

HOW FICTA DEPEND

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Abstract: I shall elaborate in this article on the connection between ficta and metaontological pluralism, i.e., the view according to which there are irreducibly many dependence relations. More precisely, I shall consider the main tenets of an artifactualist theory of ficta and show how they can be expressed from the standpoint of a pluralist theory of dependence that accepts irreducibly many Respect-of-Dependence relations (in short, RD-relations). In Section 2, I shall introduce the artifactualist theory at stake and, in Section 3, I shall recall my theory of RD-relations. In Section 4, I shall show how ficta identity-depend, origin-depend and sustenance-depend on further entities. In Section 5, I shall anticipate and solve three problems. In Section 6, I shall briefly compare my account with other accounts. Finally, in Section 7, I shall draw some conclusions.

Key Words: Fictional Objects; Artifactualism; Dependence; Grounding; Authorship.

1. *Introduction*

Fictional objects (or ficta, in short) are objects such as Sherlock Holmes, Bilbo Baggins, Sauron's ring, Harry Potter. Ficta give rise to several ontological challenges. For example, do ficta exist? If they exist, why does it seem that they do not exist in the same way as myself or my son? And how do they bear their properties – if any?

In this article, I shall not be concerned with these problems. I shall only consider ficta from the metaontological viewpoint. More precisely, I shall try to explore the relationship(s) between ficta and ontological dependence. “Ontological dependence” will be used here as an umbrella term covering many distinct notions.¹ I shall argue that one prominent theory of ficta – artifactualism – should be better developed from the perspective of metaontological pluralism. Metaontological pluralism is the view according to which there are irreducibly many relations of ontological dependence between entities.

In Section 2, I shall characterize artifactualism and my own version of this view. In Section 3, I shall recall a version of metaontological pluralism I have defended in Paolini Paoletti (2019) and (2021). By invoking this theory, in Section 4, I shall show that ficta depend in three distinct ways on further entities. Namely, that there are three distinct respects of dependence in which ficta depend on further entities. In Section 5, I shall anticipate and solve three problems.

¹ For example, grounding, modal existential dependence, and so on. See Tahko, Lowe (2020).

Finally, in Section 6, I shall argue that this view should be favoured over some views of the relationships between ficta and ontological dependence. Section 7 will contain some conclusions.

2. Ficta for Artifactualism

Artifactualism is a family of theories according to which ficta are artifacts.² Namely, ficta are objects that are created by someone and that are maintained in existence by something/someone. In this respect, ficta resemble concrete artifacts, such as weapons, forks and dishwashers.

We shall restrict our inquiry here to literary ficta. Literary ficta have creators, i.e., their authors. For example, Conan Doyle is the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Moreover, literary ficta are maintained in existence by copies of their stories and by the fact that such stories can be understood by someone. Indeed and intuitively, if all the books and movies about Sherlock Holmes were destroyed, if people ever forgot of Sherlock Holmes and/or if no one were able to understand Sherlock Holmes' stories anymore, Sherlock Holmes would go out of existence – or so artifactualists would argue.³

However, most artifactualists maintain that ficta do not exist in the same way as ordinary objects. Ficta are at least abstract. Namely, Sherlock Holmes is an abstract object, whereas I am a concrete one. At any rate, ficta exist. They exist as abstract artifacts.

Finally, most artifactualists hold that ficta possess (at least some of) their properties in a distinct and peculiar way. Sherlock Holmes is a detective. However, if one were to count all the detectives now existing in the world, one would hardly find Sherlock Holmes. If one were to solve a murder case in the 'real world', one would hardly get help from Sherlock Holmes. Indeed, Sherlock Holmes does not have the property of *being a detective* in the same way as a real detective. Sherlock Holmes is only characterized by the property of *being a detective* according to certain stories, in the fictional worlds depicted by those stories. Or he only gets the property of *being a detective* ascribed by someone (i.e., by his author).

² See van Inwagen (1977), Searle (1979), Salmon (1998), Thomasson (1999), (2003), Voltolini (2006), Kripke (2011), (2013).

³ In principle, it is also possible to hold that ficta are created by someone, although they do not owe their continued existence to anything else. Namely, they do not depend on anything else for their continued existence. But this conflicts with a powerful intuition: that everything that owes its existence to something else (e.g., a creator) cannot then become independent of anything else for its *continuing* to exist. Indeed, an entity of the latter sort can exist independently of anything else at every moment of its existence. Thus, why cannot it always exist without owing the beginning of its existence to anything else?

This does *not* rule out that ficta can also possess some properties ‘in the ordinary way’, so to say. For example, it seems that Sherlock Holmes has the properties of *being an abstract artifact*, of *having been created by Conan Doyle* and of *being a fictional character* ‘in the ordinary way’. Namely, he has such properties in the same way as I have the properties of *being human* and of *being a philosopher*.

This is only a rough sketch of artifactualism. Let me focus on the issue of ontological dependence. According to artifactualists, ficta are created by their authors. Namely, they owe their existence – or at least the beginning of their existence – to their authors. Moreover, they continue to exist insofar as copies of their stories continue to exist and insofar as such stories can be understood by someone. Copies of stories may well be written texts, but they may also be oral tales. It is vital that such stories can be understood by someone. Otherwise, no one would ever be able to think of the ficta they contain, of their properties and relations. It would be as if all of such ficta were not in existence anymore.

With regard to ontological dependence, Amie Thomasson (1999), (2003) constructed one of the most well-developed theories of ficta. She first distinguished between four sorts of ontological dependence. There is rigid dependence: A rigidly depends on B insofar as A depends on that very entity B. On the other hand, there is also generic dependence: A generically depends on the Bs insofar as the Bs are entities of a certain sort/kind on which A depends.

There is historical dependence: A historically depends on something insofar as A requires the latter at some time prior to or coincident with every time at which A exists. Roughly, A requires the latter before its beginning to exist or at least at the first time(s) of its existence. But there is also constant dependence: A constantly depends on something insofar as A requires the latter at every time at which A exists.

Equipped with these distinctions, Thomasson points out that ficta rigidly historically depend on certain physical activities and intentional acts of their authors. For example, on the mental states of their authors, on their neural realizers, on their authors’ writing certain texts, and so on. Moreover, ficta constantly generically depend on the presence of copies of their stories and on the presence of capable readership/interpreters, i.e., of readers/interpreters that can understand such stories.

I shall not conceal that artifactualism is affected by some troubles. Here are some examples.

First, it is difficult to maintain that ficta both exist – *qua* abstract artifacts – and that are fictional. Indeed, insofar as ficta are fictional, it also seems legitimate to hold that they do not exist.⁴

⁴ See Yagisawa (2001) and Brock (2002).

Secondly and more generally, it is difficult to characterize the act of their creation.⁵

Thirdly and relatedly, it is difficult to understand if ficta could have been created by different authors or not.

Fourthly, some ficta are affected by indeterminacy and/or inconsistency when it comes to the properties that are ascribed to them.⁶

Fifthly, it is difficult to single out the exact time at which they start to exist and/or the locations they seem to occupy - at least if they are located somewhere.⁷

Sixthly and relatedly, some processes of creation seem to be continuous.⁸ This may blur the distinction between creation and continued existence.

Seventhly, it seems that ficta have at least some of their properties essentially – both among the properties they seem to have ‘in the ordinary way’ and among those that are ascribed to them.⁹ For example, it is difficult to think of Sherlock Holmes – the very Sherlock Holmes created by Conan Doyle – as a rapper living in Atlanta in 2020 who is completely unable to solve murder cases.¹⁰

Eighthly and finally, dependence may be understood in different ways: in modal terms¹¹, in terms of grounding¹², in non-causal terms¹³, in terms of supervenience and embodiment.¹⁴ It is thus necessary to provide a better characterization of it in order to construct a satisfactory theory of ficta *qua* abstract artifacts.

I do not aim at solving all these problems here. What I wish to show is only that metaontological pluralism provides us with a better understanding of artifactualism.

In Paolini Paoletti (2016), I developed a theory of ficta that bears close resemblance with artifactualism. I maintained that fictional objects are objects that depend on the mental activities of their authors – and possibly of their interpreters – in order to have their properties and get individuated. Ficta can both have properties ‘in the ordinary way’ and get some properties ascribed to them. More precisely, I suggested that there is a family of ascription relations that hold (at least) between a fictional object, a minded subject, a property and a fictional context (roughly, a fictional world defined by a story). For example, Sherlock Holmes gets the property of *being a detective* ascribed to him by his author (and

⁵ See Deutsch (1991) and Brock (2010).

⁶ See Everett (2005) and (2013).

⁷ See Brock (2002) and (2010).

⁸ See Voltolini (2006).

⁹ See Voltolini (2006).

¹⁰ For some replies, see Goodman (2004), (2005), Schnieder, von Solodkoff (2009), Voltolini (2010), Zvolenszky (2013), (2014), Woodward (2017).

¹¹ See Fontaine, Rahman (2014).

¹² See von Solodkoff (2019).

¹³ See Irmak (2020).

¹⁴ See Leclerc (2016).

also by his faithful interpreters) within the fictional context defined by Sherlock Holmes' stories.

I also singled out some rather complex criteria of identity for ficta that I shall not recall here. At any rate, I left open the possibility that at least some properties are essential to ficta. Namely, that ficta have essential properties.

Finally, unlike artifactualists, I claimed that ficta do not exist – insofar as existence is characterized in a certain prototypical way (i.e., bearing irreducible causal powers). Nevertheless, ficta still are *bona fide* objects. For they still have specific identity- and individuation-conditions.¹⁵

Thus, ficta are non-existent objects that still depend – for their being objects – on the mental activities of their author – and possibly of their interpreters. This will be the version of artifactualism I shall delve into in this article.

3. Respects of Dependence.

Metaontological pluralism is the view according to which there are irreducibly many relations of ontological dependence between entities.¹⁶

In Paolini Paoletti (2019) and (2021), I developed my own version of metaontological pluralism. This version will ground my treatment of ficta in Section 4. Thus, I shall briefly recall its main tenets in this Section.

I started from the idea that, when we claim that something depends on something else, we often tacitly assume that the former depends on the latter *in some respect*. For example: accidents depend on substances in respect of their existence. Aristotelian universals depend on substances in respect of their existence and instantiation. Kimian events depend on substances, properties and times in respect of their identity and individuation. And so on.

I argued that the best way to cope with such respects of dependence consists in accepting that they give rise to distinct dependence relations. Thus, I introduced Respect-of-Dependence relations. In short, RD-relations. Among such relations, there are:

- identity-dependence (A identity-depends on B insofar as A depends on B for its being an entity of a certain sort and/or the very entity of its sort A is);
- origin-dependence (A origin-depends on B insofar as A depends on B for its starting to exist – or for its starting to possess its distinctive mode of being¹⁷);

¹⁵ In this respect, my theory is Meinongian, insofar as Meinongianism is minimally taken to hold that there are objects that do not exist. See for example Kroon, Voltolini (2018).

¹⁶ See for example Wilson (2014), Bennett (2017) and Koslicki (2018).

¹⁷ As we shall see in Section 4, this addition is meant to allow for entities distinct from substances (e.g., properties, events, and so on) to depend on something else for their distinctive modes of being. For it should be maintained in this context that only substances exist – given the restricted notion of existence I am working with here.

- sustenance-dependence (A sustenance-dependes on B insofar as A depends on B for its continuing to exist – or for its continuing to possess its distinctive mode of being¹⁸);
- instantiation-dependence (A instantiation-dependes on B insofar as A depends on B for its being instantiated);
- truth-dependence (A truth-dependes on B insofar as A depends on B for its being true);
- occurrence-dependence (A occurrence-dependes on B insofar as A depends on B for its occurrence);
- obtaining-dependence (A obtaining-dependes on B insofar as A depends on B for its obtaining);
- composition-dependence (A composition-dependes on B insofar as A is composed of B).

Of course, distinct RD-relations may only come together with certain categories of entities and not others. For example, obtaining-dependence only comes together with facts. Moreover, some RD-relations may entail further RD-relations. For example, with Aristotelian universals, instantiation-dependence entails origin-dependence and sustenance-dependence. More radically, some RD-relations may reduce to further RD-relations. For example, at least with Aristotelian universals, instantiation-dependence may well reduce to origin-dependence and sustenance-dependence taken together. What matters for metaontological pluralism is that the number of *irreducible* RD-relations is higher than one.

Additionally, some RD-relations may entail further dependence- or covariance-relations, such as supervenience, realization, and so on.

RD-relations may be qualified in further respects. First, given a certain RD-relation, there may be both *partial*₁ and *entire*₁ RD-dependence. A *partially*₁ RD-dependes on B if and only if A RD-dependes on B and on something else distinct from B.¹⁹ For example, a certain Kimian event partly₁ identity-dependes on the

¹⁸ Same here.

¹⁹ I assume here for the sake of simplicity that, if something partly RD-dependes on something else, it also entirely RD-dependes on the latter *plus* further entities. However, there may also be entities that are *only* partly RD-dependent without also being *entirely* RD-dependent. Namely, there may also be entities that partly RD-depend on something else and that are partly RD-independent of anything else. For example, I may be *partially* reimbursed by my employer for my expenses, without being fully reimbursed by my employer plus anyone else (this example is due to Leunberger 2020 and it

substance(s) partaking in it. A *entirely*₁ RD-dependes on B (or on B, C, etc.) if and only if A RD-dependes on B (or on B, C, etc.) and on nothing else. For example, a certain Kimian event *entirely*₁ identity-dependes on the property/relation, substance(s) and time partaking in it.²⁰

Secondly, given a certain RD-relation, there may be both *specific* and *generic* dependence. A *specifically* RD-dependes on B if and only if A RD-dependes on that very entity B, i.e., A RD-dependes ‘exactly’ on B. A *generically* RD-dependes on B if and only if A RD-dependes on B insofar as B plays a certain role. For example, an accident such as Aristotle’s whiteness *specifically* identity-dependes on the very substance it is an accident of (i.e., Aristotle). On the contrary, my heart *generically* sustenance-dependes on its cells. Namely, it depends on its cells only insofar as the latter compose it and do certain work. Yet, at other times and/or in other possible worlds, my heart could depend on further cells, insofar as the latter compose it and do the same work at those times/in those possible worlds.

Specific and generic RD-relations come into different types. There are three types of specific RD-relations. To single them out, it is necessary to distinguish between *necessary* and *contingent* RD-relations and between *permanent* and *non-permanent* RD-relations. A *necessarily* RD-dependes on B if and only if, in every possible world in which A exists, A RD-dependes on B. A *contingently* RD-dependes on B if and only if there is at least one possible world in which A RD-dependes on B (and A obviously exists) but it is *not* the case that, in every possible world in which A exists, A RD-dependes on B. Here and below, when A is not a substance, “exists” should be replaced with another predicate, expressing A’s distinctive mode of being (e.g., occurrence, instantiation, and so on).

Moreover, A *permanently* RD-dependes on B if and only if, at every time at which A exists, A RD-dependes on B. A *non-permanently* RD-dependes on B if and only if there is at least one time at which A RD-dependes on B, but it is *not* the case that, at every time at which A exists, A RD-dependes on B.

We can now single out three sorts of specific RD-relations. A *specifically*₁ RD-dependes on B if and only if A permanently but contingently RD-dependes on B. A *specifically*₂ RD-dependes on B if and only if A permanently and necessarily RD-dependes on B. A *specifically*₃ RD-dependes on B if and only if A non-permanently and contingently RD-dependes.

concerns non-supplementable partial grounding). In this case, my definitions of *partial*₁ and *entire*₁ RD-dependence do *not* allow for such a possibility. Thus, one should obviously redefine *partial*₁ and *entire*₁ RD-relations. One could start by taking *entire*₁ dependence as a primitive and then proceed in two steps. First, A is an *entirely*₁ RD-dependent entity if and only if there is something (an entity or a group of entity) on which A *entirely*₁ RD-dependes. Secondly, A *partly*₁ RD-dependes on B if and only if (i) A is an *entirely*₁ RD-dependent entity and B is only a proper part of what A *entirely*₁ RD-dependes on, or (ii) A is not an *entirely*₁ RD-dependent entity and A RD-dependes on B.

²⁰ In addition, I have also pointed out that A may *partly*₂ depend on B, insofar as A depends on B in some respect (i.e., for some RD-relation) but not in some other respect (i.e., for some other RD-relation).

In sum, and at least in principle, given a certain RD-relation, we can first distinguish between two further qualified RD-relations: specific RD-relations and generic RD-relations. Moreover, when it comes to specific RD-dependence, we can then distinguish between *specific₁*, *specific₂* and *specific₃* RD-dependence. For example, between *specific₁*, *specific₂* and *specific₃* origin-dependence.

Let me now turn to generic RD-relations. Also generic RD-relations may be necessary or contingent, permanent or non-permanent. Thus, we can single out: *generic₁* (i.e., permanent and contingent) RD-relations, *generic₂* (i.e., permanent and necessary) RD-relations and *generic₃* (i.e., non-permanent and contingent) RD-relations.

In addition, it is necessary to single out the relata of generic RD-relations. On the one hand, we have a certain dependent entity, e.g., my heart. On the other hand, we have further entities on which the former generically RD-depend, e.g., the cells that compose my heart and that do certain work. However, the latter entities (i.e., the *dependees*) may vary across times and possible worlds. Namely, at other times/in other possible worlds, there may be different cells composing my heart and doing certain work. Thus, it is *not* correct to claim that my heart generically RD-depend on the cells that now and/or in the actual world compose it and do certain work. For at other times/in other possible worlds my heart may come together with different cells as its *dependees* and generically RD-depend on the latter.

To cope with this issue, I suggested that generic RD-relations have *Roles-qua-groups* as *dependees*. Namely, my heart generically RD-depend on whatever plays a certain Role or, in short, on a certain Role (i.e., the Role of its cells). Moreover, such a Role should be thought of as a group. One and the same group can be composed of different members at distinct times and/or in distinct possible worlds. Members may also vary in number. Moreover, there may also be groups with only one member. Thus, my heart generically RD-depend on the *Role-qua-group* of its cells.

However, it seems that my heart also RD-depend – in some sense – on the specific cells that play the relevant *Role-qua-group* at a certain time/in a certain possible world. To disambiguate, I shall introduce here *generic-a* RD-relations, to be distinguished from generic RD-relations. A *generically-a* RD-depend on B if and only if there is some *Role-qua-group* such that A generically RD-depend on that *Role-qua-group* and B plays that *Role-qua-group* (i.e., it coincides with that *Role-qua-group* permanently or non-permanently, necessarily or contingently). This does *not* imply that A also *specifically* RD-depend on B. For A, in other situations where the *Role-qua-group* is played by something else, actually turns out to generically-a RD-depend on the latter. Thus, A's RD-dependence need *not* 'precisely' involve B. Moreover, and more crucially, *generic-a* RD-dependence must be 'mediated' by the fact that the *dependees* play

specific Role-*qua*-groups. On the contrary, specific RD-dependence is not 'mediated' in such a way.

Indeed, generic-a RD-relations come into three distinct types: generic-a₁ RD-relations (when the Role-*qua*-group is played permanently but contingently by the specific dependee(s)), generic-a₂ RD-relations (when the Role-*qua*-group is played permanently and necessarily by the specific dependee(s)) and generic-a₃ RD-relations (when the Role-*qua*-group is played non-permanently and contingently by the specific dependee(s)).

To summarize: given a certain RD-relation and at least in principle, we can distinguish between three distinct sorts of qualified, specific RD-relations (specific₁, specific₂ and specific₃ RD-relations), three distinct sorts of qualified, generic RD-relations (generic₁, generic₂ and generic₃ RD-relations) and three distinct sorts of qualified, generic-a RD-relations (generic-a₁, generic-a₂ and generic-a₃ RD-relations).

4. *Ficta and RD-relations*

In this Section, I shall apply my theory of RD-relations to ficta. I shall show that there are three different RD-relations that are relevant for ficta: identity-dependence, origin-dependence and sustenance-dependence.

Let me begin with identity-dependence. I am inclined to thinking that ficta have at least some properties essentially. Intuitively, as I pointed out in Section 2, it is difficult to think of Sherlock Holmes – the very Sherlock Holmes created by Conan Doyle – as a rapper living in Atlanta in 2020 who is completely unable to solve murder cases.

Of course, it might turn out to be difficult to specify *all* the essential properties of a fictum. We might be in doubt about the status of some of such properties. However, this does *not* imply that ficta do not have any essential property at all. Namely, this does *not* imply that ficta can vary all of their properties while remaining the same objects.

Let me then set apart the task of singling out the essential properties of ficta – a task I partly attended to in Paolini Paoletti (2016). And let me recall identity-dependence: A identity-depend on B insofar as A depends on B for its being an entity of a certain sort and/or the very entity of its sort A is.

It seems that ficta identity-depend on their essential properties, i.e., on the properties that define their being certain sorts of entities and/or the very entities of their sorts they are. Moreover, ficta seem to *entirely*₁ identity-depend on their essential properties. Namely, there is nothing besides their essential properties on which they identity-depend.²¹ Moreover, they seem to identity-depend on their

²¹ However, if we accepted the characterization of partial₁ and entire₁ RD-relations provided in note 19, we could also claim that ficta partly₁ identity-depend on their essential properties, while being also

essential properties necessarily and permanently. For if they changed at least some of such properties in a possible world/at a time, they would cease to be the very objects they are and they would immediately turn out to be different objects.

Of course, some of such essential properties may be had ‘in the ordinary way’ by ficta. For example, the property of *being a fictional object*. Further essential properties may be only ascribed to ficta. For example, the property of *being a detective* is only ascribed to Sherlock Holmes: Sherlock Holmes is not a detective ‘in the ordinary way’. Thus, with regard to ascribed properties, fictional objects would directly include in their essence only properties of the following form: *being ascribed property P by someone within a certain fictional context*. For example, *being ascribed the property of being a detective by someone within a certain fictional context*. However, the latter properties identity-depend in turn on ‘ordinary’ properties such as P (e.g., *being a detective*). And identity-dependence seems to be transitive. Therefore, ficta also identity-depend on ‘ordinary’ properties such as P (e.g., Sherlock Holmes also identity-depend on *being a detective*).

In sum, we can accept the following:

(I) ficta entirely₁ and specifically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) identity-depend on certain essential properties P_1, \dots, P_n .

Before delving into the other RD-relations, we should make four remarks.

First, I claimed in Section 2 that ficta are not endowed with the ‘ordinary’ existence we attribute to ordinary substances, such as myself and my desk. ‘Ordinary’ existence may be defined in distinct ways. As I anticipated, my favourite definition involves bearing irreducible causal powers. Namely, I define an ‘ordinarily’ existing substance as one that bears irreducible causal powers. I hold that ficta, though resembling ‘ordinarily’ existing substances in multiple respects (e.g., they bear properties without being ‘borne’ by anything else), do *not* bear irreducible causal powers. This seems to preserve the intuition that ficta do not (‘ordinarily’) exist. Thus, what do we point to when we claim that a certain fictum starts to exist, is maintained in existence and eventually stops existing?

We can reason as follows. Besides ficta, there are further types of entities that do not enjoy ‘ordinary’ existence, such as events, facts, Aristotelian universals, and so on. Yet, it is legitimate to claim that such entities start to ‘exist’, are maintained in ‘existence’ and that they may eventually stop ‘existing’. Their ‘existence’ (from now onwards, existence*) coincides with specific features that typically characterize specific categories of entities. The existence* of events coincides with their occurrence. Thus, an event starts to occur, continues to occur

partly₁ identity-independent of anything else. For example, they might be partly₁ endowed with some primitive sort of identity/individuation conditions besides the ones provided by essential properties.

and may eventually stop occurring. The existence* of facts coincides with their obtaining. The existence* of Aristotelian universals coincides with their instantiation. And so on. Occurrence, obtaining, instantiation are all analogous to existence for ordinary substances. And they are all somehow analogous with one another.²²

Thus, we can introduce one further sort of existence* for ficta – and, more generally, for all the entities that somehow depend on mental subjects. Call it “existence-f”. Existence-f may be a new mode of being, such as mental existence. Or it may just coincide with the kind-property of *being a mind-dependent object*.

At any rate, with regard to ficta, existence-f is what both origin-dependence and sustenance-dependence point to. For origin-dependence was defined in Section 3 as follows: A origin-dependes on B insofar as A depends on B for its starting to exist – or for its starting to possess its distinctive mode of being. And sustenance-dependence was defined as follows: A sustenance-dependes on B insofar as A depends on B for its continuing to exist – or for its continuing to possess its distinctive mode of being. Now, the distinctive mode of being of ficta is existence-f.

The second remark to be made is an obvious one. Existence-f is part of the essence of ficta. For all ficta, insofar as they are ficta, are somehow dependent on mental subjects. And if something somehow depends on mental subjects, it enjoys existence-f. Thus, ficta partly₁ specifically₂ identity-dependes on existence-f as well. Namely, they also but not only identity-depend on existence-f in all the possible worlds and at all the times in/at which they have existence-f. If they did not have existence-f, they would turn out to be different entities.

Yet, this does *not* entail that ficta exist-f in all the possible worlds and at all the times. For they have existence-f only in some possible worlds and at some times.

The third remark is that origin-dependence and sustenance-dependence, on the one hand, and identity-dependence, on the other hand, may part ways. Intuitively, if A identity-dependes on B, this does *not* entail that A also origin-dependes on B. Sherlock Holmes identity-dependes on *being a detective*. Yet, the latter property is not responsible (not even in part) for Sherlock Holmes’ starting to exist-f. True: Conan Doyle also mobilized *being a detective* in order to ‘create’ Sherlock Holmes. However, *being a detective* was involved in the ‘creation’ process only insofar as it was mobilized by Conan Doyle. It was only Conan Doyle that was responsible for Sherlock Holmes’ ‘creation’.

One could reply that Conan Doyle’s mobilizing Sherlock Holmes partly₁ depended on the instantiation of the property of *being a detective* somewhere in the universe. Had that property not been instantiated, Conan Doyle would not have been able to know it and to include it in Sherlock Holmes. Right. But the

²² For a broader inquiry into the analogy of being, see McDaniel (2017).

instantiation of the property of *being a detective* somewhere in the universe did *not* originate – nor did it contribute to originating – Conan Doyle’s ‘creation’ process. At best, it was only a background condition for that process. Thus, it is *not* legitimate to appeal to the (supposed) transitivity of origin-dependence in order to argue that, since Sherlock Holmes origin-depends on his author²³ – or on his author’s ‘creation’ process – and since his author’s ‘creation’ process origin-depends also on the instantiation of *being a detective*, then Sherlock Holmes origin-depends also on the instantiation of *being a detective*. For it is *not* the case that Conan Doyle’s ‘creation’ process origin-depends also on the instantiation of *being a detective*.

Moreover, if A identity-depends on B, this does *not* entail that A also sustenance-depends on B. True: in order for Sherlock Holmes to continue to exist-f, it is necessary that *being a detective* continues to be ascribed to him. However, *being a detective* continues to be ascribed to Sherlock Holmes only insofar as it is mobilized within some sustenance process, involving physical copies of Sherlock Holmes’ stories and capable interpreters. Such stories and capable interpreters are ultimately responsible for Sherlock Holmes’ sustenance. In this respect, that *being a detective* is part of the essence of Sherlock Holmes is only a background condition for the sustenance process.

Additionally, if A origin-depends on B, this does *not* entail that A also identity-depends on B. This happens because A may origin-depend on B only contingently and/or non-permanently. On the contrary, whenever A identity-depends on B, it seems that A’s identity-dependence on B comes together with necessity and permanence. For similar reasons, if A sustenance-depends on B, this does *not* entail that A also identity-depends on B.

So far, so good.

Our fourth remark is related. Indeed, it seems that ficta could have had other authors from the ones they actually had. Maybe Sherlock Holmes could have been created by someone different from Conan Doyle, had Conan Doyle lived a different life or had he not existed. I am well aware that this issue is controversial. However, at first sight, it is intuitive to hold that authorship is a contingent relation. And so I shall assume it to be. However, my account may be easily modified in order to allow for necessary authorship.

Moreover, ficta could also have been sustained in existence-f by other entities, different from the ones that actually sustain them. For example, Sherlock Holmes could have been sustained in existence-f by oral stories, rather than by written texts. Or by books published in slightly different ways, or in other languages. And different readers/interpreters could have read about him or interpreted his stories.

We can now introduce our remaining theses:

²³ Being inclined to accepting substance causation, I would actually hold that authors are the causes of ‘creation’ processes. See Paolini Paoletti (2018).

(II) ficta entirely₁ and generically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-depend (i.e., for their existence-f) on authors.

Indeed, authors may be different. But it is still the case that, in every possible world/at every time in/at which a fictum exists-f, it origin-depend on some author or another.²⁴

(II) comes together with:

(III) ficta entirely₁ and generically-a₁ (i.e., contingently and non-permanently) origin-depend on certain specific authors.

For example, Sherlock Holmes entirely₁ and generically-a₃ origin-depend on Conan Doyle. For it is contingent that Conan Doyle plays the authorship Role-*qua*-group with respect to Sherlock Holmes. Moreover, such an origin-dependence is not permanent: when Conan Doyle stops existing, he is not Sherlock Holmes' author anymore – though it is still true that he *was* Sherlock Holmes' author.²⁵

Turn now to sustenance-dependence. Here come four different theses:

(IV) ficta partly₁ and generically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) sustenance-depend (i.e., for their existence-f) on physical copies of their stories;

(V) ficta partly₁ and generically-a₃ (i.e., contingently and non-permanently) sustenance-depend on certain specific physical copies of their stories;

²⁴ If authorship were necessary, i.e., if Sherlock Holmes could not have had other authors different from Conan Doyle, (II) and (III) could be modified by just talking of entire₁ and specific₂ origin-dependence of Sherlock Holmes on Conan Doyle. Moreover, such an origin-dependence relation could be based on an essential property of Sherlock Holmes himself. Namely, Sherlock Holmes could also identity-depend on the essential property of *having been created by Conan Doyle*. And this could be what in virtue of which Sherlock Holmes entirely₁ and specifically₂ origin-depend on Conan Doyle.

²⁵ Yet, at a time at which Conan Doyle does not exist anymore, Sherlock Holmes still origin-depend on his Role-*qua*-group. For the Role-*qua*-group of Sherlock Holmes' authors should be thought of as an abstract entity that only identity-depend on Sherlock Holmes and that can be played by different authors. The intuition behind this solution is that being an author at a certain time implies existing at that time, so that Conan Doyle cannot be an author at a time at which he does not exist. But an alternative solution consists in denying this implication: someone can remain an author at a certain time even if s/he does *not* exist at that time anymore. Or someone can have at a certain time the property of *having been an author* (at a previous time) even if s/he does not exist at the former time. Or someone may never lose existence, so that s/he may always remain an author. Choosing among these alternatives hinges on one's favorite metaphysics of time.

(VI) ficta partly₁ and generically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) sustenance-depend (i.e., for their existence-f) on capable interpreters;

(VII) ficta partly₁ and generically-a₃ (i.e., contingently and non-permanently) sustenance-depend (i.e., for their existence-f) on certain specific capable interpreters.

A few words of explication. Capable interpreters and physical copies of stories are both required for the continued existence-f of ficta. If physical copies of stories were not interpretable, it would be as if Sherlock Holmes did not exist. And if capable interpreters did not have such physical copies, they would not be able to recall Sherlock Holmes. Thus, were it not for *both* physical copies and capable interpreters, Sherlock Holmes would not exist-f anymore as a fictum.

The relevant sustenance-dependence is generic, though necessary and permanent: in every possible world and at every time in/at which Sherlock Holmes exists-f, he sustenance-dependes on physical copies of his stories and on capable interpreters.

Moreover, it seems that Sherlock Holmes could have had other physical copies of his stories and other capable interpreters from the ones he *actually* has. Thus, generic-a sustenance-dependence is contingent. Additionally, in the future, Sherlock Holmes' *current* capable interpreters and the *current* copies of his stories may disappear and/or they may be unable to perform their functions. However, they may be replaced with other capable interpreters and other copies. Thus, only non-permanently does Sherlock Holmes generically-a sustenance-depend on his *current* capable interpreters and on the *current* copies of his stories.

Since there is nothing else on which ficta seem to sustenance-depend, we may also put together (IV) and (VI) – as well as (V) and (VII) – and obtain:

(VIII) ficta entirely₁ and generically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) sustenance-depend (i.e., for their existence-f) on physical copies of their stories and on capable interpreters;

(IX) ficta entirely₁ and generically-a₃ (i.e., contingently and non-permanently) sustenance-depend on certain specific physical copies of their stories and on certain specific capable interpreters.

Theses (I)-(IX) summarize how ficta depend.²⁶

²⁶ Besides Thomasson's theory, the artifactualist theory of ficta that best fits with (I)-(IX) is Voltolini (2006)'s syncretistic account, on which ficta depend on specific sets of properties and on specific types of make-believe processes.

5. Three Problems

In this Section, I shall briefly deal with three problems.

First, reconsider:

(I) *ficta* entirely₁ and specifically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) identity-depend on certain essential properties P_1, \dots, P_n .

It seems that, among the essential properties of Sherlock Holmes, there is also that of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) *origin-depend* on his authors. Indeed, Sherlock Holmes essentially is a *fictum*. Namely, Sherlock Holmes also identity-depend on *being a fictum*. And the property of *being a fictum* should be in turn defined by also appealing to *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) *origin-depend* on his authors. Since identity-dependence seems to be transitive, this entails that Sherlock Holmes also identity-depend on the property of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) *origin-depend* on his authors. But here a problem arises. It seems that the latter property is nothing but that of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) *origin-depend* on Sherlock Holmes' *Role-qua-group*. Such a property also identity-depend on Sherlock Holmes' *Role-qua-group*. And Sherlock Holmes' *Role-qua-group*, in turn, also identity-depend on Sherlock Holmes. Thus, by transitivity, Sherlock Holmes also identity-depend on Sherlock Holmes. However, this runs against the irreflexivity of identity-depend: it seems that nothing can identity-depend on itself.

To solve this problem, I see three options. First, one may reject the transitivity and/or the irreflexivity of identity-dependence. Yet, this comes at a high cost. Indeed, identity-dependence seems to be (or it should be) an ordering relation between entities. Therefore, it must be both irreflexive and transitive.

Secondly, one may reject that Sherlock Holmes' *Role-qua-group* also identity-depend on Sherlock Holmes. Yet, this comes at a high cost as well. For what would Sherlock Holmes' *Role-qua-group* identity-depend on? On all its possible members? Yet, the *Role-qua-group* may exist in possible worlds/at times in/at which some of those members do not exist. Alternatively, Sherlock Holmes' *Role-qua-group* may be an identity-independent entity. Yet, this runs against the intuition that Sherlock Holmes' *Role-qua-group* is the *Role-qua-group* of *Sherlock Holmes* and of nothing else. Namely, its connection with Sherlock Holmes is a necessary one. Moreover, such a connection is also part of what makes that *Role-qua-group* the very *Role-qua-group* it is (i.e., the *Role-qua-group* of Sherlock Holmes, and of no other *fictum*). It is an essential connection.

Thus, it seems that Sherlock Holmes' Role-*qua*-group also identity-dependes on Sherlock Holmes, so that the former cannot be an identity-independent entity.

The only remaining option consists in denying the identity between the property of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on his authors (i.e., a property on which Sherlock Holmes also identity-dependes) and that of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on Sherlock Holmes' Role-*qua*-group. This denial may look counterintuitive. But if we look at the property of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on his authors, we can see that it is far from being unreasonable.

What is essential to Sherlock Holmes as a fictum is that he *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*s on some author(s). Namely, what is actually essential to Sherlock Holmes is the possession of the property of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on some author(s).

It is trivially true that whatever plays the authorship Role-*qua*-group with respect to Sherlock Holmes is an author of Sherlock Holmes. And it is also trivially true that, by definition, this entails the existence of Sherlock Holmes' Role-*qua*-group. But it cannot be argued from these premisses that there is one additional property, i.e., that of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on Sherlock Holmes' Role-*qua*-group. Nor can it be argued from these premisses that such a property is essential to Sherlock Holmes.

In other terms, that Sherlock Holmes also identity-dependes on *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on some author(s) and that this entails the existence of Sherlock Holmes' Role-*qua*-group – these two facts put together do *not* entail that there also exists the property of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on Sherlock Holmes' Role-*qua*-group. And, even if such a property exists and it is had by Sherlock Holmes, those two facts put together do *not* entail that Sherlock Holmes also identity-dependes on it.

What is entailed by the instantiation of an essential property of A is not by itself essential to A. Only if the essential property of A identity-dependes in turn on what it entails can it be derived that the entailed entity is essential to A as well. Yet, the property of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on some author(s) – which is essential to Sherlock Holmes – does *not* identity-depend on that of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., *necessarily and permanently*) *origin-depend*ing on Sherlock Holmes' Role-*qua*-group. Therefore, the latter property is not essential to Sherlock Holmes.

There is a second, related problem. The property of *being a fictum* also identity-dependes on that of *having existence-f*. And the property of *having existence-f* may also identity-depend on the property of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂

(i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-dependence on authors. Assume now, *contra my hypothesis*, that a fictum necessarily and permanently has only a certain specific author. For example, that Sherlock Holmes cannot but have Conan Doyle as his author. In this case, it seems to be part of Sherlock Holmes' essence that he entirely₁ and specifically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-dependence on Conan Doyle. But this seems to collapse origin-dependence into identity-dependence. And something analogous may be claimed with respect to sustenance-dependence.

There are different ways to solve this problem. First, one could point out that, if there are further types of existents-*f* in addition to ficta, maybe it is *not* the case that having existence-*f* also identity-dependence on the property of *entirely*₁ and *generically*₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-dependence on authors.

But assume that this is the case. Secondly, one could point out that a fictum's necessarily and permanently having only a certain specific author (e.g., Conan Doyle) does *not* entail that the latter is part of his essence. More precisely, this does *not* entail that it is part of Sherlock Holmes' essence that he entirely₁ and specifically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-dependence on Conan Doyle. For we could define what Sherlock Holmes is even without appealing to his necessary author, i.e., Conan Doyle.

But assume that this is also the case, i.e., that the property of *entirely*₁ and *specifically*₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-dependence on Conan Doyle is essential to Sherlock Holmes. Thirdly, one could point out that this does *not* result in collapsing origin-dependence into identity-dependence. For Sherlock Holmes would still be *directly* origin-dependent on Conan Doyle. On the contrary, he would *not* be directly identity-dependent on Conan Doyle. He would be identity-dependent on Conan Doyle *only indirectly*, i.e., by transitivity. Sherlock Holmes would be directly identity-dependent only on the property of *entirely*₁ and *specifically*₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-dependence on Conan Doyle.²⁷ And the latter would be directly identity-dependent (also) on Conan Doyle. In sum, since origin-dependence and identity-dependence part ways in this respect, the former cannot collapse into the latter.

Of course, one could reply that the indirect identity-dependence of Sherlock Holmes on the property of *entirely*₁ and *specifically*₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-dependence on Conan Doyle is responsible for the direct origin-dependence of Sherlock Holmes on Conan Doyle. However, this move is far from obvious and it should be argued for. Actually, it seems to me that things stand the other way round.

The third problem still has to do with (I). Does (I) commit us to the view that ficta are nothing but bundles of properties, so that the former are derivative

²⁷ Something similar would happen if Sherlock Holmes directly origin-dependence on a "creation" process performed by Conan Doyle. Such a process would *not* be what Sherlock Holmes would directly identity-depend on.

entities? This is far from obvious. Even if ficta identity-depend on properties, properties may depend on ficta – and on other sorts of objects – in further, crucial respects. For example, if properties were Aristotelian universals, they may depend on ficta – and on other sorts of objects – for their instantiation.

6. Further Accounts

In this Section, I shall briefly compare my account with other accounts of dependence for ficta.

First, there are two modal accounts: the account presented by Thomasson (1999) – that I introduced in Section 2 – and the account presented by Fontaine and Rahman (2014).

Fontaine and Rahman (2014) first introduce artifactually dependent entities. Such entities enjoy two different sorts of dependence. First, they uniformly, historically and rigidly depend on certain individuals (i.e., their “creators”) in a possible world in which they are artifactually dependent entities. Secondly, they enjoy artifactual, constant and generic dependence on entities belonging to specific genus sets (i.e., literary works) in a possible in which they are artifactually dependent entities.

Uniform, historical and rigid dependence and artifactual, constant and generic dependence are defined in modal terms, by introducing further sorts of dependence.

Literary fictional characters are then described as artifactually dependent entities that have their characterizing properties in the worlds (partially) described by the relevant stories.

This account is a refinement of Thomasson’s account and it is meant to rule out some shortcomings connected with modal accounts of dependence. However, it seems to me that it has three main flaws.

First, it does not introduce essential properties for ficta, so that it does not provide identity- and individuation-conditions for the latter.

Secondly, it treats ficta as *bona fide* existing entities.

Thirdly and more importantly, it is less fine-grained than my own account. For my account distinguishes between origin-dependence and sustenance-dependence. On the contrary, this account just talks of the existence of ficta. With respect to the latter, it then distinguishes between historical dependence and constant dependence. Yet, the latter distinction only amounts to a distinction between different sets of modal requirements, to be stated in the possible world semantics. It is true that I invoke necessity and contingency as well. However, in my account, there is something more to origin-dependence and sustenance-dependence than their modal requirements.

We can also express this criticism in the form of a dilemma. Either this modal account aims at reducing the overall distinction between historical dependence and constant dependence to a distinction between different sets of modal

requirements, or it takes the latter as only expressing certain relevant features of the dependence relations at stake. If the former is the case, then this account runs into the risk of explaining *obscurum per obscurum*. For intuitively the distinction between historical dependence and constant dependence is less obscure than that between different sets of modal requirements expressed in the possible world semantics. Moreover, the possible world semantics still needs to be made sense of in ontological terms. What are possible worlds? Or what sorts of entities does the possible world semantics point to?

If the latter is the case (i.e., if different sets of modal requirements only express certain relevant features of the dependence relations at stake), one still needs to clarify the nature of such relations and how they are connected with further dependence relations – if any. This can be done by invoking my own account of dependence relations.

Mutatis mutandis, similar problems affect Thomasson’s modal account.

Let me now turn to Irmak (2020)’s account. According to Irmak, abstract artifacts such as ficta are entities that are intentionally and non-causally brought about by the generative conditions specified in their dependence bases. Namely, they are entities that are generated intentionally and non-causally. Irmak does not distinguish between existence and existence-f. Moreover, he does not introduce essential properties for ficta. Finally, he invokes non-causal generation in order to cope with the fact that ficta are abstract entities, so that it seems that they cannot be causally created. However, non-causal generation can be dispensed with in my own account. Indeed, if we distinguish between different modes of being (i.e., occurrence, instantiation, existence, existence-f, and so on), we can claim that causality is nothing but the origin-dependence of an effect on its cause for its own mode of being. For example, of an event on its cause for its occurrence. In this case, the “creation” of ficta may turn out to be a causal process. Or something analogous to a causal process, if causation is restricted to certain sorts of entities (e.g., substances or events). For even ficta origin-depend on their authors for their existence-f.

Let me finally deal with von Solodkoff (2017)’s account. According to von Solodkoff, ficta are grounded on further entities that are *not* fictional objects. For every fact involving a fictum is fully metaphysically explained solely by facts involving entities that are not fictional objects. Full metaphysical explanation is then interpreted in terms of grounding.

Grounding is a primitive relation of ontological dependence that seems to relate facts.²⁸ In Paolini Paoletti (2019), I argued that grounding accounts have

²⁸ Actually, “grounds” can be both interpreted as a predicate that relates facts (or propositions, corresponding to facts) or as a sentential operator. However, on the latter view, one still needs to look for the entities that are involved in grounding relations, or that make it legitimate to apply the grounding sentential operator to specific sentences. The best candidates are facts. On grounding, see for example Bliss, Trogon (2014).

two shortcomings. First, they are committed to the idea that the entities to be exclusively or primarily involved in dependence relations are facts. However, I do not see any reason for denying that further sorts of entities may be exclusively or primarily involved in dependence relations. For example, ficta – rather than facts involving ficta.

Secondly, grounding accounts are committed to the idea that there is a fact – or something akin to a fact – for everything that is involved in a dependence relation. For example, there is a fact such as the identity of a certain fictum, or its starting to exist, or its continuing to exist. However, it is rather controversial to hold that there actually are all such facts. For example, it is rather controversial to hold that, in addition to a certain fictum, there is also the fact consisting in the identity of that fictum – a fact that is primarily involved in certain grounding relations involving that fictum itself.

On the contrary, following my account, we can maintain that different sorts of entities may be involved in RD-relations. And we can also avoid postulating facts as the relata of all RD-relations.

But assume that grounding can also exclusively or primarily relate entities different from facts. For example, assume that it is also legitimate to claim that Sherlock Holmes is grounded on Conan Doyle. And that Sherlock Holmes is grounded on *being a detective*. The resulting view is still less fine-grained than my own account. For Sherlock Holmes is grounded on Conan Doyle *for its origin*, whereas he is grounded on being a detective *for its identity*. Namely, he is grounded on Conan Doyle and on *being a detective* in different respects.

To obtain a more fine-grained view of dependence, grounding should then be seen as a ternary relation between the dependent entity/-ies (e.g., Sherlock Holmes), the dependee(s) (e.g., Conan Doyle or *being a detective*) and some respect of dependence (e.g., Sherlock Holmes' origin or Sherlock Holmes' identity). But consider now respects of dependence. They are nothing but facts – or entities akin to facts. Thus, also in this case, to obtain a more fine-grained view of dependence, grounding theorists need to postulate facts – or entities akin to facts – whenever dependence *qua* grounding is in place.

7. Conclusions

I have argued in this article that we can provide a plausible reading of artifactualist dependence claims by appealing to metaontological pluralism and to RD-relations. More precisely, I have argued that ficta depend in at least three distinct ways on further entities:

(I) ficta entirely₁ and specifically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) identity-depend on certain essential properties P_1, \dots, P_n ;

(II) ficta entirely₁ and generically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) origin-depend (i.e., for their existence-f) on authors;

(VIII) ficta entirely₁ and generically₂ (i.e., necessarily and permanently) sustenance-depend (i.e., for their existence-f) on physical copies of their stories and on capable interpreters.

Moreover, (II) and (VIII) entail the corresponding generic-a dependence claims, i.e.,

(III) ficta entirely₁ and generically-a₁ (i.e., contingently and non-permanently) origin-depend on certain specific authors;

(IX) ficta entirely₁ and generically-a₃ (i.e., contingently and non-permanently) sustenance-depend on certain specific physical copies of their stories and on certain specific capable interpreters.

I have anticipated and solved three problems for my account and shown that it has some advantages over other accounts of dependence for ficta.²⁹

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