

Modal Fictionalism, Possible Worlds, and Artificiality

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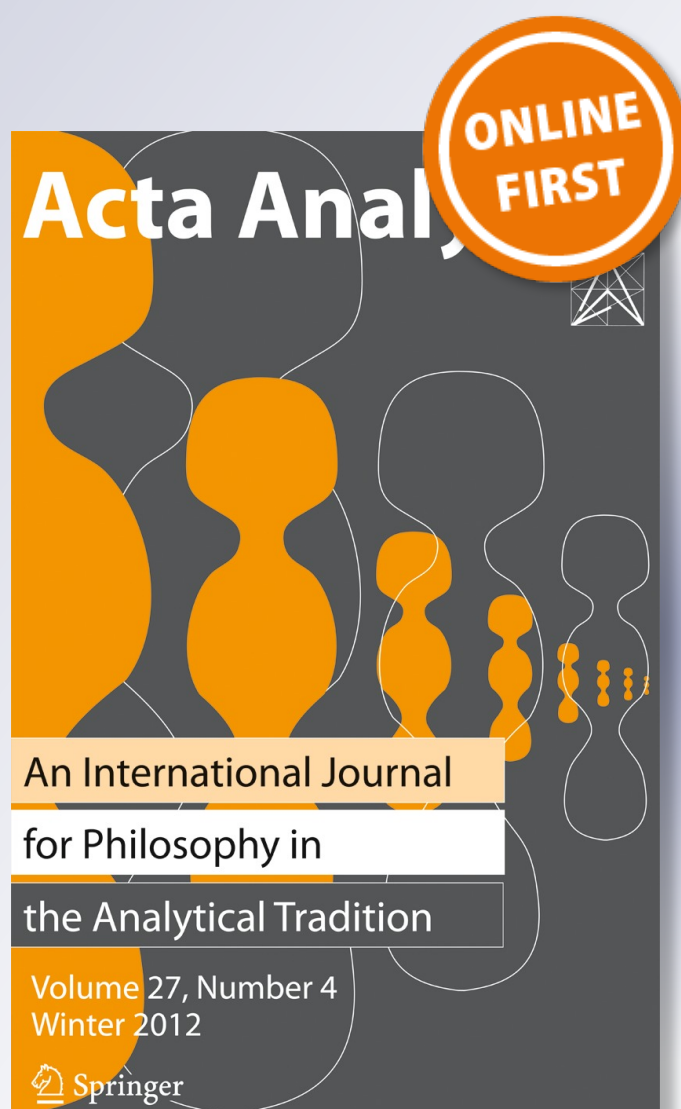
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Abstract Accounts of modality in terms of fictional possible worlds face an objection based on the idea that when modal claims are analysed in terms of fictions, the connection between analysans and analysandum seems artificial. Strong modal fictionalism, the theory according to which modal claims are analysed in terms of a fiction, has been defended by, among others, Seahwa Kim, who has recently claimed that the philosophical objection that the connection between modality and fictions is artificial can be met. I propose a new way of spelling out the intuition of artificiality and show that strong modal fictionalism should be rejected.

Keywords Modality · Fictionalism · Possible worlds · Modal fictionalism · Artificiality · Integration challenge

Strong fictionalism about possible worlds (SFPW), or strong modal fictionalism, is a theory whereby modality can be analysed in terms of a fiction about possible worlds. Many technical and philosophical arguments have been advanced against this view, but Kim (2002, 2005), Divers (1999) and Woodward (2010, 2011, 2012) have shown that at least the technical issues can be answered.¹ Nolan (1997) and, independently Kim (2002, 2005), have put forward a particularly strong philosophical objection against SFPW, the so-called ‘artificiality’ argument. Its basic idea is that analysing apparently mind-independent truths such as metaphysical modalities in terms of contingent fictions appears artificial.

The artificiality objection to SFPW has been interpreted as showing a defect in the modal status of the fiction taken as relevant for the analysis of modal claims. Seahwa

¹ A summary of these objections and further references can be found in Nolan (2011) and Sainsbury (2010: 175–192).

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Kim, however, claims that her version of SFPW can challenge this objection. In the first section, I summarise Kim's response to a modal version of the artificiality argument and discuss Daniel Nolan's and Richard Woodward's contributions to the debate. In the second section, I put forth new considerations against SFPW in which I maintain that the problem with this kind of fictionalism is related not to the modal status of the relevant fiction, but rather to our limited accessibility to it. This argument can be seen as a first step towards what follows in the third section in which, along with addressing other possible replies to my reasoning, I also argue that one way of answering to the demand of integrating the semantical aspects of SFPW leads to consider the fictionalist's position as gratuitous.

1 Artificiality as Contingency

SFPW offers an analysis of modality by establishing a necessary connection between modal claims and a fiction about possible worlds. In particular, the strong modal fictionalist takes a bi-conditional such as P iff the translation P^* of P into the language of F is such that, according to F , P^* — in the modal cases, it is possible that P iff the translation P^* of P into the language of F is such that, according to a fiction F , sometimes P^* , and it is necessary that P iff the translation P^* of P into the language of F is such that, according to a fiction F , P^* always holds — as necessary and as specifying the truth conditions of modal claims. An immediate worry is that fictions, in general, are contingent and thus could not have existed. Using the possible worlds terminology, if fictions are contingent, then there are worlds in which the necessary connection between *analysans* and *analysandum* does not hold.² Thus, there are worlds in which modal claims do not have truth conditions. Strong modal fictionalism, at least as originally proposed by Rosen (1990), takes David Lewis's modal realism as the relevant fiction to analyse modality, so the worry of artificiality can be articulated by pointing out the contingency of Lewis's theory.³ The problem can be stated as follows. Modal realism is contingent, so there are worlds in which this theory does not exist. SFPW states that modal claims are to be analysed in terms of modal realism, intended as a fiction. Suppose that w_1 is one of the worlds in which modal realism does not exist. At w_1 , there is nothing that makes modal claims true, as the fiction does not exist there, and, hypothetically speaking, at w_1 , certain modal claims are true. Therefore, we do not have a satisfying analysis of modal claims given that bi-conditionals expressing an analysis are supposed to be necessary, and there is at least one case in which modal claims are true at one world but there is no fiction (modal realism) in that world. More precisely, SFPW's analysis for claims of

² I assume here that fictions are created by their authors and that they are neither abstract *nor* necessarily existing objects. This assumption does not have any consequence for what follows (see note 20 for a possible exception). In fact, the only essential point, which I take as uncontroversial, is that fictions are known in a community only at a particular time. The literature on this topic is vast. Among the various recent interesting discussions, see Currie (1990), Thomasson (1999: 93–114), and Sainsbury (2010: 91–114).

³ In the literature on fictionalism and modality, it is frequently assumed that (1) the relevant fiction to be used to analyse modality is Lewis's modal realism, and (2) modal fictionalism essentially involves a prefix operator. In this essay, I will follow these conventions. See Sainsbury (2010: 173–4) for other specifications of the fictionalist strategy. Of course, Lewis did not think of his theory as a fiction.

possibility has the form ' $\Diamond P$ iff According to a possible worlds fiction F (Lewis's modal realism), P^* '. $V(\Diamond P, w) = T$ iff there is a fiction F at w such that $V(P^*, F) = T$. However, F is contingent so there is at least one world, w_1 , in which F does not exist.⁴ Thus, supposing that F does not exist at w_1 and that $V(\Diamond P, w_1) = T$, the bi-conditional will not always hold.

Kim resolves this issue by introducing a different kind of analysis: $\Diamond P$ iff At this universe, presently, according to the fiction about possible worlds, P^* (Kim 2005: 129). In this way, the problem envisaged before does not arise because at $w_{@}$, the actual world, the relevant fiction exists at this moment. It follows that $(V(\Diamond P, w_1) = T$ and F does not exist at $w_1)$ is no longer problematic because the bi-conditional is secured to hold necessarily by the fact that F does exist at $w_{@}$ at t . Hence, the new formulation implies that $V(\Diamond P, w_1) = T$ iff F exists at $w_{@}$ and at t and $V(P^*, F, w_{@}, t) = T$. Even though this reply is technically correct, it does not satisfy us completely. It seems that some kind of philosophical trick has been used to brush aside a much more serious issue.

Nolan anticipates Kim's solution and rephrases the discussion in counterfactuals terms.⁵ More specifically, he claims that the sense of artificiality of SFPW may be based on an intuition for the truth of the conditional 'if modal realism hadn't existed, then nothing would have been possible or necessary'. The modal fictionalist's answer to this intuition is to 'rigidify' the analysis of modal claims to an actual fiction so that the previous counterfactual turns out to be false (or vacuous). According to Nolan, this does not solve the problem because the counterfactual can be rephrased in a different way: 'if modal realism hadn't *actually* existed, then nothing would have been possible or necessary'. If we take this counterfactual as having an impossible antecedent, as the rigidifying strategy seems to imply, then we have a counterpossible conditional. Such conditionals are usually taken as being vacuously true, and we thus have a new problem. In particular, it is not clear what kind of explanation is available to the modal fictionalist if she negates the previous conditional. If the modal fictionalist denies the conditional, then the existence of the fiction seems to be disconnected or not at all influential for modal claims. In fact, the negation of the conditional seems to imply that the existence of modal realism has nothing to do with modality or, at least, it is not clear why the analysis of modality should be rigidified to this theory, understood as fiction. If this is the case, then it is also not clear what explanatory value the existence of modal realism could possibly have for the modal status or truth of certain claims, at least as long as this modal realism is taken as a fiction. Woodward, however, has recently argued that the previous argument does not show that SFPW cannot provide *any* other sort of explanation. In fact, Woodward (2011) claims that there are not only counterfactual forms of dependence (and thus explanations). Rather, even though the modal fictionalist has to deny a *counterfactual* form of dependence of modal claims on modal realism, Woodward claims that the fictionalist may still employ the notions of *because of*, *in virtue of*, or other generic sorts of *existential* dependence. Therefore, the modal fictionalist may still provide a kind of explanation that does not rely on a counterfactual to connect the selected fiction to modal truths.

⁴ It is generally assumed that in order for F to be true at w , F must exist at w .

⁵ See Nolan (1997: 266).

In response, it seems to me that these other forms of explanation still cannot be adopted by SFPW. First, it is implausible to suggest that a modal sentence in w_1 could be true *because of* a fiction in our world. Suppose that w_1 is exactly like our world up to the 1960s and that in w_1 , there are no possible world revivals in metaphysics. The truth of the sentence ‘It is possible that Caesar- w_1 conquers Gaul- w_1 ’ in w_1 would be explained by the modal fictionalist by claiming that the sentence is true *because of* a fiction (modal realism) in the actual world.⁶ A better explanation in terms of *because of* is that ‘it is possible that Caesar- w_1 conquers Gaul- w_1 ’ is true *because of* the facts of the world in question. Caesar- w_1 and his army had certain properties that, in w_1 , made it possible for him to conquer Gaul- w_1 . The possibility described in the previous sentence has its modal status because of Caesar- w_1 ’s properties and relations in w_1 , not because of real facts taking place in our world.⁷ It may be objected that it is unfair to the fictionalist to invoke intuitions about parts of what she takes to be a fictional world as if they were real. However, we can make the same point by noticing that when we say *A because of B*, we presume a certain correlation between A and B. More specifically, it is generally meant that B is connected to A causally or that B contains a specification of reasons why A occurred. Unless the notion of *because of* is further clarified, the two types of connection do not seem to hold between modal claims and fictions. Woodward also discusses another answer available to the Modal fictionalist. He maintains that SFPW is not the only theory that has an explanatory problem in terms of counterfactual dependence. Modal realism, for example, faces the same issues. Lewis himself would deny non-trivial counterfactual dependences between modal claims and his plurality of worlds, and from this, Woodward infers that Nolan’s challenge is a good one but that it contains a problem common to all theories. This implicit admission of an explanatory problem does indeed seem to be related to explanations couched in terms of possible worlds. If the problem is common to all of these theories, then perhaps we have one good reason to rethink the plausibility of this family of theories.⁸ I will delve deeper into the explanatory role of fictional possible worlds in the next section.

In sum, Kim’s solution to the contingency problem of modal realism is to apply an actuality operator to the *analysans* of modal claims. Nolan disputed this strategy and maintained that adopting it is problematic for the resulting explanatory value of SFPW. I have tried to show that Nolan’s worries are good ones. In the next section, I propose a different strategy for understanding the problem of the artificiality of the fiction that appears in the *analysans* of SFPW’s characterising bi-conditional.

2 Artificiality and Accessibility

Modality has been the subject of an increasing number of works in metaphysics, epistemology, and semantics in the past years; however, it is still not completely clear

⁶ Counterpart theorists and supporters of transworld identity can equally accept this point.

⁷ Similar considerations apply to the other idioms suggested by Woodward: it does not seem right to say that it is possible for Caesar- w_1 to conquer Gaul- w_1 *in virtue of* a fiction in our world. Similarly, maintaining that Caesar (in our world) conquered Gaul *in virtue of* what is written in Lewis’ fiction seems bizarre.

⁸ See Vetter (2011) for a survey of recent theories that do not employ the concept of a possible world as an explanatory device for modal claims.

what philosophers have in mind when they try to *analyse* or *explain* modal notions or modal claims in terms of possible worlds. It is not clear, in fact, whether these analyses are semantical (for example, the possible worlds framework provides the basic tools for an applied semantics of modal sentences and/or determines the truth conditions for modal claims), metaphysical [modal reality (including intensional entities such as propositions or events) consists and amounts to sets or subsets of possible worlds], epistemological (our knowledge of modal truths is essentially related to our knowledge of possible worlds), or conceptual (modal concepts can be reduced, without circularity, to sets of possible worlds).⁹ Thus, the objection of artificiality, intended in a broader sense, can in turn be spelled out in different ways. SFPW is usually intended to provide an analysis of modality in terms of a bi-conditional, which is supposed to specify the truth conditions of modal claims. The analysis of modality contained in Rosen (1990) seems to be directed at various levels; among them, metaphysical, conceptual, and semantical. In describing his version of SFPW, Rosen uses phrases such as “talking about possible worlds”, “quantification over possible worlds”, and “the fictionalist’s claims about possible worlds will always be elliptical for claims about the content of a story”, which suggest that he intended his fictionalist strategy to be applied to a specific framework.¹⁰ In particular, the ontological and semantic background Rosen has in mind is clearly inherited from Quine’s and Lewis’ views on quantifiers, language, and their ontological commitments. If SFPW is aimed at specifying the ellipsis of part of our *talk* about possible worlds, the thesis seems to be better understood as involving a semantic and logical analysis aimed at clarifying the ontological commitments of our language. Now, as it is well known, Lewis distinguishes two sorts of theories of meaning: one associated with the idea of providing a description of abstract semantic systems whereby symbols of a language are connected to the world and another project aimed at describing how one of these systems is the one used by a particular person or population.¹¹ We can call projects of the second type ‘foundational theories of meaning’. SFPW seems to be a theory of the first kind. As it will be argued more in detail in the next section, these two types of projects should be separated conceptually, but not to the point of arriving at incompatible results. In particular, an applied semantics of our modal talk should provide a theory at least compatible with a theory of how people have modal beliefs [this point justifies premise (2) below].

What follows is an argument that even the modified version of SFPW proposed by Kim (2002, 2005) cannot challenge. It is not necessary for the argument to focus on any particular fiction, but I will suppose that modal realism is the indexed fiction in the analysans.

1. Modal claims (whether of necessity, possibility, or other interrelated cases) are analysed in terms of a contingent fiction, produced in a relatively well-delimited period of time (SFPW’s main thesis).
2. Given the assumption that SFPW provides a semantic analysis of our modal claims, it is our understanding of a specific fiction that provides (perhaps

⁹ See Divers (2002: 26–40) for an illustration of the various applications of possible worlds to modality.

¹⁰ Rosen (1990: 331–2).

¹¹ Lewis (1970: 19). See Speaks (2010) for a detailed survey of how these ideas have been articulated.

- implicitly) our epistemic access to which modal claims are true or false or to their meaning.¹²
3. The supposed analysis of modality is necessary, and so it is the bi-conditional linking modal claims and the fiction. If it is necessary at our world, then it is true at all moments of time in our world.
 4. A fiction is created at a particular time and comes to be known in a certain community at a specific moment in that world.
 5. From the previous points it follows that at t_1 , before the creation of the relevant fiction or before that fiction has become known in a certain community, the truth values of their modal claims are not available or accessible to that community. It follows that, for instance, Julius Caesar did not really have access to the truth values of modal claims concerning the possibility of conquering Gaul because modal realism was not accessible to him. Similarly, all of those people living in this moment who have not access through causal chains to Lewis (1986)—the great majority of humans on Earth – do not know have access to the truth value of their modal claims. The conclusion is that almost nobody has the good fortune to know whether the modal sentences they utter are true.
 6. Given the widespread presence of modal elements in languages from all around the world and their crucial role in both everyday reasoning and complex philosophical and scientific arguments, the conclusion of the previous point would amount to an implausible scepticism about humanity's possibility of rationally assessing the truth value of modal claims.¹³
 7. Such scepticism, however, is absurd; thus, the conclusion of my entire argument is that we should reject the suggestion that there is a necessary connection between modal claims and a fiction regarding possible worlds.

My previous argument does not rely on the modal status of modal realism, but rather on most people's inability to come to know the truth values of their modal claims where modality is analysed, semantically, in terms of fictions, the access to which is limited. This argument captures the idea that fictions can be related to modality only in an artificial and not particularly cogent way.

The previous reasoning can be strengthened by adopting a theory of understanding along the lines of Christopher Peacocke's recent work.¹⁴ In developing an account of what it takes for a thinker T to grasp a concept C, Peacocke argues that an essential component of an understanding of C is given by T's grasping the rule of reference that determine the semantic value of C.¹⁵ Applied to modality, this can be taken as suggesting that modal concepts, and thus also ascriptions of possibility and necessity to propositions, have their rules of reference determined by what is taken as the *analysans* of the relevant modal concepts. In the case of SFPW, where modality is analysed in terms of an indexed fiction, the grasping of modal concepts is precluded to people who have no access to the fiction in question because the rules that contribute to determine their semantic value are not accessible to them. As a consequence of the combination of SFPW and the other mentioned theoretical framework,

¹² The formulation of this point relies on a remark made by Nolan (2011).

¹³ A recent study on these modal elements in our language is Portner (2009).

¹⁴ See Peacocke (2008).

¹⁵ See Peacocke (2008: 7–76).

it follows that thinkers who do not have access to the relevant fiction lack an essential component for understanding the modal concepts that they may be using. However, this clearly does not seem to be the case: Caesar did not have even an implicit grasp of the indexed fiction at issue but still he was able to think in modal and counterfactual terms.

It has to be noticed that the presupposition of a semantic analysis of modal truths in terms of truth conditions is accepted by the strong fictionalist; thus, it is not a gratuitous or uncharitable postulation, but rather another aspect of the theory itself. Adopting a different theory of meaning, such as Paul Horwich's use theory, would not change the substance of the objection.¹⁶

3 Objections and the Redundancy of Strong Modal Fictionalism

How could the modal fictionalist respond? One solution would be to negate the necessity of the bi-conditional, but this would amount to abandoning the project of analysing modality. This strategy already has a name: timid modal fictionalism (TMF). I do not have anything against TMF; on the contrary, I think that this approach is on the right track. The adoption of TMF, however, amounts to the negation of one of the essential features of SFPW.¹⁷

The strong fictionalist may reply that the problem of knowing the truth values and truth conditions of modal claims does not cause trouble *only* for SFPW. For example, Lewis himself recognised that modal realism has the same problem.¹⁸ If the truth conditions of modal claims are identified with causally detached possible worlds or parts of these worlds, the objection says, how can we know them? As is well known, Lewis has a hard time replying to this objection, and the resulting modal epistemology is one of the weakest parts of Lewis's project.¹⁹ Thus, the modal fictionalist may reply that, in the end, the fact that the truth conditions of modal claims are hardly accessible is a problem common to other accounts of modality and thus does not constitute a reason to reject SFPW over other theories. Aside from the fact that I do not think that this is a generally good strategy, it seems that, for the particular case of SFPW, this problem should trouble the fictionalist more than, for example, the modal realist. One of the reasons behind the adoption of SFPW is that the theory is intended to dispense with unknowable and inaccessible entities. We do not want to inflate our ontology with concrete possible worlds because, among other reasons, these worlds are not accessible to us. SFPW appears to be a valid alternative because it is based on metaphysically acceptable and accessible entities (fictions). It seems that the rigidifying strategy, however, by indexing the truth conditions of modal claims to a

¹⁶ See Horwich (1998) and (2005). More on this in the next section.

¹⁷ Rosen suggests that a modal fictionalist strategy may not be seen as providing a complete analysis of modality because the fictional operator may contain a hidden modal component. In this case, the advantage of adopting the theory would be reducing modal idioms to just one modal primitive. See Rosen (1990) and Divers (1999) for more details.

¹⁸ An early paper discussing this issue is Richards (1975). A classical formulation of the difficulties of providing a semantical analysis for certain truths consistent with the way in which we acquire knowledge of their truth value is Benaceraf (1973).

¹⁹ See Divers (2002: 149–165) and Sauchelli (2010: 348–357) for discussion.

particular fiction in our world and time, simply makes their truth conditions and truth values inaccessible to a large number of speakers who do not have access (even indirectly through causal chains) to the fiction and who seem perfectly able to advance and understand modal claims. If this reasoning is correct, then I do not see why someone should prefer SFPW to modal realism. Modal realism has fewer primitives (we do not need to include a fictional operator in our analysis of modality) and has at least as much explanatory value as SFPW. Therefore, the problem of accessibility undermines one of the reasons SFPW was found attractive in the first place.²⁰

Alternatively, the fictionalist may attack premise (2) and claim that her project is different from that of providing a story of how people actually come to know the truth value or the meaning of their modal claims. In other terms, the fictionalist would argue that SFPW is not aimed at providing a foundational theory of meaning for modal claims. The defender of SFPW may thus claim that even though her theory does not (and probably cannot) provide a convincing story of how people have come to believe the truth values of their modal claims, this is not, in itself, an objection to her theory: it is something that SFPW is not aimed at providing. I find this strategy unconvincing. As noticed in the previous paragraph, Lewis himself tried to answer to the objection that a semantic theory of modal claims in terms of quantifications over inaccessible possible worlds would make the truth values of the *analysans* unknowable. This seems to point at the more general problem, call it the ‘semantic integration challenge’, of integrating a semantic theory and its correlated foundational theory.²¹ My worry is that if a semantic theory is supposed to specify the meaning of certain expressions and this specification is incompatible or at odds with how the correlated symbols have acquired their meaning and with how people have come to believe the truth values of their modal claims, then the semantic theory is defective, if this is intended as an applied semantics. In the case of SFPW, if it follows that the truth conditions of modal claims are necessarily related to a contingent fiction, there is no plausible foundational theory of meaning that can be accompanied to it. If the semantic theory were just an abstract model of our modal reasoning, the theory would be only pure semantics for which providing a justification of its connection with our knowing the truth values of our modal claims is not required.²² Given that

²⁰ Another reason for which modal realism should be rejected is that it does not provide a complete reduction of modality in non-modal terms, and thus we do not have enough theoretical benefits to justify the acceptance of unknowable entities in our ontology for the sake of explanation. See Divers (2002) for discussion. This point, however, does not give any theoretical advantage to SFPW: if modal realism does not provide a reduction of modal concepts, neither does SFPW, given that the latter includes those principles of modal realism responsible for the analysis of modality. One possible theoretical advantage in adopting SFPW over modal realism is the alleged safer and saner ontology of the former. Contrary to modal realism, which asks us to believe in a plurality of worlds spatio-temporally disconnected from us, the fictionalist seems to be committed only to fictions, that is, a kind of entities we already believe in. However, whether the fictionalist’s ontology is really safe and sane depends on what kind of entities fictions are. A nominalist, somebody who does not believe in abstract objects, would not see a theoretical advantage in adopting SFPW if this requires accepting into her ontology abstract propositions to explain the nature of fiction.

²¹ The problem of integrating different perspectives on the same topic has emerged in different areas of philosophy. For example, Peacocke discusses the integration challenge as the desideratum of reconciling the epistemological account of an area of discourse and its best metaphysical theory. See Peacocke (1999) on the integration challenge in general and Sauchelli (2010: 347–52) for the modal case.

²² See Divers (2002: 38–9) for the distinction between pure and applied semantics.

SFPW has been understood as a theory that is supposed to specify the ontological commitments of our modal talk and thus the range of some of our quantifiers, we should consider SFPW as providing a schema for an applied semantics for modal claims. Therefore, SFPW specifies the meaning of our modal expressions, along with their truth conditions, and, consequently, a description of where to look to determine their truth values. Premise (2) of my reasoning is meant to capture the intuition that if we are dealing with a piece of applied semantics for certain expressions of our natural language, this theory should meet the ‘semantic integration challenge’.²³

In response, the fictionalist may try to show that the relevant fiction or the related truth conditions are not actually inaccessible. For instance, the strong fictionalist may argue that it is not the case that everybody knew *precisely* the truth conditions of our modal claims before our philosophical investigations and that, at the same time, the function of our theorising on these matters is to make clear and systematise our intuitions into a coherent system. More precisely, the fictionalist can argue that the basic principles on which modal realism is based do capture some of our pre-theoretically imaginative practices about what is possible or necessary. It may also be argued that the rules of reference responsible for the truth value of modal concepts that are included in the fiction are those that are required to understand the modal concepts at issue. The idea is that a fiction concerning modal realist possible worlds is implicitly connected to those imaginative practices that guide our modal reasoning. According to this line of reasoning, the basic principles on which the fiction is based have been known all along by rational agents asserting modal claims, and thus the ‘semantic integration challenge’ can be met, in principle. The conclusion is that, in a loose and implicit sense, the truth conditions of modal claims were also accessible to people in ancient times, despite the fact that they did not know anything about modal realism. The only difference is that now we have systematised them into a coherent whole.

One reply to this argument is that now SFPW seems gratuitous and theoretically redundant: an analysis of modality can be formulated simply by using those principles or rules that determine our understanding of modal concepts without inflating our account with talk about a fiction. The fictionalist should provide good reasons to believe that the principles must be formulated in terms of (fictional) possible worlds. More important, it seems that rigidifying the analysis to a specific fiction now seems a *particularly* gratuitous move. Choosing one specific fiction seems arbitrary or, as it has been put forth by Peacocke, a form of fetishism.²⁴ If the basic principles of the fiction have somehow always been known and simply made explicit, then why do we have to use an actuality operator and rigidify our analysis? Why do we have to take a particular fiction as necessarily connected to modal claims?²⁵ Suppose that Pierre Menard composed a book in 2001 called *On the Plurality of Worlds*, word for word and line for line coincident with Lewis (1986). Why do we have to index the analysis of modality to Lewis’s work instead of Menard’s replica? Originality may be an

²³ I have not specified in detail the requirements that a foundational theory of modal meaning should meet. However, among them, I would list ‘providing a convincing story of how the meaning of our modal talk is connected to our beliefs about the truth values of our modal claims.’

²⁴ See Peacocke (1999: 154).

²⁵ For an answer to the related worry of fetishism, see Woodward (2011: Section 1).

artistic or aesthetic merit, but here, it seems beyond the point. In conclusion, this strategy seems to undermine the idea of indexing modality to a single fiction.

A related point is that it cannot be taken for granted that modal realism, if it is the indexed fiction, captures those practises responsible for our modal claims better than other theories. There are many other extensionally equivalent accounts of modality that can accommodate roughly the same intuitions about the truth values of the same set of modal claims.²⁶ Again, the fictionalist does not seem to be justified in rigidifying his account of modality to a specific fiction. The fictionalist may invoke a type/token distinction and claim that the indexed fiction in the analysis of modality is a fiction-type and that Menard's work is just one token of the modal realism-type. In this way, by indexing the analysis of modality to a fiction-type, all subsequent instantiations of it, such as Menard's *On the Plurality of Worlds*, would just be tokens of the same type. This reply, however, also fails. First, there are arguments to the effect that the author and various other contextual features are essential to the identity of fictions.²⁷ If this is the case, Menard's and Lewis's works are different, and so we still need an explanation of why we should choose one instead of the other. Apart from this theoretically loaded reply, the type/token distinction will not help in any case because, of course, different types of fictions (for example, different theories of modality) can exist that could be taken as the relevant fiction-type. Thus, the objection can be equally couched in terms of types. For instance, suppose that Pierre Menard also wrote a fiction called *On the Varieties of Worlds*, similar to *On the Plurality of Worlds*, but different enough to be considered an instance of a different type. Why should we rigidify our analysis to Lewis's fiction-type? Another way, envisaged by Woodward, to answer this objection is to rigidify SFPW's analysis of modality to a *family* of fiction-types, rather than just one. In particular, the analysis of modality would be in terms of a family of fiction-types in a certain range. For example, 'it is necessary that P iff at our actual world, presently, according to a range of fiction-types R, P always holds'. This solution also does not help very much. Unless the fictionalist is able to specify a set of criteria to decide what has to be included in the range of fiction-types, it would exclude all of those fictions that might be taken into the family and that will be written, for example, in the future.²⁸ What we need is a principle that indicates what counts as being a member of the range R. This does not mean that we are trying to find a definition of modality, a task that may be hopeless, but rather only a criterion (or criteria) telling us when a fiction has to be counted as relevant for our analysis. If these criteria coincide with the principles or rules of reference required to determine the truth value of modal claims, then, again, it seems that appealing to a fiction to explain modality is redundant and that we can just appeal to such principles.²⁹ In addition, for this line of reasoning to be successful against my charge of inaccessibility, we need to also know which fiction-types are to be seen as adhering to our modal intuitions. A related and more crucial point is that we are certainly in need of a more explicit description of those imaginative practices that are supposed to be connected with modality because,

²⁶ See Divers (2002) for a survey of various accounts of modality.

²⁷ See Currie (1989), Lamarque (2002), and Davies (2004: 1–74) for discussion.

²⁸ Depending on when we read 'presently' in the proposed analysis.

²⁹ An attempt along these lines is pursued by Peacocke (1999).

in its present form, SFPW does not explicitly and convincingly defend its adherence to any modal intuition.

4 Conclusions

SFPW is artificial because it establishes a connection between a restrictedly accessible fiction and the truth values and truth conditions of modal claims. This connection, assuming a specific theory of understanding, seems to hinder also the possibility of truly understanding modal concepts by those who came before modal realism (or any other indexed fiction). If it is claimed that the indexed fiction does actually capture principles relevant to the understanding of modal claims, then it seems that talking about a specific fiction is redundant and gratuitous. The best solution is to give up the necessity requirement that SFPW prescribes and, if we want to save the intuition that possible worlds are (useful) fictions, to interpret our possible worlds talk as the content of a fiction that may help formulate a certain thesis in modal metaphysics but that does not provide an analysis of modal claims.

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