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Anti-realists about a particular region of discourse think the subject matter is either non-existent or non-objective. Typically they provide a semantic exposition of their view. Non-factualists argue that the declarative sentences within the discourse are not truth-apt. Deflationists concede that they are, but claim that their content is not representational. Indeterminists accept that the sentences have representational contents, but not contents that can determine truth-values. Reductionists propose contents yielding determinate truth-values, but insist that those contents are not what we would naively think they are. All such views face an uphill battle against the realist who thinks that “if the theory seems to say, for example, that every person has a guardian angel in heaven, then the theory is true only if the angels in heaven really exist.”<sup>1</sup>

Fictionalists are a new breed of anti-realists who don't fight these semantic battles. They subscribe to a full-blown realist construal of the disputed discourse, but maintain that the point of accepting claims within the relevant discourse is not to commit ourselves to the truth of those claims. If we were clearheaded about what the discourse is for, we would accept those claims without believing them. Hermeneutic fictionalists think we are in fact clearheaded; revolutionary fictionalists think we should be.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gideon Rosen, 'Problems in the History of Fictionalism.' In Kalderon (2005): 14.

<sup>2</sup> The hermeneutic/revolutionary distinction is from Burgess (1983). Hermeneutic fictionalists make a descriptive claim (“we accept certain claims without belief”), while revolutionary fictionalists make a normative one (“we should accept certain claims without belief”). In principle they can be neutral about each other's tenets. In practice, hermeneutic fictionalists tend to accept the normative claim and revolutionary fictionalists tend to reject the descriptive one. In the introduction to this volume Kalderon says that unlike hermeneutic fictionalism, which is “a distinctive kind of irrealism, distinct from both nonfactualism and the error theory, revolutionary fictionalism is a kind of error theory.” (Kalderon (2005): 6) While it is true that revolutionary fictionalists tend to be error theorists, there is no conceptual tie between these views. One could maintain that people should accept certain claims without belief, while taking any attitude whatsoever regarding the truth of those claims.

Fictionalism goes a long way towards respecting the quietist impulse: it says that the target discourse is in good order despite the cogency of the philosophical criticism mounted against it, and it does so without being dragged into a philosophical defense of the discourse. It thus offers the advantages of theft over honest toil – which, as honest laborers should readily concede, are considerable. So, can you have it all? There is no better place to look to find out than this volume. It contains Kendall Walton's paper on metaphor and make-belief that has profoundly influenced the way fictionalist views have been developed in the last decade. You can see fictionalism at work as it is developed with regard to theories traditionally targeted by anti-realists, such as mathematics (Stephen Yablo) or ethics (Richard Joyce). There are interesting contributions that explore the possibility of a fictionalist attitude towards areas of our everyday discourse, like modality (Seahwa Kim), propositional attitudes (Frederick Kroon and Daniel Nolan), or truth (James A. Woodbridge). There are discussions about how the fictionalist alternative compares with its historical and contemporary rivals (Gideon Rosen, David Lewis and Simon Blackburn) and how fictionalist ideas can be employed in making sense of ontological disagreement in general (Cian Dorr). The volume also has a good introduction from the editor (Mark Eli Kalderon) with suggestions for further reading on the topic. As in nearly all collections, the quality and originality of the contributions varies. But every one of these papers is well worth reading.

The interest of the fictionalist's proposal is beyond doubt. How viable the view is strikes me as a wide open question. I will isolate here two challenges fictionalists face irrespective of what area of discourse their view is applied to, and collect some ideas from the papers in this volume about how one might face them.

## **1. What is fictionalism?**

There is a theory that says space-time is expanding. You read about it in astronomy journals and talk about it with your astronomer friends. You try to follow the arguments that purport to show that this theory is superior to its competitors. All in all, you find the

case for the theory compelling. However, you also find it incomprehensible how space-time itself could be expanding. You understand what it is for a thing *in* space-time to expand but that's no help. And you find explanations that ask you to imagine that the surface of an inflating ball is *all* of space time less than satisfying. What should you do? On the one hand, you are strongly inclined to embrace the theory – you are not someone to reject an otherwise viable scientific theory just because it clashes with your unreflective pre-theoretical intuitions. On the other hand, you do want to give those intuitions some weight. You are in a bind. The fictionalist has a proposal to help you out: you should suspend your belief that space-time is expanding but you should continue to act in ordinary circumstances as if you held it.

When put so bluntly, the proposal sounds like an invitation to deceive. And since your problem was not how you might avoid conflict with your astronomer friends but how you could hold onto an attractive theory in the face of an attractive criticism, it sounds like an invitation to deceive yourself. But the fictionalist does not issue a blanket proposal for any situation when inclinations to believe clash: you have to earn the right to follow the advice. You need to show that the virtues of the theory that space-time is expanding are independent of its truth. You need to examine the reasons you and your astronomer friends are attracted to this theory and see whether they would survive even if the theory turned out to be false. You need to throw out all the reasons that fail this test and then see whether the remaining ones still suffice to recommend the theory to you. Only then are you invited to accept the theory without believing it.

What seemed to be a frivolous and trivial recommendation at first now looks somber and paradoxical. There are two delicate balancing acts involved in being a fictionalist. The first is to show that your reasons for adopting a theory are simultaneously good and truth-independent. Normally we regard truth-insensitive reasons as bad, and truth-independent reasons as useless. If your reason for adopting the hypothesis that there is a barn in front of you is that it appears to you visually as if there was, you should no longer think your reason is any good once I point it out to you that we are in fake-barn country. Of course, you can maintain that you still have *some* reason for adopting the hypothesis – your

visual experience makes it more likely than most other alternatives (e.g. that there is an elephant in front of you, that there is a palm tree in front of you, that there is nothing in front of you) even if it does not make it the most likely alternative (because the hypothesis that there is a barn façade in front of you is more likely). If, however, I can convince you that your visual appearance is hallucinatory – i.e. that it is not only insensitive to, but strictly independent of truth – it is hard to see how you could still regard it as a good reason for adopting any hypothesis about what is in front of you. The vast majority of our ordinary reasons for adopting a view would *not* survive the realization that they are disconnected from truth. Fictionalism is committed to some extraordinary reasons.

The second balancing act concerns the coherence of the fictionalist attitude. We can, of course, accept theories we do not believe for some purpose or other. We no longer believe Newtonian mechanics but we continue to use it in a wide variety of contexts, relying on its results without thereby committing ourselves to its truth. But despite the similarities, this is not the attitude the fictionalist advocates. We regard the falsehood of Newtonian mechanics a *defect*, something we can ignore in some settings but not in others. Our Newtonian calculations are accompanied by the silent disclaimer that we engage in them only to make things simpler and because we have good reason to believe that the results will be only negligibly incorrect. Fictionalists advocate acceptance without reservations of this sort.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is tempting to say that they advocate

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<sup>3</sup> I am following Gideon Rosen's characterization of fictionalism: "Everyone agrees that a false claim can be acceptable for certain purposes. The fictionalist's distinctive claim is that a false claim can be *ideally* acceptable. For the fictionalist, literal falsity is simply not a defect and literal truth as such is not a virtue." ('Problems in the History of Fictionalism.' In Kalderon (2005): 16.) See also Mark Kalderon's introduction; Kalderon (2005): 2. (I take it that talk of ideal acceptance is to be construed as acceptance for *all ordinary purposes*, not as acceptance *at the end of inquiry*. We couldn't know that a false theory is ideally acceptable in the latter sense.) It is not clear that all philosophers who describe themselves as fictionalists advocate ideal acceptance. Many of them seem to regard fictionalism as an instrumentalist coda to an error theory: they claim that a certain widely accepted theory is false, they are challenged why they nonetheless use this theory, they reply that they use it for certain purposes but not for others, and that's the end of it. This style of fictionalism strikes me as problematic. I accept  $2+2=5$  for certain purposes (e.g. to derive a contradiction from it) and I also accept that there are witches for certain purposes (e.g. to make life easier when I talk to people who believe there are witches). We teach a large number of false theories in schools just to give a sense of why false theories can be attractive and how they can be refuted. Fictionalists presumably want to tell us that the theory that says  $2+2=4$  is better than the theory that says  $2+2=5$ . I doubt that they only want to say that they are each good in their own way and that we shouldn't

acceptance without reservations of any sort, but it is not clear that this is so. We are, after all, supposed to withhold belief, and this fact is supposed to be fully manifested in philosophical conversations about the theory. The acceptance advocated by the fictionalist is between mere supposition and full-blown belief: unconditional as long as we are not in a philosophical context. Fictionalism is committed to an extraordinary form of acceptance.<sup>4</sup>

Fictionalism has its name for a reason. The best examples of theories whose virtues are disconnected from their truth are works of fiction. (Of course, we would never call a novel a theory. For our current purposes, a theory is just a collection of meaningful sentences.) Reading fiction requires that you immerse yourself in the story: you think about the fate of the characters, you sympathize with their plight, you draw a moral from the story, you imagine how things could have unfolded differently, etc. In a sense, all these involve acting (mostly inwardly but sometimes also outwardly) as if you believed that the fiction is fact without believing that it is. Acting this way is sensible only because the virtues of a fiction are largely independent of its truth. Fictionalists about a certain theory think the proper attitude towards the theory is roughly analogous to the attitude we bear to fictions.

The appeal to fiction must be used with care. Our reasons for engaging in the sorts of discourses realists and anti-realists tend to disagree about are quite different from the ones we have for immersing ourselves in novels. There might be aesthetic value in adopting the theory that space-time is expanding but that isn't what drives us to astronomical theorizing. What matters is the peculiar indirect way fiction relates to the world in virtue of which it enables us to understand things we could otherwise hardly articulate. As Walton's example goes, we can get a good sense of where Crotona is if we

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compare them because we use them for different purposes. An obvious way to avoid this problem is to go along with Rosen and Kalderon and insist that the former but not the latter are ideally acceptable claims. (Thanks to Matti Eklund for discussion on this topic.)

<sup>4</sup> In saying this, I am not implying that fictionalist acceptance is not ubiquitous. That would beg the question against the hermeneutical fictionalist. My point is that accepting a theory we believe to be false without reservations – whether this is *in fact* done regularly – does not fit the normal reflective view about our mental life.

say that it is on the arch of the Italian boot.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps there are analogous reasons for adopting certain theories. If there are, they might be the reasons the fictionalist needs.

Similarly, in explaining the nature of the peculiar acceptance he advocates, the fictionalist should not simply point to the theatre as a model. The conditions under which it is appropriate for an actor to make-believe something are clearly demarcated by conventions. There is undoubtedly an element of conventionality in entering into and exiting from theoretical discourse but it does not compare with the trappings of the stage. What might be helpful instead is to consider extended games of make-belief played by children. These are not limited by script or circumstance, and may involve something like ideal acceptance – acceptance that is nearly unconditional as long as the children are not in contexts reflective of the game itself (e.g. parents objecting to the use of a plate as a shield). Perhaps we can adopt similar attitudes towards our practices of serious intellectual enquiry. If so, it can be the acceptance the fictionalist envisions.

As I see it, the viability of fictionalism about a certain region of discourse depends on how well these two strategies can be fleshed out. When it comes to the theory that space-time is expanding, the chances are slim. The best case for fictionalism always rests on the feeling that certain philosophical objections somehow miss the point of the relevant discourse. When trying to solve a problem in number theory, it seems oddly out of place to press people whether they really believe that there are numbers. The natural reaction to such a query is not unlike the reaction of children to someone who does not see that the question whether the stump is really a bear is simply irrelevant to their acceptance that it is. But astronomers discussing the fundamental nature of space-time shouldn't (and usually won't) dismiss philosophical objections. There is no sense in which their concern lies somewhere else.

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<sup>5</sup> Kendall Walton, 'Metaphor and Prop-Oriented Make-Belief.' In Kalderon (2005): 66.

## 2. Should we be fictionalists?

Let us revisit the person who has learned that he is hallucinating, but nonetheless accepts that there is a barn in front of him on the basis of how things appear to him visually. This person is clearly irrational. But now suppose that he learns not only that he is right now hallucinating but that he has been hallucinating for years. (Imagine a case like that of that of Thomas Anderson having a conversation with Morpheus and learning about the Matrix.) This makes a difference: someone who has been hallucinating for years has an excellent reason to accept – though not to believe – the testimony of his senses. He knows that acting on his hallucinations has been successful, so he has inductive grounds for thinking that acting on them will continue to be successful. The normal reason he had for accepting that there is a barn in front of him has been defeated by the revelation that he is hallucinating. But he has a fall-back reason that remains as good as ever.

This is the sort of reason most fictionalists tend to give for acceptance without belief. Hartry Field has motivated fictionalism about mathematics with more or less standard nominalist arguments, which together with a realist stance about semantics yield arguments against the truth of mathematics.<sup>6</sup> The fact that mathematical theories can help deriving consequences from nominalistic theories without yielding new nominalistic consequences is offered then as a fall-back reason for accepting mathematical theories despite their falsehood. Modal fictionalism and fictionalism about attitude ascriptions are both defended in a similar manner: first arguing that quantification over possible worlds or attitude ascriptions involving empty names cannot be literally true, then claiming that there are various practical benefits associated with continued engagement in the relevant discourses and that this gives us good reasons for acceptance without belief. In their contributions to this volume, Richard Joyce and David Lewis endorse moral fictionalism as a fall-back view: they argue that if it turned out that morality is infused with essential error – i.e. error such that eliminating it from morality would yield something that no

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<sup>6</sup> Field (1980).

longer deserves the name – then treating morality as a fiction would be a more sensible alternative than eliminating it altogether.<sup>7</sup>

I think such justifications for fictionalism are suspect. If you were to learn that you had been hallucinating for years, you would indeed be rational to continue to act as if you believed your senses on the basis of the past success of such behavior. But you should find this success a complete mystery, and you should be looking for an explanation of how it came to be. You have good reason for accepting that things tend to be the way they visually appear to you for the purposes of getting by, but not for the purposes of planning all your actions. (Thomas Anderson took the red pill and embarked on a search for an explanation of how the Matrix works; he did not quietly accept that things are as they seem.) Similarly, if mathematics is false but useful in drawing inferences, we have good reason for accepting it for the limited purposes of drawing inferences, and if morality is bunk but useful for combating our weaknesses then we have good reason for accepting it for the limited purposes of combating our weaknesses. It does not follow that we would have good reason for ideal acceptance without belief.

This seems to me to be a fairly general problem with fictionalist reasons. The fictionalist says that the aim of a certain theory is something other than truth. Suppose she is right. Then it seems that we have a good reason for accepting the theory for the limited purposes identified by the fictionalist. This leaves the question open whether we have a good reason for ideal acceptance. Moreover, it seems that ideal acceptance is ill-advised because it encourages us to turn a blind eye to a mystery: Why is it that this theory – which for all we know is blatantly false – is so successful? If it were true that we are in fact constantly taking special care to employ the theory in question for just the limited purposes the fictionalist has identified, there would not be a mystery. But in the cases fictionalists have focused on there seems to be no sign of such special care. For example, mathematicians do not restrict themselves to formulating theories in order to provide

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<sup>7</sup> Unlike Joyce, Lewis thinks morality is not in fact infused with essential error because its content is “sufficiently ill-defined that we cannot show that any errors are errors of morality as such, and not just the errors of some moralists.” (‘Quasi-Realism is Fictionalism.’ In Kalderon (2005): 318.)



inferential aids for scientists, and ordinary employment of moral discourse is by no means constrained by the purpose of providing effective means for strengthening resolve.<sup>8</sup>

In his contribution to the volume, Stephen Yablo takes on this problem in the case of mathematics. He argues that the central problem for fictionalists about mathematics is to explain what makes mathematics such an effective aid to empirical science. His answer is that mathematical entities are fictional entities that start their life as representational aids. Some of them will work better than others and so “as wisdom accumulates about the kind(s) of mathematical system needed, theorists develop an intuitive sense of what is the right way to go and what is the wrong way. Norms are developed that take on a life of their own, guiding the development of mathematical theories past the point where natural science greatly cares.”<sup>9</sup> Yablo says more about how this process might work, and even gives a fictional story about how our Goodmanian ancestors (people speaking a first order language quantifying over concrete entities only) could come to adopt games of make-belief which eventually led them to think of mathematical entities as existing. But this is not much more than a hint towards a possible explanation of the success of mathematics.<sup>10</sup> Yablo himself encourages further inquiry into this question. But as long as he does, what he should be recommending is at most tentative acceptance of mathematics, combined with a tentative agnosticism regarding its truth. Fictionalism recommends ideal acceptance, ideal acceptance requires no reservations, and without reservations it is not clear why we should press this sort of enquiry.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> One might argue that it is not psychologically feasible to accept morality exclusively for the limited purposes of combating the weakness of our will – unless we forget about the falsity of moral theory in ordinary circumstances we will predictably yield to immorality. (Thanks to Richard Joyce for emphasizing this point.) This is a coherent view with the troubling consequence of representing moral theorizing as something that is likely to undermine morality. If remembering the falsity of the moral theory one accepts makes one more likely to act immorally then one should indeed be weary of philosophers who already in philosophical (or otherwise highly reflective) contexts one always runs the risk of immorality.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Yablo, ‘The Myth of the Seven.’ In Kalderon (2005): 96.

<sup>10</sup> One of the crucial things that seems to me to be missing from this sort of account is an explanation of how and why proof has become the sole standard of acceptability in mathematics.

<sup>11</sup> Compare this with the case of fiction. The question why novels are good ways to learn about the world is a question for psychology. I doubt that Yablo regards the question why mathematics is such an effective aid of empirical science as a psychological problem. But it is not clear what else it can be for the fictionalist.

### 3. Can we be fictionalists?

Good reasons for accepting a theory without belief are hard to come by but I see no reason to think that the search must be in vain. Simon Blackburn, however, seems to think that there are conceptual difficulties with many forms of fictionalism. Here is what he says about a possible fictionalist account of our ordinary color talk:<sup>12</sup>

So consider ‘canaries are yellow’ which, on the account, in our world is told as if true, or should be told as if true, although it is actually just a fiction. Now we ask: is it true in the color fiction, that canaries are yellow? To answer we need to understand what it is for ‘canaries are yellow’ to be fact, and to be known as such, although in our world it is not. This is a tall order. If it is neither a fact nor known to be such in our world, what is different in those worlds in which it is? Are canaries even more blazing yellow than they are here? But how does their not being so extremely yellow, if they are not, also disqualify them from being truly yellow as they are?

Blackburn’s challenge to the fictionalist about color is to explain how worlds without color differ from worlds with color – assuming the actual world is one of the former.<sup>13</sup> If, as Blackburn suspects, this challenge cannot be met then we don’t have a grip on the sort of commitment the fictionalist seeks to avoid.<sup>14</sup> The worry clearly generalizes beyond fictionalism about color – Blackburn himself says moral fictionalism faces the same problem.

I think the fictionalist should grant that she cannot meet Blackburn’s challenge without conceding that this shows she cannot have good reasons for her stance. Suppose an oracle whose veracity is beyond any doubt were to tell us that the common-sense theory

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<sup>12</sup> Simon Blackburn, ‘Quasi-Realism no Fictionalism.’ In Kalderon (2005): 325.

<sup>13</sup> Color fictionalists need not accept that there are worlds with color. Perhaps the non-existence of color is metaphysically necessary – one could still act as if colors existed. Blackburn’s challenge would perhaps be better formulated in terms of a request to explain what the falsehood of the color fiction consists in. (Thanks to Kendall Walton for raising this point.)

<sup>14</sup> It is by no means clear that this follows. The *general* view according to which one cannot understand a sentence unless one can state its truth-conditions in terms not employed by the sentence itself is not credible. Still, I am inclined to agree with Blackburn that there is a *special* reason in this case to worry whether the color fictionalist can understand ‘Canaries are yellow’ by his own lights.

underlying our ordinary color talk is in irredeemable error, that there is in fact a true theory about the relevant phenomena which through a complicated translation mechanism accounts for the success of our ordinary talk about colors. Unfortunately the better theory is so vastly complicated that it is determinately beyond our cognitive capacities. We have then learned from the oracle that the best theory of world does not include color theory but *our* best theory of the world is stuck with it. Under these circumstances we should accept without belief that there are colors.<sup>15</sup> This is so even though we have no substantive understanding of what exactly it is that our world lacks.

So let us grant that we could *in principle* have good reasons to adopt a fictionalist attitude towards any theory. This does not settle the question whether we could actually adopt that attitude. Adopting the fictionalist attitude requires a disposition to shift our assessment of a theory as context shifts from the ordinary to the philosophical. A fictionalist about colors is normally supposed to assent unreservedly to the sentence ‘Canaries are yellow’ but when she finds herself in a philosophical discussion about the reality of color she is supposed to equally unreservedly dissent from it. This is a disposition that requires that one have the ability to reliably identify philosophical contexts. I think there is ample reason to doubt that we can do that.

There are well-known cases when our assessment sentences without apparent indexicals shifts with the context. There is the case when I am talking on the phone to someone and express sincere agreement with his utterance ‘It is raining’ even though when I talk to someone standing nearby I utter ‘It’s not raining. Let’s go out!’<sup>16</sup> There is the case when I am sorting leaves for decoration and I hold up a red Japanese maple leaf painted green and utter ‘This leaf is green’ even though when I sort the leaves by species I utter ‘This leaf is not green’.<sup>17</sup> And there is the case when I am willing to utter ‘I know the bank is

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<sup>15</sup> This is the sort of case I described in Szabó (2001). Although appealing to an oracle is the easiest way to show that we could have good reasons for accepting a view without belief there are other ways as well. Colin McGinn (1993) has argued that we have inductive evidence that solving a host of philosophical problems is beyond our cognitive capacities. If he is right, we might be entitled to accept various philosophical views without belief.

<sup>16</sup> Perry (1998).

<sup>17</sup> Travis (1994).

open tomorrow' but when I realize that I will be in big trouble if I cannot make the deposit I utter 'I don't know that the bank is open tomorrow.'<sup>18</sup> And there are many, many more. In all these cases the speaker exhibits some sort of sensitivity to context. In the first case there is sensitivity to a salient place, in the second perhaps to a salient part of the leaf, in the third possibly to relevant practical interests.<sup>19</sup> But sensitivity to a distinction between ordinary and philosophical contexts would be something else altogether.<sup>20</sup>

Carnap argued that we indeed have such sensitivity. He thought that 'Are there numbers?' in ordinary contexts is taken as an internal question and evaluated according to the rules of a presupposed linguistic framework. According to our normal linguistic framework, the answer is trivially yes. In a philosophical context, however, it is taken as an external question regarding the linguistic framework itself. It asks whether we should adopt a framework where the corresponding internal question receives a positive answer. External questions, Carnap contends, are misconstrued by philosophers as questions that need answering *before* a linguistic framework is adopted. Seen in proper light, they turn out to be practical questions, not theoretical ones. In Carnap's view, our sensitivity to the ordinary/philosophical distinction is sensitivity to the internal/external distinction, which when seen in proper light turns out to be sensitivity to the theoretical/practical distinction. And it is plausible that we are sensitive to that distinction.

But fictionalists cannot help themselves to this line of thought. Carnap took a characteristically non-cognitivist line regarding external questions:<sup>21</sup>

To be sure, we have to face at this point an important question of whether or not to accept the new linguistic forms. The acceptance cannot be judged as being either true or false because it is not an

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<sup>18</sup> DeRose (1992).

<sup>19</sup> Whether the sensitivity is a matter of semantics – i.e. whether the relevant sentences change their truth-values as the context shifts – is a matter of disagreement. Contextualist and relativist views are both semantic in this sense. The pragmatic alternative is to say that the sentences uttered have a stable truth-value but speakers can communicate different things in uttering them.

<sup>20</sup> My concern is not that the distinction between ordinary and philosophical contexts is vague: there are plenty of vague distinctions to which we are sensitive to, including the ones mentioned above.

<sup>21</sup> Carnap (1950).

assertion. It can be judged as being more or less expedient, fruitful, conducive to the aim for which the language is intended. Judgments of this kind supply the motivation for the decision of accepting or rejecting the kind of entities.

Fictionalists want to say that our dissent from the sentences of the relevant discourse in philosophical contexts is a genuine assertion expressing lack of belief and that this lack of belief is based on proper philosophical reasons. Fictionalists may not object to the idea that in philosophical contexts we face a question about an entire way of thinking but they cannot take on board the suggestion that this question is fundamentally non-theoretical. And they cannot agree with Carnap that the way we make up our mind about a theory in a philosophical context is by assessing how expedient, fruitful, or conducive it is for our purposes. These are exactly the considerations they cite for accepting the theory in ordinary circumstances. In philosophical contexts we are supposed to open ourselves to different sorts of considerations, and acknowledge that despite its expediency, fruitfulness, or conduciveness to our purposes it is false. But are philosophical considerations really different in kind from ordinary ones?

Let me put all my cards on the table. The reason I worry whether we are sensitive to the ordinary/philosophical distinction is that I don't believe there are philosophical contexts, just as I don't believe there are astronomical contexts, sociological contexts, or stamp-collecting contexts. I think the distinction is a myth. We might retract or qualify some of our ontological commitments in the face of philosophical criticism but this isn't substantially different than retracting or qualifying other commitments in the face of other far-flung criticism we would like to bracket, at least for the time being.

My worry is similar to Quine's: Carnap said it is proper for us to act differently with respect to the question 'Are there numbers?' depending on whether it is construed as internal or external. Quine thought this can't be right because there is no such distinction to be drawn. Fictionalists say it is proper for us to act differently with respect to the question 'Are there numbers?' depending on whether it is asked within an ordinary or a philosophical context. I think this can't be right because there is no such distinction to be

drawn. Of course, if I am right then it is trivial that we cannot be sensitive to the ordinary/philosophical distinction. But I don't have a conclusive argument in favor of my view, so instead I formulated a challenge. Fictionalists believe that there is such a distinction. Suppose they are right – they still owe us a reason to think that we are, or at least could be, sensitive to this distinction.

Realists about a certain area of discourse often point to our ordinary practice of assenting to its sentences as evidence that we are genuinely committed to their truth. Fictionalists argue that the evidence is questionable. Perhaps we are only acting as if we were, and if not, this is what we should be doing. In making this recommendation they suggest and sometimes explicitly say that they themselves have adopted the fictionalist stance. But realists can reasonably point out that here too the evidence is questionable. For one cannot successfully adopt a fictionalist stance towards an area of discourse without being appropriately sensitive to the distinction between ordinary and philosophical contexts. Fictionalists have not said enough to convince us that they really possess this sensitivity.\*

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