

7. This last formulation of the difficulty with positing rational preferences that are unsupported by reasons is borrowed from Donald Regan, "Value, Comparability, and Choice" in *Incommensurability, Incomparability and Practical Reason*, ed. Ruth Chang, pp. 129–150.

8. Amartya Sen, "Internal consistency of choice," *Econometrica* 61 (1993) p. 501.

9. If failures of precise comparability arise because of the vagueness of the standard comparative value relations, it would be less misleading to put the positional principle thus: That we cannot truthfully say of an option that it is worse than any of the alternatives constitutes a reason in favor of choosing it.

10. T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 95–98.

11. It is worth noting, perhaps, that it is natural when asked to justify a choice of one option over an alternative to respond that the chosen option was better. But had failures of precise comparability not given us a reason to do otherwise, a spirit of parsimony would understandably lead us to treat this response not as saying that the betterness provided a reason, but as a concise way of referring to the many first-order reasons that made it so.

12. To be precise, the relation of being 'rationally preferable to, all things considered' cannot be understood univocally. Of course, the considerations offered here will imply the same ambiguity in the relation 'rationally preferable to with respect to such-and-such value' provided that the relevant value admits of failures of precise comparability.

13. Chang, "The Possibility of Parity", p. 665. The context makes it clear that the incomparability Chang has in mind is a failure in the comparability of two options' value. For other expressions of the same thought, see Joseph Raz, "Incommensurability and Agency," in *Incommensurability, Incomparability and Practical Reason*, ed. Ruth Chang, p. 112; and Donald Regan, "Value, Comparability, and Choice," p. 144.

14. Many thanks are due to Samantha Brennan, Ruth Chang, Joshua Gert, Larry Temkin, Aaron Zimmerman, an anonymous reviewer for this journal, and audiences at the 2003 Central Division Meeting of the APA and the 2001 Binghamton-Cornell-Syracuse Philosophy Triangle for helpful discussions of this paper and the issues it addresses.

CREATURES OF FICTION, MYTH, AND IMAGINATION

Ben Caplan

0. INTRODUCTION

In writing *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Charles Dickens wrote down the following sentence:

- (1) She was a fat old woman, this Mrs. Gamp.

Some philosophers think that, when Dickens was writing *Martin Chuzzlewit*, he created a fictional character, Mrs. Gamp. More generally, these philosophers think that, when authors write works of fiction, they create fictional characters and other objects that we can call *creatures of fiction*.¹ Let's call this view *creationism about creatures of fiction*.

In the nineteenth century, astronomers thought that a planet between Mercury and the Sun was causing perturbations in the orbit of Mercury, and they introduced "Vulcan" as a name for such a planet. But they were wrong: there was, and is, no intra-Mercurial planet. Still, these astronomers went around saying things like

- (2) Vulcan is a planet between Mercury and the Sun.

Some philosophers think that, when nineteenth-century astronomers were theorizing about an intra-Mercurial planet, they created a hypothetical planet, Vulcan. More generally, these philosophers think that, when theorists believe false theories, they create hypothetical planets and other objects that we can call

creatures of myth.² Let's call this view *creationism about creatures of myth*.

In "Nonexistence," Nathan Salmon (1998) entertained a theory according to which there is a present emperor of France—an armed fanatic has just taken over the government of France and, with the backing of the United Nations, declared himself emperor—and introduced "Nappy" as a name for such a person (if there is one). But he didn't believe that there is such a person. Still, according to the theory that he entertained, the following sentence is true:

- (3) Nappy is a French emperor.

Some philosophers think that, when he entertained a theory about a French emperor, Salmon created an imaginary emperor, Nappy. More generally, these philosophers think that, when theorists entertain theories that they *don't* believe, they create imaginary emperors and other objects that we can call *creatures of imagination*.³ Let's call this view *creationism about creatures of imagination*.

Nowadays, lots of philosophers are creationists about creatures of fiction.⁴ But only a few are creationists about creatures of myth.⁵ And even fewer are creationists about creatures of imagination.⁶ This paper argues that the decreasing popularity of these views is unjustified. Section 1 presents an argument of Peter van

Inwagen's for the existence of creatures of fiction and argues that parallel arguments can be made for the existence of creatures of myth and imagination. Section 2 presents an argument of Nathan Salmon's for creationism about creatures of myth and argues that a parallel argument can be made for creationism about creatures of imagination.

1. VAN INWAGEN'S ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF CREATURES OF FICTION

In "Creatures of Fiction," Peter van Inwagen (1977) argues that fictional characters and other creatures of fiction exist.⁷ He points out that a theory that we believe—namely, a certain fairly simple *literary criticism*—existentially quantifies over all sorts of things, including novels, plots, and characters. The theory says things like

- (4) Some novels have simple plots

and

- (5) Some characters appear in novels that have simple plots, whereas other characters appear in novels that have complicated plots.

Van Inwagen calls novels, plots, characters, and the like *theoretical entities of literary criticism*. Some of these theoretical entities—for example, Mr. Pickwick, Mrs. Gamp, and Dotheboys Hall—he calls *creatures of fiction*. And some of these creatures of fiction—for example, Mr. Pickwick and Mrs. Gamp—he calls *characters*. Since we believe the theory of literary criticism, and since it existentially quantifies over fictional characters and other creatures of fiction, we should believe in fictional characters and other creatures of fiction; that is, we should believe that they exist.

A parallel argument can be made for the existence of creatures of myth.⁸ Just as we believe a theory that is ontologically committed to fictional characters, because it says things like (5), we believe a theory—a fairly simple history of astronomy—that is ontologically committed to hypothetical planets, because it says things like

- (6) There is a hypothetical planet whose orbit was thought to lie between Mercury and the Sun, but there has never been a hypothetical planet whose orbit was thought to lie between Mercury and Venus.

And, just as fictional characters are creatures of fiction, hypothetical planets are creatures of myth.

A parallel argument can also be made for the existence of creatures of imagination. Just as we believe theories that are ontologically committed to fictional characters and hypothetical planets, because they say things like (5) and (6), we believe a theory—a fairly simple history of Salmon's mental life—that is ontologically committed to imaginary emperors, because it says things like

- (7) There is an imaginary emperor who Nathan Salmon imagined to have taken over France, but there has never been an imaginary emperor who Nathan Salmon imagined to have taken over Canada.

And, just as fictional characters are creatures of fiction and hypothetical planets are creatures of myth, imaginary emperors are creatures of imagination.

One way to avoid being ontologically committed to creatures of fiction would be to find suitable paraphrases for sentences like (5). Similarly, one way to avoid being ontologically committed to creatures of myth and imagination would be to find suitable paraphrases for sentences like (6) and (7). Van Inwagen has long insisted that there is no ready, systematic way of finding suitable paraphrases for sentences like (5). But, one might think, there is such a way of finding suitable paraphrases for sentences like (6) and (7). So one might think that, unlike an ontological commitment to creatures of fiction, an ontological commitment to creatures of myth and imagination can be avoided.

But, thanks to Stuart Brock (2002), there is a ready, systematic way of finding paraphrases for sentences like (5). The idea is that the paraphrase of (5), for example, would say that (5) is true *according to creationism about*

creatures of fiction. Call such a paraphrase *fictionalist*. However one spells out the details of such fictionalist paraphrases, it is easy to see that one could find parallel fictionalist paraphrases for sentences like (6) and (7): for example, the paraphrase of (6) would say that (6) is true *according to creationism about creatures of myth*, and the paraphrase of (7) would say that (7) is true *according to creationism about creatures of imagination*. Perhaps the fictionalist paraphrase of (5) is just as ontologically committed to creatures of fiction as (5) is. In that case, the fictionalist paraphrases of (6) and (7) would be just as ontologically committed to creatures of myth and imagination as (6) and (7) are. Or perhaps the fictionalist paraphrase of (5) isn't ontologically committed to creatures of fiction, but the availability of such a paraphrase does not undermine van Inwagen's argument for the existence of creatures of fiction. In that case, the availability of fictionalist paraphrases of (6) and (7) wouldn't undermine the parallel arguments for the existence of creatures of myth and imagination either. In either case, the parallel arguments for the existence of creatures of myth and imagination are no worse than van Inwagen's original argument for the existence of creatures of fiction.

2. SALMON'S ARGUMENT FOR CREATIONISM ABOUT CREATURES OF MYTH

There are two things to note about van Inwagen's argument for the existence of creatures of fiction. First, it is an argument for the existence of creatures of fiction, rather than for creationism about creatures of fiction, since its conclusion leaves open the possibility that creatures of fiction exist but aren't created. Second, the argument is based, not on what authors do, but rather on what literary critics say. Similar points apply to the parallel arguments for the existence of creatures of myth and imagination: they are arguments for the existence of creatures of myth and imagination, rather than for creationism about creatures of myth and imagination; and

the arguments are based, not on what myth-makers and imaginers do, but rather on what historians of myth and imagination say.

Nathan Salmon does not explicitly offer an argument for creationism about creatures of fiction (rather than merely for the existence of creatures of fiction), one that is based on what authors do (rather than on what literary critics say). (Salmon [1998, 2002a] endorses van Inwagen's argument for the existence of creatures of fiction; and perhaps, like van Inwagen, he thinks that the best account of literary practice is one on which authors bring creatures of fiction into existence.⁹) But Salmon (2002a) does offer an argument for creationism about creatures of myth (rather than merely for the existence of creatures of myth), one that is based on what authors and myth-makers do (rather than on what literary critics and historians of myth say). He uses an analogy between authors and myth-makers to argue for creationism about creatures of myth. After mentioning "the nearly perfect similarity between fiction and myth," he says:

Whatever good reason there is for acknowledging the real existence of [the creature of fiction] Holmes extends to Vulcan. . . . Myths and fictions are both made up. The principal difference between mythical and fictional objects [i.e. creatures of myth and fiction] is that the myth is believed while the fiction is only make-believe. This difference does nothing to obliterate the reality of either fictional or mythical objects [i.e. creatures of fiction or myth].¹⁰

In effect, Salmon is offering something like the following argument for creationism about creatures of myth.

- (P1) Authors create creatures of fiction.
 (P2) If authors create creatures of fiction, then myth-makers create creatures of myth.
 (C1) So myth-makers create creatures of myth.

The argument from (P1) and (P2) to (C1) is valid. And creationists about creatures of fiction accept (P1). So, if creationists about creatures of fiction are to avoid creationism about creatures of myth, then they must deny (P2).

The difference between authors and myth-makers is one of propositional attitude: authors *make-believe* their works of fiction, whereas myth-makers do not make-believe their myths; rather, they genuinely *believe* their myths. If (P2) is false, then make-believing must be *ontologically special* in a way that believing is not: it must be the case that there is something ontologically special about make-believing in virtue of which, when authors make-believe their works of fiction, they create abstract objects (namely, creatures of fiction); whereas it must not be the case there is anything ontologically special about believing in virtue of which, when myth-makers believe their myths, they create abstract objects (namely, creatures of myth). It is hard to see how make-believing could be ontologically special in this way if believing is not. At the very least, it is incumbent upon creationists about creatures of fiction who are not creationists about creatures of myth to explain what it is about make-believing that makes it ontologically special in a way that believing is not.

We can use an analogy between authors and imaginers in a parallel argument for creationism about creatures of imagination.¹¹

(P1) Authors create creatures of fiction.

(P3) If authors create creatures of fiction, then imaginers create creatures of imagination.

(C2) So imaginers create creatures of imagination.

The argument from (P1) and (P3) to (C2) is valid. And creationists about creatures of fiction accept (P1). So, if creationists about creatures of fiction are to avoid creationism about creatures of imagination, then they must deny (P3).

The difference between authors and imaginers is one of propositional attitude: authors *make-believe* their works of fiction, whereas imaginers do not make-believe their theories; rather, they merely *entertain* their theories. If (P3) is false, then make-believing must be

ontologically special in a way that entertaining is not: it must be the case that there is something ontologically special about make-believing in virtue of which, when authors make-believe their works of fiction, they create abstract objects (namely, creatures of fiction); whereas it must not be the case there is anything ontologically special about entertaining in virtue of which, when imaginers entertain their theories, they create abstract objects (namely, creatures of imagination). It is hard to see how make-believing could be ontologically special in this way if entertaining is not. At the very least, it is incumbent upon creationists about creatures of fiction who are not creationists about creatures of imagination to explain what it is about make-believing that makes it ontologically special in a way that entertaining is not.¹²

Salmon endorses creationism about creatures of fiction and myth, but he does not endorse creationism about creatures of imagination.¹³ That is, he endorses (P1) and (C1), but he does not endorse (C2). Since (C2) follows from (P1) and (P3), he must not endorse (P3). If he does not endorse (P3), then it must be because he does not endorse the claim that entertaining is ontologically special in the way that make-believing is. As we have seen, it is incumbent upon Salmon to explain what it is about make-believing that makes it ontologically special in a way that entertaining is not. And Salmon endorses (P2). So he thinks that believing is ontologically special in the way that make-believing is. As a result, he has even more explaining to do: it is incumbent upon him to explain what it is about make-believing *and* believing that makes them ontologically special in a way that entertaining is not. Absent such an explanation, Salmon should concede that he created Nappy just as much as Dickens created Mrs. Gamp or nineteenth-century astronomers created Vulcan.

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NOTES

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1. The term *creatures of fiction* comes from van Inwagen (1977).
2. The term *creatures of myth* is inspired by Salmon (1998, 2002a, 2002b), who calls such objects *mythical objects*. (He calls any false theory that is believed a *myth*.)
3. The term *creatures of imagination* is inspired by Braun (forthcoming), who calls such objects *imaginary objects*. The term *imagination* is not ideal; but no better term comes to mind. The term is supposed to cover cases in which agents bear propositional attitudes (other than believing or make-believing) to theories or the like; it is not supposed to cover cases in which agents merely have mental images without bearing such propositional attitudes.
4. See Kripke ms.; van Inwagen 1977, 1983, 1985, 2000, 2003; Searle 1979; Howell 1983, 1996; Levinson 1993; Schiffer 1996; Salmon 1998, 2002a; Thomasson 1999, 2003; Predelli 2002; Soames 2002; Goodman 2003, 2004; Braun forthcoming.
5. See Kripke ms.; Salmon 1998, 2002a, 2002b; Braun forthcoming. Soames (2002) is neutral on creationism about creatures of myth. Thomasson (1999) does not explicitly discuss myths, but it seems that she is committed to creationism about creatures of myth. (See Friend 2000, Braun forthcoming.) See also Thomasson 2003.
6. See Thomasson 1999, Braun forthcoming. In conversation, David Kaplan has expressed sympathy for the view. Salmon (1998) is neutral on creationism about creatures of imagination. See note 13.
7. See also van Inwagen 1983, 1985, 2000, 2003. Kripke (ms.) offers much the same sort of argument.
8. See Salmon 2002a.
9. Of the thesis that authors do not create, but rather merely discover, creatures of fiction, van Inwagen (1977, p. 308) says, "I shall not explore the ramifications of this thesis, except to point out that it makes the creativity of the novelist seem very like the 'creativity' of the flower-arranger." Here is not the place to defend the creativity of flower-arrangers, nor to assess its consequences for creationism about creatures of fiction.
10. Salmon 2002a, p. 121, n. 22.
11. See also Braun forthcoming.
12. Alternatively, we can use the analogy between myth-makers and imaginers.
 - (P1) Authors create creatures of fiction.
 - (P2) If authors create creatures of fiction, then myth-makers create creatures of myth.
 - (P4) If myth-makers create creatures of myth, then imaginers create creatures of imagination.
 - (C2) So imaginers create creatures of imagination.

The argument from (P1), (P2), and (P4) to (C2) is valid. And creationists about creatures of fiction accept (P1). So, if creationists about creatures of fiction are to avoid creationism about creatures of imagination, then they must deny either (P2) or (P4). To deny either (P2) or (P4), creationists about creatures of fiction would have to explain what it is about make-believing that makes it ontologically special in a way that either believing or entertaining is not.

13. Salmon (1998, p. 306) says, "To the allegation that I have invented a fictional emperor of France, I plead Not Guilty." So, on his view, he did not create a *creature of fiction*. And he says that he does not "subscribe to any theory to the effect that France now has an emperor." (See Salmon 1998, p. 306.) So, on his view, the theory that there is a present emperor of France is not a myth and hence he did not create a *creature of myth* either. Still, this leaves open the possibility that, on his view, he created a *creature of imagination*. In "Nonexistence," he does not explicitly endorse or reject the claim that he created a creature of imagination. In correspondence, Salmon has indicated that he intended to remain neutral about the claim. Thanks to David Braun and Nathan Salmon for discussion on this point.

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