


ARTICLE

Fictional Creationism and Negative Existentials

Jeonggyu Lee 

Department of Philosophy, Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, Korea
Email: jeonggyulee@skku.edu

Abstract

In this paper, I defend fictional creationism, the view that fictional objects are abstract artifacts, from the objection that the apparent truth of fictional negative existentials, such as “Sherlock Holmes does not exist,” poses a serious problem for creationism. I develop a sophisticated version of the pragmatic approach by focusing on the inconsistent referential intentions of ordinary speakers: the upshot would be that creationism is no worse—perhaps even in a better position—than anti-realism, even if we restrict our linguistic data to fictional negative existentials.

Keywords: negative existentials; fictional creationism; fictional objects; referential intention; existence predicate; contextualism

1. The Problem of Negative Existential for Fictional Creationism

Fictional creationism is the ontological view that fictional objects are abstract artifacts whose existence supervenes on our mental activities involving literary practices.¹ The main motivation for creationism is that it can provide a straightforward explanation for our intuition about the literal truth of the following so-called *external metafictional* sentences, sentences that seem to be directly talking about fictional objects:

- (1) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character.
- (2) Sherlock Holmes was created by Conan Doyle.
- (3) There are some fictional characters inspired by Sherlock Holmes.

Like many creationists, in this paper, I will assume referentialism (or Millianism) about names, the semantic view that the semantic content of a name, if it has any, is simply its referent. Then, according to creationism, the semantic content of the fictional name “Sherlock Holmes” is the fictional character Sherlock Holmes brought into existence by Conan Doyle’s act of creation, and so all the above sentences (1)–(3) semantically express true singular propositions about the fictional character Sherlock Holmes. (1) is true because Sherlock Holmes has the property of being a fictional character. (2) is true because Sherlock Holmes has the property of having been created by Conan Doyle. Creationists’ taking (2) to be literally true aligns with our natural intuition that the existence of Sherlock Holmes is contingent on Conan Doyle’s act of creation. This provides a *prima facie* reason that favors creationism over other realist positions on fictional objects, such as Meinongianism and Platonism, which should paraphrase (2) to accommodate

¹For proponents of creationism, see Braun, 2005; Friedell, 2016; Kripke, 2013; Lee, 2022, 2023; Salmon, 1998; Searle, 1979; Thomasson, 1999; van Inwagen, 1977; and Voltolini, 2006.

our intuition about its truth.² (3) is true because the quantifier in (3) ranges over fictional characters, and some of them (e.g., Dr. Gregory House and Conan Edogawa) are inspired by Sherlock Holmes. These simple and straightforward explanations make creationism theoretically attractive.

Creationists, however, face the problem of negative existentials.³ Consider the following singular fictional negative existentials (“*FNEs*” for short):⁴

- (4) Sherlock Holmes does not exist.
- (5) There is no Sherlock Holmes.

It seems that creationists should take (4) and (5) to be literally false: Sherlock Holmes does exist. But this conflicts with the apparent truth of (4) and (5). Therefore, the challenge for creationists is to provide a plausible and tenable explanation for the apparent truth of (4) and (5).⁵

The aim of this paper is to address this challenge by analyzing the nature of *FNEs*. I will argue that *FNEs* do not pose any serious problem for creationism: In Section 2, I first argue that there is indeed a certain kind of an *FNE* that presents linguistic data requiring additional revisionary work for anti-realism but not for creationism, thus favoring creationism over anti-realism. In Section 3, I criticize contextualism about the existence predicate proposed in response to the problem of *FNEs*. In Sections 4 and 5, I defend my pragmatic approach by distinguishing between cases where speakers intend to refer to a fictional object by using a fictional name in an *FNE* and cases where they intend to refer to nothing. In Section 6, I diagnose the reason why solving the problem of *FNEs* is difficult: ordinary speakers’ uses of fictional names in *FNEs* are often inconsistent and confused.

2. The Literal Truth of Fictional Negative Existentials

In this section, I will first argue that even if we restrict our linguistic data to *FNEs*, creationism is not in a worse starting position than anti-realism. My aim here is not to provide a conclusive argument against anti-realism, but to provide one reason for considering creationism as theoretically preferable to anti-realism. To be specific, although both creationists and anti-realists need a revisionary, error-theoretic explanation for *FNEs* such as (4) and (5), when it comes to data related to *FNEs* in modal contexts, anti-realists require an additional different revisionary approach, while creationists can straightforwardly explain them.

Let us begin our discussion by noting that, according to creationism, fictional objects are contingent beings: although Sherlock Holmes does exist, it might not have existed if Conan Doyle had not created it. Now, consider the following (6) and (7), which contain a modal *FNE*:

- (6) Contrary to what actually happened, there might have been no such thing as Sherlock Holmes. Indeed, Conan Doyle might not have written any novels at all. Fortunately, he wrote *A Study in Scarlet*, and the fictional character Sherlock Holmes came into existence.
- (7) Contrary to what actually happened, the fictional character Sherlock Holmes might not have existed, for Conan Doyle might not have written any novels at all.

²See Parsons, 1980 for Meinongianism and Zalta, 1983 for Platonism.

³Another common objection against creationism relates to the question of how to individuate fictional objects (see Brock, 2010; Everett, 2005, 2013, pp. 188–230), which I will not discuss in this paper but have addressed elsewhere (Lee, 2022, 2023).

⁴For simplicity, I will primarily focus on singular negative existentials. Nevertheless, I expect that similar arguments and explanations in this paper apply to descriptive or quantified *FNEs* as well.

⁵Of course, most philosophers at least agree that if one uses sentence (4) or (5) in a so-called intra-fictional or internal metafictional context and conveys the proposition expressed by “According to the Sherlock Holmes stories, Sherlock Holmes does not exist,” the conveyed proposition is not true. In this paper, I will set aside those uses of (4) and (5).

Ordinary speakers will naturally believe that (6) and (7) are literally true, and this intuition of literal truth is straightforwardly explained by creationism, which posits that Sherlock Holmes is a contingent being: Sherlock Holmes does not exist in the closest possible worlds where Conan Doyle did not write any novels.

In contrast, anti-realists cannot take (6) and (7) at face value because, according to anti-realism, the fact that there is no Sherlock Holmes is not contrary to what actually happened. They need to engage in a revisionary work to accommodate our intuition about the truth of (6) and (7). What is worse for anti-realists, however, is that the revisionary work for (6) and (7) becomes an *additional* one, distinct from their original revisionary explanation for bare *FNEs* (i.e., *FNEs* that do not involve any modal operator) such as (4) and (5). The explanations provided by anti-realists for bare *FNEs*—for example, Walton (1990), Crimmins (1998), and Everett (2013)—are revisionary: they suggest that, when ordinary speakers utter bare *FNEs*, they are engaging in some sort of make-believe game or pretense,⁶ even though they seem to sincerely assert bare *FNEs*. But the same revisionary explanations cannot apply to the *FNEs* in (6) and (7).

To see why anti-realists require two different kinds of revisionary approaches for bare *FNEs* and modal *FNEs*, let us consider Everett's view as an example. According to Everett (2013, pp. 72–73), utterances of (4) convey the information that actual singular representations that count as referring to Holmes within the scope of the pretense (“actual Holmes-representations” for short) fail to genuinely refer.⁷ However, this analysis cannot be applied to modal *FNEs* such as “There might have been no such thing as Sherlock Holmes” in (6) and “Sherlock Holmes might not have existed” in (7). This is because if uttering those sentences conveys the information that it is possible that actual Holmes-representations fail to genuinely refer, (6) and (7) make no sense. According to anti-realism, the fact that actual Holmes-representations fail to genuinely refer is what actually happened, and its possibility is not due to the fact that Conan Doyle might not have written novels. Rather, *because* Conan Doyle wrote *A Study in Scarlet*, we came to have Holmes-representations that fail to genuinely refer. Likewise, Everett's analysis cannot be applied to the sentence “Sherlock Holmes came into existence” in (6). Anti-realists, of course, cannot admit that the utterance of this sentence conveys the information that the actual Holmes-representations genuinely refer.

So, in order to explain the intuitive truth of (6) and (7), anti-realists should acknowledge that the *FNEs* in (6) and (7) convey substantially different information than bare *FNEs* like (4) and (5), implying that they require double revisionary works for *FNEs*. This observation makes anti-realism less theoretically appealing than it may initially seem, especially when considering that creationists do not need any revisionary work at all to account for the intuitive truth of (6) and (7).

Moreover, there is compelling linguistic evidence that the modal *FNEs* in (6) and (7) are literally true, in line with creationists' expectations. Consider the following (8):

- (8) Had Biden's parents not met, the person Biden would not have been born. Had Doyle not written any novels, the fictional character Holmes would not have come into existence. So, contrary to what actually happened, both Biden and Holmes might not have existed.

Since the predicate “exist” in the last sentence applies to the plural subject “Biden and Holmes” and does not seem to be a case of syllepsis, as seen in sentences like “Both this color and this feather are

⁶For Walton, 1990, it is an unofficial make-believe game; for Crimmins, 1998, it is a shallow pretense; for Everett, 2013, it is an extended pretense.

⁷For Walton, 1990, pp. 424–425, what fail to genuinely refer are referential *attempts*, whereas for Crimmins, 1998, pp. 33–34, they are modes of presentation. But the criticism against Everett equally applies to their views as well.

light,” we have strong reason to believe that the sentence attributes to both Biden and Holmes the possibility of nonexistence in exactly the same sense.⁸ Therefore, given that the last sentence in (8) semantically expresses the proposition about the possibility of Biden’s literal nonexistence, the same proposition is also about the possibility of Holmes’s literal nonexistence.

Indeed, the natural and straightforward creationist analysis of (8) is that (8) is literally true because both Biden and Holmes are contingent beings: their existence conditions might not have been satisfied. Of course, since Biden and Holmes belong to different species of objects, that is, one is a person and the other is a fictional character, their existence conditions would be different, and (8) describes two different possible situations where the existence conditions for each object are not satisfied.

Note, on the other hand, that the following sentence is infelicitous:

(9) Contrary to what actually happened, there might have been no such thing as the king of the U.S.

The straightforward explanation for the felt infelicity of (9) is that the non-existence of the king of the U.S. is not contrary to what actually happened: there is no such thing as the king of the U.S. in the actual world. Together with the linguistic datum from (8), then, this observation suggests that the ontological status of Sherlock Holmes is different from that of the king of the U.S.: while Biden and Holmes are contingent beings that exist in our actual world, the king of the U.S. does not exist at all, and the description “the king of the U.S.” fails to denote.

Again, I am not denying that anti-realists might find a way to explain away the intuition about the literal truth of (8). My point is simply that there are linguistic data on *FNEs* such as (6)–(8) that favors creationism over anti-realism. While anti-realists need an additional error-theoretic explanation for them, distinct from that for bare *FNEs*, creationists can provide a straightforward, non-revisionary explanation.⁹ This constitutes one theoretically appealing aspect of creationism.

In this section, I have argued that creationism is not in a worse starting position—perhaps creationism is even in a better starting position—than anti-realism, even if we restrict our linguistic data to *FNEs*. However, having a better starting position for creationism, achieved by having a smaller number of revisionary works, does not guarantee that creationism is indeed the best theory. To establish its superiority, creationists must demonstrate that there is a plausible way to explain the apparent truth of bare *FNEs* like (4) and (5).¹⁰ If it turns out that there is none, creationism will lose its theoretical appeal. Therefore, from the next section, I will explore how creationists can successfully address the problem of bare *FNEs*.

3. Against Contextualism about the Existence Predicate

In this section, before defending my pragmatic approach, I will first criticize the so-called contextualism about the existence predicate (“*CEP*” for short), a version of the semantic approach to explaining the apparent truth of *FNEs*.¹¹ I describe this view as follows:

⁸Indeed, it is Everett’s observation that the sentence “*a* and *b* do not exist” denies the existence of *a* and *b* in exactly the same sense, provided the existence predicate is not used as a syllepsis (Everett, 2007, pp. 58–65; 2013, pp. 149–151). Everett uses this observation to criticize creationism, which I will discuss in more detail in Section 3.2.

⁹Note that Meinongians and Platonists also need revisionary work to accommodate our intuition about the truth of (6)–(8).

¹⁰Of course, it is also important to evaluate whether the revisionary explanations proposed by anti-realists are plausible. However, due to the space limit, I will defer criticism of them for another time.

¹¹See, for example, Predelli, 2002, pp. 272–277; Spewak, 2016; Thomasson, 1999, pp. 112–113; and von Solodkoff, 2014 (although Thomasson, 1999 does not explicitly state whether her approach is semantic or pragmatic).

Contextualism about the Existence Predicate: A speaker *S*'s utterance of the singular negative existential "*N* does not exist" in a context *C* semantically expresses the proposition that *N* does not exist as a *Kc* (where a *Kc* is a salient kind in *C*).¹²

For simplicity, I will treat *CEP* as a hidden indexical view about the existence predicate. But my criticism equally applies to other semantic approaches such as the ellipsis view, according to which when a speaker utters "*N* does not exist," she elliptically utters "*N* does not exist as a *Kc*,"¹³ and the modulation view (Spewak, 2016), according to which the semantic content of "exist" is determined by the pragmatic process of modulation.

Now the question is which ontological kinds can be assigned to "*Kc*." Thomasson (1999, pp. 112–113) proposes that "*Kc*" is assigned a kind to which *N* in a relevant fiction in *C* belongs. In many ordinary contexts, for example, our utterances of (4) semantically express the proposition that Sherlock Holmes does not exist *as a person*. However, Everett (2007, pp. 65–71) offers a compelling criticism against Thomasson's view. Suppose an author wrote a story about Yugo where it is indeterminate and unclear to which kind Yugo belongs; what we as readers can only know from the story is that Yugo is a fictional object. But even in this case, the following sentence seems to be true:

(10) Yugo does not exist.

Since there is no kind to which Yugo belongs in fiction, Thomasson's view has a problem explaining the apparent truth of (10).

In response to Everett, von Solodkoff (2014) provides a sophisticated defense of *CEP*.¹⁴ Her idea is that there is no reason to regard the value of "*Kc*" as restricted to a kind to which *N* belongs in fiction. Rather, it seems plausible that a kind like the *concrete object*, that is, a so-called ontologically fundamental kind of object, can also be a salient kind in most contexts. Indeed, assigning *concrete object* to "*Kc*" seems to predict the right result in most contexts. For example, in many ordinary contexts, our utterances of (4) will semantically express the true proposition that Sherlock Holmes does not exist as a concrete object. Similarly, the apparent truth of (10) is well explained because our utterances of (10) semantically express the true proposition that Yugo does not exist as a concrete object. Moreover, it also seems correct to predict that the utterance of (4) will sometimes semantically express a false proposition in contexts where the value of "*Kc*" is fixed to a kind that includes an abstract object or artifact, that is, in such a context where the utterances of (6)–(8) are true.

I think von Solodkoff's approach sheds some light on the problem of *FNEs*. But her view still seems to face some serious problems that are not easily solved. In what follows, I will offer two criticisms against von Solodkoff's version of *CEP*.

3.1. The problem of ordinary negative existentials

Note that *CEP* is a general claim about negative existentials: it is a claim that the existence predicate is context-sensitive. That is, *CEP* applies not only to *FNEs*, but also to ordinary negative

¹²When it comes to a quantified sentence such as (5) whose form is "There is no *N*," creationists can appeal to the well-known phenomenon of context dependent domain restrictions on quantifiers. Therefore, in this paper, I will mainly focus on explaining an *FNE* that contains the existence predicate such as (4).

Walton (2003) criticizes the restricted quantification strategy by pointing out that there seems to be no domain restriction when we use the existence predicate instead of a quantified expression. However, *CEP* is immune to Walton's criticism in that *CEP* does not invoke domain restrictions but rather claims that the existence predicate is a context-sensitive term. (See von Solodkoff, 2014, pp. 348–351 for a response to Walton's criticism.)

¹³Predelli (2002, pp. 272–277) introduces the ellipsis view as one of the possible approaches to *FNEs*.

¹⁴Von Solodkoff (2014, p. 351) mentions that although she prefers the semantic understanding of her proposal, an analogous account could be developed on a more pragmatic understanding of the proposal. But in Sections 4 and 5, I will defend a pragmatic approach that is substantially different from her view.

existentials (“*ONEs*” for short), which include non-fictional ordinary names. Now consider the following *ONE*:

(11) Biden does not exist.

The intuitive falsity of (11) is well explained by von Solodkoff’s *CEP*: our utterances of (11) semantically express the false proposition that Biden does not exist as a concrete object in many ordinary contexts.

However, given that most creationists believe that abstract objects and concrete objects are two equivalent and exhaustive categories of objects, it does not seem easy for von Solodkoff to explain why there seems to be no context where our utterances of (11) semantically express the true proposition that Biden does not exist as an abstract object, where the value of “*Kc*” is fixed to *abstract object*. That is, if our utterances of *FNEs* including fictional names that refer to existing abstract objects, like (4), can express true propositions when uttered in a context where the value of “*Kc*” is *concrete object*, there seems to be no prima facie reason to deny that our utterances of *ONEs* including ordinary names that refer to existing concrete objects, such as (11), can express true propositions when uttered in a context where the value of “*Kc*” is *abstract object*. But, however, salient the kind *abstract object* may be in a particular conversational context, there seems to be no way to semantically express a true proposition by simply uttering (11).

Proponents of *CEP* might claim that every time we utter an *ONE* in a context where the kind *abstract object* is salient, our utterances themselves bring about the context shift, and the value of “*Kc*” comes to be fixed to *concrete object*. However, they should then provide a non-ad hoc explanation for why context shifts occur only when we utter an *ONE*, even if abstract and concrete objects are two equivalent categories of objects. I do not mean to suggest here that such an explanation is impossible. Still, given that the explanation contextualists must provide should not be something that anti-realists can exploit to defend their own position, it seems quite challenging for them to provide such an explanation.

3.2. The problem of plural subjects

Let us now turn to my other criticism, which I consider more serious and is based on Everett’s (2007, pp. 60–62) observation. Everett proposes the apparent truth of the following sentence as a linguistic datum that refutes *CEP*:

(12) Biden exists, but Sherlock Holmes and the round square do not.

The VP elision in the right conjunct suggests that (12) both affirms the existence of Biden and denies the existence of the round square in an *ordinary sense*, whatever that may be. But then we seem forced to admit that (12) also denies the existence of Sherlock Holmes in the same ordinary sense. Everett takes it that linguistic data like (12) point to a constant semantic content of the existence predicate across contexts. In what follows, I will defend Everett’s anti-contextualist view by showing why proponents of *CEP* cannot provide a non-ad hoc response to Everett’s criticism.

Note that von Solodkoff’s version of *CEP* seems immune to Everett’s original objection. In a context where the value of “*Kc*” is fixed to *concrete object*, the utterance of (12) semantically expresses the true proposition that Biden exists as a concrete object, but Sherlock Holmes does not exist as a concrete object and the round square does not exist as a concrete object.¹⁵ Therefore, (12) affirms the existence of Biden and denies the existence of Sherlock Holmes and the round square in the same sense.¹⁶

¹⁵Since the round square does not exist as any kind of object, it does not exist as a concrete object.

¹⁶Spewak (2016) provides an explanation similar to von Solodkoff’s, except that he invokes the process of free enrichment of the existence predicate.

Consider, however, the following seemingly true sentence:¹⁷

- (13) Biden, the U.S., and the number 3 exist, but Sherlock Holmes, Wakanda, and the largest number do not.

In this case, von Solodkoff's contextualist strategy for accommodating the intuitive truth of (12) does not work: it is not the case that the U.S. and the number 3 exist as concrete objects. Arguably, they are abstract objects (or at least there does not seem to be any fictional creationist who denies that they are abstract objects). Moreover, given that Wakanda is a fictional country, it does not seem that the utterance of (13) simply claims that Wakanda does not exist as a concrete object because the U.S. does not exist as a concrete object either. Rather, it seems to claim to the effect that Wakanda is not a *real* country.

Is there any kind other than *concrete object* for the value of "Kc" that can accommodate the intuitive truth of (13)? Von Solodkoff (2014, pp. 341–242) suggests a so-called *serious object*, defined as a non-pretend object: the existence of a serious object has nothing to do with any acts of pretense. Her suggestion seems to predict the right result: Biden, the U.S., and the number 3 exist as serious objects, whereas Sherlock Holmes, Wakanda, and the largest number do not exist as serious objects (i.e., each either does not exist *at all* or is not a serious object).

What then of so-called mythical objects like Vulcan? According to mythical creationism, Vulcan was inadvertently created by Le Verrier's act of mistaken theorizing;¹⁸ Vulcan is not a pretend object, as its existence has nothing to do with any acts of pretense. Thus, if the name "Vulcan" is added to the plural subject of the right conjunct of (13), it seems that the strategy of using *serious object* does not apply. Von Solodkoff, however, gets around this problem in the following way:

[E]ven if [the realist] denies that Vulcan is a pretend object, the realist could expand the category of non-serious objects to include any mythical object. (von Solodkoff, 2014, p. 344)

Nevertheless, I do not think that this move brings any substantial improvement. Expanding the category of non-serious objects to include mythical objects would define non-serious objects disjunctively as pretend or mythical objects. But this looks highly arbitrary and ad hoc.

To illustrate this point, let us consider so-called imaginary objects and hallucinatory objects.¹⁹ Von Solodkoff's maneuver makes it too easy for us to explain away the apparent truth of negative existentials regarding those objects. We could simply expand the category of non-serious objects to include imaginary objects and hallucinatory objects (or narrow down the category of serious objects so that it excludes them), thereby defining non-serious objects disjunctively as pretend, mythical, imaginary, or hallucinatory objects. Regardless of the kinds of objects we encounter that pose the problem of the apparent truth of negative existentials about those objects, expanding the category of non-serious objects to include them offers us a cheap solution. But it is obviously ad hoc.

What von Solodkoff should provide is a substantive explanation of what constitutes (non-) serious objects. However, what we can derive from her suggestion seems to be nothing but the following:

Serious Object: An object *o* is a non-serious object if and only if in most contexts ordinary people tend to utter "*N* does not exist" to express something true, even if a name "*N*" refers to *o*.

¹⁷I thank Daehwi Jeong and Jungkyun Kim for the helpful discussion on this topic.

¹⁸For fictional creationists' arguments for mythical creationism, see Braun, 2005, 2012; Kripke, 2013; and Salmon, 1998, 2002.

¹⁹Cf. Caplan, 2004. Caplan argues convincingly that whatever the arguments for fictional creationism, similar arguments can be made for mythical and imaginary objects. See also Kripke, 2013, pp. 94–100 for his argument for hallucinatory objects.

This clearly shows why the strategy of employing the concept of serious objects is ad hoc. Again, I do not intend to imply here that it is entirely impossible to provide a non-ad hoc, substantive explanation for serious objects. But it does seem to be quite challenging for her to provide such an explanation.

The discussion so far supports the anti-contextualist view that the existence predicate expresses a constant semantic content across contexts. (12) and (13) seem to affirm and deny the existence of various objects in exactly the same primitive sense of “exist.” Given the problems for *CEP*, which we have seen in this section, I believe we now have a motivation to explore an alternative approach in explaining the apparent truth of *FNEs*. In the next section, I will defend a sophisticated version of the pragmatic approach to *FNEs* that aligns with the view that the existence predicate is not a context-sensitive term.

4. The Pragmatic Approach to Fictional Negative Existentials

I propose the following version of the pragmatic approach to *FNEs* (“*PAF*” for short):²⁰

Pragmatic Approach to *FNEs*: When a speaker *S* takes “*N*” to be a fictional name that refers to a fictional object, *S*’s utterance of the singular negative existential “*N* does not exist” (or “There is no *N*”) usually pragmatically conveys the descriptive proposition expressed by the sentence “*N* as a *Kc* does not exist” (or “There is no *N* as a *Kc*”), which results from substituting “*N*” with “*N* as a *Kc*” (where a *Kc* is a salient kind with respect to *N* in a context of utterance).²¹

For simplicity, I will use “*N* as a *Kc*” as an abbreviation for the description “the thing that is both *N* and a *Kc*” (or “the *Kc N*” for short). For example, “Sherlock Holmes as a person” will be used as an abbreviation for the description “the thing that is both Sherlock Holmes and a person” (or “the person Sherlock Holmes”).²² Now, according to my *PAF*, the relevant pragmatic mechanism typically comes into play when a speaker takes “*N*” to be a fictional name referring to a fictional object, because in this case, she generally intends to deny the existence of an eccentric object that is both a fictional character and a *Kc*, for example, Sherlock Holmes as a person (or as a concrete object). On the contrary, if the speaker believes that “Sherlock Holmes” is an ordinary name referring to a person who is already dead, she will generally intend to convey only the literal meaning of her utterance of “Sherlock Holmes does not (or no longer) exist.”²³

This pragmatic mechanism, of course, needs further explanation. Let us first note that, according to creationism, the existence and persistence of fictional objects supervene on our mental activities.

²⁰Nathan Salmon explicitly suggests a pragmatic account of *FNEs* (Salmon, 1998, pp. 302–304). My *PAF* is a more sophisticated pragmatic approach based on his view. van Inwagen (1977, p. 308, n.11) also seems to have in mind a version of the pragmatic approach to *FNEs*, though he gives only a brief outline of his view.

²¹In line with von Solodkoff’s view, I believe that there is no reason to confine the value of “*Kc*” to a kind to which *N* belongs in fiction. Ontologically fundamental kinds can also be assigned to “*Kc*.”

²²In this paper, for the sake of convenience, I will treat “*N* as a *Kc*” as a description. However, this does not commit to any substantial syntactic claim regarding descriptions. The point here is simply that, for example, “Sherlock Holmes as a person” expresses a descriptive content unlike the bare name “Sherlock Holmes,” given that the following three sentences seem to have the same truth condition: “Sherlock Holmes as a person does not exist,” “The person Sherlock Holmes does not exist,” and “The thing that is Sherlock Holmes and a person does not exist.” Readers may substitute the uses of “*N* as a *Kc*” in this paper with “the *Kc N*” or “the thing that is both *N* and a *Kc*” if the latter expressions sound more natural to them. But this substitution does not affect my argument, as the central idea of *PAF* is that “*N*” is substituted by an expression that has a descriptive content. (I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this issue, and to Junhyo Lee and Wooram Lee for their helpful discussion.)

²³Conversely, in uttering “Napoleon does not exist,” if the speaker believes that “Napoleon” is a fictional name that refers to a fictional character, she will generally intend to pragmatically convey the proposition that Napoleon as a person (or as a concrete object) does not exist, which is false.

Thus, when a speaker takes “Sherlock Holmes” to be a fictional name and utters (4) or (5), if she succeeds in having singular thought about Sherlock Holmes and in using the name “Sherlock Holmes” to refer to Sherlock Holmes, then this very success of her mental activities implies the existence of Sherlock Holmes and also contributes to the persistence of Sherlock Holmes. Then it follows from this that her utterance of (4) or (5) cannot be literally true, if her use of “Sherlock Holmes” refers to Sherlock Holmes.²⁴ If the hearer realizes this, he will think that the speaker’s real intention is not to convey the literal meaning, which is false, but to convey another proposition that the speaker believes to be true. Finally, the hearer succeeds in pragmatically grasping the true descriptive proposition that Sherlock Holmes as a person does not exist.

The same process, of course, does not take place with respect to concrete objects like Socrates, whose existence and persistence conditions are independent of our mental activities. Our thinking of or referring to Socrates has no influence on his survival or death: even if he presently no longer exists, we can think of him, use the name “Socrates” to refer to him, and sincerely assert that Socrates no longer exists, without any difficulty.

Our situation is rather comparable to the fact that there is arguably no ordinary context of utterance where a speaker’s utterance of the following sentence (14) is literally true; her successful utterance of (14) normally implies her existence.^{25,26}

(14) I do not exist.

When we hear someone says (14), we almost always expect that the speaker, who is sensible enough, does not just intend to convey the literal meaning of her utterance. In most contexts, (14) is used to pragmatically convey something else. Similarly, creationists can naturally expect that, since there is no context where utterances of bare *FNEs* like (4) and (5) are true when referring is successful, these utterances are usually used to pragmatically convey something else.^{27,28}

Now, the main advantage of *PAF* over contextualism is that *PAF* can account for our observation that the existence predicate expresses a constant semantic content across contexts, that is, the observation that our utterances of (12) and (13) seem to affirm and deny the existence of various objects in exactly the same primitive sense of “exist.” For example, according to *PAF*, if a speaker takes “Sherlock Holmes” and “Wakanda” to be fictional names referring, respectively, to the fictional character Sherlock Holmes and the fictional country Wakanda, then her utterance of (13) pragmatically conveys the proposition expressed by the following sentence (13’), which is obtained by substituting the names “Sherlock Holmes” and “Wakanda” in (13) with the description “Sherlock Holmes as a person” and “Wakanda as a country,” respectively:

²⁴Note again that the propositions expressed by (4) and (5) are true not at the actual world, but at a possible world where Sherlock Holmes does not exist due to Conan Doyle’s lack of any written work. But the inhabitants of that world cannot properly utter (4) or (5) because they cannot entertain any proposition about Sherlock Holmes at all, let alone the proposition that Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

²⁵For simplicity, let us leave aside exceptional cases, such as situations where the deceased in a will video says, “Maybe I do not exist anymore by now.”

²⁶But the speaker’s utterance of “I might not have existed” is true, of course, since the speaker is a contingent being (unless she is a necessary being, such as God). Likewise, although our utterance of (4) or (5) cannot be literally true, since Sherlock Holmes is a contingent being, our utterance of “Sherlock Holmes might not have existed” is true, as we have seen in Section 2.

²⁷Is this pragmatically conveyed proposition (or implicature) cancellable? Since (4) and (5) are not literally true, it will not be canceled in a normal situation, just as the implicature conveyed by uttering (14) will not be canceled in a normal situation where the speaker knows that her utterance is literally false. For example, if the hearer asks, “So, you mean Sherlock Holmes is not a real person. Right?”, the speaker’s natural answer would be “yes.” But this does not mean that there is no context where the implicature can be canceled: if the speaker mistakenly believes that Sherlock Holmes is a real detective who was already dead, she might cancel the implicature and say, “No, I simply mean that Sherlock Holmes no longer exists. He was dead.”

²⁸But there is also an important difference between the two cases: ordinary speakers seem to have a natural intuition that (4) and (5) are literally true, unlike (14). I will explain the reason for this in detail in Sections 5 and 6.

- (13') Biden, the U.S., and the number 3 exist, but Sherlock Holmes as a person, Wakanda as a country, and the largest number do not.

For the sake of argument, let us adopt the orthodox Russellian analysis of a description. Then (13') is equivalent to the sentence "There is (or exists) Biden, the U.S., and the number 3, but there is (or exists) no unique thing that is both Sherlock Holmes and a person, no unique thing that is both Wakanda and a country, and no unique thing that is a largest number." That is, we affirm and deny the existence of various objects in the same primitive sense of "exist."

In a similar vein, according to *PAF*, there is no need for any ad hoc work, to which *CEP* is committed, to identify a single "*Kc*" that appropriately applies to every subject in (13). It is sufficient to replace each name that the speaker takes to be fictional with a corresponding description to obtain the correct result. Even if the name "Vulcan" is added to the plural subject of the right conjunct of (13), as long as the speaker takes "Vulcan" to be a mythical name, she will intend to deny the existence of the eccentric object that is both a mythical object and a planet, namely Vulcan as a planet. Therefore, we can apply exactly the same approach as *PAF* here: simply replacing "Vulcan" with "Vulcan as a planet" leads to the correct result.²⁹

At this point, it should be noted that *PAF* is an approach to illuminate a general, but not every, mechanism for pragmatically conveying something true through the utterance of an *FNE*. I do not deny that there is a case where a speaker uses the existence predicate "exist" to pragmatically convey <existing as a *Kc*>.³⁰ Indeed, there seems to be no reason to deny this, given that the sentence "*N* does not exist as a *Kc*" is equivalent to "*N* as a *Kc* does not exist." Rather, what I deny is that the existence predicate is a context-sensitive term, so that the use of an *FNE* semantically expresses the proposition that *N* does not exist as a *Kc* in a given context. Moreover, as we have seen, in cases where a speaker utters (13), it becomes problematic to assume that the speaker uses the existence predicate for the plural subject in order to pragmatically convey <existing as a *Kc*>, where *Kc* is a single salient kind in a given context. That is precisely why we need a general approach like *PAF*.

Thus far, I have argued that *PAF* satisfactorily explains the apparent truth of a bare *FNE*. But there is one remaining concern: given that ordinary speakers seem to have a natural intuition that (4) and (5) are literally true, I seem to have to admit that there is a kind of meaning confusion among ordinary speakers. Note, however, that my previous explanation only works when a speaker has a referential intention, whether explicit or implicit, for her use of a name to refer to a fictional object. While I expect that in most cases, ordinary speakers at least implicitly have such a referential intention when they think that they are using a fictional name and thus uttering an *FNE*, it seems

²⁹*PAF* is also immune to Everett's criticism against the pragmatic approach (Everett, 2007, pp. 62–64, 2013, pp. 150–151). Suppose a world *w* is identical to ours except for the absence of Biden, and consider the following four sentences:

- (i) Biden does not exist in *w* and Holmes does not exist in *w*.
- (ii) Biden and Holmes do not exist in *w*.
- (iii) Mary got married and had a baby and Sally had a baby and got married.
- (iv) Both Mary and Sally got married and had a baby.

Everett points out that when (iii) and (iv) generate a generalized conversational implicature concerning the expression "and," the utterance of (iii) partly conveys the proposition that Sally had a baby *before* she got married, while the utterance of (iv) does not convey the same proposition. However, (i) and (ii) do seem to convey the same proposition, and this illustrates that the same proposition is not conveyed through a generalized conversational implicature.

I grant that Everett's criticism is applicable to the pragmatic approach that relies on a generalized conversational implicature concerning the existence predicate. However, it does not apply to *PAF* because each sentence resulting from substituting "Holmes as a person" for "Holmes" in (i) and (ii) expresses the same proposition. In this case, the conversational implicature is successfully generated because the interlocutors take the name "Holmes" to be a fictional name.

³⁰For example, when a speaker utters "Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character and does not exist," I think her utterance usually pragmatically conveys the true proposition that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character and does not exist as a person (a detective, or a concrete object).

evident that this is not true for all conversational situations. In uttering an *FNE*, ordinary speakers sometimes seem to have no referential intention to refer to any object, believing instead that their use of a fictional name refers to nothing.³¹ If so, it follows that not every way in which a speaker uses a bare *FNE* has been explained yet. From the next section, to complete an exhaustive explanation for an *FNE*, I will explore a case where a speaker has no referential intention. I believe this will shed important light on the source of ordinary speakers' meaning confusion concerning *FNEs* and why the problem of *FNEs* is notoriously difficult to address.

5. No Referential Intention for Fictional Names in Negative Existentials

Suppose Gi-hun utters (4), but he has a *clear* intention for his use of "Sherlock Holmes" to refer to nothing, believing that the name "Sherlock Holmes" refers to nothing.³² Suppose further that the hearer, Jun-ho, grasps Gi-hun's intention. As we have seen, *PAF* is silent on this case. Nevertheless, it still seems that even in this case, Gi-hun can successfully convey something true to Jun-ho. Certainly, it cannot be the literal meaning of (4), which is false according to creationism. Consequently, our remaining task is to elucidate how Gi-hun conveys something true and to identify the proposition he conveys.

My proposal is to invoke the distinction between the speaker's referent and the semantic referent of "Sherlock Holmes."³³ As a creationist, I suggest that the semantic referent or content of "Sherlock Holmes" is constantly fixed to the abstract artifact Sherlock Holmes, so that in any conversational situation, our use of "Sherlock Holmes" semantically refers to the very abstract artifact Sherlock Holmes. There are at least two reasons supporting this view. First, it offers its own explanatory power. If the semantic referent of "Sherlock Holmes" is indeed the abstract artifact Sherlock Holmes, then, as we have seen, our intuition about the literal truth of external metafictional sentences like (1)–(3) and even of *FNEs* in (6)–(8) is straightforwardly explained. Second, it possesses the virtue of theoretical simplicity; it is simpler than the view that the semantic referent of "Sherlock Holmes" is indeterminate or ambiguous between an abstract object and nothing. Thus, if my simpler view successfully provides a convincing analysis of the phenomenon that we seek to explain, as I will argue in this section and the next, there would be no reason to adhere to the alternative, more complex view.³⁴

On the view I have taken, then, even if an ordinary speaker sometimes uses "Sherlock Holmes" to refer to nothing when uttering (4), this *deviant* use does not determine the semantic referent of "Sherlock Holmes" in (4).³⁵ In other words, while the speaker's referent of Gi-hun's use of "Sherlock Holmes" is nothing, its semantic referent remains the fictional object Sherlock Holmes. Gi-hun is *mistaken* in thinking that the semantic referent of "Sherlock Holmes" is nothing, and as a result, he does not intend for his use of "Sherlock Holmes" to refer to anything.

³¹At this point, however, it should be noted that the literal truth of "N does not exist" does not imply the literal truth of "N does not refer." For example, the truth of "Socrates no longer exists" does not imply the truth of "Socrates' does not refer." Another example, albeit a controversial one, is Salmon's Noman (the merely possible individual who would have come into existence if a particular sperm *S* and a particular egg *E* had fused): the nonexistence of Noman in the actual world does not imply the reference failure of "Noman" (Salmon, 1997, 1998).

³²In this section, for the sake of simplicity, I will limit our discussion to cases where the speaker is clearly aware of her intention to refer to nothing.

³³This distinction is first introduced by Kripke (1977).

³⁴In this respect, Salmon (1998, pp. 298–299) says, "There is first a general methodological consideration. Once fictional characters have been countenanced as real entities, why hold onto an alleged use of their names that fails to refer to them? It is like buying a luxurious Italian sports car only to keep it garaged." See also Thomasson, 2003, pp. 210–214.

³⁵Of course, the speaker still has the so-called reference borrowing intention for her use of "Sherlock Holmes" to refer to the same referent that other speakers' uses of "Sherlock Holmes" refer to. This intention determines the semantic referent of her use of "Sherlock Holmes" as the abstract artifact Sherlock Holmes.

The situation is analogous to cases where we make a mistake in using an ordinary name. For example, suppose I attend a film festival with my friend and encounter the movie star Colin Firth. I intend to inform my friend about him, but I mistakenly use a similar name of another movie star and say, “Colin Farrell was fantastic in the Kingsman movie series!” In this case, the speaker’s referent for my use of “Colin Farrell” is Colin Firth, while its semantic referent is Colin Farrell. Furthermore, despite my mistake, I can still pragmatically convey something true to my friend, namely the proposition that Colin Firth was fantastic in the Kingsman movie series, provided my friend immediately grasps my intention.

Similarly, Gi-hun can pragmatically convey something true to Jun-ho. I propose that the proposition conveyed by Gi-hun is the negation of a so-called atomic gappy proposition: gappy propositions are propositions that lack their essential constituents, and they are expressed by sentences containing genuinely non-referring names.³⁶ For explanatory purposes, let us assume the existence of a structured singular proposition. Then we can represent the proposition semantically expressed by (1) with the ordered pair <Holmes, being a fictional character>. Likewise, (4) semantically expresses the false proposition <<Holmes, existing>, NEG>. But since Gi-hun intends for his use of “Sherlock Holmes” to refer to nothing when uttering (4), even though (4) is literally false, he pragmatically conveys something true, that is, the negation of the atomic gappy proposition <<__, existing>, NEG>, given that an atomic gappy proposition is always untrue.³⁷

We now have an explanation for how Gi-hun conveys something true and which proposition he conveys. When uttering (4), Gi-hun mistakenly thinks that the semantic referent of “Sherlock Holmes” is nothing, leading him to intend to refer to nothing. As a result, the speaker’s referent for Gi-hun’s use of “Sherlock Holmes” becomes nothing, and Gi-hun conveys the true gappy proposition <<__, existing>, NEG>, mistakenly believing that what he conveys is the literal meaning of his utterance. If Jun-ho grasps Gi-hun’s intention, he can get the proposition conveyed by Gi-hun.^{38-39,40}

With the account provided above, we finally have a *theoretically* complete explanation of how the speaker can convey something true by uttering (4): If the speaker has the intention for her use of “Sherlock Holmes” to refer to a fictional character, she pragmatically conveys the true descriptive proposition that Sherlock Holmes as a person (a detective, or a concrete object) does not exist. If, on the other hand, the speaker has no referential intention (by mistake), she pragmatically conveys the true gappy proposition <<__, existing>, NEG>. In either case, the speaker can convey something true.⁴¹

³⁶For the gappy proposition theory, see, for example, Adams & Stecker, 1994; Braun, 1993, 2005; and Salmon, 1998. Of course, there are criticisms (see, e.g., Brock, 2004; Everett, 2003; Mousavian, 2011), but the reason I introduce the concept of a gappy proposition here is solely for the sake of convenience in the explanation. Regardless of which semantic theory is considered the best for sentences containing genuinely non-referring names, my explanation remains consistent with that theory.

³⁷Salmon (1998, pp. 308–310) contends that an atomic gappy proposition is neither true nor false, while Braun (2005, pp. 604–607) argues for its falsity. But both at least agree that it is untrue. (For Salmon, if the proposition <<__, existing>, NEG> is true, then the negation here is to be understood as a so-called *exclusion* negation.)

³⁸The true gappy proposition <<__, existing>, NEG> is of course *pragmatically* conveyed by Gi-hun in a sense. But it is not a Gricean implicature, for in this case (as in the Colin Firth/Farrell case) the speaker is mistaken in grasping the literal meaning of a sentence.

³⁹In this case, Gi-hun might also intend to convey the proposition about a fictional name that “Sherlock Holmes” does not semantically refer, mistakenly believing that it is true.

⁴⁰One might raise an objection that if what the speaker conveys here is the true gappy proposition <<__, existing>, NEG>, it fails to account for our intuition that our utterances “Spider-man does not exist” and “Peter Parker does not exist” are about the same fictional character, whereas “Sherlock Holmes does not exist” is about a different fictional character (cf. Everett, 2013, p. 152). While this objection may pose a challenge for philosophers who claim that every fictional name in *FNEs* always semantically fails to refer, it does not apply to my view. First, in a case where the speaker has a *transparent* intention to refer to nothing, the speaker herself will, at least at the time of the utterance, consider all such utterances to be merely about nothing. Second, *our* intuition about such utterances is easily explained by *PAF*, and the cases I examine in this section are limited to cases where, even though a speaker has an intention to refer to nothing, this intention does not determine the semantic referent of a fictional name.

⁴¹A similar explanation applies to sentence (5) as well.

But what about the *actual* linguistic practice of ordinary speakers with respect to bare *FNEs*? Can the theoretical explanation provide thus far be readily applied to our actual linguistic practice? If most speakers consistently maintain a single transparent referential intention in every utterance of *FNEs*, whether that intention is to refer to a fictional object or to refer to nothing, then there would be no issue in directly applying our explanation to the actual linguistic practice. Reality, however, does not seem to be quite so straightforward. In fact, I believe that the final crucial step in explaining the apparent truth of a bare *FNE* is to address this very issue.

6. Ordinary Speakers' Inconsistent Intentions

I mentioned earlier that I expect that in most cases, when ordinary speakers utter *FNEs*, they at least implicitly have the intention to refer to a fictional object. However, that does not mean that they do not at the same time have any implicit intention to refer to nothing. If they are not careful about maintaining their own referential intention when they utter *FNEs*, they are likely to become confused and fail to have a single transparent intention. They might implicitly and vaguely have two inconsistent intentions without consciously realizing they have both intentions. It might be the case that they implicitly have the intention to refer to a fictional object when they begin to utter but think that they have no referential intention at the end of their utterance, or vice versa. I believe that this is a real source of difficulty in resolving the problem of *FNEs*.

Indeed, David Braun has previously highlighted that ordinary speakers' beliefs about fiction are confused and inconsistent. He wrote:

Most ordinary speakers' beliefs about fiction really are (deep down) confused and inconsistent. This should not surprise us. Fiction, after all, raises *hard* issues in semantics and metaphysics. We should not expect ordinary speakers to (tacitly) believe a coherent, unproblematic theory of fiction, when philosophers have so many difficulties formulating an explicit one that fits their pre-theoretic intuitions. (Braun, 2005, p. 613)

I agree with Braun's view with respect to bare *FNEs*, as I expect that, more often than not, ordinary speakers are indeed confused and implicitly have two inconsistent referential intentions when they utter bare *FNEs*. Unlike Braun, however, the kind of inconsistency I ascribe to ordinary speakers is a local one; it arises only when they utter *FNEs* and is not a widespread one extending to every use of all kinds of sentences about fiction. For example, I do not see a compelling reason to attribute inconsistent referential intentions to ordinary speakers when they utter external metafictional sentences like (1)–(3) or modal *FNEs* like (6)–(8). That is, my theory minimalizes the attribution of inconsistency and confusion to ordinary speakers as much as possible, which is preferable if it provides a satisfactory explanation for the phenomena.

Suppose the speaker implicitly has two inconsistent intentions when she utters (4). In such a case, there are two true propositions that she can convey to the hearer: one is the proposition that Sherlock Holmes as a person does not exist, and the other is the proposition $\langle\langle __, \text{existing} \rangle, \text{NEG} \rangle$. If, after her utterance, she pays attention to her intention to refer to a fictional object, she will believe that she has pragmatically conveyed the first proposition. On the other hand, if she pays attention to her other intention to refer to nothing, she will believe that she has *literally* conveyed the second proposition.⁴² But without any conscious reflection on her own mental state, the speaker's thought remains disorganized and confused. She believes, of course, that she has conveyed something true anyway, but she has no clear idea of which intention(s) she has, exactly which proposition(s) she

⁴²And presumably she also believes that she has pragmatically conveyed the proposition that "Sherlock Holmes" semantically refers to nothing.

conveys, and whether the proposition(s) she conveys belongs to an implicature or a literal meaning. The same applies to the hearer as well. Although the hearer believes that the speaker conveys something true to him, he too has only a vague idea of which intention(s) the speaker has, which proposition(s) he gets from the speaker, and whether the proposition(s) he gets belongs to an implicature or a literal meaning. I suggest that all of this contributes to the source of ordinary speakers' meaning confusion with respect to bare *FNEs*, if there is any ordinary intuition that bare *FNEs* such as (4) and (5) are literally true.

In this regard, the difficulty in resolving the problem of *FNEs* arises from this inconsistency and confusion of ordinary speakers. Suppose, without exception, that ordinary speakers invariably intend to refer to a fictional object using a fictional name, even when they utter bare *FNEs* such as (4) and (5). Under this supposition, since they will recognize that the true descriptive proposition that Sherlock Holmes as a person does not exist is conveyed only pragmatically, it becomes challenging to explain why many have the mistaken ordinary intuition that *FNEs* such as (4) and (5) are literally true, even though they are in fact literally false.

But it is also unsatisfactory to assume that, unlike other kinds of metafictional sentences, bare *FNEs* are exceptional in the sense that ordinary speakers always have no referential intention whenever they utter *FNEs*. This is because, not to mention modal *FNEs* in (6)–(8), there are certain linguistic data on bare *FNEs* which support that the speaker has a referential intention to refer to a fictional object. For example, suppose I utter “Sherlock Holmes does not exist” and a little later I utter “Spider-Man does not exist either.” Then it seems that I am literally talking about two different fictional characters (not just about two different fictional names) and expressing something different by each utterance.⁴³ But if I utter “Peter Parker does not exist” and a little later I utter “So, neither does Spider-Man,” it seems that I am literally talking about one and the same fictional character.⁴⁴

All of this suggests that we should admit that, in our actual linguistic practice, ordinary speakers frequently have inconsistent referential intentions when they utter bare *FNEs*. If we overlook this and assume that ordinary speakers' uses of fictional names in *FNEs* are consistent, we will always be left with some unexplained ordinary intuitions about *FNEs*. Embracing the reality of this inconsistency and confusion among ordinary speakers enables us to find a way to account for all the various ordinary intuitions about *FNEs*.

I suggest that the inconsistency arises because ordinary speakers have ambivalent ordinary intuitions about fictional objects. Indeed, the following seems clear to me: In many cases, ordinary speakers' uses of fictional names presuppose that there are fictional objects, but it is also hard to deny that they have an ordinary anti-realist intuition about fictional names and objects. To the extent that this anti-realist intuition is pre-theoretic and ordinary, it is well explained away by creationism, as we have seen so far. But what about cases where a speaker explicitly believes and expresses her belief that fictional characters are nothing at all, just like an anti-realist?⁴⁵ Before finishing, let me make a diagnosis of this case.

Consider the following conversation:

Jennie: Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

LISA: You mean Sherlock Holmes is not a real person, right?

If Jennie casually replies, “Yes, because Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character,” then no problem arises, and they are staying in an ordinary conversational context. However, suppose Jennie replies as follows:

⁴³See Braun, 1993, pp. 454–455 for criticism against the so-called metalinguistic view that *FNEs* *semantically* express propositions about fictional names, which I found quite persuasive. (See Donnellan, 1974 and Thomasson, 2003, 2007, Chapter 2.5, 2011 for the metalinguistic view; see Everett, 2013, Chapter 7.2 for criticism of Thomasson.)

⁴⁴See also note 40.

⁴⁵I thank Daehwi Jeong for the helpful discussion on this topic.

- (15) No, I do not just mean that Sherlock Holmes is not a real person. What I mean is that Sherlock Holmes is nothing at all, *because* he is a fictional character. Fictional characters do not exist, not just as real people, but they are simply nothing.

I suspect that in this case, if Jennie's view, as expressed by (15), is literally and explicitly the same as the view held by anti-realists, then Jennie is expressing her premature *philosophical* view, which could develop into anti-realism. But if a speaker's anti-realist intuition becomes no longer pre-theoretic, it is surely wrong according to creationism. While some speakers may sometimes say something like (15), creationists need not paraphrase (15) as expressing true and consistent propositions. Indeed, creationists need not paraphrase the philosophical views of anti-realists and their utterances as true and consistent.⁴⁶ Thus, the fact that there is no way for creationists to paraphrase (15) does not provide any motivation for giving up creationism. According to creationism, it is simply wrong to say that fictional characters are simply nothing.⁴⁷

7. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have argued that *FNEs* do not pose any serious problem for creationism. I first pointed out that modal *FNEs* provide linguistic evidence that favors creationism over anti-realism, as anti-realists require additional revisionary work, whereas creationists can straightforwardly explain them. I then diagnosed that the difficulty in resolving the problem of *FNEs* arises from the inconsistency and confusion of ordinary speakers. By acknowledging this, we can satisfactorily explain all the various ordinary intuitions regarding *FNEs*.

From this, I hope to have demonstrated that creationism remains a viable and compelling view. At the very least, I hope that my discussion in this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the problem of *FNEs*, which stands as one of the most perplexing and significant issues that has constantly troubled philosophers.

Acknowledgments. For their valuable suggestions and comments on earlier versions of this paper, I am grateful to Yoorim In, Hannah Kim, Junhyo Lee, Wooram Lee, Steve Wagner, and especially two anonymous reviewers for the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. I also greatly appreciate the engaging discussions and feedback received from the audience during my presentation at the Korean Society for Analytic Philosophy Graduate Conference in winter 2022 and the 2023 APA Central Meeting, as well as the students of my graduate seminar in spring 2021. Special thanks go to Daehwi Jeong, Jungkyun Kim, and Seong Soo Park for their exceptionally helpful comments.

Jeonggyu Lee is an assistant professor of philosophy at Sungkyunkwan University. He works primarily on philosophy of language, metaphysics, and philosophy of fiction.

References

- Adams, F., & Stecker, R. (1994). Vacuous singular terms. *Mind & Language*, 9, 387–401.
- Braun, D. (1993). Empty names. *Noûs*, 27, 449–469.
- Braun, D. (2005). Empty names, fictional names, mythical names. *Noûs*, 39, 596–631.
- Braun, D. (2012). Hob, nob, and mythical witches. In W. P. Kabasenche, M. O'Rourke, & M. H. Slater (Eds.), *Reference and referring* (pp. 149–187). MIT Press.
- Brock, S. (2004). The ubiquitous problem of empty names. *Journal of Philosophy*, 101, 277–298.

⁴⁶I suspect that the use of the existence predicate "exist" makes an ordinary context susceptible to being shifted into a (quasi-) philosophical context, as its use tends to mix ordinary and philosophical contexts. In addition, not every *ordinary* speaker might agree with Jennie's utterance of (15). Lisa may *sincerely* ask Jennie back about how it is possible for something that is a fictional character to be considered as nothing at all. In this case, I believe they commence a philosophical debate, and anti-realists need not paraphrase Lisa's so-called *realist* utterance either.

⁴⁷Therefore, there is of course no problem for creationists to argue against those *quasi*-philosophers. (This aligns somewhat with Braun's view that philosophers can recommend to speakers how to reform their speech.)

- Brock, S. (2010). The creationist fiction: The case against creationism about fictional characters. *The Philosophical Review*, 119, 337–364.
- Caplan, B. (2004). Creatures of fiction, myth, and imagination. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 41, 331–337.
- Crimmins, M. (1998). Hesperus and phosphorus: Sense, pretense, and reference. *The Philosophical Review*, 107, 1–47.
- Donnellan, K. (1974). Speaking of nothing. *The Philosophical Review*, 83, 3–31.
- Everett, A. (2003). Empty names and ‘gappy’ propositions. *Philosophical Studies*, 116, 1–36.
- Everett, A. (2005). Against fictional realism. *Journal of Philosophy*, 102, 624–649.
- Everett, A. (2007). Pretense, existence, and fictional objects. *Philosophy and phenomenological research*, 74, 56–81.
- Everett, A. (2013). *The nonexistent*. Oxford University Press.
- Friedell, D. (2016). Abstract creationism and authorial intention. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 74, 129–137.
- Kripke, S. (1977). Speaker’s reference and semantic reference. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 2, 255–276.
- Kripke, S. (2013). *Reference and existence*. Oxford University Press.
- Lee, J. (2022). Authorial intention, readers creation, and reference shift. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 72, 381–401.
- Lee, J. (2023). Harry Potter and the philosopher’s table. *Philosophies*, 8, Article 67. <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies8040067>
- Mousavian, S. N. (2011). Gappy propositions? *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 41, 125–158.
- Parsons, T. (1980). *Nonexistent objects*. Yale University Press.
- Predelli, S. (2002). “Holmes” and Holmes—a Millian analysis of names and fiction. *Dialectica*, 56, 261–279.
- Salmon, N. (1997). Existence. *Philosophical Perspective*, 1, 49–108.
- Salmon, N. (1998). Nonexistence. *Noûs*, 32, 277–319.
- Salmon, N. (2002). Mythical object. In J. K.Campbell, M.O’Rourke, & D.Shier (Eds.), *Meaning and truth: Investigations in philosophical semantics* (pp. 91–107). Oxford University Press.
- Searle, J. (1979). The logical status of fictional discourse. In his *Expression and meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. (pp. 58–75). Cambridge University Press.
- Spewak, D. (2016). A modulation account of negative existentials. *Philosophia*, 44, 227–245.
- Thomasson, A. (1999). *Fiction and metaphysics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thomasson, A. (2003). Speaking of fictional characters. *Dialectica*, 57, 205–223.
- Thomasson, A. (2007). *Ordinary objects*. Oxford University Press.
- Thomasson, A. (2011). Fiction, existence and indeterminacy. In J.Woods (Ed.), *Fictions and models: New essays* (pp. 109–148). *Philosophia*.
- Van Inwagen, P. (1977). Creature of fiction. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14, 299–308.
- Voltolini, A. (2006). *How ficta follow fiction: A syncretistic account of fictional entities*. Springer.
- Von Solodkoff, T. (2014). Fictional realism and negative existentials. In M.Garcia-Carpintero, & G.Marti (Eds.), *Empty representations: Reference and non-existence* (pp. 333–352). Oxford University Press.
- Walton, K. (1990). *Mimesis as make-believe: On the foundations of the representational arts*. Harvard University Press.
- Walton, K. (2003). Restricted quantification, negative existentials, and fiction. *Dialectica*, 57, 239–242.
- Zalta, E. (1983). *Abstract objects: An introduction to axiomatic metaphysics*. D. Reidel.