

7

Brutal Identity

Ben Caplan and Cathleen Muller

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we defend a view according to which the identity and distinctness of fictional characters is, in a sense to be explained, brute. In Section 2, we present the view and two of its rivals, which are due to Terence Parsons (1980, 2011) and to Benjamin Schnieder and Tatjana von Solodkoff (2009). A common objection to the view we defend is that it leads to unacceptable arbitrariness about how many fictional characters there are. But, in Sections 3 and 4, we argue that, at least as far as arbitrariness is concerned, there is no reason to reject the view in favour of either of its rivals.

We should say at the outset that there is one question about fictional characters that we disagree about: whether there are any. (One of us thinks that there are; the other does not.¹) But, although we disagree about that, we agree that, *if* there are any fictional characters, then their identity and distinctness is, in the sense to be explained, brute.² In Section 5, we briefly address the question of when there are, and when there aren't, fictional characters. But, again, we do so on the assumption that there are some fictional characters.

2. Parsons, Schnieder and von Solodkoff, and Us

2.1. *The Identity Question for fictional characters*

The first two novels in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy are *The Golden Compass* (1995) and *The Subtle Knife* (1997). In *The Golden Compass*, a young girl, Lyra Belacqua, leaves Oxford and ventures north to Svalbard; along the way, she is

¹ See Muller (2012).

² Actually, it turns out that the view we defend is trivially true if it's necessary that there are no fictional characters. See note 26. So we could both accept the view even if we disagree about whether there are fictional characters. But we're more interested in whether those who accept that there are fictional characters should accept the view; we think that they should.

accompanied by an armoured bear, Iorek Byrnison. In *The Subtle Knife*, Lyra meets up with Will Parry, a young boy from another world who is looking for his father, John Parry. (Warning: this chapter contains a spoiler about John Parry.) On some views, the realm of objects includes fictional characters such as Lyra, Iorek, Will, and his father.³ One reason for accepting these views is that they straightforwardly account for the truth of some sentences that contain names that seem to refer to, and quantifier expressions that seem to quantify over, fictional characters: for example,

- (1) Lyra and Iorek are fictional characters.

and

- (2) Some fictional characters that come from *The Golden Compass* reappear in *The Subtle Knife*.

In *Nonexistent Objects*, Parsons (1980) argues that fictional characters are concrete but don't exist.⁴ By contrast, Peter van Inwagen (1977), in 'Creatures of Fiction', and Saul Kripke (2013), in *Reference and Existence*, argue that fictional characters exist but aren't concrete.⁵ But, on all of their views, sentences like (1) and (2) are straightforwardly true.⁶

On the assumption that the realm of objects includes fictional characters, we can ask questions about when they are, or are not, identical.⁷ More generally, we can ask the following question.

The Identity Question (for Fictional Characters): For any fictional characters x and y , what necessary and sufficient conditions must x and y satisfy for it to be the case that $x = y$?

An answer to the Identity Question is a proposition expressed by an instance of the following schema.

- (3) Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if and only if ____.⁸

³ And by 'his father' we mean, of course, 'the fictional character that, according to *The Subtle Knife*, is Will's father'.

⁴ See also Parsons (2011). For similar views, see Routley (1980: 537–605); Zalta (1983: 91–9; 1988: 123–7); Priest (2005: 116–33); Berto (2013: 182–9). Somewhat confusingly, Zalta describes the objects that he posits as 'abstract', but we think that his view belongs in the same camp as Parsons'.

⁵ See also van Inwagen (2003), Kripke (2011). For similar views, see Salmon (1998), Thomasson (1999), Braun (2005). A third possibility is that fictional characters exist and are concrete (but perhaps are not actual). Sainsbury (2009: 68–90) discusses but does not endorse this view. The view would fit with David Lewis' (1986) modal realism; but, as far as we know, it is not actually Lewis' view. (See Lewis, 1978: 262–3.)

⁶ See van Inwagen (1977: 40–7); Parsons (1980: 32–8, 52–4); Kripke (2011: 62–4; 2013: 69–72).

⁷ Actually, Fine (1982: 97, 99) thinks that we can ask these questions even if we don't think that the realm of objects includes fictional characters.

⁸ We are taking questions and answers to be, not linguistic expressions, but rather their semantic contents (see Braun, 2011: 577). Taking questions and answers to be semantic contents might complicate the question of which answers are informative and which are not. See notes 14 and 15.

In *Nonexistent Objects*, Parsons proposes the following answer to the Identity Question.

Parsons' Answer (to the Identity Question): Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if and only if x and y have all the same nuclear properties.⁹

(We say a bit more about what nuclear properties are below, in Section 3. We should say here that we are assuming that properties like *being identical with A* aren't nuclear.¹⁰ Otherwise, Parsons' Answer would be trivial.) Van Inwagen and Kripke don't propose an answer to the Identity Question.¹¹ But, in 'In Defence of Fictional Realism', Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009) propose the following answer to the Identity Question on behalf of those, like van Inwagen and Kripke, who think that fictional characters exist but aren't concrete.

Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer (to the Identity Question): Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if and only if

- (i) there is a fiction T such that x and y both come from T ; and,
- (ii) according to T , $x = y$.¹²

According to the view we defend, by contrast, Parsons' Answer and Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer are false; and, indeed, there is no true, finitely stateable, informative answer to the Identity Question.

Brutal Identity (for Fictional Characters): There is no true, finitely stateable, informative answer to the Identity Question.¹³

⁹ See Parsons (1980: 19, 27–9; 2011: 28). Parsons' Answer is the necessitation of his Principle (1)—which he later calls 'Individuation'—that is restricted to fictional characters.

¹⁰ See Parsons (1980: 28).

¹¹ But—because of the possibility of fictional characters that, according to the fiction that they come from, are indistinguishable—van Inwagen would probably reject Parsons' Answer and any view that individuates fictional characters by the properties that they are said to have in the fiction. See van Inwagen's (2003: 152) discussion of Wolterstorff (1980). For further discussion of fictional characters that are indistinguishable within the fiction, see Parsons (1980: 190–4); Fine (1982: 132–6; 1984: 133–4).

¹² See Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009: 143). Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer is equivalent to their Identity, provided that (a), if Identity is true, then it's necessarily true and (b), necessarily, if two fictional characters come from distinct fictions, then they're distinct. (Our criticism of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's view in the text doesn't rely on either of these assumptions.) A fictional character comes from a fiction that, in Schnieder and von Solodkoff's (2009: 143) sense, it originates in.

¹³ For similar views, see Fine (1982: 135–6); Thomasson (1999: 69; 2011); Berto (2013: 206). But Thomasson arrives at something like Brutal Identity by a different route: the indeterminacy of identity for fictional characters.

On the indeterminacy of identity for fictional characters, see also Lamarque (2003: 206–7), Parsons (2011); and, on the indeterminacy of identity in general, see Parsons (1987, 2000). In the case of fictional characters, Cameron (2012) and Murday (forthcoming) offer a supervaluationist way of making identity sentences come out indeterminate without committing themselves to metaphysical indeterminacy. (For a parallel view in the case of musical works, see Moore, 2012.) For doubts about this supervaluationist strategy, see Howell (2011a: 167–8). Note that the indeterminacy of identity does not entail Brutal Identity. For example, on Parsons' view, the indeterminacy of identity for fictional characters follows from the

In the rest of Section 2, we say a bit more about Brutal Identity. In the rest of this chapter, we compare Brutal Identity with Parsons' theory (Section 3) and Schnieder and von Solodkoff's theory (Section 4).

2.2. Some views in the vicinity of Brutal Identity

Several kinds of answers to the Identity Question are consistent with Brutal Identity. First, it's consistent with Brutal Identity that some answers to the Identity Question are finitely stateable and informative but false: for example, the proposition expressed by

- (4) Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if and only if there are more polar bears than humans in Svalbard.

(False answers can be informative, too. They provide information; it's just that the information they provide is *misinformation*.)

Second, it's consistent with Brutal Identity that some answers to the Identity Question are informative and true but not finitely stateable: for example, the proposition expressed by

- (5) Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if and only if
- (i) $x = \text{Lyra}$ and $y = \text{Lyra}$, or
 - (ii) $x = \text{Colonel John Parry}$ and $y = \text{Colonel John Parry}$, or
 - (iii) $x = \text{Colonel John Parry}$ and $y = \text{Dr Stanislaus Grumman}$, or
 - (iv) $x = \text{Harry Potter}$ and $y = \text{J.K. Rowling's most famous creation}$, or
 - (v) ...¹⁴

The proposition expressed by (5) is what Markosian (1998: 214; 2008: 352) would describe as 'an infinitely long list of every possible situation' in which some fictional characters are identical, a claim that 'simply enumerates each individual case' of identity. And there might be other answers to the Identity Question that are

indeterminacy of property possession and Parsons' Answer, which of course is inconsistent with Brutal Identity. See Parsons (2011: 40).

The similarity between Brutal Identity and Brutal Composition (see Markosian, 1998; 2008: 352–4) is intentional, as is the similarity between Brutal Identity and McDaniel's (2007) Brutal View (about simples). (Markosian no longer accepts Brutal Composition. See Markosian, 2014.) The similarity between Brutal Identity and Hazlett's (2010) Brutal Individuation, which is a view about the modal profile of objects, is the result of a common cause. On Brutal Composition, see Section 4.5 below.

¹⁴ If (5) requires infinitely many disjuncts, that would be, not because there are infinitely many fictional characters, but rather because there are infinitely many ways of describing those characters. Still, it's a nice question whether the proposition expressed by (5) is finitely stateable. Introducing new predicates might allow us to state that proposition finitely if all of the models of (5) have infinite domains. (The result is a strengthening, due to Craig and Vaught, 1958, of an original result due to Kleene, 1952; see Makkai, 1971. Thanks to Peter Pagin for drawing our attention to these results.) We won't pursue these matters here except to note that Brutal Identity is consistent with the finite stateability of the proposition expressed by (5), provided that the proposition expressed by the resulting sentence—the one with new predicates—is not informative in the relevant sense. (Markosian [1998: 218; 2008: 352] suggests that the original sentence—the one without the new predicates—or perhaps the proposition it expresses is not informative to begin with.)

informative and true but not finitely stateable: for example, the proposition expressed by

- (6) Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if and only if
- (i) x and y are a case of kind K_1 , and P_1 is true, or
 - (ii) x and y are a case of kind K_2 , and P_2 is true, or
 - (iii) ...

The proposition expressed by (6) is what Markosian (2008: 353–4) would describe as ‘a serial response’, one that in effect provides infinitely many necessary and sufficient conditions for infinitely many different kinds of cases.

Third, it’s consistent with Brutal Identity that some answers to the Identity Question are true and finitely stateable but uninformative: for example, the proposition expressed by

- (7) Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if and only if $x = y$.

The proposition expressed by (7) is uninformative, either because it’s circular or because it’s trivial.¹⁵ It’s also consistent with Brutal Identity that there are true, finitely stateable, and informative necessary conditions: for example, the proposition expressed by

- (8) Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ only if it’s not the case that, for some property F , x has F and y lacks F .

What’s not consistent with Brutal Identity is the conjunction of the propositions expressed by (8) and

- (9) Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if it’s not the case that, for some property F , x has F and y lacks F .

Well, at least not if the proposition expressed by (9) is informative. That proposition is trivially true if we allow the quantifier expression ‘for some property F ’ to quantify over identity properties like *being identical with A*. But, in that case, the proposition expressed by (9) wouldn’t be informative in the relevant sense. If we restrict the quantifier expression ‘for some property F ’ in (9) to purely qualitative properties, then the proposition expressed by (9) might no longer be true.¹⁶

¹⁵ To rule out some answers as uninformative, Markosian (1998: 212–13) appeals to synonymy and McDaniel (2007: 233) appeals to circularity. We won’t here try to settle, in general, what counts as an informative answer to the Identity Question; nothing much in the text hangs on exactly what counts, or doesn’t count, as an informative answer to the Identity Question. (But see note 14.) We are assuming, though, that the proposition expressed by (7) is not an informative answer to the Identity Question and that Parsons’ Answer and Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer are both informative answers to the Identity Question.

¹⁶ If Fred and George (fictional characters that are introduced in Section 2.3) are distinct, they might provide a counter-example to the proposition expressed by (9) on this restricted reading. This is a problem for Routley’s (1980: 414–15) and Priest’s (2005: 87–9, 110–15) theories. They say that A and B are identical if and only if they have the same (perhaps extensional) properties (perhaps in the same worlds). (See also

According to Brutal Identity, there is no true, finitely stateable, informative answer to the Identity Question. But that doesn't entail that identity is ever (metaphysically) indeterminate. Perhaps, for any fictional characters, either it's determinate that they're identical or it's determinate that they're distinct. It's just that, if Brutal Identity is true, then there can't be a true, finitely stateable, informative principle that settles the matter in every case: that is such that it is necessary that, for any fictional characters, either that principle entails that they're identical or it entails that they're distinct. For such a principle would be a true, finitely stateable, informative answer to the Identity Question.

It might be helpful at this point to distinguish Brutal Identity from two views with which it might be confused.

The Brutality of Identity Facts (about Fictional Characters): For any fictional characters x and y , if it is a fact that $x = y$, then there is no further fact in virtue of which the fact that $x = y$ obtains.¹⁷

The Non-supervenience of Identity Facts (about Fictional Characters): It is not the case that all of the identity facts about fictional characters supervene on the purely qualitative facts.¹⁸

Brutal Identity is consistent with the denial of the Brutality of Identity Facts. For example, perhaps each identity fact about fictional characters obtains in virtue of a fact about the mind of God (and perhaps any true, informative proposition that describes all of these facts about the mind of God could be expressed only by a sentence that is infinitely long). Brutal Identity would also be consistent with the denial of the Non-supervenience of Identity Facts if, for example, the facts about the mind of God in virtue of which identity facts about fictional characters obtain are all purely qualitative facts (and there is still no true, finitely stateable, informative proposition that describes all of these facts about the mind of God). As it happens, we are sympathetic to something like the Brutality of Identity Facts and

Berto, 2013: 179–81.) If those properties include *being identical with A*, then their answer to the Identity Question isn't informative (see Priest, 2005: 88); and, if they don't, then their answer is open to counter-example. For a defence of the possibility of distinct but actually indiscernible objects, see Adams (1979: 17–19). (And of course see also Black, 1952.) The needed counter-example, though, might be provided only by distinct objects that are necessarily indiscernible. For further discussion, see Berto (2013: 203–6). In the end, Berto seems sympathetic to something like Brutal Identity. See Berto (2013: 206).

¹⁷ See Cameron (2012: 188–9). Compare the Brutality of Compositional Facts, which Markosian (1998: 215) was once sympathetic to, and the Brutal View of Facts about Simplicity, which McDaniel (2007: 236) might not be sympathetic to. (Markosian no longer takes compositional facts to be brute; rather, he takes them to be grounded in existence and location facts, and he takes those facts to be brute. See Markosian, 2014.) As Cameron (2012: 189) points out, the brute identity facts posited by the Brutality of Identity Facts have a lot in common with the brute semantic facts (about the reference of names or the extensions of predicates) posited by Kearns and Magidor (2008, 2012) and Breckenridge and Magidor (2012). (See also Cameron, 2010b.)

¹⁸ Compare the Non-supervenience of Composition, which Markosian (1998: 216) is not sympathetic to, and the negation of World Actualism, which negation Fine (1982: 101) is not sympathetic to either.

the Non-supervenience of Identity Facts, largely for reasons that have nothing to do with fictional characters, but we won't discuss either of those views further here.¹⁹ (Very quickly, the idea is that, if $x = y$, then the fact that $x = y$ just is the fact that $x = x$; and that fact doesn't obtain in virtue of, and doesn't supervene on, purely qualitative facts—although it might obtain in virtue of, and supervene on, the fact that x exists or [to be more Meinong-friendly] the fact that x is an object.)²⁰

The Identity Question is a question about the identity and distinctness of fictional characters. We can ask parallel questions about other kinds of objects: for example, quarks, or musical works, or persons. Consider the following schema.

The Schematic Identity Question (for Objects of Kind K): For any objects x and y that are of kind ____, what necessary and sufficient conditions must x and y satisfy for it to be the case that $x = y$?

For any kind K , there is a corresponding identity question, where an identity question that corresponds to K is a proposition expressed by an instance of the Schematic Identity Question in which the blank is filled with an expression that picks out K . Consider the following schema.

(10) Necessarily, for any objects x and y that are of kind ____, $x = y$ if and only if ____.

For any kind K , an answer to the corresponding identity question is a proposition expressed by an instance of (10) in which the first blank is filled with an expression that picks out K . According to one view, most of these corresponding identity questions don't have true, finitely stateable, informative answers.

Generalized Brutal Identity: For most kinds K , it is not the case that there is a true, finitely stateable, informative answer to the corresponding identity question.

In the course of discussing identity across possible worlds, Kripke expresses sympathy for something like Generalized Brutal Identity, which is a claim about identity within possible worlds. He says

Really, adequate necessary and sufficient conditions for identity [across possible worlds] which do not beg the question are very rare in any case. Mathematics is the only case I really know of

¹⁹ Provided, of course, that there are fictional characters. If there are no fictional characters, then the Brutality of Identity Facts is trivially true and the Non-Supervenience of Identity Facts is trivially false (on the assumption that, if there are no fictional characters, then there are no identity facts about them either). In the rest of this chapter, we omit the caveat when discussing our views; the careful reader is invited to insert it where appropriate.

²⁰ See Salmon (1986: 110–14; 1987). For a contrary view, see Costa, ms. Another, more powerful reason to accept the Non-Supervenience of Identity Facts, which was suggested to us by Sam Cowling, comes from the combination of author essentialism and haecceitism: if Lyra could have been created only by Philip Pullman and it is a non-qualitative matter whether a possibility is about Philip Pullman, then *no* fact about Lyra is going to supervene on the qualitative facts.

where they are given even *within* a possible world, to tell the truth. I don't know of such conditions for identity of material objects over time, or for people. (1972: 43; italics in original)

We are sympathetic to Generalized Brutal Identity, too, and this sympathy is part of what motivates our sympathy for Brutal Identity. (Generalized Brutal Identity does not entail Brutal Identity, but Brutal Identity is nonetheless in the spirit of Generalized Brutal Identity.) But we won't discuss Generalized Brutal Identity in what follows.²¹

2.3. *A problem*

If Brutal Identity is true, then there is no true, finitely stateable, informative answer to the Identity Question. In that case, there could be fictional characters whose identity or distinctness is not settled by whatever principles there are governing the identity and distinctness of fictional characters. That is, there could be fictional characters *A* and *B* such that it is consistent with whatever principles there are governing the identity and distinctness of fictional characters that *A* and *B* are identical and it is also consistent with those principles that *A* and *B* are distinct. Consider the following (very) short story.

'A Curious New Shop': A curious man came into the shop. A curious man left the shop. It's indeterminate whether the curious man who came into the shop is the curious man who left the shop and whether the curious man who left the shop is the curious man who came into the shop. It's even indeterminate whether the curious man who came into the shop is the curious man who came into the shop and whether the curious man who left the shop is the curious man who left the shop.²²

There is a fictional character that, according to 'A Curious New Shop', is the curious man who came into the shop; let's call that fictional character 'Fred'. There is a fictional character that, according to 'A Curious New Shop', is the curious man who left the shop; let's call that fictional character 'George'.²³ How many fictional characters are there in 'A Curious New Shop'—one or two? Well, there's one fictional

²¹ On Generalized Brutal Identity, see, for example, Parsons (1987: 1–2); Jubien (1996). See also Jubien (2009: 46–54). In the case of identity over time, see Zimmerman (1997: 458); Merricks (1998). (But, for a contrary view, see Della Rocca, 2011.) Given her view that the incompleteness of application conditions for sortal terms leads to the indeterminacy of identity, Thomasson (2007: 93) would probably accept something like Generalized Brutal Identity. (See also Thomasson, 1999: 69.) Thanks to David Braun, Ross Cameron, and John Hawthorne for forcing us to think about Generalized Brutal Identity.

²² For discussion about what 'A Curious New Shop' should be like, thanks to Elizabeth Barnes, Kit Fine, and Tim Kenyon. See also Cameron (2012: 186–7). 'A Curious New Shop' is inspired by Anthony Everett's (2005: 629) 'Frackworld'. (For critical discussion of Everett, 2005, see Schnieder and von Solodkoff, 2009; Howell, 2011a; 2011b; Thomasson, 2011; Cameron, 2012; Murday, forthcoming. For some replies, see Everett, 2013: 215–24.)

²³ Fred and George have the same names as, but are nonetheless distinct from, fictional characters that come from J.K. Rowling's (1997) *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and that, according to that fiction, are identical twins.

character in 'A Curious New Shop' if Fred and George are identical, and there are two fictional characters if Fred and George are distinct. But, if whatever principles there are governing the identity and distinctness of fictional characters don't entail that Fred and George are identical, and those principles don't entail that Fred and George are distinct either, then it seems that there is no non-arbitrary answer to the question of how many fictional characters there are in 'A Curious New Shop'.²⁴ For example, speaking of fictional characters like the fictional characters in 'A Curious New Shop', Kit Fine (1982: 104) says

how many such objects are there? Any one answer, as opposed to another, seems quite arbitrary.

Some find such arbitrariness unacceptable. For example, Anthony Everett (2005: 632–3) says

we... face the problem of deciding whether [Fred] is the same as [George]... And there seems no principled way in which we might decide... we have no more reason to choose one of the options than the other and whatever choice we make will be unacceptably *ad hoc*.²⁵ (italics in original)

Fine's and Everett's remarks suggest the following reason for rejecting Brutal Identity.

Avoid Arbitrariness: Other things being equal, a view that doesn't face arbitrariness is preferable to a view that does face arbitrariness.²⁶

Even if Brutal Identity faces some amount of arbitrariness of some kind, the theory behind Parsons' Answer does, too, as does Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer. So Avoid Arbitrariness doesn't provide a reason for rejecting Brutal Identity in favour either of the theory behind Parsons' Answer or of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's

²⁴ We need to be careful about what we say is arbitrary. There are two scenarios. In the first scenario, in creating a very short story called 'A Curious New Shop' we created one fictional character, to which we then gave two names: 'Fred' and 'George'. In the second scenario, in creating a very short story called 'A Curious New Shop' we created two fictional characters, one of which we then called 'Fred', the other of which we then called 'George'. What is arbitrary is which of these scenarios obtains, and it is that arbitrariness that we mean to get at when we say that it's arbitrary how many fictional characters there are in 'A Curious New Shop'. But we don't want to say that it's arbitrary whether Fred and George are identical. For, if Fred = George, then the fact that Fred = George just is the fact that Fred = Fred; and that fact isn't arbitrary. (For another instance of this kind of argument, see the text at note 20.) We owe this observation to Chris Tillman.

²⁵ See also Everett (2005: 637).

²⁶ Fine (1982: 104, 135–6) considers, but ultimately does not endorse, something like Avoid Arbitrariness as a reason for rejecting Brutal Identity. Everett does endorse something like Avoid Arbitrariness. (See also Everett, 2013: 224, 225.) To avoid having to come up with arbitrary answers, Everett rejects views on which the realm of objects includes fictional characters. (But, if such views are necessarily false, then any answer to the Identity Question is trivially true and, perhaps, uninformative in the relevant sense. In that case, Everett would accept Brutal Identity after all! But we're not interested in those who accept Brutal Identity for *that* reason.)

Answer. And more nuanced claims about the kind, or amount, of arbitrariness that Brutal Identity faces don't provide such a reason either. Or so we argue in the rest of this chapter.

One way to defend Brutal Identity would be to deny that, if Brutal Identity is true, then it is in fact arbitrary how many fictional characters there are in 'A Curious New Shop'. Brutal Identity doesn't actually entail that it is arbitrary how many fictional characters there are in 'A Curious New Shop'. Perhaps there is a true, informative principle that entails an answer in this case, but it doesn't entail an answer in some other case and so isn't an answer to the Identity Question. Or perhaps there is a true, informative answer to the Identity Question, but it's not finitely stateable; perhaps that answer is expressed by a sentence of the form (6) rather than of the form (5); and perhaps in that case it is not arbitrary how many fictional characters there are in 'A Curious New Shop'.²⁷ But that isn't how our defence of Brutal Identity goes. So, in what follows, we ignore these possibilities and assume that, if Brutal Identity is true, then it's arbitrary how many fictional characters there are in 'A Curious New Shop'.

3. Parsons

3.1. *The theory*

In addition to his answer to the Identity Question, Parsons' theory includes the following three axioms.²⁸

Plenitude: For every set of nuclear properties, there is an object whose nuclear properties are all and only the members of that set.²⁹

Watering Down: For every extranuclear property F , there is a nuclear property F^N that is a weakened, 'watered-down' version of F .³⁰

Link: For any fictional character x and any nuclear property F , x has F if and only if either,

(i) according to the fiction that x comes from, x has F ; or

(ii) F is the nuclear weakening of an extranuclear property G and, according to the fiction that x comes from, x has G .³¹

²⁷ Thanks to Peter Pagin for raising this possibility.

²⁸ Parsons' Answer isn't exactly an axiom of his theory. See note 9.

²⁹ Plenitude is Parsons' Principle (2). (We borrow the term 'plenitude' from Deutsch, 1991: 219.) Parsons (1980: 19; 2011: 28) later calls it his 'Generating Principle'. Parsons (2011: 36) proposes another version of Plenitude, one that allows fictional characters to have properties indeterminately. But this version entails Plenitude, and it doesn't affect the discussion below in the text (in particular, Parsons' Answer remains unchanged—see Parsons, 2011: 36), so we ignore it.

³⁰ See Parsons (1980: 44, 155). The superscript notation comes from Fine (1984: 98). The name of the principle comes from Parsons (1980: 73, 158–9).

³¹ Link is a refinement of a principle that Parsons (1980: 54–6, 175, 183; 2011: 29–30) proposes. See Fine (1984: 103–10). (The name of the principle comes from Fine, 1984: 101.) See also Parsons (1980: 197–202). A fictional character comes from a fiction that, in Parsons' (1980: 51; 2011: 31–2) sense, it is native to.

Parsons' Answer, Plenitude, Watering Down, and Link all rely on the distinction between *nuclear* and *extranuclear* properties.³² Parsons needs to distinguish properties that are of the right kind and properties that are not. Without some such distinction, he would have a principle like

Plenitude*: For every set of properties, there is an object whose properties are all and only the members of that set.

instead of Plenitude. And Plenitude* is problematic, since it has the consequence that there is an object that has the properties *being golden*, *being a mountain*, and *existing*; it's an object whose properties are all and only the members of {*being golden*, *being a mountain*, *existing*}. Parsons (1980: 22–3; 2011: 29) introduces the distinction between nuclear and extranuclear properties to play the role of the distinction between properties that are of the right kind and properties that are not. This distinction is primitive; it can't be defined in other terms. But Parsons (1980: 22–6) does say some things to try to help us get a grip on the distinction, and we can give examples. The properties *being golden* and *being a mountain* are nuclear, as are the properties *being round* and *being square*; whereas the property *existing* is extranuclear, as are the properties *being a nonexistent object that is identical with A* and *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from B*.

Parsons needs a principle like Link to tell us which nuclear properties fictional characters really have. Consider the following (very) short story.³³

'A's Story': There is an object *A*, which has the properties *being round* and *being square*.

A is a fictional character that comes from 'A's Story'. According to 'A's Story', *A* has two nuclear properties—*being round* and *being square*—and doesn't have any other nuclear or extranuclear properties.³⁴ So, by Link, *A* has exactly two nuclear properties: *being round* and *being square*.

³² The distinction comes from Meinong's student Ernst Mally via Meinong (1915). See, for example, Findlay (1963: 176).

³³ Parsons (1980: 198) doesn't think that we should take such very short stories seriously. But literary practice recognizes a genre of very short stories. Sometimes the genre is called *microfiction*; sometimes it's called *flash fiction*; sometimes it's called other things. For stories of fewer than 750 words or so, see Thomas et al., eds (1992). For stories of exactly six words, see 'Very Short Stories' (2006), including this one from Alan Moore: 'Machine. Unexpectedly, I'd invented a time'.

³⁴ To avoid complications having to do with properties that *A* might have according to 'A's Story' that *A* is not explicitly said to have in 'A's Story', let's suppose that 'A's Story' is written in a hypothetical genre governed by the convention that nothing is true in the fiction unless it's explicitly stated in the fiction; and likewise for the other microfictions discussed in the text. Fine (1982: 116–17), who as far as we know invented the genre, calls it *inert literature*. One of the things that we are assuming is *not* explicitly stated in 'A's Story' is that *A* is called 'A'. ('A's name is used in telling the story, but the story itself does not mention the name.) So, although 'A' names *A*, and *A* has the property *being called 'A'*, it is not the case that, according to 'A's Story', 'A' names *A*; nor is it the case that, according to 'A's Story', *A* has the property *being called 'A'*. See Parsons (1980: 192–3), Fine (1982: 133).

Parsons needs a principle like Plenitude to tell us which fictional characters there are in the first place. By Link, *A* is an object whose only nuclear properties are *being round* and *being square*. But is there such an object? By Plenitude, there is at least one such object; it's an object whose nuclear properties are all and only the members of $\{\textit{being round}, \textit{being square}\}$. (And, by Parsons' Answer, there is at most one such object, so we can single it out to bestow the name '*A*' upon it.)

And Parsons needs a principle like Watering Down to help us distinguish fictional characters in other cases. Consider two further (very) short stories.

'*B*'s Story': There is an object *B*.

'*C*'s Story': There is an object *C*, which has the property *being distinct from B*.

B is a fictional character that comes from '*B*'s Story'. According to '*B*'s Story', *B* doesn't have any nuclear or extranuclear properties. So, by Link, *B* has no nuclear properties. *C* is a fictional character that comes from '*C*'s Story'. According to '*C*'s Story', *C* has no nuclear properties and has exactly one extranuclear property: *being distinct from B*. If the extranuclear property *being distinct from B* didn't have a nuclear weakening, then, by Link, *C* wouldn't have any nuclear properties either. So, by Parsons' Answer, *B* and *C* would be identical. But that might seem like the wrong result. By Watering Down, the extranuclear property *being distinct from B* has a nuclear weakening: $[\textit{being distinct from B}]^N$.³⁵ So, by Link, *C* has exactly one nuclear property: $[\textit{being distinct from B}]^N$. So *B* and *C* have different nuclear properties: *B* lacks, but *C* has, $[\textit{being distinct from B}]^N$. So, by Parsons' Answer, *B* and *C* are distinct, as desired.

3.2. *A problem*

Consider yet another (very) short story.

'*A Problematic Story*': There is an object *A*, which has the property *being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*. There is an object *B*, which has the property *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*.³⁶

A is a fictional character that comes from '*A Problematic Story*'.³⁷ According to '*A Problematic Story*', *A* has no nuclear properties and has exactly one extranuclear property: *being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*. By Watering Down, the extranuclear property *being a nonexistent object that is identical with B* has a nuclear

³⁵ The expression $[\textit{being distinct from B}]^N$, picks out the nuclear weakening of the property *being distinct from B*; see note 30. We have introduced square brackets to indicate the scope of the superscripted nuclear-weakening operator.

³⁶ '*A Problematic Story*' has obvious affinities with Everett's (2005: 634) '*Asymmetryville*'. This is no accident, given the connections between Meinong and Parsons, on the one hand, and Russell and Everett, on the other. See what follows in this subsection.

³⁷ *A* has the same name as, but is nonetheless distinct from, the fictional character that comes from '*A*'s story'.

weakening: [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N. So, by Link, *A* has exactly one nuclear property: [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N. (By Plenitude, there is at least one object whose sole nuclear property is [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N. And, by Parsons' Answer, there is at most one such object.) Similarly, *B* is a fictional character that comes from 'A Problematic Story'.³⁸ According to 'A Problematic Story', *B* has no nuclear properties and has exactly one extranuclear property: *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*. By Watering Down, the extranuclear property *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A* has a nuclear weakening: [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N. So, by Link, *B* has exactly one nuclear property: [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N. (By Plenitude, there is at least one object whose sole nuclear property is [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N. And, by Parsons' Answer, there is at most one such object.)

How many fictional characters are there in 'A Problematic Story'—one or two? It seems that either answer is arbitrary. On the one hand, it might seem that there is one fictional character in 'A Problematic Story': *A* and *B* are one, since *A* has the nuclear property [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N. But the nuclear property [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N is distinct from the extranuclear property *being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*, so it doesn't follow that *A* really is identical with *B*. On the other hand, it might seem that there are two fictional characters in 'A Problematic Story': *A* and *B* are two, since *B* has the nuclear property [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N. But, again, the nuclear property [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N is distinct from the extranuclear property *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*, so it doesn't follow that *B* really is distinct from *A*.³⁹ This seems to be a case in which the choice between two or more answers to a question about the number of objects is arbitrary. Let's call this kind of arbitrariness *object-number arbitrariness*.

There are other ways of trying to get at much the same problem. For example, in his review of the anthology in which Alexius Meinong's (1904a) 'The Theory of Objects' was published, Bertrand Russell (1905: 533) objects to Meinong's theory as follows:

If 'A differs from B' and 'A does not differ from B' are to be both true, we cannot tell, for example, whether a class composed of A and B has one member or two. Thus in all counting, if our results are to be definite, we must first exclude impossible objects. We cannot, if B is impossible, say 'A and B are two objects'; nor can we strictly say 'B is one object'.

³⁸ *B* has the same name as, but is nonetheless distinct from, the fictional character that comes from '*B*'s story'.

³⁹ The argument in the text relies on the claim that *A* and *B* are nonexistent objects. For, if they were existing objects, then they would have the extranuclear properties whose nuclear weakenings they have. (See Parsons, 1980: 44, 155.) But *A* and *B* are not existing objects, since (on pain of contradiction) no existing objects have the extranuclear properties *being a nonexistent object that is identical with B* and *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*. So, if *A* and *B* are objects, then they're nonexistent objects.

Russell (1903: 43) thinks that all objects can be counted, so it's bad for a theory of objects, like Meinong's, if it posits objects that can't be counted.⁴⁰ ('A Problematic Story' is inspired by Russell's objection, and Parsons' theory is inspired by Meinong's theory.) In Russell's example, *B* is an impossible object, presumably one that has the properties *being identical with A* and *being distinct from A*. In 'A Problematic Story', by contrast, *A* and *B* are impossible objects. The difference matters, since Parsons' theory doesn't have a problem with a microfiction in which *B* is said to have the properties *being identical with A* and *being distinct from A*. (By Watering Down and Link, *B* would have exactly two nuclear properties: [*being identical with A*]^N and [*being distinct from A*]^N. By Parsons' Answer, *B* would be distinct from *A*, unless *A* had exactly those nuclear properties, too, in which case *A* and *B* would be identical.)⁴¹

A and *B* from 'A Problematic Story' are what Fine (1982: 123; 1984: 110) calls 'correlates': roughly, objects that are defined in terms of each other. We need correlates, since the set of nuclear properties that *Lyra* corresponds to includes the property *being friends with Iorek* and the set of nuclear properties that *Iorek* corresponds to includes the property *being friends with Lyra*. How best to accommodate correlates within Parsons' theory is tricky.⁴² But it can be done. And, in any case, we can raise the problem without correlates. Consider distinct extranuclear properties *F* and *G*.⁴³ By Watering Down, they have nuclear weakenings: *F*^N and *G*^N. By Plenitude, there is at least one object whose sole nuclear property is *F*^N, and there is at least one object whose sole nuclear property is *G*^N. And, by Parsons' Answer, there is at most one object whose sole nuclear property is *F*^N, and there is at most one object whose sole nuclear property is *G*^N. Call the object whose sole nuclear property is *F*^N '*A*' and the object whose sole nuclear property is *G*^N '*B*'. By Parsons' Answer, *A* and *B* are identical if and only if *F*^N and *G*^N are identical. But are they?⁴⁴ This raises the problem without appealing to correlates. But raising the problem in this way is less elegant, and it's further removed from Russell's criticism of Meinong.

3.3. Some objections

We think that Parsons' theory faces object-number arbitrariness. In this subsection, we defend that claim from two arguments to the contrary.

First, we might appeal to Ockham's razor and say that *A* and *B* are one, since we should choose the answer that posits fewer entities. But this appeal to Ockham's razor won't sway everyone. In particular, it won't sway Parsons. He says

⁴⁰ We owe this reading of Russell (1905) to David Sanson. For a closely related reading, see Griffin (1985–1986: 396–7).

⁴¹ On the reason for the further move from the properties *being identical with B* and *being distinct from A* to the properties *being a nonexistent object that is identical with B* and *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*, see note 39.

⁴² See Parsons (1980: 194–7); Fine (1982: 123–9; 1984: 110–19).

⁴³ *F* and *G* must be coextensive over objects that exist. See note 39.

⁴⁴ For a similarly problematic case, see Fine (1984: 120–1).

unadorned appeals to Occam's razor have (or should have) absolutely no force at all. There is no *prima facie* reason to suppose that the universe contains a small number of things, or a small number of kinds of things. There is no *prima facie* reason to believe that a theory that endorses a smaller number of things, or kinds of things, or employs a smaller number of primitives, is simpler or likelier to be true or likely to yield more insight than another. Theories should not be compared by counting entities, kinds of entities, or primitives. If, in a given case, considerations of this kind *do* make one theory better than another, then that point should be made, and the particular reasons should be given; but different cases will require different explanations. And in *no* case does citing 'Occam's razor' *add* anything to the critique.⁴⁵

In a footnote, he adds, 'I am not saying here that Occam's razor is a principle that may be *outweighed* by other considerations in certain situations; rather it is, by itself, totally weightless—it has, at best, heuristic value.'⁴⁶

And, second, someone might give the following sophisticated argument for the conclusion that *A* and *B* are two. '*A* has exactly one nuclear property: [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N. And *B* has exactly one nuclear property: [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N. So, by Parsons' Answer, *A* and *B* are distinct if the nuclear properties [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N and [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N are distinct. And they are. The extranuclear properties *being a nonexistent object that is identical with B* and *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A* are distinct; so by

Distinctness: Distinct extranuclear properties have distinct nuclear weakenings.

their nuclear weakenings [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N and [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N are distinct, too.'

But, unfortunately, Distinctness is inconsistent with Parsons' Answer, Plenitude, and Watering Down. Here's a quick sketch of the proof. Consider any distinct properties *F* and *G*. Suppose that *F* and *G* are both extranuclear. In that case, by Watering Down, *F* and *G* have nuclear weakenings: *F*^N and *G*^N. By Distinctness, *F*^N and *G*^N are distinct (since *F* and *G* are). By Plenitude, there is an object whose sole nuclear property is *F*^N, and there is an object whose sole nuclear property is *G*^N; and, by Parsons' Answer, those objects are distinct. It shouldn't be too hard to see that there are also distinct objects corresponding to *F* and *G* if either or both of them are nuclear. So there are at least as many objects as properties; but there can't be that many objects.⁴⁷ So, we think, Parsons' theory does face object-number arbitrariness after all.

⁴⁵ Parsons (1979: 660–1; italics in original).

⁴⁶ Parsons (1979: 661 *n.* 31; italics in original).

⁴⁷ See Parsons (1980: 203–4 *n.* 14); Fine (1982: 115–22; 1984: 119–24). As Michael Hallett pointed out, Watering Down is reminiscent of Russell and Whitehead's (1910) Axiom of Reducibility (according to which for any predicate of any order there is a first-order predicate that it is equivalent to); so, if Watering Down is to blame here, then the problem with Parsons' neo-Meinongian theory is really that it's too Russellian!

3.4. *The dialectical situation*

Brutal Identity faces object-number arbitrariness. But so does Parsons' theory. So those who wish to reject Brutal Identity in favour of Parsons' theory can't appeal to Avoid Arbitrariness: the claim that, other things being equal, a view that doesn't face arbitrariness is preferable to a view that does face arbitrariness. Nor can they appeal to a claim about the kind of arbitrariness that the views face. But perhaps Parsons' theory is better off than Brutal Identity is when it comes to the amount of arbitrariness that the views face. Perhaps Parsons' theory faces less object-number arbitrariness than Brutal Identity does. In that case, those who wish to reject Brutal Identity in favour of Parsons' theory could appeal to the following reason.

Minimize Arbitrariness: Other things being equal, a view that faces less arbitrariness of any kind is preferable to a view that faces more arbitrariness of any kind.

But it seems that Parsons' theory faces just as much object-number arbitrariness as Brutal Identity faces.

Consider any objects *A* and *B* such that Brutal Identity faces an instance of object-number arbitrariness that a question about *A* and *B*—like 'How many fictional characters are *A* and *B*?—gives rise to. Given a sufficiently rich background theory of properties, there will be the extranuclear properties *being a nonexistent object that is identical with B* and *being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*; and, by Watering Down, those extranuclear properties will have nuclear weakenings: [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^{*N*} and [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^{*N*}.⁴⁸ By Plenitude and Parsons' Answer, there is exactly one object whose sole nuclear property is [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^{*N*};

Whatever its source, the problem is not limited to Parsons' theory. Zalta's (1983, 1988) theory fares no better here. Consider the following (very) short story.

'**Another Problematic Story**': There is an object *A*, which encodes the property *being an abstract object that loathes B*; there is an object *B*, which encodes the property *being an abstract object that loathes C*; and there is an object *C*, which encodes the property *being an abstract object that loves Meinong*.

(*A* and *B* are named after, but are nonetheless distinct from, fictional characters that come from 'A Problematic Story'. Also, the distinction between encoding and exemplifying is a descendant of distinctions that Mally [1912] makes. See, for example, Findlay, 1963: 110–12, 183–4.) How many fictional characters are there in 'Another Problematic Story' that aren't identical with *C*—one or two? There is one such fictional character if and only if *A* and *B* are identical; and *A* and *B* are identical if and only if the properties *being an abstract object that loathes B* and *being an abstract object that loathes C* are identical. But, although *B* and *C* are distinct (since *C* encodes the property *being an abstract object that loves Meinong* but *B* doesn't), it doesn't follow that the properties *being an abstract object that loathes B* and *being an abstract object that loathes C* are distinct; otherwise we run into cardinality worries again. See Zalta (1983: 37, 176 n. 23; 1988: 31). (For related problems, see Anderson, 1993.) For problems with other neo-Meinongian theories, see note 16.

⁴⁸ Without a sufficiently rich background theory of properties, there might not be enough properties to distinguish fictional characters: for example, *B* and *C* from '*B*'s Story' and '*C*'s Story'. On what consistent theories of properties might look like, see Fine (1982: 115–22; 1984: 119–24).

let's call it 'A*'. Similarly, by Plenitude and Parsons' Answer, there is exactly one object whose sole nuclear property is [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N; let's call it 'B*'. By Parsons' Answer, A* and B* are identical if and only if [*being a nonexistent object that is identical with B*]^N and [*being a nonexistent object that is distinct from A*]^N are. In the absence of a principle like Distinctness that would settle whether those properties are identical, it seems that Parsons' theory doesn't settle whether A* and B* are identical. In that case, there is a question about A* and B*—like 'How many objects are A* and B*?'—that will give rise to an instance of object-number arbitrariness that Parsons' theory will face. So we think that, at least as far as arbitrariness is concerned, there is no reason to reject Brutal Identity in favour of Parsons' theory.

4. Schnieder and von Solodkoff

4.1. Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer

According to Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer, fictional characters are identical if and only if they come from the same fiction and, according to that fiction, they're identical. In effect, Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer exports identity claims. If an identity claim is true according to the fiction, then according to Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer that claim really is true outside of the fiction; otherwise, we can infer distinctness.⁴⁹ In the case of 'A Curious New Shop', Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer entails that Fred and George are distinct. For Fred and George come from 'A Curious New Shop'; and it's not the case that, according to 'A Curious New Shop', Fred and George are identical. (After all, according to 'A Curious New Shop', it's indeterminate whether the curious man who came into the shop is the curious man who left the shop.) So, according to Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer, it seems that it is not arbitrary how many fictional characters there are in 'A Curious New Shop': there are two of them.

One way to criticize Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer would be to insist that, even if it's true, it might still be arbitrary how many fictional characters there are in 'A Curious New Shop'. Truth in fiction is notoriously complicated.⁵⁰ If there are no

⁴⁹ This is a loose, intuitive way of stating the upshot of their view. We don't mean to be claiming that, for example, quantified identity claims—like the claim that everything is identical with Lyra—are exportable on their view. (That way contradiction lies.) Thanks to Sam Cowling for pointing out the need for this qualification.

⁵⁰ Sometimes something that is explicit in the text is not true according to the fiction. (This happens in the case of unreliable narrators, for example.) And often something that is not explicit in the text is true according to the fiction. (This happens, well, just about all the time. But see note 34 on inert literature.) This is not the place to come up with a general account of truth in fiction. (For starters, see Lewis, 1978; Byrne, 1993. For complications, see Walton, 1990: 138–87.) We assume here that it's not the case that, according to 'A Curious New Shop', Fred and George are identical and that it's not the case that, according

principles that get us from texts (and whatever extra-textual facts are relevant) to truth in fiction, then—even if there are principles, like Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer, that get us from truth in fiction to identity and distinctness facts outside of the fiction—there is a sense in which it might still be arbitrary, given Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer, how many fictional characters there are in some cases. And the identity and distinctness of fictions might turn out to be as complicated as the identity and distinctness of fictional characters.⁵¹ If there are no principles that settle the identity and distinctness of fictions, then—even if there are principles, like Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer, that get us from the distinctness of the fictions that fictional characters come from to distinctness facts—there is also a sense in which it might still be arbitrary, given Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer, how many fictional characters there are in some cases.⁵² But our defence of Brutal Identity doesn’t rest on this way of criticizing Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer. So, in what follows, we ignore these complications and assume that, if Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer is true, then it’s not arbitrary how many fictional characters there are in ‘A Curious New Shop’.

However, as we have argued elsewhere, we think that there is another problem with Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer.⁵³ The crux of the problem is that, instead of Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer, we could adopt the following answer to the Identity Question.

The Alternative Answer: Necessarily, for any fictional characters x and y , $x = y$ if and only if

- (i) there is a fiction T such that x and y both come from T ; and
- (ii) it’s not the case that, according to T , $x \neq y$.⁵⁴

In effect, the Alternative Answer exports distinctness claims. If a distinctness claim is true according to the fiction, then according to the Alternative Answer that claim really is true outside of the fiction; otherwise, we can infer identity.⁵⁵

Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer and the Alternative Answer disagree about Fred and George: according to Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer, Fred and

to ‘A Curious New Shop’, Fred and George are distinct either. These assumptions could be disputed, but they strike us as reasonable things to say about ‘A Curious New Shop’.

⁵¹ This is not the place to defend a general account of the identity and distinctness of fictions (although you can probably guess what someone who endorses Generalized Brutal Identity would say). We are assuming that *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* and *The Subtle Knife* are distinct; but other cases might be more complicated.

⁵² Thanks to a number of people at Oslo and Stockholm, including Olav Gjelsvik, for raising the complications in this paragraph.

⁵³ See Caplan and Muller (2014). Everett (2013: 215–19) independently offers similar arguments against Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s view. We are sympathetic to those arguments but don’t discuss them here.

⁵⁴ Howell (2011b: 55 n. 56) mentions a principle in the vicinity of the Alternative Answer. See Caplan and Muller (2014: 215 n. 16).

⁵⁵ Provided that the fictional characters come from the same fiction, that is.

George are distinct; whereas, according to the Alternative Answer, Fred and George are identical. For Fred and George come from ‘A Curious New Shop’; and it’s not the case that, according to ‘A Curious New Shop’, Fred and George are distinct. (After all, according to ‘A Curious New Shop’, it’s indeterminate whether the curious man who came into the shop is the curious man who left the shop.)

What’s the answer to the Identity Question—Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer, the Alternative Answer, or neither? Suppose that we had to choose between Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer and the Alternative Answer. Either answer, it seems, would be arbitrary. (Why would identity claims be exportable in a way that distinctness claims are not? Or why would distinctness claims be exportable in a way that identity claims are not?) This seems to be a case in which the choice between two or more answers to a question about the truth of principles is arbitrary. Let’s call this kind of arbitrariness *principle-truth arbitrariness*. In Groucho Marx’s words from *Duck Soup*, ‘Those are my principles. If you don’t like them, I have others.’

4.2. Two more principles

Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer is supposed to be supported by two further principles.

Interpretation: ‘Since stories seldom explicitly *state* the non-identity of an entity *x* and an independently mentioned entity *y*, their non-identity is the (warranted but defeasible) *default* assumption in interpreting a story.’⁵⁶

Grounding: ‘The nature (and identity) of fictional entities must be grounded in facts about their stories; unless the story provides sufficient grounds for the identity of an entity *x* and an entity *y*, no such identity is constituted.’⁵⁷

But, instead of Grounding and Interpretation, we could adopt the following principles.

Interpretation*: Since stories seldom explicitly *state* the **identity** of an entity *x* and an independently mentioned entity *y*, their **identity** is the (warranted but defeasible) *default* assumption in interpreting a story.

Grounding*: The nature (and **distinctness**) of fictional entities must be grounded in facts about their stories; unless the story provides sufficient grounds for the **distinctness** of an entity *x* and an entity *y*, no such **distinctness** is constituted.

We argue elsewhere that, in the end, Grounding and Interpretation are no more plausible than Grounding* and Interpretation*. So we have just as much reason to accept Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer as we do to accept the Alternative Answer. The principle-truth arbitrariness remains.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009: 143); italics in original.

⁵⁷ Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009: 143); italics in original.

⁵⁸ We defend this conclusion at length in Caplan and Muller (2014).

Here's one way of thinking about it. According to Grounding, identity requires 'sufficient grounds'; whereas, according to Interpretation, distinctness need not be 'explicitly state[d]'. But why is it identity that requires sufficient grounds and distinctness that need not be explicitly stated? Why isn't it the other way around? That is, why isn't it distinctness that requires sufficient grounds and identity that need not be explicitly stated? That possibility is exactly what Grounding* and Interpretation* capture.⁵⁹

We admit that Interpretation might initially seem more plausible than Interpretation*. But we have several lines of defence. First, although Interpretation is more plausible than Interpretation* in some cases, Interpretation* is more plausible than Interpretation in others. Second, it's hard to tell whether more cases support Interpretation or Interpretation*, in part because we don't have a good independent grip on what it is for one or more characters to be 'independently mentioned'. Third, even if more cases support Interpretation, that doesn't mean that Interpretation is true. And, finally, even if Interpretation is true, that doesn't mean that Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer is true, since Interpretation says what happens *as a default*, whereas Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer says what happens *in all cases*.

But perhaps there's a reason to prefer Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer. The reason doesn't come from Grounding or Interpretation. Perhaps we don't know what that reason is. Perhaps it's even unknowable. But, still, there is such a reason. Positing unknown (and perhaps unknowable) reasons might sound bad, but it might not be any worse than positing unknown (and perhaps unknowable) identity and distinctness facts, as Brutal Identity might do.⁶⁰

As it happens, we think that positing an unknown or unknowable reason to prefer Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer to the Alternative Answer would be worse than positing unknown or unknowable identity and distinctness facts. There are two relevant disanalogies. One disanalogy is that Brutal Identity posits identity and distinctness facts where we would expect to find such facts. After all, by the law of the excluded middle, either Fred and George are identical or they're not. But the current proposal posits reasons where we wouldn't necessarily expect to find any. After all, the disjunction of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer and the Alternative Answer isn't a consequence of the law of the excluded middle. The other disanalogy is that the current proposal is taking bets on which principle the unknown or unknowable reason will favour, whereas Brutal Identity isn't taking bets on which unknown or unknowable facts will obtain. Brutal Identity is consistent with the identity of Fred and George, and it's consistent with their distinctness. But the current proposal isn't consistent with the reason favouring the Alternative Answer. So we think Brutal Identity remains better off here.

⁵⁹ We owe this way of putting the point to Tor Sandqvist.

⁶⁰ We owe this objection to Peter Pagin.

In any case, even if we're wrong about this and positing an unknown or unknowable reason to prefer Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer to the Alternative Answer is no worse than positing unknown or unknowable identity and distinctness facts, we don't think it's any *better* either. So, even if Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer can escape principle-truth arbitrariness by positing an unknown or unknowable reason, we don't think that in that case there would be a reason to reject Brutal Identity in favour of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer.

4.3. *Haukioja's Answer*

Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer exports identity facts but not distinctness facts, whereas the Alternative Answer exports distinctness facts but not identity facts. But why choose between identity and distinctness facts? Why not say that they're both exportable?

This is a good idea, but it won't work without some qualification. If identity and distinctness facts are both exportable, then, in the case of inconsistent fictions that contain contradictory identity and distinctness facts (as it were), we would end up exporting those contradictory facts; so we would be stuck with contradictions outside of the fiction.

Why not say, then, that identity facts are exportable in the absence of contradictory distinctness facts and vice versa? This is consistent. But it doesn't tell us what to say about inconsistent fictions that contain contradictory identity and distinctness facts. Nor does it tell us what to say about fictions, like 'A Curious New Shop', that contain neither identity nor distinctness facts.

Why not say, then, that such fictions contain no fictional characters?

Haukioja's Answer: If a fiction contains contradictory identity and distinctness facts, or if it contains neither identity nor distinctness facts, then there are no fictional characters. Otherwise, identity and distinctness facts are both exportable.⁶¹

Again, this is consistent. And Haukioja's Answer doesn't seem to be arbitrary in the way in which Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer or the Alternative Answer does. (There are several alternatives to Haukioja's Answer; but, as far as we can tell, they're all wildly implausible.) So there is a consistent, non-arbitrary principle that settles the identity and distinctness of fictional characters!

As we see it, the problem with Haukioja's Answer is that it denies that there are any fictional characters in 'A Curious New Shop'. This might seem wrong. And, if there are no fictional characters in 'A Curious New Shop', then fictional realists could not straightforwardly account for the truth of sentences like

⁶¹ The principle is named for Jussi Haukioja, who suggested it to us.

- (11) Fred is a fictional character that comes from ‘A Curious New Shop’, as is George; and, according to that story, they are indeterminately identical.

Fictional realists could deny that (11) is true. This sort of move might not be so bad in this case, but it might be less plausible in other cases. Consider the following (very) short story.

‘**Dialethialand**’: ‘When she arrived in Dialethialand, Jane met Jules and Jim. This confused Jane since Jules and Jim both were, and were not, distinct people. And this made it hard to know how to interact with them. For example, since Jules both was and was not Jim, if Jim came to tea Jules both would and wouldn’t come too. This made it hard for Jane to determine how many biscuits to serve. Then Jane realized what to do. She needed both to buy and not to buy extra biscuits whenever Jim came. After that everything was better.’⁶²

‘Dialethialand’ contains contradictory identity and distinctness facts. According to Haukioja’s Answer, there would be no fictional characters in ‘Dialethialand’. This seems wrong. And, if there are no fictional characters in ‘Dialethialand’, then fictional realists could not straightforwardly account for the truth of sentences like

- (12) Jules and Jim are fictional characters that come from ‘Dialethialand’ and, according to that story, they both are and are not identical.

Fictional realists could deny that (12) is true, but this might not be something that they want to do. At any rate, it is not something that we would want to do. We would rather have fictional characters in ‘Dialethialand’ whose identity or distinctness isn’t settled by whatever principles there are governing the identity and distinctness of fictional characters than not have any fictional characters in ‘Dialethialand’ at all.⁶³ So, in what follows, we set Haukioja’s Answer aside and focus instead on the choice between Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer and the Alternative Answer.

4.4. *The dialectical situation*

Brutal Identity faces object-number arbitrariness. But, we take it, Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s Answer faces principle-truth arbitrariness. So, to reject Brutal Identity, Schnieder and von Solodkoff can’t appeal to Avoid Arbitrariness: the claim that, other things being equal, a view that doesn’t face arbitrariness is preferable to a view that does face arbitrariness. Instead, they might appeal to the following reason.

Avoid Object-Number Arbitrariness: Other things being equal, a view that faces some other kind of arbitrariness is preferable to a view that faces object-number arbitrariness.

⁶² Everett (2005: 633–4).

⁶³ For a defence of the claim that there are fictional characters in ‘Dialethialand’ (at least if there are any fictional characters at all), see Everett (2005: 634–7).

If Brutal Identity faces object-number arbitrariness but Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer doesn't, then Avoid Object-Number Arbitrariness would provide some reason for rejecting Brutal Identity in favour of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer.

But it's difficult to assess the relative importance of different kinds of arbitrariness.⁶⁴ Perhaps objects are more fundamental than principles; perhaps principles are true because objects are the way they are. In that case, would object-number arbitrariness be worse than principle-truth arbitrariness, since it would occur at a more fundamental level? Or would it be expected that, if there were arbitrariness, it would be found at the more fundamental level, which would then determine, in a non-arbitrary way, which principles are true?⁶⁵ Or perhaps principles are more fundamental than objects; perhaps objects are the way they are because certain principles are true. In that case, would principle-truth arbitrariness be worse than object-number arbitrariness, since it would occur at a more fundamental level? Or would it be expected that, if there were arbitrariness, it would be found at the more fundamental level, which would then determine, in a non-arbitrary way, how objects are?⁶⁶

So it's not obvious that Avoid Object-Number Arbitrariness is true: it's not obvious that facing object-number arbitrariness, as Brutal Identity does, is any worse than facing principle-truth arbitrariness, as Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer does. So it's not obvious that, when it comes to the *kind* of arbitrariness that the views face, Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer is any better off than Brutal Identity is.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Thanks to Joshua Spencer for helping us get clearer on some things here.

⁶⁵ If the facts about objects are arbitrary, and if those facts determine which principles are true, then there is a sense in which it's arbitrary which principles are true. When we say that arbitrary facts about objects determine, in a non-arbitrary way, which principles are true, we mean that there is no *further* arbitrariness about which principles are true; we mean to exclude, among other things, a situation in which two principles are equally consistent with the facts about objects and it's arbitrary which of those two principles is true.

⁶⁶ When we say that arbitrary principles determine, in a non-arbitrary way, the facts about objects, we mean that there is no *further* arbitrariness about the facts about objects. See note 65.

⁶⁷ In case you're still tempted by Avoid Object-Number Arbitrariness, consider this: if Avoid Object-Number Arbitrariness is true, then there would be an arbitrariness-based reason to reject Brutal Composition in favour of *n* Composition (or 0 Composition, or ω Composition); but there isn't. See Section 4.5.

Perhaps some objects are fundamental and some objects are not; and perhaps it's bad if facts about the fundamental objects are arbitrary. This would be bad for Brutal Identity if fictional characters were fundamental. (Thanks to Einar Duenger Bøhn, Ross Cameron, and Olav Gjelsvik here.) But, as it happens, we don't think that fictional characters are fundamental. (The brutality about existence that we flirt with in Section 5 is about principles rather than facts; we don't find the brutality of existence facts for fictional characters particularly plausible across the board. Among other things, there isn't a Salmon-style argument for it in the way that there is for the Brutality of Identity Facts. See the text at note 20.) And, in keeping with Generalized Brutal Identity, we don't think that it's bad if facts about the fundamental objects are arbitrary anyway. For a defence of the related claim that there can be indeterminacy (rather than arbitrariness) at the fundamental level, see Barnes, forthcoming.

But perhaps Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer is better off than Brutal Identity is when it comes to the *amount* of arbitrariness that the views face. Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer faces one instance of principle-truth arbitrariness. By contrast, Brutal Identity faces many instances of object-number arbitrariness, one for each problematic case. (But perhaps not every case is problematic if we have true, finitely stateable, informative necessary conditions like [8].) To reject Brutal Identity, Schnieder and von Solodkoff could appeal to Minimize Arbitrariness: the claim that, other things being equal, a view that faces fewer instances of arbitrariness of any kind is preferable to a view that faces more instances of arbitrariness of any kind. (As it happens, we think that Brutal Identity faces just the right amount of arbitrariness, but we realize that we can't just leave our defence of Brutal Identity at that.)

The argument that appeals to Minimize Arbitrariness wouldn't show that Brutal Identity is unacceptable, although it might show that there is a defeasible reason for rejecting Brutal Identity in favour of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer. But this defeasible reason would be a matter of totting up instances of arbitrariness, so it would be the sort of reason that could be counterbalanced (or outweighed, or undercut) by other considerations, especially by other, more systematic considerations that aren't simply a matter of degree. And we think that this is exactly what happens. We think that whatever reason Minimize Arbitrariness provides for rejecting Brutal Identity in favour of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer is counterbalanced (or outweighed, or undercut) by the fact that Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer does, and Brutal Identity doesn't, face principle-truth arbitrariness.⁶⁸

The dialectical situation would be different if there were independent reason to believe that the domain of fictional characters is 'lawful' or governed by principles.⁶⁹ In that case, there would in effect be an independent reason to reject Brutal Identity, according to which the domain of fictional characters is not lawful. But we remain sceptical that there is such an independent reason.⁷⁰

4.5. *A mereological analogy*

A mereological analogy might help illustrate the point that facing principle-truth arbitrariness counterbalances (or outweighs, or undercuts) whatever reason Minimize Arbitrariness provides.⁷¹ In *Material Beings*, van Inwagen (1990: 21–32) asks the following question.

⁶⁸ Similar remarks apply to the following principle instead of Minimize Arbitrariness: other things being equal, if n is less than m , then a view that faces n instances of principle-truth arbitrariness is preferable to a view that faces m instances of object-number arbitrariness. See note 79.

⁶⁹ Thanks to John Hawthorne for pointing this out to us.

⁷⁰ Amie Thomasson suggested that, in general, there might be epistemic advantages to having a principled account; but, as she also pointed out, these epistemic advantages might be lost given principle-truth arbitrariness. Similar remarks apply to Brutal Composition and its competitors. See Section 4.5.

⁷¹ The analogy was inspired by a conversation with Tim Schroeder. The analogy is extended but simple.

The Special Composition Question: For any x s, what necessary and sufficient conditions must the x s satisfy for it to be the case that there is a y such that the x s compose y ?⁷²

An answer to the Special Composition Question is a proposition expressed by an instance of the following schema.

- (13) Necessarily, for any x s, there is a y such that the x s compose y if and only if ____.

Some think that there is no true, finitely stateable, informative answer to the Special Composition Question.

Brutal Composition: There is no true, finitely stateable, informative answer to the Special Composition Question.⁷³

As one might expect, Brutal Composition faces some arbitrariness.

Suppose that there are infinitely many boxes, each of which contains exactly two mereological simples.⁷⁴ And suppose that, if any box contains anything in addition to two mereological simples, that additional thing overlaps at least one of the mereological simples. Consider one of those boxes. How many objects does it contain—exactly two or exactly three?⁷⁵ Brutal Composition doesn't provide an answer to this question. Perhaps the answer is exactly two; perhaps the answer is exactly three. Both answers are consistent with Brutal Composition; and either answer, it seems, would be arbitrary. This is a case of object-number arbitrariness.

Some find the object-number arbitrariness that Brutal Composition faces unacceptable. For example, Terence Horgan (1993: 695) says

an adequate metaphysical theory—like an adequate scientific theory—should itself be systematic and general, and should keep to a minimum the unexplained facts that it posits. In particular, a good metaphysical or scientific theory should avoid positing a plethora of quite specific, disconnected, *sui generis*, compositional facts. Such facts would be ontological danglers; they would be metaphysically queer. Even though explanation presumably must bottom out somewhere, it is just not credible—or even intelligible—that it should bottom out with specific compositional facts which themselves are utterly unexplainable. Rather, if one bunch of physical simples compose a genuine physical object, but another bunch of simples do not

⁷² The x s compose $y =_{df}$ each of the x s is a part of y and every part of y overlaps at least one of the x s. (y overlaps $x =_{df}$ there is a z such that (i) z is a part of x and (ii) z is a part of y .) Van Inwagen's definition of composition is slightly different. See van Inwagen (1990: 29).

⁷³ This used to be Markosian's view. (See Markosian, 1998; 2008: 352–4.) It's no longer his view (see Markosian, 2014), but it's now Paul's (2012: 251) view.

⁷⁴ x is a mereological simple $=_{df}$ x has no proper parts. (y is a proper part of $x =_{df}$ y is a part of x and $y \neq x$.)

⁷⁵ If we add Uniqueness of Composition—according to which any things compose at most one thing—we can eliminate the possibility that the box contains more than three objects. On Uniqueness of Composition, see Lewis (1991: 79–81).

compose any genuine object, then there must be some reason *why*; it couldn't be that these two facts are themselves at the explanatory bedrock of being.

There cannot, then, be a body of specific compositional facts that are collectively disconnected and unsystematic, and are individually unexplainable. Such ontological arbitrariness is not possible in the mind-independent, discourse-independent world... I shall call this *the principle of the non-arbitrariness of composition*. (italics in original)

One way of reading Horgan's 'principle of the non-arbitrariness of composition' is as the claim that a correct answer to the Special Composition Question cannot be one that faces object-number arbitrariness.⁷⁶

Let's go back to the boxes. Suppose that they're numbered 1, 2, 3, ... Given certain background assumptions, we could adopt the following answer to the Special Composition Question.

***n* Composition:** Necessarily, for any *x*s, there is a *y* such that the *x*s compose *y* if and only if either (i) there is exactly one of the *x*s or (ii) the *x*s are in a box numbered less than or equal to *n*.

(Suppose that, necessarily, nothing is outside all of the boxes; and suppose that, necessarily, there is no cross-box composition.) But, given those background assumptions, we could also adopt the following answer to the Special Composition Question.

***n* + 1 Composition:** Necessarily, for any *x*s, there is a *y* such that the *x*s compose *y* if and only if either (i) there is exactly one of the *x*s or (ii) the *x*s are in a box numbered less than or equal to *n* + 1.

What is the answer to the Special Composition Question: *n* Composition, *n* + 1 Composition, or neither? Suppose that we had to choose between *n* Composition and *n* + 1 Composition. Either answer, it seems, would be arbitrary. This is a case of principle-truth arbitrariness.

Some would find the principle-truth arbitrariness that *n* Composition faces unacceptable. For example, although he doesn't discuss *n* Composition in particular, Theodore Sider (2001) does discuss a more general view—Restricted Composition—according to which some things compose something and some things don't.⁷⁷ Speaking of the cut-off between a case in which some things determinately compose something and a case in which some extremely similar things determinately don't compose anything, Sider (2001: 124) says

there would seem to be something 'metaphysically arbitrary' about a sharp cut-off in a continuous series of cases of composition. Why is the cut-off here, rather than there? Granted, everyone must admit *some* metaphysically 'brute' facts, and it is a hard question why one brute

⁷⁶ For a reply, see Markosian (1998: 233–7; 2008: 353).

⁷⁷ On Restricted Composition, see, for example, Markosian (2008).

fact seems more or less plausible than another. Nevertheless, *this* brute fact seems particularly hard to stomach. (italics in original)

Sider's question—'Why is the cut-off here, rather than there?'—gets at the principle-truth arbitrariness that n Composition faces.⁷⁸

So we have two objections: Horgan's objection, that it's bad for a theory to face object-number arbitrariness; and Sider's objection, that it's bad for a theory to face principle-truth arbitrariness. Brutal Composition falls prey to Horgan's objection but avoids Sider's objection; whereas n Composition avoids Horgan's objection but falls prey to Sider's objection. All things considered, is there a reason to reject Brutal Composition in favour of n Composition? We think that the answer is *no*. If it's bad for Brutal Composition that it faces object-number arbitrariness, then it's just as bad (if not worse) for n Composition that it faces principle-truth arbitrariness.

Suppose, as is plausible, that Brutal Composition faces more arbitrariness than n Composition does. In that case, Minimize Arbitrariness would provide some reason for rejecting Brutal Composition in favour of n Composition. But, all things considered, there isn't a reason to prefer n Composition to Brutal Composition. One obvious hypothesis is that whatever reason Minimize Arbitrariness provides for rejecting Brutal Composition in favour of n Composition is counterbalanced (or outweighed, or undercut) by the fact that n Composition does, and Brutal Composition doesn't, face principle-truth arbitrariness.⁷⁹

Now, as far as we know, no one has ever taken either n Composition or $n + 1$ Composition seriously; we just made them up so that we could consider a view that obviously faces principle-truth arbitrariness. But we think the dialectical situation remains unchanged if we consider views, or at least analogues of views, that have been taken seriously.⁸⁰ Consider the version of n Composition where $n = 0$.

0 Composition: Necessarily, for any xs , there is a y such that the xs compose y if and only if either (i) there is exactly one of the xs or (ii) the xs are in a box numbered less than or equal to 0.

⁷⁸ Nolan (2006: 727) and Cameron (2007: 116) consider what we take to be a similar reading of Sider. Van Inwagen (1990: 77, 121–2) raises similar objections against other views. Sider (2001: 124) is also concerned with the autonomy of the macroscopic:

To postulate such a sharp cut-off would be to admit that the realm of the macroscopic is in some sense 'autonomous' of the microscopic. By 'autonomous' I do not mean 'non-supervenient', since accepting a sharp cut-off in a continuous series of cases of composition does not threaten supervenience. Rather, I mean that there would seem to be something 'metaphysically arbitrary' about a sharp cut-off.

For replies to the autonomy objection, see Markosian (1998: 237–9; 2008: 353–4); Hawthorne (2006: 107–9).

⁷⁹ Similar remarks apply to the principle that, other things being equal, if n is less than m , then a view that faces n instances of principle-truth arbitrariness is preferable to a view that faces m instances of object-number arbitrariness.

⁸⁰ Thanks to Amie Thomasson for encouraging us to consider a less made-up example.

The principle of 0 Composition entails that in every possible non-trivial case of composition—in every case in which we've got two mereological simples in a box—composition does not occur. The principle of 0 Composition is thus the analogue of Compositional Nihilism, according to which there are no composite objects.⁸¹ Or consider the version of n Composition where $n = \omega$.

ω Composition: Necessarily, for any xs , there is a y such that the xs compose y if and only if either (i) there is exactly one of the xs or (ii) the xs are in a box numbered less than or equal to ω .

The principle of ω Composition entails that in every possible non-trivial case of composition—in every case in which we've got two mereological simples in a box—composition does occur. The principle of ω Composition is thus the analogue of Unrestricted Composition, according to which, for any xs , there is a y such that the xs compose y .⁸²

Suppose that 0 Composition faces principle-truth arbitrariness.⁸³ (Perhaps the arguments for Unrestricted Composition in 'Parthood' (Sider, 2007) equipose the arguments for Compositional Nihilism in 'Against Parthood' (Sider, 2013); and perhaps the other arguments for or against the views stack up evenly.)⁸⁴ And suppose that, although Brutal Composition faces object-number arbitrariness, there is nothing further to be said against the view. All things considered, would there be a reason to reject Brutal Composition in favour of 0 Composition? Again, we think that the answer is *no*. You might think that the answer is less obvious in this case than it was in the previous case, when we were comparing Brutal Composition and n Composition; but, if so, we suspect that's because you're really thinking that there's some reason to prefer 0 Composition to ω Composition and hence that 0 Composition doesn't really face principle-truth arbitrariness after all. (Or maybe you're thinking that there's something else to be said against Brutal Composition, other than the fact that it faces object-number arbitrariness, and it is this further reason that is not counterbalanced—or outweighed, or undercut—by the fact that 0 Composition faces principle-truth arbitrariness.)

Suppose, as is plausible, that Brutal Composition faces more arbitrariness than 0 Composition does. In that case, Minimize Arbitrariness would provide some reason for rejecting Brutal Composition in favour of 0 Composition. But, all things considered, there wouldn't be a reason to prefer 0 Composition to Brutal Composition if 0 Composition faced principle-truth arbitrariness. We think this is because whatever

⁸¹ On Compositional Nihilism, see, for example, Rosen and Dorr (2002); Cameron (2010a); Sider (2013). But Cameron (2010a) and Sider (2013) both have streaks of mereological anti-realism. On mereological anti-realism, see Cowling, forthcoming.

⁸² On Unrestricted Composition, see, for example, Lewis (1991: 79–81); Sider (2001: 121–32).

⁸³ In a similar spirit, Nolan (2006: 727) and Cameron (2007: 116) argue that Sider's objection to Restricted Composition applies to Unrestricted Composition, which is his own view in Sider (2001).

⁸⁴ For further arguments against Compositional Nihilism, see Sider (1993; 2001: 176–80).

reason Minimize Arbitrariness provides for rejecting Brutal Composition in favour of 0 Composition would be counterbalanced (or outweighed, or undercut) by the fact that 0 Composition does, and Brutal Composition doesn't, face principle-truth arbitrariness.

What goes for Brutal Composition and n Composition, or for Brutal Composition and 0 Composition, also goes for Brutal Identity and Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer: whatever reason Minimize Arbitrariness provides for rejecting Brutal Identity in favour of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer is counterbalanced (or outweighed, or undercut) by the fact that Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer does, and Brutal Identity doesn't, face principle-truth arbitrariness. We conclude, then, that—at least as far as arbitrariness is concerned—there is no reason to reject Brutal Identity in favour of Schnieder and von Solodkoff's Answer either.

5. Existence

One of the issues that we have not addressed so far in this chapter has to do with the existence of fictional characters or, more precisely, with when there are, and when there aren't, fictional characters.⁸⁵ This question is one that, we think, confronts all fictional realists. Unsurprisingly, we are inclined to accept the view that there are no true, informative, finitely stateable principles that settle the matter. We aren't going to defend that view here, but in closing we do want to say a few admittedly speculative and underdeveloped things about two of its competitors.

Parsons' Plenitude might be a principle that settles when there are, and when there aren't, fictional characters (if we could sort out which objects are fictional characters and which aren't). But we think Plenitude faces principle-truth arbitrariness. Instead of Plenitude, we could adopt

Plenitude:** For every **non-empty** set of nuclear properties, there is an object whose nuclear properties are all and only the members of that set.

And it seems that there is no reason to prefer Plenitude to Plenitude**. In presenting Plenitude, sometimes Parsons (1980: 18) speaks of any sets: 'just include *any* set of properties that isn't already there', he says, and there will be a corresponding object.⁸⁶ But sometimes he speaks of non-empty sets: 'write down any other nonempty set of properties', he says, and there will be a corresponding object.⁸⁷ Parsons seems to acknowledge that the choice between Plenitude and Plenitude** is (at least somewhat) arbitrary. He says

[Plenitude] requires that there be a 'null' object, that is, an object that has no nuclear properties at all (and [Parsons' Answer] says that it is unique). I am not at all sure whether this is

⁸⁵ See, for example, Everett (2005: 630–2; 2013: 225–30); Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009: 144–7); Brock (2010). Thanks to Olav Gjelsvik for returning our attention to this question.

⁸⁶ Italics in original. ⁸⁷ Parsons (1980: 18).

desirable. It makes for a certain amount of theoretical simplicity, and that offers some justification. But it would not make a great deal of difference to the applications of the theory that I know of if it were omitted (by inserting ‘nonempty’ after ‘any’ in [Plenitude]).⁸⁸

And, if the choice between Plenitude and Plenitude** is arbitrary, then Plenitude faces principle-truth arbitrariness (although admittedly the principles agree about the vast majority of cases).

Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009: 147) propose a principle that addresses when there are, and when there aren’t, fictional characters. According to their principle, a fictional character that comes from a fiction exists if that fiction contains a *quasi-reference* to that character.⁸⁹ Their principle thus turns on this notion of quasi-reference. Here is what Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009: 147) say about quasi-reference:

Such a quasi-reference can be achieved by the use of a proper name, a definite description, or some other device that is in non-fictional contexts suitable for the introduction of a particular object into discourse. Whether a story involves quasi-reference to some object is to be settled by the best interpretation of the story.

This leaves a lot about quasi-reference open, especially if there aren’t general principles that fix the best interpretation of a story. And their principle is a conditional rather than a biconditional; as such, it falls short of being sufficiently general. If neither Parsons nor Schnieder and von Solodkoff provide non-arbitrary principles that settle the matter, then perhaps the existence of fictional characters is brute, too.^{90, 91}

References

Adams, Robert Merrihew (1979). ‘Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity.’ *Journal of Philosophy* 76: 5–26.

⁸⁸ Parsons (1980: 22). In stating Plenitude, we have ‘every’ where Parsons has ‘any’, and we hyphenate ‘non-empty’. Nothing hangs on this.

⁸⁹ This is equivalent to their Existence.

⁹⁰ Markosian (2014) endorses a generalized version of this claim. For a contrary view, see Costa, ms.

⁹¹ For comments and discussion, thanks to the first author’s students at Ohio State in Advanced Metaphysics, the First-Year Seminar, a Metaphysics seminar, Philosophical Problems in the Arts, and Twentieth-Century Philosophy; to participants at talks at Copenhagen, the CSPA, Dubrovnik, Kenyon, NTNU, Oslo, SPAWN, Stockholm, l’Université de Montréal, Wayne State, and the WCPA; and to Elizabeth Barnes, David Braun, Stuart Brock, Scott Brown, Einar Duenger Bøhn, Ross Cameron, Don Caplan, Sam Cowling, Wesley Cray, Gregory Currie, Eva Della Lana, Kit Fine, Salvatore Florio, Cody Gilmore, Olav Gjelsvik, Lars Bo Gunderson, Michael Hallett, Jussi Haukioja, John Hawthorne, Bob Howell, Carrie Jenkins, Tim Kenyon, Jonathan Knowles, Greg Lavers, Bernie Linsky, Hans Lottenbach, Per Martin-Löf, Olivier Massin, Michael McKinsey, Brendan Murday, Peter Pagin, Larry Powers, Wayne Riggs, Tor Sandqvist, David Sanson, Tim Schroeder, Joshua Spencer, Amie Thomasson, Chris Tillman, Rebecca Lloyd Waller, and an anonymous referee.

This paper shares a common ancestor with Caplan and Muller (2014), which is a reply to Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009). As a result, there is some overlap in Sections 2.1, 2.3, 4.1, and 4.2.

- Anderson, C. Anthony (1993). 'Zalta's Intensional Logic.' *Philosophical Studies* 69: 221–9.
- Barnes, Elizabeth (forthcoming). 'Fundamental Indeterminacy.' *Analytic Philosophy*.
- Berto, Francesco (2013). *Existence as a Real Property: The Ontology of Meinongianism*. Synthese Library 356. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Black, Max (1952). 'The Identity of Indiscernibles.' *Mind* 61: 153–64.
- Braun, David (2005). 'Empty Names, Fictional Names, Mythical Names.' *Noûs* 39: 596–631.
- Braun, David (2011). 'Implicating Questions.' *Mind and Language* 26: 575–95.
- Breckenridge, Wylie and Ofra Magidor (2012). 'Arbitrary Reference.' *Philosophical Studies* 158: 377–400.
- Brock, Stuart (2010). 'The Creationist Fiction: The Case against Creationism about Fictional Characters.' *Philosophical Review* 119: 337–64.
- Byrne, Alex (1993). 'Truth in Fiction: The Story Continued.' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71: 24–35.
- Cameron, Ross P. (2007). 'The Contingency of Composition.' *Philosophical Studies* 136: 99–121.
- Cameron, Ross P. (2010a). 'How to Have a Radically Minimal Ontology.' *Philosophical Studies* 151: 249–64.
- Cameron, Ross P. (2010b). 'Vagueness and Naturalness.' *Erkenntnis* 72: 281–93.
- Cameron, Ross P. (2012). 'How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist.' In *Art and Abstract Objects*, edited by Christy Mag Uidhir. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 179–96.
- Caplan, Ben and Cathleen Muller (2014). 'Against a Defense of Fictional Realism.' *Philosophical Quarterly* 64: 211–24.
- Chisholm, Roderick, ed. (1960). *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Costa, Damiano. ms. 'Grounding Identity.'
- Cowling, Sam (2014). 'No Simples, No Gunk, No Nothing.' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 95: 246–60.
- Craig, William and Robert L. Vaught (1958). 'Finite Axiomatizability Using Additional Predicates.' *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 23: 289–308.
- Della-Rocca, Michael (2011). 'Primitive Persistence and the Impasse between Three-Dimensionalism and Four-Dimensionalism.' *Journal of Philosophy* 108: 591–616.
- Deutsch, Harry (1991). 'The Creation Problem.' *Topoi* 10: 209–25.
- Everett, Anthony (2005). 'Against Fictional Realism.' *Journal of Philosophy* 102: 624–49.
- Everett, Anthony (2013). *The Nonexistent*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Findlay, John Niemeyer (1963). *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values* (1933). 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Fine, Kit (1982). 'The Problem of Non-Existents: I. Internalism.' *Topoi* 1: 97–140.
- Fine, Kit (1984). 'Critical Review of Parsons' *Non-Existent Objects*.' *Philosophical Studies* 45: 95–142.
- Griffin, Nicholas (1985–1986). 'Russell's Critique of Meinong's Theory of Objects.' *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 25–26: 375–401.
- Hawthorne, John (2006). 'Three-Dimensionalism.' In *Metaphysical Essays*. Oxford: Clarendon: 85–109.
- Hazlett, Allan (2010). 'Brutal Individuation.' In *New Waves in Metaphysics*, edited by Allan Hazlett. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 72–90.

- Horgan, Terence (1993). 'On What There Isn't.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53: 693–700.
- Howell, Robert (2011a). 'Fictional Realism and its Discontents.' In *Truth in Fiction*, edited by Franck Lihoreau. Frankfurt: Ontos: 153–202.
- Howell, Robert (2011b). 'Literary Fictions, Real and Unreal.' In *Fictions and Models: New Essays*, edited by John Woods. Munich: Philosophia Verlag: 27–107.
- Jubien, Michael (1996). 'The Myth of Identity Conditions.' *Philosophical Perspectives* 10: 343–56.
- Jubien, Michael (2009). *Possibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kearns, Stephen and Ofra Magidor (2008). 'Epistemicism about Vagueness and Meta-Linguistic Safety.' *Philosophical Perspectives* 22: 277–304.
- Kearns, Stephen and Ofra Magidor (2012). 'Semantic Sovereignty.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85: 322–50.
- Kleene, Stephen Cole (1952). 'Finite Axiomatizability of Theories in the Predicate Calculus Using Additional Predicate Symbols.' In *Two Papers on the Predicate Calculus*. Memoirs of the American Mathematical Society 10. Providence, RI: American Mathematical Society: 27–66.
- Kripke, Saul A. (1972). 'Naming and Necessity.' In *Semantics of Natural Language*, edited by Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman. Synthese Library 40. Dordrecht: Reidel: 253–355, 763–9. Reprinted (with preface) as Kripke (1980).
- Kripke, Saul A. (1980). *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kripke, Saul A. (2011). 'Vacuous Names and Fictional Entities.' In *Philosophical Troubles: Collected Papers, Volume I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 52–74.
- Kripke, Saul A. (2013). *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lamarque, Peter (2003). 'How to Create a Fictional Character.' In *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*, edited by Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 33–52. Reprinted in Lamarque (2010): 188–207.
- Lamarque, Peter (2010). *Work and Object: Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, David K. (1978). 'Truth in Fiction.' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15: 37–46. Reprinted (with postscripts) in Lewis (1983): 261–80.
- Lewis, David K. (1983). *Philosophical Papers*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, David K. (1986). *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Lewis, David K. (1991). *Parts of Classes*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Makkai, Mihály (1971). Review of Kleene (1952) and Craig and Vaught (1958). *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 36: 334–5.
- Mally, Ernst (1912). *Gegenstandstheoretische Grundlagen der Logik und Logistik*. Leipzig: Barth.
- Markosian, Ned (1998). 'Brutal Composition.' *Philosophical Studies* 92: 211–49.
- Markosian, Ned (2008). 'Restricted Composition.' In *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, edited by John Hawthorne, Theodore Sider, and Dean Zimmerman. Contemporary Debates in Philosophy 10. Oxford: Blackwell: 341–63.
- Markosian, Ned (2014). 'A Spatial Approach to Mereology.' In *Mereology and Location*, edited by Shieva Kleinschmidt. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 69–90.

- McDaniel, Kris (2007). 'Brutal Simples.' *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 3: 233–66.
- Meinong, Alexius (1904a). 'Über Gegenstandstheorie.' In Alexius Meinong, ed. (1904b): 1–51. Translated by Isaac Levi, D.B. Terrell, and Roderick M. Chisholm as 'The Theory of Objects' in Chisholm, ed. (1960): 76–117.
- Meinong, Alexius, ed. (1904b). *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie*. Leipzig: Barth.
- Meinong, Alexius (1915). *Über Möglichkeit und Wahrscheinlichkeit: Beiträge zur Gegenstandstheorie und Erkenntnistheorie*. Leipzig: Barth.
- Merricks, Trenton (1998). 'There Are No Criteria of Identity over Time.' *Noûs* 32: 106–24.
- Moore, Joseph (2012). 'Musical Works: A Mash-Up.' In *Art and Abstract Objects*, edited by Christy Mag Uidhir. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 284–306.
- Muller, Cathleen (2012). *Harry Potter and the Rescue from Realism: A Novel Defense of Anti-Realism about Fictional Objects*. Unpublished dissertation, Ohio State University.
- Murday, Brendan (forthcoming). 'Fictional Realism and Indeterminate Identity.' *Journal of Philosophical Research*.
- Nolan, Daniel (2006). 'Vagueness, Multiplicity, and Parts.' *Noûs* 40: 716–37.
- Parsons, Terence (1979). 'The Methodology of Nonexistence.' *Journal of Philosophy* 76: 649–62.
- Parsons, Terence (1980). *Nonexistent Objects*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Parsons, Terence (1987). 'Entities without Identity.' *Philosophical Perspectives* 1: 1–19.
- Parsons, Terence (2000). *Indeterminate Identity: Metaphysics and Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parsons, Terence (2011). 'Fictional Characters and Indeterminate Identity.' In *Truth in Fiction*, edited by Franck Lihoreau. Frankfurt: Ontos: 27–42.
- Paul, L.A. (2012). 'Building the World from Its Fundamental Constituents.' *Philosophical Studies* 158: 221–56.
- Priest, Graham (2005). *Towards Non-Being: The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Pullman, Philip (1995). *The Golden Compass*. New York: Knopf. Also published in the UK as *Northern Lights* by Scholastic in 1995.
- Pullman, Philip (1997). *The Subtle Knife*. New York: Knopf.
- Rosen, Gideon and Cian Dorr (2002). 'Composition as a Fiction.' In *Blackwell Guide to Metaphysics*, edited by Richard M. Gale. Oxford: Blackwell: 151–74.
- Routley, Richard (1980). *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond: An Investigation of Noneism and the Theory of Items*. Departmental Monograph 3. Canberra: Philosophy Department, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.
- Rowling, J.K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury. Also published in the US as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by Scholastic in 1998.
- Russell, Bertrand (1903). *Principles of Mathematics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Russell, Bertrand (1905). Review of Meinong, ed. (1904b). *Mind* 14: 530–8.
- Russell, Bertrand and Alfred North Whitehead (1910). *Principia Mathematica*. Volume 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sainsbury, R.M. (2009). *Fiction and Fictionalism*. New Problems of Philosophy. London: Routledge.

- Salmon, Nathan (1986). 'Modal Paradox: Parts and Counterparts, Points and Counterpoints.' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 11: 75–120. Reprinted in Salmon (2005b): 273–344.
- Salmon, Nathan (1987). 'The Fact that $x = y$.' *Philosophia* 17: 517–18. Reprinted in Salmon (2005a): 153–4.
- Salmon, Nathan (1998). 'Nonexistence.' *Noûs* 32: 277–319. Reprinted in Salmon (2005a): 50–90.
- Salmon, Nathan (2005a). *Metaphysics, Mathematics, and Meaning: Philosophical Papers I*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Salmon, Nathan (2005b). *Reference and Essence* (1981). 2nd edn. Studies in Analytic Philosophy. Amherst, New York: Prometheus.
- Schnieder, Benjamin and Tatjana von Solodkoff (2009). 'In Defence of Fictional Realism.' *Philosophical Quarterly* 59: 138–49.
- Sider, Theodore (1993). 'Van Inwagen and the Possibility of Gunk.' *Analysis* 53: 285–9.
- Sider, Theodore (2001). *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sider, Theodore (2007). 'Parthood.' *Philosophical Review* 116: 51–91.
- Sider, Theodore (2013). 'Against Parthood.' *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 8: 237–93.
- Thomas, James, Denise Thomas, and Tom Hazuka, eds (1992). *Flash Fiction: Very Short Stories*. New York: Norton.
- Thomasson, Amie L. (1999). *Fiction and Metaphysics*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomasson, Amie L. (2007). *Ordinary Objects*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thomasson, Amie L. (2011). 'Fiction, Existence and Indeterminacy.' In *Fictions and Models: New Essays*, edited by John Woods. Munich: Philosophia Verlag: 109–48.
- Van Inwagen, Peter (1977). 'Creatures of Fiction.' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14: 299–308. Reprinted in van Inwagen (2001): 37–57.
- Van Inwagen, Peter (1990). *Material Beings*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Van Inwagen, Peter (2001). *Ontology, Identity, and Modality: Essays in Metaphysics*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Inwagen, Peter (2003). 'Existence, Ontological Commitment, and Fictional Entities.' In *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, edited by Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 131–57.
- 'Very Short Stories' (2006). *Wired*, 14 November, available at: <<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/sixwords.html>>. Accessed 25 September 2014.
- Walton, Kendall L. (1990). *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundation of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas (1981). *Works and Worlds of Art*. Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Zalta, Edward (1983). *Abstract Objects: An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics*. Synthese Library 160. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Zalta, Edward (1988). *Intensional Logic and the Metaphysics of Intentionality*. Bradford. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Zimmerman, Dean (1997). 'Immanent Causation.' *Philosophical Perspectives* 11: 433–71.