Tobias Klauk

Zalta on Encoding Fictional Properties
(Abstract)

Theories which take fictional objects to be a kind of abstract object are faced with the obvious problem of how to explain the seeming truth of sentences ascribing internal properties. Abstract objects cannot be cynical, be magicians or smoke pipe. Call this the problem of the wrong kind of object. There are a number of well-known strategies which abstractists have employed to evade the problem. In this paper, I discuss whether Edward Zalta's distinction between two kinds of predication, exemplifying and encoding, can help us solve the problem.

I start out in section 2 by reviewing the general debate between realists and antirealists concerning fictional objects. Realists think that fictional objects exist, while antirealists deny this. It is however useful to remember that participants in the debate differ in their interpretation of »exists« and »fictional«. Remembering this helps to locate Zalta's account in the realist camp.

Section 3 introduces the problem of the wrong kind of object, namely of how we can simultaneously take fictional objects to be abstract objects and understand sentences like »Rick Blaine is cynical« as straightforwardly true. I distinguish five strategies of dealing with this problem. Abstractists can (a) assume that fictional names are ambiguous, (b) distinguish between two kinds of properties, (c) understand such sentences as being governed by a fiction operator, (d) distinguish between two kinds of predication, or (e) take the predicate to be evaluated in some special way (which needs to be specified). I shortly comment on (a) and (b), then a problem for strategy (c) is discussed: It seems to commit us to the view that fictions prescribe recipients to imagine de re of some fictional objects that they have properties which they actually cannot have. I argue that this is not what fictions actually prescribe.

Section 4 introduces strategy (d), Zalta's distinction between exemplifying and encoding. The distinction turns out to be a remedy against the problem of the wrong kind of object. Unfortunately it reintroduces the problem identified for strategy (c). I explore a radical way of evading the problem by understanding fictional objects to be representations. Although the idea can be found in Zalta's writings, it leads to internal tensions in his account, cannot solve the problem at hand, and seems to generate additional problems. Additionally, Zalta's assumption that fictional objects have their individuation conditions via the properties they encode is shown to be problematic on independent grounds.

Section 5 discusses whether Zalta's distinction between exemplifying and encoding is compatible with an artefactualist account of fictional characters. Assuming that most artefactualists would not want to understand existence as a discriminating predicate, I argue that combining this idea with the exemplifying/encoding distinction goes at least against the spirit of the artefactualist account.

Section 6 introduces the idea of different evaluations of predicates without simultaneously being committed to Zalta's strong assumptions. While this seems to be possible, such accounts also need to find a way of answering the argument given at the end of section 3.

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