

Reply to Pelletier

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► **To cite this version:**

François Recanati. Reply to Pelletier. Maria-José Frapolli. Saying, Meaning, and Referring: Essays on François Recanati's Philosophy of Language, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004. ijn_00000640

HAL Id: ijn_00000640

https://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn_00000640

Submitted on 20 Oct 2005

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Reply to Pelletier

According to Jérôme Pelletier, the property I appeal to in order to distinguish imaginary from real situations, viz. hyper-insulation, is nothing but (or follows from) the property of *spatio-temporal or causal disconnection*. Real situations are spatio-temporally or causally connected ; but imaginary situations are not spatio-temporally or causally connected to real situations. It follows that what happens in the imaginary situation described by a certain book has no consequence on what happens in the real situation in which the book itself is written or read, and conversely. In particular, if there is a man who can fly in the imaginary situation, it does not follow that there is such a man in the real situation in which the imaginary situation is described. Now this is an example of what I call hyper-insulation : even facts that are ‘persistent’ in the logical sense (such as the fact that there is a man who can fly) do not necessarily persist when we move upward from imaginary situations to the real situations comprising them.

But the notion of causal disconnection is not itself crystal-clear. What happens to the author of the story in the actual world may have an impact upon what he writes and therefore upon what happens in the imaginary situations he describes ; and what happens in the imaginary situation the author describes may have consequences upon the real situation in which he writes. If Superman starts abusing children in the imaginary situation, anti-pedophile associations will boycott the Superman stories in the actual world. Is there, or is there not, a causal relation between the two facts ? One might argue that what causes the boycott of the Superman stories is a real fact : the fact that they feature Superman as a pedophile. But this real fact is a fact about an imaginary situation : it is the fact that, in the imaginary situation described by the stories in question, Superman behave as a pedophile. The idea that imaginary situations are causally disconnected from the actual world is not crystal-clear because certain real situations (e.g. books and other fictions) ‘comprise’ imaginary situations. When the causal consequences of a real situation (say, the publication of the new Superman stories) are essentially tied to the properties that situation has in virtue of comprising an imaginary situation (say, a situation in which Superman behaves badly), there is a sense in which the imaginary situation itself has those consequences and causally affects the actual world, via the path that does exist between the real situation and the imaginary situation. That path is the comprise relation, which here takes the form of one situation containing a description of the other. To be sure, the path in question is not a spatio-temporal or causal path internal to the actual world, but an ‘intentional’ path which essentially involves a shift from the actual world to some other possible world. But this intuitive distinction is precisely what we are trying to make sense of : we are trying to make sense of the idea that some situations — those to which we have access through books and other representations — are merely ‘imaginary’. My suggestion is that hyper-insulation is criterial : whenever the comprise relation between two situations s_1 and s_2 involves a world-shift, in such a way that s_2 is ‘imaginary’ with respect to the parent situation s_1 , then even if a fact σ belongs to the persistent variety, its being a fact in s_2 does not entail that it is a fact also in s_1 (contrary to what happens when s_1 and s_2 belong to the same world).

Pelletier wonders whether the fact that imaginary worlds are insulated from the actual world and from each other prevents them from containing the same individuals. As is well-known, Kripke accepts trans-world individuals, while Lewis takes individuals to be 'world-bound'. For Kripke, however, only actual individuals can be stipulated to exist in other possible worlds, because nonactual individuals (e.g. fictional individuals) lack clear conditions of individuation:

Granted that there is no Sherlock Holmes, one cannot say of any possible person that he *would have been* Sherlock Holmes, had he existed. Several distinct possible people, and even actual ones such as Darwin or Jack the Ripper, might have performed the exploits of Holmes, but there is none of whom we can say that he would have *been* Holmes had he performed these exploits. For if so, which one ? (Kripke 1980 : 158)

In Lewis' system, identity across possible worlds is ruled out on principle. No individual, whether actual or fictional, can exist in more than one possible world. But the inhabitants of one possible world may have 'counterparts' in other possible worlds. Fictional individuals are just like other individuals, in this respect. If an actual individual is found who is called 'Sherlock Holmes', performs the exploits of Holmes, has a friend named 'Watson' with such and such characteristics, etc., in the actual world, there will be no doubt that that person is a 'counterpart' of Sherlock Holmes in the actual world.

Pelletier takes both Kripke and Lewis to be insulationists who reject the possibility for fictional individuals to show up in the actual world ; and he thinks metaleptic narratives in which the author of a fiction meets one of his or her fictional characters cannot be handled consistently within Lewis's theory of fictional truth if one accepts insulationism. For Lewis, a sentence 'In fiction f , ϕ ' is true iff ϕ is true at every possible world where f is told as known fact rather than fiction (Lewis 1983 : 268). Pelletier objects that if one is an insulationist (as he takes Lewis to be), then there is no possible world in which a metaleptic narrative is told as known fact. I think that objection fails because Lewis is not really an insulationist : he can accept the possibility for the (actual or fictional) author of a fiction to meet a counterpart, in his world, of the fictional character he has created. The only argument for considering Lewis an insulationist is his wholesale rejection of trans-world identity in favour of a less demanding counterpart relation, but this is irrelevant to the issue about metalepsis.

Be that as it may, I need not take a stand on those issues because, contrary to what Pelletier suggests, my claim that imaginary situations are 'hyper-insulated' from the real situations containing them entails nothing regarding insulationism, as described by Pelletier. Hyper-insulation means that if Superman kisses Lois Lane in the imaginary situation, it does not follow that he kisses her in the actual situation in which the imaginary situation is described. This entails nothing regarding the possibility or impossibility for Superman and Lois Lane or for their counterparts to exist in the actual situation in question.

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The last issue Pelletier raises regards simulation. I hold that meta-representations are essentially simulative, for they contain the representation they are about as a proper part ; hence one cannot, for example, entertain the thought that my cousin

believes that Paris is a large city without eo ipso entertaining the thought that Paris is a large city. This implies that we cannot meta-represent the thoughts of creatures whose concepts we do not possess. Pelletier objects that when we meta-represent, the thought expressed by the embedded portion is not necessarily identical to the thought actually entertained by the ascriber. Perhaps my cousin does not literally entertain the thought 'Paris is a large city', but has a similar thought, which I report by saying (or thinking) that he believes Paris to be a large city. This is true, but so what? The meta-representer cannot but entertain *the thought that he is ascribing* ; whether this thought exactly or approximately corresponds to the ascriber's actual thought is another matter. Goldman writes that « the output state [of the simulation procedure used in predicting an agent's emotion or affect in a given circumstance] should be viewed as pretend or surrogate state, since presumably a simulator doesn't feel the very same affect or emotion as a real agent would » (Goldman 1995 : 189). In the same way, the thought which the meta-representer ascribes and which (I claim) he is bound to entertain should perhaps be viewed as a pretend or surrogate thought, since it need not correspond exactly to the ascriber's thought. This is not a problem for me, and there is no reason to assume that my brand of simulationism is closer to Gordon's radical simulationism than it is to Goldman's, or that it corresponds to the imaginative project which Wollheim calls 'empathizing'.

References

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