

Two Interpretations of 'According to a Story'

The general topic of this paper is the ontological commitment to so-called "fictitious objects", that is, things and characters of fictional stories, like Sherlock Holmes and Pegasus.

Discourse about fiction seems to entail an ontological commitment to fictitious entities, a commitment that is often deemed inconsistent with empirical facts. For instance, "Pegasus is a flying horse" seems to entail "There are flying horses" as well as "Pegasus exists" (according to some widely accepted logical principles).

I discuss two solutions that have been proposed in the literature. The first one amounts to rejecting sentences like "Pegasus is a flying horse" as false, at least if they are taken at face value. This solution is called the "story operator strategy". It consists in paraphrasing sentences like "Pegasus is a flying horse" by means of the expression "according to a story" such that it is interpreted as an elliptic formulation of "According to a story, Pegasus is a flying horse". I spell out the difficulties of the story operator strategy and opt for a realist ontology of fiction. A novel interpretation of the story operator "according to a story" is given, which is not only consistent with but even sheds new light on such a realist ontology. In particular, it is shown how the story operator can be used as a tool to introduce the so-called "modes of predication distinction" (which is an essential ingredient of many realist ontologies of fiction) in a commonsensical way.