

Can Normative Properties Be Fictional?

A Metanormative Inquiry

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Introduction

- In philosophy, we often classify statements as normative or as fictional
- Fiction contains normative statements (e.g., "Spider-Man did the right thing").
- This leads to a key question: can *normativity itself* be fictional?

The Research Question

- Can normative properties belong to the class of fictional properties?
- Inspired by:
 - Kendall Walton: "Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality " (1994)
 - Matti Eklund: "Choosing Normative Concepts" (2017)

Initial Framework

Suppose that an object X has a set of properties $M = \{a, b, c, d, \dots, n, f\}$.

Among the properties of M are:

- **n**: normativity,
- **f**: fictionality.

Each property of that object can belong to one or several classes of properties.

For example, normativity (**n**) may belong to the class of accidental properties **α (alpha)** if n is not an essential property of the object X .

Key Questions

- **Question 1:** Does there exist a non-empty class of fictional properties ϕ (phi)? In other words, can the properties of objects be fictional?
- **Question 2:** If the class ϕ is non-empty, can the normativity of the object X (denoted as nX) belong to this class ($nX \in \phi$)?

Let's start with the question 1 (rephrased: "can properties of objects be fictional"?)

Defining Fictional Properties

Definition: A property P of an object O is fictional (belongs to a class of fictional properties) if and only if the truth value of any proposition in which P appears as a predicate and O as the subject is determined by the content, structure, genre, artistic features, and the creation context (historical, cultural, etc.) of a work of fiction.

Example:

“to be a dragon” – fictional

because

“Smaug is a dragon” IS true within “The Hobbit” (its content, structure, genre, etc.)

Objection #1

"to be a dragon" – fictional property

&

"The creature I saw yesterday isn't a dragon" IS NOT fictionally determined

Our reply: Fictional dragon \neq real "dragon" \rightarrow different properties (or different tokens of the type *"to be a dragon"*)

Objection #2

"*Mona Lisa is a Renaissance painting*" is determined by the context of that fiction

&

"*to be a Renaissance painting*" in this case is not a fictional property

Our reply: Fictionality requires *internal* content + context (+genre, structure, etc.) to determine the truth of proposition

Question 2

If the class ϕ is non-empty, can the normativity of the object X (denoted as nX) belong to this class ($nX \in \phi$)?

OR in other words

Is it possible that there is a proposition in which “to be normative” (or its closest moral derivatives: “to be right” or “to be good”) would be the predicate and the truth value of that proposition would be determined by together by the content, structure, genre and artistic features and a creation context of fiction?

Compound vs Primitive Properties

- Compound: made of simpler properties (e.g., "to be a dragon")
- Primitive: irreducible (e.g., "to be true", "to be normative")

Our claim: Fictional properties must be compound

The Main Argument Structure

P1) A property is fictional IFF the truth value of any proposition that contains this property and the object having it is determined by the content, structure, genre, artistic features and creation context of a piece of fiction. (*that's basically our definition of fictional properties*)

P2) The truth value of a proposition that contains a fictional property is determined by that the property is made up by the author in a certain way, so it is the combination of specific properties possessed by that object.

P3) Fictional property must be combined from other properties – be compound property (*from P1, P2*)

P4) Normativity is a primitive property (not compound)

P5) The truth values of propositions that contain “to be normative” (and its derivatives) as a predicate can't be determined within the fiction (*from P3, P4*)

C) Normativity can't be fictional (*from P1, P5*)

Objection — Lovecraft's Color

Lovecraft's "Color out of space" seems primitive AND fictional (contrary to P2!)

Our reply: Actually, it's a negation-combination of known colors → compound

Objection — Alternative Truths

Fiction may present alternative logics/truths yet they seem primitive (contrary to P2!)

Our reply: Without functional role or clear semantics, not true *truths*

Final Conclusion

- Fiction can contain normative statements
- But normativity itself cannot be fictional
- Normative fantasy isn't possible

Any questions?

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Thank you!