

# Fictional Realism and Commonsense Ontology

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**Abstract.** Attempts to defend the realist position on the ontology of fictional entities usually involve aligning this realist position with common sense ontology. However, the success of fictional realist arguments in explaining the truth of some propositions such as “Sherlock Holmes is a Fictional Character,” is inconsistent with the common sense truth of negative existential claims like “Sherlock Holmes does not exist.” This creates a dilemma for the fictional realist, who is attempting to align the realist position with common sense truths. The attempt to align fictional realism with common sense truths presupposes the superiority of common sense ontology as a prima facie meta-ontological position. This paper argues that this presupposition is false, and that common sense ontology is flawed as a meta-ontological position. Consequently, the reliance on common sense in the justification of fictional realism or in the discourse of the ontology of fictional entities is unwarranted.

**Keywords:** Fictional Realism, Creationism, Fictional Entities, Common Sense Ontology, Negative Existential Claims, Abstract entities

## Introduction

Fictional realism is the philosophical position that fictional entities exists as part of the fabrics that make up reality. Attempts by a notable number of scholars to defend this realist position on the ontology of fictional entities usually involve aligning the realist position with common sense. In effect, many realists tend to justify their position by showing how a realist view explains the truth or falsity of claims such as “Sherlock Holmes is a famous detective,” “Sherlock Holmes is a Fictional Character,” and “Sherlock Holmes is more famous than Emma Bovary,” statements which are believed to be consistent with common sense.

However, the success of fictional realist arguments in explaining the truth of propositions such as the above is inconsistent with the common sense truth of negative existential claims like “Sherlock Holmes does not exist.” The truth of negative existential claims presupposes an antirealist ontology which negates the realist position that fictional entities exist. It appears that the realist has to deny the truth of negative existential claims

to remain consistent.

A dilemma facing the realist, as noted by Tatjana von Solodkof, is that dismissing negative existential claims as false puts the realist in the awkward position of refuting the common sense position on which he relies. Thus, a number of realists have tried to justify how the realist view is consistent with the common sense truth of negative existential claims. This puts the fictional realist in the awkward position of trying to align a realist ontology with propositions that rely on a supposedly commonsensical antirealist ontology which seems to stand at variance with the realist ontology.

The attempt to align fictional realism with common sense truths presupposes the superiority of common sense ontology as a *prima facie* meta-ontological position. In this paper, I argue that this presupposition is false, and that common sense ontology is flawed as a meta-ontological position. Consequently, the reliance on common sense in the discussion of the ontology of fictional entities is unwarranted.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the basic elements of the creationist account of the ontology of fictional entities. Section two discusses the puzzle of negative existential claims and the implication of this puzzle for the creationist account of the ontology of fictional entities. Section three presents a description of common sense ontology and the need to examine the usual glorification of common sense in ontological discourse. Sections four and five examine two possible routes for justifying common sense ontology, identifying and discussing the shortcomings of these routes. The paper concludes by noting the inadequacy of common sense ontology as a meta-ontological theory. Consequently, the paper argues that the usual attempt to justify fictional realist ontology by aligning it with common sense ontology is unwarranted.

### **Creationism/Artefactualism Version of Fictional Realism**

While fictional realists generally argue for the independent existence of fictional entities in reality, these fictional realists are far from united in their account of how to justify the existence of these fictional entities as well explaining their nature. Broadly speaking, we may identify three traditional positions on the ontology of fictional entities, namely; non-ac-

tualism or meinongianism, possibilism, and creationism or artefactualism. It may be important to note also that proponents of the various versions of fictional realism vary in their account of the nature of fictional entities. While the reality of such variations is not the focus of the current paper, a brief description of the three broad versions is perhaps in order.

The origin of the non-actualist position is commonly attributed to Alexius Meinong who argues that fictional entities are subsisting, non-actual, entities in the world. This view is motivated by a presupposition that we cannot make sense of discourses involving apparent reference to non-existent objects unless such objects *are* in some sense. However, since these objects do not constitute part of the things that exist in our real or actual world, it must be that such objects *are* while they are, simultaneously, lacking in existence. They subsist, but do not exist.<sup>1</sup> This view has influenced a number of philosophers who have tried to defend the position or some variant of it.<sup>2</sup> One major challenge facing the non-actualist position is its inability to address the issue of the identity of fictional entities. The non-actualist position does not account for the identity of distinct fictional entities, thus making it impossible to distinguish various fictional entities from each other. Besides, the non-actualist position undermines the role played by authors of literary works in our acquaintance with fictional entities.<sup>3</sup> This problem will be further discussed later in this paper.

Possibilism adapts possible worlds semantics to address the puzzle about the nature and ontological status of fictional entities. Possibilism maintains that fictional stories represent possible worlds and that fictional entities represent possible entities that constitute these fictional worlds. Fictional possibilism is subtly introduced in Aristotle's *Poetics* where he argues that fictional entities represent possible entities which are introduced by authors to present their thoughts about the way things could

- 1 Meinong, A., "The Theory of Objects". In *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, (ed.) Roderick Chisholm (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 84.
- 2 Parsons, T., "A Prolegomenon to Meinongian Semantics" *The Journal of Philosophy*, 71(16) 1974; Priest, G., *Towards Non-Being: The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 3 Sainsbury, R. M., *Fiction and Fictionalism* (New York: Routledge Publishers, 2010), 74; Salis, F., "Fictional Entities." *Online Companion to Problems of Analytic Philosophy*. (eds.) João Branquinho and Ricardo Santos, (Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, 2013), 9.

have been in the world.<sup>4</sup> However, possibilism was advanced by David Lewis who argues that fictional stories present accounts of different possible ways the world could be. Fictional entities are the actual inhabitants of their relevant worlds, and they have the same ontological status in their relevant worlds as actual objects have in our actual world.<sup>5</sup> While arguments may be advanced to explain how possibilism addresses the challenge of determining the identity of fictional entities, it is not clear how the possibilist model will address the role of authors in the ontology of fiction, since fictional entities are presumed to exist as independent entities in their relevant possible worlds.

The introduction of creationism/artefactualism as a version of fictional realism attempts to address the challenges which the other two versions have been unable to address. One of the major distinctions of creationism is that, unlike the other fictional realist accounts, it acknowledges that fictional entities owe their existence to certain activities of human beings. In other words, the existence of fictional entities depends on human beings. The creationist thesis is that fictional entities are created by authors of literary works when they introduce these entities in their works.<sup>6</sup> Thus, fictional entities are artefacts just as tables and chairs are artefacts. However, since fictional entities are not concrete entities that are empirically perceptible, they are regarded as abstract. Thus, Saul Kripke describes fictional entities as “abstract entities which exists in virtue of the activities of human beings.”<sup>7</sup>

One of the strengths traditionally ascribed to the fictional realist position is that the position is able to account for various kinds of ex-

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4 Aristotle, “Poetics” *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. (ed.) Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991), 8. 1451b 2-10.

5 Lewis, D., *On the Plurality of Worlds*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 3.

6 Thomasson, A. L., *Fiction and Metaphysics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); “Speaking of Fictional Characters” *Dialectica*. 57(2), 2003, 207-226; Kripke, S., “Vacuous Names and Fictional Entities” in *Philosophical troubles*, (ed.) Saul Kripke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Zvolenszky, Z., “Abstract Artefact Theory about Fictional Characters Defended: Why Sainsbury’s Category-Mistake Objection is Mistaken” *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, Vol. 5, 2013.

7 Kripke, S. “Vacuous Names and Fictional Entities” 63.

pressions involving apparent reference to fictional entities. Creationism shares in this strength. The creationist account of statements involving apparent reference to fictional entities is that such statements are about the entities which have been created by authors within the relevant literary works. Example of statements which is accounted for in this way include fiction-internal statements (e.g. Sherlock Holmes was a famous detective), cross-textual statements (e.g. Sherlock Holmes is more famous than Emma Bovary), meta-fictive statements (e.g. Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character in Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*), etc. The view that fictional entities exist accounts for the positioning of the relevant fictional names in the subject position in the relevant sentences. The consequence of this is that a subject-predicate account of sentences which applies to reference to concrete entities is also acceptable for sentences involving reference to fictional entities. Besides, the success of fictional realism in explaining these statements is usually characterised as a justification for holding the realist position, since these statements are believed to align with commonsense.

Aside the fact that creationism, like other versions of fictional realism, is able to account for the kinds of statements above, creationism avoids the major flaw of the other fictional realist positions. This is because creationism acknowledges the role of authors in the existence of fictional characters. It accounts for what is more or less a factual data that authors of literary works are responsible for our acquaintance with fictional entities. Thus, the fact that creationism accounts for the important role of authors gives it an edge over other traditional versions of fictional realism. The recognition of the creative role of authors in the ontology of fictional entities also explains the intuitive belief that the existence of any fictional entity does not predate the introduction of that particular entity by the relevant author. Creationism tries to explain how authors carry out the creation of fictional entities. Suffice to say that the tools available for to the author are linguistic devices with which the author stipulates fictional entities into existence.

### **The Problem about Negative Existential Claims**

While fictional realists have arguably been able to account for statements involving reference to alleged fictional entities, they have had a

serious difficulty explaining negative existential claims such as “Hamlet does not exist.” Negative existential claims about fiction explicitly express what is usually tagged the common sense intuition that fictional entities do not exist. This greatly undermines the primary claim of the fictional realist, including the creationist who argues that fictional entities are created by authors of literary works. It appears that to be consistent, the fictional realist has to either abandon the view that fictional entities exist or deny the truth of negative existential claims.

Generally speaking, negative existential claims or propositions appear in the grammatical subject-predicate form. Given this grammatical subject-predicate form of negative existential claims, such propositions seem to assert nonexistence of particular individuals which are represented by the grammatical subject of the relevant proposition. If this subject-predicate account of negative existential propositions is accepted, then the subject term should have an object which it designates. For the proposition to be true, it appears that the property of nonexistence is predicated of that object to which the subject term refers. This seemingly grammatical form of such statements have elicited debate among notable scholars about whether existence can be characterized as a property which objects may have or lack.<sup>8</sup> This debate is beyond the scope of the current paper. The seeming requirement that there be an object serving as the subject of negative existential propositions is consistent with the creationist position. However, acknowledging a subject for such propositions leads to inconsistencies, as it implies affirming the existence of the subject and denying its existence simultaneously.

Thus, the creationist is faced with the need to make an exclusive choice between her realist view of fictional entities and the truth of negative existential claims. This creates a dilemma for the creationist. On the one hand, she cannot abandon the realist thesis affirming that fictional en-

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8 Meinong, A., “The Theory of Objects”; Aquinas, T., *On Being and Essence*, (trans.) Armand Maurer (Ontario, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968); Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (eds.) David F. Norton and Mary J. Norton, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Kant, I., *Critique of Pure Reason*, (trans. & eds.) Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Russell, B., “Review of: A. Meinong, ‘Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie im System der Wissenschaften’” *Mind*, 16: 436-439

tities exist. On the other hand, as Tatjana von Solodkof (2014; 335) notes, dismissing negative existential claims as false puts the creationist in the awkward position of refuting the common sense position on which she relies. To address this dilemma, a number of creationists, as well as some other realists, have tried to show how the fictional realist view is consistent with the common sense truth of negative existential claims.

The puzzle regarding the truth of negative existential claims is one of the most intractable puzzles bedeviling any theory of the ontology of fictional entities. Besides being very difficult, it has attracted a very large volume of contributions from philosophers in Metaphysics and Philosophy of Language. In spite of the large volume of contributions to the addressing the puzzle, the puzzle has remained unresolved. In “On What There Is”, W. V. O. Quine identifies the puzzle about negative existential claims in general, and names it *Plato’s beard*. Quine expresses the difficulty by noting that “in any ontological dispute the proponent of the negative side suffers the disadvantage of not being able to admit that his opponent disagrees with him.” This is because it is difficult for anyone who argues that a particular entity does not exist to express his view without referring to the entity whose existence he denies.<sup>9</sup> The proposition ‘Mary does not exist’ is difficult to explain because the proposition seems to be about Mary, and it says of Mary that she does not exist. But if Mary does not exist, how can the proposition be about Mary?

The difficulty that the creationist faces with the puzzle generated by negative existential propositions is evident in Kripke’s discussion. Having considered a number of options for addressing the puzzle, Kripke settles for some kind of metalinguistic analysis of negative existential claims. According to this proposal, negative existential propositions are to be understood as expressing the falsity of the corresponding existential propositions which they negate. For instance, the negative existential proposition ‘Sherlock Holmes does not exist’ simply asserts that there is no true proposition as ‘Sherlock Holmes exists.’<sup>10</sup> Kripke describes this proposal as “tentative” because the proposal generates some other challenges which are difficult to resolve. For instance, if we adopt this proposal, it

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9 Quine, W. V. O., “On What There is” *From a Logical Point of View*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1961), 1.

10 Kripke, S., *Reference and Existence*, 159.

will then suggest that our understanding of negative existential propositions depends on our understanding of affirmative propositions like ‘Sherlock Holmes exists’. According to Kripke, one who utters the proposition ‘Sherlock Holmes exists’ is wrong, “not because the proposition itself is false, but because there is no such true proposition.” But even Kripke notes that an analysis like this is faced with challenges applicable to any kind of metalinguistic analysis. Just like the case of referring expressions, propositions making existential claims, whether affirmative or negative, do not seem to be about the propositions. Rather, they are about the content of the expressions or propositions.<sup>11</sup>

We can identify two major challenges elicited by this puzzle of negative existential propositions. The first has to do with the truth conditions of such propositions while the second has to do with the implication of such propositions for a realist view of the ontology of fictional entities. While it is important to address the first challenge because it presents the background for understanding negative existential claims generally, it is also important to address the second challenge here because of the realist position advanced in this paper.

With regards to the truth of negative existential propositions, we may recall again that these propositions are ordinarily taken to be true owing to the common sense belief that fictional entities do not exist. This is the genesis of the problem about such propositions. According to Tim Crane, the truth of propositions depends on the relation of such propositions to reality. In other words, if a proposition must be true, it must say how things really are.<sup>12</sup> So if ‘Sherlock Holmes does not exist’ must be true, it must say something about reality. If these kind of propositions are about reality, then, as Jerold Katz’ notes, the propositions must be about something. If they are about something, then those things that they are about must exist. But if they exist, then the propositions are false. Simply put, if ‘Sherlock Holmes does not exist’ is true, then the proposition is about Sherlock Holmes. If the proposition is about Sherlock Holmes, then Sherlock Holmes exists. But if Sherlock Holmes exists, then the proposition is false, because the proposition denies the existence of Sherlock

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<sup>11</sup> Kripke, S., *Reference and Existence*, 153-157.

<sup>12</sup> Crane, T., *The Objects of Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18-19.

Holmes.<sup>13</sup> Thus, from the creationist perspective, affirming the truth of negative existential propositions engenders some inconsistency.

### **Fictional Realist Responses and the Glorification of Common Sense**

One possible way to address the paradox of negative existential propositions is to adopt Bertrand Russell's classical logic approach. This approach suggests that we can have a meaningful analysis of negative existential claims without committing ourselves to the existence of the alleged referents of the singular expressions that purportedly refer to non-existent objects. This suggestion is grounded on the Russellian analysis of proper names as abbreviated definite description.<sup>14</sup> However, given the quantificational analysis of definite descriptions in Russell's thoughts, classical logic then proposes that negative existential propositions are not genuine subject-predicate propositions, but negative quantified general propositions.<sup>15</sup> This approach is favoured by W. V. O. Quine.<sup>16</sup>

While the classical logic approach addresses the problem of the meaningfulness of negative existential propositions, it comes at some cost. Kenneth J. Perszyk observes that one major flaw of classical logic is its underlying account of names, a theory which has been criticized by some notable philosophers.<sup>17</sup> For instance, in *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke argues that descriptions are not semantically equivalent to proper names, and as such, descriptions cannot be taken as substitutes for proper names. If this is so, then the descriptive analysis of proper names, as well as the consequent quantificational analysis of negative existential propositions, is flawed. The failure of the classical approach is not particularly a problem for the realist since this approach is not grounded on a realist

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13 Katz, J. J., *Sense, Reference, and Philosophy* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004), 177.

14 Russell, B., "Descriptions." *The Philosophy of Language* (eds.) A. P. Martinich and David Sosa. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114-120.

15 Perszyk, K. J., *Non-Existent Objects: Meinong and Contemporary Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 1993), 178.

16 Quine, W. V. O., "Designation and Existence" *The Journal of Philosophy*, 36(26), (1939), 701-709.

17 Perszyk, K. J., *Non-Existent Objects*, 178.

ontology of fictional entities. So, how can a realist respond to the puzzle of negative existential propositions.

One notable realist approach to the puzzle is the adoption of the idea of restricted quantifiers. Thomasson initially adopts this view by arguing that the truth of negative existential propositions is limited to the domain of *real* or *actual* things. This is because the use of quantifiers in negative existential propositions is restricted to the domain of *real* or *actual* entities. In Thomasson's words, "nonexistence claims regarding fictional characters in general are true provided that they are understood as shorthand for claims to the effect that there is no such (real) man, no such (real) animal, and so on."<sup>18</sup> The implication of this is that the common sense denial of the existence of fictional entities is not applicable to reality as a whole, but only to the domain containing actual or concrete entities. Thus, the common sense truth of 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' is simply to deny that Sherlock Holmes is an actual detective or to deny that Sherlock Holmes belongs to the domain of actual entities. This appears to work well for the realist. However, it comes at a cost.

While the restricted quantifier approach seems to explain away the truth of negative existential propositions involving fictional reference, it has been argued that such an approach is inconsistent with our intuitive understanding of the use of the concept of existence in existential propositions. Kendall Walton argues that while domain restriction may apply to the use of quantifiers 'there is/are,' they do not apply to 'exist.' For him, what this suggests is a distinction between being and existence. Thus, while we may agree to the truth of the claim that *there are* fictional characters, we cannot deny the common sense truth of existential propositions denying the *existence* of fictional characters. Perhaps it was the realization of this challenge that compelled Thomasson to abandon the restricted quantifier approach to adopt Keith Donnellan's proposal for explaining names without reference. Donnellan argues that we have a case of reference failure when the historical chain of the use of a name leads to a block. The position that the historical chain of the use of a name leads to a block implies that there is no object at the original point of the use of the name to which the name is intended to refer.<sup>19</sup> Thomasson adopts this view and

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18 Thomasson, A. L., *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 112.

19 Keith Donnellan, "Speaking of Nothing," *Philosophical Review*, 83(1), 1974, 22-30.

thus proposes that the historical chain of the use of fictional names lead to a block. However, in spite of this block, fictional names have referents because they refer to fictional characters.<sup>20</sup>

The implication of the drive by fictional realists to align their position with commonsense views and beliefs, attempting to justify their position by aligning it with common sense views, suggests that they rely on commonsense ontology as a sort of meta-ontological foundation for assessing ontological theories. This glorification of common sense is suspect and needs to be examined. Thus, it is important to ask questions about whether reliance on commonsense ontology is as warranted as is presupposed by the view which seeks to adopt commonsense as basis for justifying ontological theories about fictional entities. This paper argues for a negative answer to this question.

### **Justifying Common Sense Ontology: The Second Order Route**

Uriah Kriegel defines commonsense ontology as any theory of what there is that does not diverge overmuch from the verdicts of *common sense*.<sup>21</sup> I like to interpret this idea of *common sense* as intuitions that are collectively held by a majority of people. According to Robert Sudgen “common sense ontology is littered with assumptions about human exceptionalism which philosophers are often reluctant to question.”<sup>22</sup> However, there are arguments which indicate that commonsense positions are not warranted a priori. For instance, Stuart Brock argues that “the fact that a philosophical theory does violence to common sense is not a decisive blow to the theory.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Kendall Walton notes that “common sense isn’t sacrosanct, and we sometimes have reason to abandon our initial intuitions.” However, Walton insists that the fact that people commonly hold

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20 Thomasson, A., “Fictional Characters and Literary Practices,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43(2), 2003, 141.

21 Kriegel U., “Two Defenses of Common Sense Ontology,” *Dialectica*, 65(2), 2011, 177-204.

22 Sudgen, R., “On ‘Common Sense Ontology’: A Comment on the Paper by Frank Hindriks and Francesco Guala,” *Journal of Institutional Economics*, 11(3), 2015, 490.

23 Brock, S., “The Creationist Fiction: The Case against Creationism about Fictional Characters” *The Philosophical Review*, 119(3), 2010, 344.

such beliefs as the denial of the existence of fictional entities is part of the data that any theory of fiction must take into account.”<sup>24</sup>

What the foregoing suggests is that if we must adopt common sense ontology as a meta-ontological basis for assessing ontological theories, there is a need to justify the viability of common sense ontology in playing such justificatory role. Kriegel identifies two possible routes to justifying common sense ontology – The First Order and Second Order routes – and defends a second order route by reviewing what he describes as Eli Hirsch’s version of the second order route to common sense ontology. Let us examine these two routes to defending common sense ontology, starting with the second order route. Having refuted Hirsch’s argument which moves from superficialism and the principle of charity to common sense, Kriegel proposes a different argument which moves from premises including an acceptance of constructivism and a suggested data of ontological inquiry to the conclusion that common sense is a plausible ontological theory. Kriegel’s argument may be phrased as follows:

Premise: The main aim of ontology is to provide data-adequate theories, and a theory is data adequate just in case it describes, predicts and postdicts the data accurately - (constructivism)

Premise: The data of ontological inquiry are singular, modest intuitions of *normal subjects* in *normal conditions*.

Conclusion: The appropriate ontological theory is common sense ontology

The first premise of this argument proposes the condition that a plausible theory of ontology must satisfy to be deemed adequate while the second premise proposes what the data of ontological inquiry is. The conclusion then proceeds to affirm that common sense ontology is the appropriate theory to adopt. This conclusion appears to rest on a warrant that common sense ontology meets the condition specified in the first premise. The condition proposed in the first premise suggests that a theory is deemed plausible on the basis of its ability to explain the data for which it is propounded. This premise appears to propose a plausible condition. However, if this condition for the assessment of a theory must be attained,

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<sup>24</sup> Kendall Walton, “Restricted Quantification, Negative Existentials, and Fiction,” *Dialectica*, 57(2), 2003, 240.

there has to be a way of accessing or assessing the data of inquiry appropriate to the theory in a manner that is not theory laden. In other words, if an ontological theory must be assessed in line with its ability to adequately explain the data of ontological inquiry, determining the data of ontological inquiry must be independent of theoretical or conceptual underpinnings.

The second premise in Kriegel's second argument, which specifies intuitions as the data of ontological theories fails in this regard. There are two major challenges with this premise. First, the premise is seriously value laden, and filled with value laden concepts. For instance, it is far from clear what is to be taken as *normal subjects*, or what conditions suffice as *normal conditions*. Unless this vagueness is cleared, it is unclear what the second premise of the argument is actually suggesting. Perhaps, owing to the fact that certain beliefs derive from our everyday experiences, they appear to us to be obvious, self-evident, intuitive, and remain largely unquestioned, we tend to take such beliefs as the norm. We pass such beliefs as common sense beliefs and probably assume that they cannot be questioned. Thus, agents who hold such beliefs are perceived as normal, while any dissent is perceived as abnormal. If we are to construe 'normal' following this pattern, it appears that what is described as normal is simply the view of the majority, not necessarily the truth.

The second challenge with the premise under review is that it seems to misconstrue what constitutes the primary data of ontological inquiry. By proposing *singular, modest intuitions of normal subjects in normal conditions* as the primary data of ontological inquiry, it seems to suggest that the aim of ontology is to examine the intuitions of rational agents. While understanding the nature and content of our intuition may form part of the subject of ontology, ontology encompasses much more than that. As Thomas Hofweber argues, while ontology is committed to studying our ontological commitments, it also studies what there is and their general features.<sup>25</sup> This suggests that the primary subject of ontology cannot be exhausted by the 'intuitions of normal subjects.' Thus, Kriegel's premise presents an implausible conception of the appropriate data of ontological inquiry.

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25 Hofweber, Thomas, "Logic and Ontology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/logic-ontology/>>.

If, as Theodore Sider argues, the aim of ontology is to develop theories that carve nature at its joint, then an appropriate ontological theory must be able to explain data that are independent of our intuitions.<sup>26</sup> The question about whether fictional entities exist, for instance, is not a question about whether we are ordinarily committed to their existence, or whether their existence aligns with our intuition. Rather, it is a question about whether fictional entities exist as part of the fabrics of reality, regardless of whether our common sense beliefs are committed to their existence. Sider's argument suggests that there are independent facts in reality and that ontological theories are successful to the extent that the concepts within the theory are able to match up with the description of that independent reality. This suggests further that the data of ontological inquiry are really independent facts, and also explains how ontological disputes are substantive.

Thus, Kriegel's second order route to common sense ontology fails because the second premise fails. This failure may also be because this problematic premise has a prejudged theoretical underpinning which influences the selection of the proposed data of ontological inquiry. It reflects a priori restrictions which presuppose, without warrant, that independent facts about reality are not directly accessible to ontological inquiry. A major shortcoming arising from the theoretical underpinning of the second order route to common sense ontology is explained by R. C. Osborne who argues that there is an explanatory gap between our common sense *beliefs and intuitions* about which kinds of objects exist and *the facts* about which kinds of objects exist. In fact, Osborne goes further to argue that no appropriate, non-deviant, explanatory connection can be postulated between the facts of what there is and our common sense intuitions about what there is.<sup>27</sup>

### **The First Order Route to Common Sense Ontology**

Kriegel describes the first order route to common sense ontology as one which proceeds from engaging in empirical ontological inquiry

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26 Sider, T., "Ontological Realism" *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology* (eds.) D. J. Chalmers et al. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2009), 392.

27 Osborne, R. C., "Debunking Rationalist Defenses of Common-Sense Ontology: An Empirical Approach" *Rev.Phil.Psych.* 7 (2016), 197-200.

to theoretical verdicts akin to common sense. He also calls this the empirical route. According to Lynne Rudder Baker (2007; 9), the empirical route draws a conclusion to common sense ontology on the grounds of the existence and nature of ordinary objects from evidence provided by our senses.<sup>28</sup> A similar viewpoint is proposed by Kristof Nyiri (2016; 442) who argues that ontology and epistemology has to acknowledge the fact that our knowledge of the world is founded more on immediate visual images than on the mediating capacity of words.<sup>29</sup> What this implies is that the evidences of our senses give us an idea of the things that exist in the world. Since these evidences, which, according to E. J. Lowe, are derived from either direct perception or from the causal influence of the objects, are available for the common run of human beings, we tend to derive beliefs about the nature of reality that are common.<sup>30</sup> Thus, these sensory evidence leads to a justification of common sense as a viable ontological theory for accessing the nature of reality. In other words, if we rely on the evidence of our senses in the apprehension of reality, the most appropriate ontological theory to adopt is common sense ontology.

The first order route seems more appropriate because it tends to put facts about reality, and our awareness of these facts, at the centre of ontological disputes. In this way, it avoids the kind of prejudiced conclusions that are bound to result from the second order route, making independent facts about reality, rather than subjective intuitions, the primary subject of ontology. However, it is important to examine whether the inference from sensual perception to the justification of common sense ontology is warranted. In other words, whether there is some warrant for the inference from our sensual perception to the conclusions we draw about the things that exist in reality. The connection between our sensual perceptions and the common sense beliefs that we derive from them, on the first order route, cannot be absolutely a matter of logical connections. This is owing to the fact that if our judgment is based on a strictly logical connection,

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28 Baker, L. R., *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

29 Nyiri, K., "Towards a Common-Sense Realism," *In the Beginning was the Image: The Omnipresence of Pictures*, (eds.) András Benedek / Ágnes Veszelszki, (Online edition: 2016), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3726/b10396>.

30 Lowe, E. J., "How are Ordinary Objects Possible?" *The Monist*, 88(4) 2005, 525.

that will probably reduce the first order route to a second order route. This is because our beliefs about what exist will ultimately depend on logical inferences rather than facts about what exist.

An appropriate first order route to a theory of ontology cannot rest strictly on logical deductions. Rather, it should rest on the appropriate data about the existence of the concerned entity. Once this is appropriately determined, it does not matter whether the appropriate ontological theory aligns with common sense or not. What is essential is that the theory represents that data more accurately. Thus, when any ontological theory, including common sense ontology, contradicts the data which it tries to explain, such a theory is inadequate. What this reveals is that common sense ontology is not sacrosanct. Given this reality, the common sense ontological conclusions derived from the first order route may also fail as has happened at some point in the history of scientific investigation. For instance, it seemed that the idea of a flat earth was common sense in ancient Greece and within some Asian cultural milieu for some time, until scientific investigations disproved the idea.

The fallibility of common sense ontology, as discussed above, indicates that common sense ontology cannot be adopted as a meta-ontological position for determining the success or failure of other ontological theories. Thus, whether fictional realism fails or succeeds cannot be determined on the basis of whether the fictional realist position aligns with common sense ontology. Rather, the success or failure of fictional realism should be determined on the basis of how well the position of the fictional realist is able to explain the data concerning the ontology of fictional entities. The foregoing discussion of the first order route to an appropriate theory of ontology of fictional entities raises a further question about what constitutes the appropriate data of the inquiry whenever our discussion is on the ontology of fictional entities. In order to properly identify the appropriate data of inquiry when our subject is the ontology of fictional entities, it is important to duly appreciate the role of authors in the *coming to being* of fictional entities.

The importance of the role of authors stems from the fact that our acquaintance with fictional entities result from the introduction of fictional characters by authors of literary works that contain fictional characters. In creating a work of fiction, the author imagines certain states of affairs, and

certain mental pictures begin to take shape in her/his mind. Sometimes, the imagination may be prompted by actual experiences of the author, but essentially, the author of a work of fiction is not writing to directly represent these actual experiences. These mental pictures include situations, spatial and temporal locations, characters (human and non-human), relations between these characters, etc. The author begins to represent these mental pictures using some propositions and other linguistic devices. Gradually, this process leads to the formation of a fictional work. With the aid of propositions and these other linguistic devices, the author introduces the various characters and situations which make up the fictional work.

It is important to note that at no point in the process of creating a work of fiction is there any recourse conscious to some kind of doubt about whether the propositions uttered by the author make *assertions*. As Peter Pagin notes, assertions are speech acts which claims that the truths expressed by a proposition holds true of some aspects of reality.<sup>31</sup> Since the propositions expressed by authors in the making of fictional works are not expected to be literally true of any aspect of reality, these propositions cannot be called assertions.<sup>32</sup> It appears that the disclaimer found in many fictional works, expressly indicating that the content is not about any *real* entities, stresses the point that authors of fiction are not interested in making assertions in the making of fictional works as well as the consequent introduction of fictional entities.

Some scholars have made some attempts to explain what exactly the author of a fictional work does in introducing fictional characters, if the author is not simply representing reality. For instance, Searle argues that the author is involved in a non-deceptive act of pretence because the author does not intend that his/her audience takes the propositions as literally true. However, considering his realist position, Searle argues that this act of pretence leads to the creation of fictional entities. While engaging the work of fiction, the author also expects the audience to join

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31 Pagin, P., "Assertions" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/assertion/> (accessed 12th January, 2018).

32 Searle, J. "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History*, 6(2), 1975, 322.

in the act of pretence.<sup>33</sup> What is not clear from Searle's account is how an ordinary act of pretence leads to the creation of real entities. This is a major challenge for Searle and other scholars with similar views, especially within the realist framework. Besides, as Gregory Currie argues, authors of fiction do not seem to be pretending about anything when they create their works. These authors simply create those works and questions about whether they are pretending or not do not arise at any point. As such, they "must be doing something more than merely pretending to assert."<sup>34</sup>

If authors of fiction are not involved in an act of pretence, and they are not making assertions, what exactly are they doing? It is also important to note that the author of a work of fiction simply begins to introduce the characters that make up the fictional work by stipulating certain attributes or properties of these characters. This includes the stipulation of names of human and non-human characters, attributes, plot, setting, etc. This indicates an important aspect of the creative role of authors in the making fictional works and fictional entities. They simply make-up or stipulate those entities and their properties into existence. The tools available for this stipulation are linguistic devices. They include referring expressions, descriptions, etc. What the author does with these tools is to create the fictional entities. This suggests that linguistic tools do not only function to *describe* reality, they can also serve as ontological tools for *creating* objects. The idea that linguistic devices can also play ontological roles requires some explanation, but that is beyond the scope of the current paper. Suffice to say at this point that the expressions contained in a fictional work do not describe reality. Rather, these expressions create reality.

### Conclusion

The implication of the foregoing is that the available data in discussion the ontology of fictional entities are the processes and devices that authors of fiction engage in bringing these fictional entities into being. An appropriate theory of the ontology of fictional entities must be able to account for the fact that authors of works of fiction use linguistic devices, not to make assertions or describe reality, but to create some entities

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33 Searle, J. "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," 324.

34 Currie, G., *The Nature of Fiction* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18.

which take on a life of their own once they are thus created. One may argue that the creation of any particular fictional entity by an author is like the creation of a particular table by a carpenter. One significant difference between these two artefacts is that the tools for creating the table are concrete tools while the tools for creating the fictional entity are abstract tools. Thus, the fictional entity is an abstract entity while the table is a concrete entity. What follows from this is that the fictional realist account of the ontology of fictional entities presents a better explanation of the data relating to such entities, regardless of how aligned the fictional realist view is with common sense ontology.

Given the failure of the first and second order routes to common sense ontology, the glorification of common sense as a meta-ontological position for assessing ontological theories fail. As such, the drive by fictional realists to justify their position by showing its consistency with common sense truths is unwarranted. Consequently, if the ontological data available to the fictional realist suggests that fictional entities exist, the fictional realist is not under obligation to show a consistency between his realist view and the antirealist presupposition of common sense. The foregoing reveals that the dilemma of not being able to affirm the falsity of negative existential claims, which is believed to pose a serious challenge for fictional realism, is a false dilemma. Given an appropriate realist theory of the ontology of fictional entities, fictional entities exist and any proposition of any ontological theory contrary to this will be false unless there are grounds to prove their truth independently of the uncritical reliance on common sense.

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