I find her mysterious. What *sort* of thing is she? What ontological categories does she belong to? *Answer*: Well, she is, as I said, a character in a novel. And characters in novels are members of a category of things I shall call *creatures of fiction*. Some things belonging to this category that are not characters in novels are the Wife of Bath, Polyphemus, the Forest of Arden, Dotheboys Hall, and Professor Moriarty's book *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*. And creatures of fiction belong to a broader category of things I shall call *theoretical entities of literary criticism*, a category that also includes plots, sub-

⁵ "He [Rush Rhees] thinks we use "exists" chiefly in connexion with physical objects' . . . The nearest newspaper shows the contrary; 'conditions for a durable agreement do not yet exist', or the like, is the commonest currency of journalism." P. T. Geach, review of Rush Rhees's *Without Answers* in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 68 (1971), pp. 531-532.

plots, novels (as opposed to tangible *copies* of novels), poems, meters, rhyme schemes, borrowings, influences, digressions, episodes, recurrent patterns of imagery, and literary forms ("the novel," "the sonnet"). Or this category includes such things as these if there *are* any such things as these. (Cf. the sequence: the thing that caused this trace in the cloud-chamber, electron, sub-atomic particle, theoretical entity of physics.)

Question: And just what are theoretical entities?

Answer: That's a very good and not very clear question. Of course, it's not *your* fault it's not clear. But let's look at it this way. There are various "theoretical disciplines" like physics and literary criticism. (The former of these is a science, the latter not.) There are various sentences in which the "conceptual machinery" of these disciplines is inextricably embedded: you couldn't *say* what these sentences say without employing theoretical vocabularies like the ones these disciplines employ. Some of these disciplines may be such that we are comfortable with saying that nothing interesting that can be said only by means of their special vocabularies is ever *true*. (Astrology, for example.) But for many disciplines (physics, say) this would be an absurd thing to say. (Like many absurd things, it has been said.) And I think it would be absurd to think that nothing that can be said only in the language of literary criticism is true, especially if we take "literary criticism" to include all "informed" discourse about the nature, content, and value of literary works. And, sometimes, if what is said in a piece of literary criticism is to be true, then there must be entities of a certain type, entities that are never the subjects of non-literary discourse, and which make up the extensions of the theoretical general terms of literary criticism. It is these that I call "theoretical entities of literary criticism." To say this much, however, is not to answer the question, Which theoretical terms of criticism must be taken as having special sorts of entity as their extension?, or the question, Which, if any, of these terms is in principle eliminable from critical discourse? But I think that "discourse about characters," which is the sort of critical discourse that is our present concern, is not *easily* eliminable from literary criticism. I see no way to do it, at any rate. That is, I see no way to paraphrase sentences (4), (5), and (6), and others like them, in such a way as to produce sentences that seem to "say the same thing" and which do not involve "quantification over creatures of fiction." (This is not a very carefully stated claim; taken

literally, it is obviously false, since it would be easy enough to paraphrase these sentences in such a way that the paraphrases involve quantification only over, say, unit sets whose members are creatures of fiction. Don't take it *that* literally.)

Question: But isn't finding such a paraphrase a fairly easy task? Take sentence (4). It seems obvious that, once all the 18th- and 19th-century novels have been written, once certain novelists, writing during certain centuries, have finished putting words down on paper in a certain order, then the *facts* relevant to the truth-value of (4) are completely settled, and the truth-value of (4) is determined. Suppose a philosopher is guided by this thought and suppose he is willing to admit novels and classes into his ontology but not willing to admit creatures of fiction. Then he might simply invent an open sentence, e.g., "*x dwelphs y*," which is satisfied only by pairs of classes of novels, and which (however its semantics is to be spelled out in general) is satisfied by the pair <the class of 19th-century novels, the class of 18th-century novels> if and only if what is expressed by (4) is *true*. Couldn't this philosopher then offer "The class of 19th-century novels dwelphs the class of 18th-century novels" as a paraphrase of (4) that does not involve quantification over creatures of fiction? *Answer:* In a certain trivial sense, this device works. The "dwelphs"-sentence, on the usage of "dwelph" your philosopher has stipulated, expresses the same proposition as (4)—or, at least, expresses a proposition necessarily equivalent to that proposition. But this is not *all* that is required of a good paraphrase. To see this, consider

- (8) Every female character in any 18th-century novel is such that there is some character in some 19th-century novel who is presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than she is.

Now the proposition expressed by this sentence is certainly a logical consequence of the proposition expressed by (4). *I*, who accept the existence of things I call "characters in novels," can account for this fact: (8) is a translation into ordinary English of a sentence in the regimented quantifier-variable idiom that is a *formal* consequence of (4)*, which is a translation of (4) into the quantifier-variable idiom. But if someone were to paraphrase (8) into a sentence consisting of two class-terms flanking a relation-sign (this is what you just now imagined a philosopher doing with (4); let's imagine the paraphrase of (8) looks like this:

“The class of 18th-century novels praphs the class of 19th-century novels”), he would have no way to *account for* the fact that his paraphrase of (8) expresses a proposition that is a logical consequence of the proposition expressed on his usage by “The class of 19th-century novels dwelphs the class of 18th-century novels.”

Because of this consideration, I lay down the following condition of adequacy on any attempt to paraphrase away quantification (or apparent quantification) over “creatures of fiction”: an adequate paraphrase must not be such as to leave us without an account of the logical consequences of (the propositions expressed by) the paraphrased sentences. Almost certainly, any paraphrase that satisfies this condition will have a quantificational structure not much simpler than the (apparent) quantificational structure of its “original.”

I am not saying it would be *impossible* to devise paraphrases of (4), (5), (6), and similar sentences, that satisfy this condition. Probably the most promising candidates for such paraphrases would involve quantifications mainly over “character-names” (e.g., “Sophia Western,” “Rodya Raskolnikov”), the sentences of fiction in which these “names” occur, and the open sentences that can be got by replacing them in these sentences by variables. I do not myself see any way of doing this, but perhaps someone cleverer than I will think of some way to do it.

But (if I may ask *you* a question) why should anyone bother to try to construct such paraphrases? It would probably be very difficult to do this, and the paraphrases would probably be long and messy if they could be got at all; and maybe they *couldn't* be got, in which case one would have been wasting one's no doubt valuable time in trying to get them. So why embark on such an enterprise?

Compare this question with a similar question in the ontology of mathematics: Why should anyone bother to try to construct paraphrases of such sentences as “There is a prime number between 18 and 20” and “There exists a least number that can be expressed in more than one way as the sum of two cubes” that do not involve quantification over numbers? One reason someone might have (there could be others, such as a desire to indulge one's “taste for desert landscapes”) is that he finds the idea of there being such things as numbers a very puzzling one. How *could* there be things (he might ask) that *exist* in the same sense as that in which you and I exist, which *have properties* in the same sense as that in which “moderate-sized speci-

mens of dry goods” have properties, and *bear relations* to one another in the same sense as that in which stones and bits of stick bear relations to one another, and which are, nevertheless, intangible and eternal?

And perhaps there are philosophers who find the very idea of creatures of fiction objectionable. We shall investigate just what it is that might be objectionable about them in Part IV. (That is, we shall investigate the question, What is it that is objectionable about creatures of fiction *per se*? We shall not attempt to answer objections that stem from a conviction that theoretical or abstract entities *in general* are objectionable.)

IV

Just what is puzzling or objectionable about Mrs. Gamp? Well, consider the following properties

being old
being fat
being fond of gin
being named “Sarah Gamp”
having a friend called “Mrs. Prig.”

No one (in 1843) had *all* these properties. (If by chance someone did, we could enlarge the list.) But, someone may argue, Mrs. Gamp has, or had, or is supposed to have had all these properties. Thus, Mrs. Gamp is a very puzzling entity indeed, and, since this point could be generalized so as to apply to all “creatures of fiction,” any ontology that includes them is objectionable.

This is a very powerful argument. The Meinongian and I are equally obliged to respond to it. *He* will deny the premise that no one has (or had in 1843) these properties. To the objection that it is simply an empirical fact that no one in 1843 had these properties, he will reply that this is not an empirical fact. What is an empirical fact, he will say, is that no one *existent* in 1843 had these properties. This reply is not available to me, however, who regard “no one existent” as a long-winded way of saying “no one.” *I* shall deny the premise that Mrs. Gamp has or had these properties. This thesis will probably strike the reader as odd. But I think it is not so odd as it sounds, and, in fact something formally very much like it is a familiar philosophical doctrine.

Let us turn for a moment to the Cartesian psychology, that is, to the doctrine that each of us is an immaterial substance. Suppose someone were to say to Descartes, “Your theory is obviously wrong since Jones here has all the following properties:

being tangible
 being six foot tall
 weighing 190 pounds
 being mainly pinkish-white in color,

and these properties could not be had by an immaterial substance." Descartes, of course, will reply that Jones does *not* have the properties on this list. What he *has*, Descartes tells us, are properties like these:

thinking about Vienna
 being free from pain
 being in a state of Grace
 animating a body.

Nonetheless, Descartes will concede, Jones bears a certain intimate relation to the properties on the former list that is not the relation of "having" or "exemplifying" but, rather, the relation of "animating a body that has or exemplifies." Descartes will further concede that in ordinary speech we often say "is" when *strictly speaking* we should say "animates a body that is": what looks like predication in ordinary speech is not always predication.

I want to say something similar with respect to Mrs. Gamp. Here are some of the properties she *has*:

being a character in a novel
 being a theoretical entity of literary criticism
 having been created by Dickens
 being a satiric villainess.

Moreover, if Dickens and Professor Manning are right, she has the following properties:

being a fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness in 1843
 being the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels.

Moreover, *if* existence is a property (an hypothesis the correctness of which I take no stand on in this paper), she has that, too. Thus, the properties Mrs. Gamp *has* are just those "literary" properties that are appropriate to what she is: a theoretical entity of criticism. If she shares any properties with you and me, they are "high-category" properties like existence, self-identity, and non-identity with any ordinal number.

Now just as Jones, according to Descartes, does not *have* the property of being tangible, so Mrs. Gamp, according to me, does not *have* the property of being fat. Nevertheless, just as Jones, on the Cartesian view, bears a certain intimate relation

to tangibility, Mrs. Gamp bears a certain intimate relation to fatness. And just as, on the Cartesian view, we may *say* "Jones is six foot tall" and be talking *about* an immaterial substance without thereby *predicating* being six foot tall of that immaterial substance, so, on the present view, we may *say* "Mrs. Gamp is fond of gin" and be talking *about* a theoretical entity of criticism without thereby *predicating* fondness for gin of that theoretical entity of criticism.

Such circumlocutions as were employed in the preceding paragraph are cumbersome. Clearly it would be to our advantage to introduce some name or other for this special relation that Mrs. Gamp bears to fatness and fondness for gin. For want of a better name, I shall call it "ascription." Thus, we might write, "Fatness is ascribed to Mrs. Gamp" if we wished to express the proposition expressed in ordinary usage by "Mrs. Gamp is fat" without using what looks like the "is" of predication. But I think we had better make ascription a three-term relation. For consider the fact that the sentences "Shiela Smith was fat" and "Shiela Smith was not fat" might appear in one and the same novel, owing either to the author's inadvertence or to the passage of narrative time. Suppose there was such a novel. Should we, describing its content in a review, write "Shiela Smith was fat"? This would be misleading. If the two sentences appeared in the novel owing to the author's inadvertence, clearly we ought to write something like "Shiela Smith is described as fat in Chapter Four. But in Chapter Six we are told she is not fat." In order to provide for cases like this, let us use the following open sentence in asserting that the ascription relation holds: " x is ascribed to y in z " [hereinafter abbreviated "A(x, y, z)"]. For any x, y , and z , if A(x, y, z), then x is a property, y is a creature of fiction, and z is what I shall call a "place." A *place* is either a work of fiction (such as a novel, short story, or narrative poem) or a part or section thereof, even a part or section that is so short as to be conterminous with a single (occurrence of a) sentence or clause. The proposition commonly expressed by "Mrs. Gamp is fat" we may express by "A(fatness, Mrs. Gamp, *Martin Chuzzlewit*)" or "A(fatness, Mrs. Gamp, Ch. XIX of *Martin Chuzzlewit*)" or "A(fatness, Mrs. Gamp, the only occurrence of (1) in *Martin Chuzzlewit*)." Or, if these assertions be thought to be too definite to capture the normal sense of "Mrs. Gamp is fat," we could write

$$(\exists x)A(\text{fatness, Mrs. Gamp, } x),$$

or even the conjunction of this last sentence with

$\sim (\exists x)A(\text{non-fatness, Mrs. Gamp, } x).$

Now the word "ascription" is not a good word for this relation. It is misleading. But I cannot think of a word that would not be misleading. In order to see how this term could mislead, consider the following cases. Suppose Dr. Leavis should write an essay called "Current Nonsense about Dickens," and suppose this essay contained the sentence (used in a straightforward way as the vehicle of an assertion), "Mrs. Gamp is thin." Given the ordinary meaning of "ascription," someone might be led to describe this state of affairs by writing

(9) $A(\text{thinness, Mrs. Gamp, "Current Nonsense about Dickens"}).$

But this would be a mistake. "Current Nonsense about Dickens" is not a fictional work but a critical essay, and hence is not a "place" and hence sentence (9) does not express a truth.

Or consider the following sentence

(10) $A(\text{vanity, Napoleon, } War\ and\ Peace).$

Although in the ordinary sense of "ascribe" it is true that Tolstoy ascribed vanity to Napoleon in *War and Peace*, nonetheless (10) is not true since Napoleon is not a creature of fiction.⁶

Finally, it is important to realize that it does not follow from the truth of "A(fatness, Mrs. Gamp, *Martin Chuzzlewit*)" that Dickens made a certain sort of silly mistake: viz., that in writing sentence (1), he (mistakenly) ascribed to a certain theoretical entity of criticism the property of being fat. For it is not the case that when Dickens wrote (1) he was ascribing any property to anything, either in our technical sense of "ascribe" or in the ordinary sense; to ascribe a property to something (in either sense of "ascribe"), Dickens would have had to have been expressing some proposition when he wrote (1), and, as I have said, he did not express any proposition by writing (1).

I shall not attempt to give a definition of "A(x, y, z)." This three-place predicate must be taken as primitive. But I think its sense is fairly easily grasped. We are saying something *true* about the relations that hold between the novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the main satiric villainess of that novel, and the property fatness when we say, "Mrs.

Gamp, a character in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, is fat." And I think that we are *not* saying that the relation of *exemplification* holds between Mrs. Gamp and fatness when we say this, since that would *not* be true: if anything *exemplifies* fatness, then it occupies a certain region of space-time and you and I (if we are appropriately located in space-time) can touch it; but Mrs. Gamp is a theoretical entity of criticism, and we could no more touch her than we could touch a plot or a sonnet. "A(fatness, Mrs. Gamp, *Martin Chuzzlewit*)" is nothing more than the way I choose to express what we normally express by the above sentence, and that is all the explanation I am able to give of the use of "A(x, y, z)." In order to see the difficulties one encounters in attempting to provide an explicit definition of "A(x, y, z)" let us look at two rather obvious proposals.

First, one might say that "A(fatness, Mrs. Gamp, *Martin Chuzzlewit*)" simply means that if there were a real woman like Mrs. Gamp, that woman would be fat. But this would be either wrong or circular. A "real" woman (I suppose that means, strictly, a woman) could not be "like" Mrs. Gamp, if that means having the properties Mrs. Gamp *has*, since no "real" woman could be a character in a novel, be a theoretical entity of criticism, or have been created by Dickens. Of course, a "real" woman could be "like" Mrs. Gamp in *having* the properties that are *ascribed to* Mrs. Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. But, obviously, "like" in this sense cannot occur in a *definition* of the ascription relation.

Or one might want to say that "A(fatness, Mrs. Gamp, *Martin Chuzzlewit*)" means that if *Martin Chuzzlewit* were not a novel but a true record of events, then there *would be* a woman called "Mrs. Gamp" and she would be fat. But there is a subtle difficulty hidden in this proposal. Consider "A(fatness, the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*)" or "A(fatness, the most important character in *Martin Chuzzlewit* introduced in Ch. XIX, *Martin Chuzzlewit*)." If we were to try to understand these sentences (which express truths) in the way proposed, we should come up with "If *Martin Chuzzlewit* were not a novel but a true record of events, then there would be a woman denoted by 'the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit*' and she would be fat" in the case of

⁶ That is, normally "Napoleon" is used to denote a certain *man*. It *may* be that when critics discuss *War and Peace*, they at least sometimes use "Napoleon" to designate a certain creature of fiction that is (of course) numerically distinct from the man Napoleon. (See n. 8.) If this is the case, then the triple $\langle \text{vanity, the creature of fiction sometimes called "Napoleon" by critics discussing } War\ and\ Peace, War\ and\ Peace \rangle$ satisfies "A(x, y, z)." But $\langle \text{vanity, the man Napoleon, } War\ and\ Peace \rangle$ does not satisfy "A(x, y, z)."

the first of these sentences, and a similar piece of nonsense in the case of the second.

Let us see why this difficulty arises. How it is we are able to use the *proper name* "Mrs. Gamp" to refer to a certain creature of fiction? Normally, an object gets a proper name by being dubbed or baptized. But no one ever dubbed or baptized the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit* "Mrs. Gamp."⁷ There is no corresponding problem about how it is this creature of fiction is denoted by "the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit*," for this is a quite straightforward definite description that names what we also call "Mrs. Gamp" for the same reason that "the tallest structure in Paris in 1905" names what we also call "the Eiffel Tower": in each of these cases, a definite description denotes a certain object in virtue of a certain property that that object has uniquely. I think that if we are to have a satisfactory theory of how it is that we manage to refer to particular creatures of fiction, this theory will have to treat such *descriptions* as "the main satiric villainess" as the *primary* means of reference to these objects, and *proper names* as a secondary (though more common) means of reference. I would suggest that the *only* reason "Mrs. Gamp" denotes a certain creature of fiction is that that creature of fiction satisfies the open sentence "A (being named 'Mrs. Gamp,' *x*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*)."⁸ Thus, any such explanation of "A(*x*, *y*, *z*)" as the one we are considering must be circular, for the fact that a certain creature of fiction (such as the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit*) is denoted by a "fictional proper name" (like "Mrs. Gamp") can be explained only in terms of the ascription relation. Moreover, even if such an explanation were not circular, it would not show us how to understand instances of "A(*x*, *y*, *z*)" in which the '*y*'-position is filled by a definite description involving a uniquely exemplified "literary" property, such as "the character introduced in Ch. XIX."

⁷ Of course, Dickens might have said to himself, "I'll call the character I'm about to introduce, 'Sarah Gamp.'" He might even have said this out loud, to an audience. And he might *not* have done (and probably *did* not do) these things. Whether he did or not, Mrs. Gamp would be called "Mrs. Gamp." Therefore, such an utterance on Dickens's part (if it occurred) was not an act of dubbing, and had nothing in particular to do with the fact that it is proper for us to call the important female character introduced in Ch. XIX of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, "Mrs. Gamp." Moreover, it is obvious that our ability to refer to this character as "Mrs. Gamp" does not derive from some early Dickens critic's having said, "I hereby dub the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 'Sarah Gamp.'"

⁸ That is, we have embodied in our rules for talking about fiction a convention that says that a creature of fiction *may* be referred to by what is (loosely speaking) "the name it has in the story." It is owing to a similar convention that we use *personal* pronouns in connection with entities that are literally *not* persons: we call Mrs. Gamp "she" because, though she is not a woman, the property of being a woman is ascribed to her. (Cf. the Cartesian's explanation of how it is we are able to use demonstrative pronouns and adjectives in referring to substances that are *literally* non-spatial.) Once we have grasped the ascription relation, it is easy enough to explain and analyze our use of "mixed" descriptions like "the fat old nurse introduced in Ch. XIX." (Cf. the Cartesian's explanation of our use of "the fattest person thinking of Vienna.")

It is because of these difficulties that I am content to take "A(*x*, *y*, *z*)" as primitive. (But one small stipulation: let us say that a property *entails* a second property if it is impossible that something have the former and not have the latter; then ascription is "closed" under entailment. That is, $(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z)(\forall w)[A(x, y, z) \ \& \ x \text{ entails } w. \supset A(w, y, z)].$)

This, in essence, is the theory of creatures of fiction I want to present. To recapitulate:

- (a) Sentences like (2), (3), (4), (5), and (6) are about characters in novels. Characters in novels belong to a class of entities I call "creatures of fiction," which class is a subclass of the class of theoretical entities of criticism.
- (b) Sentences like (1), that is, typical narrative or descriptive sentences taken from works of fiction, are not about creatures of fiction. They are not about anything. They are not used by their authors as the vehicles of assertions.
- (c) Creatures of fiction exist and obey the laws of logic, just as everything else does.
- (d) Creatures of fiction *have* or *exemplify* only "literary" properties such as *being introduced in Ch. XIX* and "high-category" properties like self-identity. They do not have such properties as being human or being fat, despite the fact that ordinary-language sentences like "Mrs. Gamp is fat" can be used to express true propositions about them. (We call the relation that, I claim, is asserted by sentences like this to hold between creatures of fiction and such everyday properties as you or I might have, "ascription.")

I shall conclude by showing how three problems about fictional entities can be easily solved on the present theory.

V

The first problem: How should we deal with questions like "Has Mrs. Gamp an even number of hairs on her head?" The Meinongian, remember, says that Mrs. Gamp neither has nor lacks the property of having an even number of hairs on her head. The typical anti-Meinongian says (roughly) that "she" is not "there" either to have or to lack such a property. I say she simply lacks it, just as she lacks the properties of being material, being human, having hair, and being bald. Moreover, for any property whatever, Mrs. Gamp either has that property or lacks it.

But what is *not* true is this:

$(\forall x)(\exists y)[A(x, \text{Mrs. Gamp}, y) \dot{\vee} A(\text{not having } x, \text{Mrs. Gamp}, y)].$

(Here ' $\dot{\vee}$ ' represents exclusive disjunction.) And, in particular, *this* is not true:

$A(\text{having an even number of hairs on one's head, Mrs. Gamp, Martin Chuzzlewit}) \dot{\vee} A(\text{not having an even number of hairs on one's head, Mrs. Gamp, Martin Chuzzlewit}).$ ⁹

This disjunction is false simply because Dickens was noncommittal about the oddness or evenness of the number of Mrs. Gamp's hairs. It is these facts, I think, that the Meinongian perceives through a glass darkly when he says that a creature of fiction is an incomplete object.

The second problem: Mrs. Gamp appears to have incompatible properties. For consider the properties

being a woman

having been created by Dickens.

Now, since Dickens was not God, it would seem that nothing could have both these properties. To this the Meinongian will reply that I am mistaken in thinking that only God can create things that fall within the extension of the property *being a woman*; what only God can do, the Meinongian will tell us, is to create things that fall within this extension and which are also *existent*. Dickens is perfectly

capable of creating women (the Meinongian holds); he is, however, incapable of creating *existent* women. (Or perhaps, the Meinongian will want to say that Dickens did not *create* Mrs. Gamp, but did something more like *discovering* her in the realm of *Sosein*. I shall not explore the ramifications of this thesis, except to point out that it makes the creativity of the novelist seem very like the "creativity" of the flower-arranger.) This reply seems to me to be unsatisfactory. What reason do we have for saying that Mrs. Gamp has the property *being a woman*? Only that she "has it in the story." Well, "in the story" she also has the property of existence, at least if existence is a property (but this the Meinongian assumes).¹⁰ Therefore, I submit, if the Meinongian has any good reason for saying that the extension of *being a woman* includes Mrs. Gamp, he has an equally good reason for saying that the extension of *being existent* includes her.

This problem is, of course, trivial on the theory I am proposing: Mrs. Gamp *has* only the second of these properties; the first is not *exemplified* by her, but is, rather, ascribed to her.

The third problem: Consider the definite descriptions, "the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit*" and "the character in *Martin Chuzzlewit* who appears in every chapter." Since no character in *Martin Chuzzlewit* appears in every chapter, there seems to be an important difference between these two descriptions. I can describe this difference very simply. The first of these descriptions denotes something (Mrs. Gamp), the second does not: there *is* no character in *Martin Chuzzlewit* who appears in every chapter; no such character *exists*. The Meinongian will want to say that each of these descriptions denotes something, and that what each denotes fails to exist. But there is obviously an important ontological difference between the ways in which these two descriptions relate to the world. I leave it to the Meinongian to explain how this difference is to be spelled out in his terms.¹¹

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⁹ But the proposition that $A(\text{having or not having an even number of hairs on one's head, Mrs. Gamp, Martin Chuzzlewit})$ is true, owing to the fact that ascription is closed under entailment.

¹⁰ Note that "in the story" Mrs. Gamp's imaginary friend Mrs. Harris, unlike Mrs. Gamp herself, does *not* exist.

¹¹ A little reflection on this problem should show that what I call creatures of fiction cannot be or be among the "merely possible individuals" the existence of which is assumed in most informal explanations of Kripke's and others' systems of formal semantics for quantified modal logic. Creatures of fiction could not serve as merely possible objects because, for one thing, they are *actual* objects. But then what of the sentence with which we began, "Mr. Pickwick does not exist," and our concession that it could be used to express a truth? This is a very complicated question. Part of the answer is this. The utterer of such a sentence would probably be addressing himself to someone who had mistaken discourse about Pickwick for discourse about a *man*, owing to the fact that the ascription relation is expressed in English by what sounds like the apparatus of predication. He would probably be expressing the proposition that there is no such *man* as Pickwick, or, more precisely, the proposition that nothing *has* all the properties *ascribed* to Pickwick.