

Thinking About Different Nonexistents Of The Same Kind *

Reid's Account Of The Imagination And Its Nonexistent Objects

THIS IS THE PENULTIMATE DRAFT. PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION, FROM PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH. DOI: 10.1111/phpr.12196. (2015).

Abstract

How is it that, as fiction readers, we are nonplussed by J. K. Rowling's prescription to imagine Ronan, Bane, and Magorian, three different centaurs of the Forbidden Forrest at Hogwarts? It is usually held in the philosophical literature on fictional discourse that singular imaginings of fictional objects are impossible, given the blatant nonexistence of such objects. In this paper, I have a dual purpose: (i) on the one hand, to show that, without being committed to Meinongeanism, we can explain the phenomenon of singular imaginings of different nonexistents of the same (fictional) kind; (ii) while, at the same time, to attribute this position to Thomas Reid, thus correcting some misunderstandings of his view on imagination.

1 Introduction

As fiction readers we have no trouble thinking about different nonexistent objects, even when they are of the same (fictional) kind. However, if we put on our philosophy hat and want to explain how fictional discourse works, we are faced with a cluster of questions: (1) what are fictional objects? (this assumes that such objects exists, in some way, and, indeed, in this paper, I will assume that they do); (2) how do we refer to *ficta*?; (3) how do we imagine *ficta*?; (4) how is

*I would like to thank Jim Van Cleve, Gideon Yaffe, Ed McCann, and Alex Radulescu for helping shape this paper and for encouraging me to believe in tropes when it was starting to seem difficult to do so. I would also like to thank Peter Markie and Matthew McGrath for closely reading and commenting on previous versions of this paper. In 2010, some of the material discussed here was presented at the *South Central Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy*, at Texas A & M University, and at the *Atlantic Canada Seminar In Early Modern Philosophy*, at Dalhousie University. I am grateful to the organizers – Stephen Daniel, Mike LeBuffe, and Tom Vinci, respectively – and to everyone in the audience for their suggestions, especially to Gregory A. Brown, Todd Buras, Geoffrey Gorham, Yitzhak Melamed, Andrew Roche, and Raffaella de Rosa. I would also like to thank an anonymous referee for her or his enthusiastically helpful comments on this paper.

it possible to entertain singular imaginings of such objects?; (5) how do we singularly imagine different *ficta* of the same kind, for instance, Ronan, Bane, and Magorian, three of the centaurs of the Forbidden Forest at Hogwarts? As metaphysicians and philosophers of language, we will be primarily interested in understanding what fictional objects are and how we are able to refer to them, thus, in providing good answers to questions (1)-(3).¹ But to paint a complete picture of fictional discourse we should not stop here; we should strive to understand how our minds are able to connect with such objects, given that any kind of causal interaction with *ficta* seems impossible. This side of fictional discourse has been less investigated and answers to questions (4)-(5) are few and far between. This should not create the wrong impression. It is important to focus on such questions since, even if we argue that fictional proper names refer in a way similar to how regular proper names do, and that the entities thus named do exist, in some sense, we are nowhere nearer to understanding how imagination works to connect us with these entities, given that there seems to be something missing in the causal relationship between us and them (namely, them).

This paper will be focused on Thomas Reid's account of imagination, arguing that his theory, although so far largely misunderstood and unduly neglected, has the resources to provide insightful answers to questions regarding our interaction with fiction, especially (1), (3), (4), and (5) on our list. I will develop and defend Reid's answers to questions (4) and (5), which are built upon his account of imagination. I will show that, on a plausible reconstruction of his theory, we can entertain singular imaginings of nonexistent objects, just as we can entertain singular perceptions of existing objects. This is crucial for understanding how, as fans of fiction, we are nonplussed by J. K. Rowling's prescription to imagine different individual centaurs, when we are thinking about the Harry Potter novels. His account gives rise to some classical problems – e.g. what are tropes? –, but also to some new ones – how do I imagine the same thing as J. K. Rowling? Some of these problems will be dealt with in this paper, while others will be left for future research.

In what follows, to show how imagination works to connect us with *ficta*, I will present and

¹Various theories explaining how to understand what fictional names refer to and how to interpret fictional discourse have been offered, especially in the twentieth century, some of the most influential being the ones put forward by Kripke (2013) and by Parsons (1980).

evaluate two theories that explain what we imagine when we imagine Pegasus or Don Quixote. These theories purport to throw light on the nature of the relevant *entia rationis*. In addition, these two theories offer competing interpretations of Reid's views on imagination. According to the first theory, *ficta* are understood to be bundles of universals. Throughout the paper, I will call this "the complex universal view", since a fictional object is thought to be composed of many different simple universals, put together by the imaginer's mind, in an act of imagination. This is the standard interpretation of Reid, advocated, among others, by Gallie (1997) and Wolterstorff (2001). One purpose of this paper is to show that, although there seems to be some textual evidence supporting this reading, on such a reconstruction of his theory, Reid's views are inconsistent.²

The other theory discussed in this paper directly opposes the one above, and, throughout the paper it will be referred to as "the complex trope view." According to this view, *ficta* are bundles of tropes, or abstract particulars. Based on textual evidence, I will argue that Reid is the proponent of such a view. My interpretation has the benefit of not attributing inconsistent views to him, and in the interest of engaging in charitable interpretation, I believe it should be preferred over the standard interpretation. In fact, I will argue for something stronger: that this view will show what it would take for a theory of imagination to explain how singular imaginings of different nonexistents *of the same kind* can occur.

2 *Ficta* as Complex Universals

In this section, I develop and evaluate the view that fictional objects and characters are bundles of universals. A view like this is *prima facie* attractive. On a closer look, however, it turns out not only that Reid could not have consistently held this view, but also that we cannot entertain singular thoughts (in the form of singular imaginings) about such objects.

²Throughout the history of philosophy, there were several defenders of a view like this. For instance, Russell (1967) argued that existent objects are nothing more than complex universals. Also, Meinong-inspired theories of fiction, such as the one developed in Parsons (1980), hold that this is the right way to think about fictional characters and objects.

2.1 The View

How does one construe nonexistent objects? It may be thought that the most problematic aspect of a *fictum* is its blatant nonexistence. One cannot look around oneself to see what a unicorn looks like, one must rely entirely on one's own mind to envisage such a fictional animal. Granted, there are stories and images of unicorns and they can help us think about such magical creatures. Even in the absence of such stories, if someone were told to imagine a unicorn, he would probably be given some minimal instructions: e.g. he would probably be told to imagine a white horse with a horn attached to its forehead. It is not particularly difficult to follow such instructions: all one has to do is think about a white horse and a horn and combine them in their mind to think about a unicorn.

This procedure shouldn't seem more mysterious than what we are required to do when we think about a real, existing, horse. On some views, real objects are nothing more than collections of properties, understood as universals, which are spatio-temporally indexed. For instance, Bertrand Russell held such a view at one time:

[W]herever there is, for common sense, a "thing" having the quality C, we should say, instead, that C itself exists in that place, and that the "thing" is to be replaced by the collection of the qualities existing in the place in question. (Russell (1967, p. 98))

If we thought that real, existing rocks, trees, and human beings are nothing more than presently existing at a place collections of universal properties, why shouldn't we also think that *fictional* rocks, trees, and human beings are like that? Indeed, what the latter category of things is missing is existence in a place, at a time; but that should not preclude us from thinking about collections of properties, disentangled from such mundane requirements.³ All that is needed here is being able to abstract away from the existing universals everyone encounters in their day-to-day life and then use these abstract notions to generate fictional collections. One way of making this talk of collections and bundles of universals precise is to construe these collections as sets whose members

³In the interest of historical accuracy, one should note that Russell himself would not have agreed to extend his theory in this way, since he thought that talk of fictional objects does not make much sense.

are universals.⁴ On this picture, whenever one thinks about a centaur it is part of one's thinking to think about the complex property of centaurhood, since thinking about any type of object involves, essentially, thinking about the unique non-empty set of properties that corresponds to (or is) that object.⁵

2.2 Did Reid Hold This View?

The standard interpretation of Reid, advocated mainly by Gallie (1997) and Wolterstorff (2001), attributes to him a view that is very much like the one described above, although less technically precise. We should not expect Reid to talk about sets of properties, and indeed no one argues that he did. However, the main idea behind the rather technical apparatus of set theory is attributed to him: Wolterstorff, for instance, argues that “[f]ictional characters, fictitious beings, plans for unbuilt buildings – all are, on [Reid’s] view, not nonexistent particulars but complex universals – person-types, animal-types, building-types, etc.” (Wolterstorff (2001, p. 74)). On this interpretation, to conceive a centaur requires no more than to conceive the meaning of the word that expresses that attribute in language. This is true with regard to more important concepts, like felony or justice, and there is no reason it should not be true about centaurs.⁶ This interpretation is *prima facie* supported by the text. For instance, Reid argues that our conceptions are of three kinds, and by reading the passage below, one might think that conceiving a centaur is exactly like conceiving of a general object, which seems to always go through a linguistic representation:

They are either the conceptions of individual things, the creatures of God; or they are conceptions of the meaning of general words; or they are the creatures of our

⁴I use the notions of sets here, because sets are fairly well understood. There are other options: classes, fusions, or perhaps bundles, understood as a special kind of collection, might do as well. Choosing among these options is not trivial, and my choice is determined primarily by simplicity, rather than metaphysical accuracy. The main point, however, is that thinking about a centaur, on this picture, consists in thinking about a construct made up of universals.

⁵Some Meinongian theories of fictional discourse construe fictional objects in this manner. On such an account, to any object there corresponds a unique non-empty set of properties. These are all the properties that the object has. A Meinongian can thus include in his ontology nonexistent and even impossible objects. For example, the set {goldenness, mountainhood} is correlated with a golden mountain, which is a nonexistent object. For more on this way of understanding objects, see Parsons (1980, p. 18-19).

⁶Reid talks about this issue in *EIP* IV. 1, p. 303. I would like to note that his arguments there are reminiscent of what Locke thought about mixed modes, in *Essay*, II. xxii. 1-2.

own imagination; and these different kinds have different properties which we have endeavored to describe. (*EIP* IV. 1, p. 305)

The standard interpretation groups the last two kinds of conceptions together, based on their common feature of not being about concrete extant objects. Reid thinks that universals and creatures of our fancy do not exist in the way in which concrete particulars exist, but they all can be thought about, and the mind can reason about them. One can easily conceive of triangles, in general, and one should also be able to think of centaurs, in general, in the same fashion. Wolterstorff (2001, p. 69-70) argues that to exercise one's bare conception means nothing more than to mentally apprehend (or entertain) an object of thought. One can do this, even though that object could never exist. In addition, Gallie (1997, p. 321) argues that one must use something like a linguistic representation to think about centaurs, and this idea seems to be supported by passages like the one quoted above, where Reid talks about conceiving *the meaning* of a word, when there is no concrete object that is denoted or referred to by that word.

This interpretation is also attractive if we thought that nonexistence goes hand-in-hand with generality. After all, Reid argues, just like Locke before him, that everything that exists is an individual. Reid does not think that every nonexistent is a universal, but he argues that universals, because they are general, do not exist:

[E]very mathematical figure is accurately defined, by enumerating the simple elements of which it is formed and the manner of their combination. [...] It is not a thing that exists, for then *it would be an individual*; but it is a thing conceived without regard to existence. (my emphasis; *EIP* V. 4, p. 373)

Gallie (1997) and Wolterstorff (2001) endorse the idea that if something does not exist, then it is a universal. If that thing had existed, it would have been an individual. They do more, however: they assume that there can be no nonexistent individuals, and that all "conceptions of things that don't exist – imaginings of such things – are just special cases of *general conceptions*" (original emphasis; Wolterstorff (2001, p. 74)). Wolterstorff (2001) presents as evidence for this claim the following passage from Reid:

Some general conceptions there are, which may more properly called *compositions* or *works* than mere combinations. Thus, one may conceive a machine which never existed. He may conceive an air in music, a poem, a plan of architecture, a plan of government, a plan of conduct in public or in private life, a sentence, a discourse, a treatise. Such compositions are things conceived in the mind of the author, not individuals that really exist; and the same general conception which the author had may be communicated to others by language.

Thus, the Oceana of HARRINGTON was conceived in the mind of its author. The materials of which it is composed are things conceived, not things that existed. [...] And the same may be said of every work of the human understanding. (*EIP* V. 4, p. 375-76)

I partly agree with the standard interpretation. According to Reid, conception, when exercised on its own, works like this: one may conceive complex universals, which are composed, in the mind of the conceiver only, from simple universals, which are derived from the individuals with which the conceiver is acquainted.⁷ However, I also partly disagree with this interpretation: one should pay closer attention to the things Reid lists in the passage quoted above. They are all abstract things, which are connected, in essential ways, with language: sentences, discourses, and treatises. I do not wish to suggest that this list is exhaustive, but it is quite extensive. This, in turn, makes me believe that by thinking about some of the things that are *not* included on this list we might get closer to Reid's considered view. The passage in question does not talk about what it is like to conceive Don Quixote, Pegasus or any other fictional object. Neither does it say anything about what it is like *to imagine* such objects. I argue that these omissions are significant, and I discuss their importance in detail in the next section.⁸

The standard interpretation of Reid seems to make a rather compelling case for thinking that centaurs, unicorns, and the like are just like machines that never existed, or plans of government never put into practice, namely complex universals that can be thought of by exercising our bare conception. Even so, in what follows I show that this interpretation is both incomplete and incorrect: not only does it not account for a distinction that Reid draws, but it also attributes inconsistent

⁷See, for instance, what Reid writes in *EIP* V. 4, p. 376: "Nature has given us the power of combining such simple attributes, and such a number of them as we find proper."

⁸This is not the only evidence against the standard interpretation. However, this should be taken as indicative of the incompleteness, if not also of the incorrectness, of the standard interpretation of Reid.

views to him.

2.3 Problems With the View

In what follows, I talk about two types of problems with the view that *ficta* are complex universals: first, I argue that this is not Reid's considered view, *contra* the standard interpretation. Second, I argue that this view comes with serious philosophical problems that should make anyone interested in fictional discourse and imagination dig deeper and find a better explanation of how we are capable of thinking about different nonexistent objects of the same kind.

2.3.1 Reid's View is Different

The main flaw of the standard interpretation of Reid – that of attributing inconsistent views to him – stems from not acknowledging that Reid distinguished between conception and imagination proper. This distinction is made apparent by Reid's discussion concerning the proper objects of conception and of imagination. He argues that universals can only be conceived, and never imagined, because imagination “signifies a conception of the appearance an object would make to the eye, if actually seen. An universal is not an object of any external sense, and therefore *it cannot be imagined*; but it may be distinctly conceived” (my emphasis; *EIP* V. 6, p. 394). Moreover, Reid sides with Berkeley and argues that “creatures of imagination” (*EIP* IV. 1, p. 301), like centaurs, unicorns, and witches, can indeed be *imagined*: “I can imagine a man with two heads, or the upper parts of a man joined to the body of a horse” (Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Introduction, 10, p. 68; cited by Reid, *EIP* V. 6, p. 393-94). This runs contrary to Wolterstorff's interpretation, according to which “bare conceptions of things that don't exist” are equivalent to “imaginings of such things” (Wolterstorff (2001, p. 74)). Since centaurs can be imagined while universals can only be conceived, one should conclude that centaurs are *not* universals, even though one can think of centaurs in general.⁹ In §3.1, I will argue that centaurs and the like can be imagined

⁹If I am correct, according to Reid, I can imagine a particular centaur, and conceive of centaurhood in general, just as I can imagine a particular man, while also conceiving of humanity in general. These are two distinct types of mental acts, and their objects are distinct types of objects.

because they are individuals, just as the substances the imaginer is using to construct such creatures of fancy are particular substances.

The standard interpretation is at a disadvantage when it comes to explaining how it is possible to use proper names to talk about fictional characters and objects, given that Reid argues that proper names can only be used to refer to individuals, and not to universals, which by their nature are general. If we follow the standard interpretation, and we do not pay heed to Reid's distinction between conception and imagination, we reach an inconsistent triad:

1. Some *entia rationis* are bearers of names (e. g. Pegasus; don Quixote; Oceana):

We can give names to such creatures of imagination, conceive them distinctly, and reason consequentially concerning them, though they never had an existence. They were conceived by their creators, and may be conceived by others, but they never existed (*EIP* IV. 1, p. 302).

2. Proper names are linguistic devices used to “express individuals in language”, and anything that is so expressed is an individual:

An individual is expressed in language either by a proper name or by a general word joined to such circumstances as distinguish that individual from all others; if it is unknown it may, when an object of sense and within reach, be pointed out to the senses; when beyond the reach of the senses, it may be ascertained by a description, which, though very imperfect, may be true and sufficient to distinguish it from every other individual. (*EIP* IV. 1, p. 303)¹⁰

3. All conceptions of *entia rationis* are general (according to the standard interpretation).

There are two ways out of this bind: accept that Reid is inconsistent in his treatment of conception and imagination of fictional creatures, or reject the standard interpretation.

¹⁰Note that, strictly speaking, this passage could be interpreted as stating a principle of this kind: If x is an individual, then it is “expressed in language” by a proper name or a general word joined to distinguishing circumstances. If this were the intended meaning of the passage, things that are not individuals could also be “expressed” by proper names. In other words, we might think that we could use proper names to talk about universals, too, since Reid's ontology includes only these two categories of things: individuals and universals (e.g. *EIP* IV. 1, p. 302). This is, however, not so, as witnessed by this passage: “[u]niversals are always expressed by general words, and all the words of language, excepting proper names, are general words; they are the signs of general conceptions, or of some circumstance relating to them” (*EIP* IV. 1, p. 304). The interpretation offered in the main text is, thus, the correct one.

Reid's view is not inconsistent. He argues that imagination is a *subspecies* of conception, such that only a subclass of the things that can be conceived can also be imagined (*EIP* V. 6, p. 326). He never equates imagination with conception, in the way required by the standard interpretation; on the contrary, he points out that the distinction between them is real, "though it be too often overlooked" (*EIP* V. 6, p. 394). The standard interpretation of Reid overlooks this distinction and this results not only in an inconsistency, but also in a far less interesting view, which does not allow for the possibility of imagining different nonexistents of the same kind. One advantage of the view I attribute to Reid is that it allows for this possibility, as we shall see in §3.3.

2.3.2 Philosophical Problems With This View

There are additional reasons against the view that fictional objects are complex universals. In this section I discuss several philosophical considerations showing that this position should be rigorously strengthened before being attributed to Reid, in the absence of clear-cut textual evidence. There are three main objections to which this position is open. First, we do not have a way of identifying a singular complex property of centaurhood. Second, there is no way to recover a notion of singular thought in imagination. Third, adopting this position leads to the so-called "problem of creation." I discuss these objections in turn.

One immediate problem with this view is to know what exactly is *the* complex universal denoted by "centaur": what are the simple attributes that make up this property? To re-introduce a degree of precision here, we might want to help ourselves to the tools of set theory (although, as already indicated, Reid did not have access to such a sophisticated technical apparatus). Let us suppose, with some Meinongians, that we can think of the complex property of centaurhood as a kind of object by collecting all the simple properties usually attributed to centaurs in a (non-empty) set, which would correspond to a nonexistent object.¹¹ But which are these simple properties that

¹¹See, for instance, Parsons (1980) and Deutsch (1991). To be a Meinongian, on the current proposal, just means to believe that one can generate nonexistent objects in the manner described in the text, in order to be able to quantify over such objects. This differs from the classification of fictional realism, proposed in Everett (2013, p. 140). Everett claims that to be a true Meinongian, one must think that such objects are concrete, just as regular actual objects are. On his classification, some theories that are usually thought to be Meinongian, do not count as such (e.g. those advanced by Zalta (1983) or Lamarque (2010)). Everett does not explain what would make such objects concrete, rather than

would populate the required set? Depending on which simple properties one uses to construct the respective set, one will end up with different complex properties of centaurhood, or with different centaur-like objects. For instance, we could generate a set corresponding to *a* complex property of centaurhood, which includes color among its members, and we could generate another set corresponding to *another* complex property of centaurhood, which does not include color among its members, etc. This issue is primarily engendered by how sets are individuated, namely by their members. Adopting this picture of nonexistent objects forces us to acknowledge that there are many nonexistent centaur-like objects, and that there is no unique way of specifying something like a fictional natural kind comprising all centaur-like objects.¹²

One way of solving this issue is to try to generate a set which contains all and only the simple properties which are essential for construing centaurs; those and only those should specify *the* complex property of centaurhood. This kind of essentialism is difficult to realize in practice: the problem here is that it is a lot more difficult to know what properties should constitute the essence of centaurs even if we knew the essence of the animals centaurs are modeled after. If we agree with some proposals, DNA sequencing constitutes the essence of biological organisms.¹³ This proposal is fraught with difficulties, however, due to the great variation one can observe in nature, even in the genome of individuals of the same species. How is the essence of *horsehood* to be specified here, when all that we can find out is the DNA sequencing of individual horses? Moreover, in the case of the property of centaurhood the problem is of a different order of magnitude: we can't specify the DNA of individual centaurs, even when we know the DNA of individual men and horses. There is no way of "connecting" or even of imagining to connect such DNA sequences in a reasonable way, as Kripke (1980, p. 156-58) points out. On this picture we must embrace this indeterminacy; but

abstract. Only if such objects (be they concrete or abstract) are not supposed to be generated in the manner described in the text, by combining general properties to form complex sets, will the arguments of the present paper be in need of revising. Since it is unclear that this is the case, I will proceed as announced.

¹²Parsons (1980, p. 23) sees this as an advantage of the theory: the ontology includes infinitely many objects, and the theory specifies a way of distinguishing among them, by their nuclear properties, which make up the sets corresponding to them. Since no two objects share all their properties, because if they did they would be numerically identical, a centaur-like object corresponding to a set having color among its members would indeed be different from a centaur-like object corresponding to a set that would not have color among its members. The problem arises when one wants to find out what "centaur" means in English, or exactly what property it is supposed to denote.

¹³A view like this was initially discussed by Kripke (1980, p. 156-58).

this leads to our not being able to use language to talk about *the* unique property of centaurhood. I think we can do better, as I show in §3.

The next issue on our list of objections makes vivid another respect in which this metaphysical position is lacking: if fictional characters and objects are supposed to be complex universals, how is it that we can have individuals allegedly belonging to *the same* fictional species portrayed in our most beloved stories? Readers of the *Harry Potter* novels know that Harry interacts with several centaurs, at different junctures in the narrative. These centaurs are named, and they display different characteristics, even though the contours of their portrait might be a bit vague overall. The point here is that unless we have a way of understanding how we can generate and entertain singular thoughts about fictional individuals it is very difficult to describe exactly what happens in a case like Harry's. On the view that *ficta* are complex universals, there are no *particular* centaurs that one thinks about when one reads Harry's story. What readers think about in cases like this one, the theory goes, are just bundles of universals, loosely held together by the narrative line.

However, this response is not satisfactory. Readers of fiction do seem to be interested and invested in the well-being of the heroes and heroines of the stories they read, something that is not easily explained by appeal to bundles of universals. No one would cry over the death of a bundle of universals, whereas thick tears are brought to the eyes of the readers of Anna Karenina's story. Philosophers interested in better understanding fictional discourse and its power to elicit such strong emotions in its consumers have even coined a term describing this situation: we are dealing here with the so-called "paradox of fiction". If we know that there never was and never will there be an Anna Karenina, how can we be moved by her fate?¹⁴ Sets and bundles of universals do not seem to help us explain this paradox away. Allowing for the existence of singular thoughts in the consumers of fiction, on the other hand, might be a first step in that direction. This move, at least, allows us to understand how we can think about three different nonexistent of the same kind. I will come back to explaining how singular thoughts are possible under such circumstances when I discuss Reid's considered view, in §3.2.

¹⁴The issue about the paradoxical character of our engagement with fiction was first discussed in Radford (1975).

A third problem is the so-called “problem of creation”, which arises due to the eliminativist character of the complex universal view. On this view there are no fictional objects, just sets of general properties, which have the feature of being eternal. Only by instantiation could such properties be made to descend from their Platonic realm into the sublunar world. But authors of fiction do not have such instantiating powers; their so-called “characters” remain general, complex universals, even when the stories are complete. All that is required for the construal of a fictional, nonexistent object, on Parson’s view, for instance, is that some properties be co-members of certain sets. Sets, just like properties, are eternal.¹⁵ Any possible combination of properties – a set – exists from the moment its members exist; and the properties themselves belong to the set in question for all time. It is thus difficult to argue that authors of fiction *create* fictional characters and objects, when they seemingly write about them. The creative process results in something else: “sentences, descriptions, stories, props in games of make-believe”, depending on the specific details of the theory under consideration, as advocated, among others, by Deutsch (1991) or Walton (1990).¹⁶ This way of describing the creative process, however, runs contrary to the common-sense approach to fiction: we want our theory to account for Shakespeare’s creating Hamlet, not just for writing ingenious iambic pentameters.

Given all these problems that the view under scrutiny has – it is not a good interpretation of Reid and it quickly runs into big problems – we should find an alternative. The next section explores such an alternative.

¹⁵Properties may or may not be eternal; someone may think that properties exist as long as there are instances of those properties. Even if this were the case, these properties, and the sets they are members of, would still pre-date the author of a novel and this is the issue here. The problem is not the eternality or non-eternality of the property in question, but the fact that the author of the novel would not be the creator of the characters and the worlds of the novel.

¹⁶Lamarque (2010, p. 188).

3 *Ficta* as Complex Tropes

3.1 The View

Reid does not offer a detailed explanation of *how* it is possible to imagine nonexistent things. The details he gives, however, allow us to construct an interpretation that does not attribute inconsistent views to him, by contrast to the standard interpretation. Put briefly, here is the alternative I offer: instead of thinking that fictional objects are nothing more than complexes of universals, let us think that they are collections of tropes. This view, albeit inspired by the complex universal view, has all of its advantages, but none of its disadvantages – neither as an interpretation of Reid, nor as a philosophical position, more generally. Or so I shall argue.

To begin, let us see what tropes are and why they are sometimes called “abstract particulars”. Tropes are instance-properties, individuals in their own right, which belong to the individual objects of the world.¹⁷ Tropes have a beginning of existence in time and are tied to a place of origin; they are not shareable or repeatable. They are pieces of the world, much like trees or mountains. As pieces of the world, tropes come packaged together in a very specific way. We can, however, single them out, think about them in isolation from all the other tropes inhering in the same object, and even use them to form new collections, by imagination or by intellect, different from the ones actually found in nature.

To have a better grasp of the distinctive character of tropes, it is worth looking at what Campbell (1983, p. 130) writes about our ability to think about them in isolation:

To single out that temperature [of my right hand, at a given moment of time] for thought and discussion on its own, we must perform an act of abstraction, selectively ignoring what is found along with the temperature. Tropes are brought before the mind by an act of abstraction. That is the sense, and the only sense, in which they are abstract entities.

¹⁷There is another way of thinking about tropes, not as *belonging* to objects, but as completely making-up such objects. Reid thought that the real world contains objects that *have* properties, which are tropes. Other philosophers, Hume among them, thought that there is nothing more to a particular object than a collection of tropes held together by a bundling relation. For more on Hume and trope theory, see Kail (2010, p. 29).

We must use abstraction to “tease” tropes apart from the place in which they are naturally found. However, mentally isolating a trope in this way will not remove it from the object to which it belongs; tropes are inextricably connected with the objects they are qualities of. In this sense, and by contrast to universals, tropes are entirely concrete; they are the physical qualities of material objects, found in the world. What Campbell calls “abstract particulars” are abstract only in the sense that they are mental representations of such qualities. The concrete qualities themselves cannot directly enter our minds; we need to reach them by a process of abstraction. “Trope”, therefore, is ambiguous: it may designate either a physical quality or the mental representation of that quality. In either of these senses, however, a trope is a particular.

This very conservative trope theory can help us explain how it is possible to imagine individual nonexistent things. Here is the picture: whenever I am told to imagine a centaur, I engage in an act of imagination in which I combine several abstract particulars, which represent tropes found in real existing objects, with which I am acquainted. For instance, to imagine the centaur Bane of the *Harry Potter* novels, I combine in my imagination the torso of my next-door neighbor Ben and the body of my next-door neighbor’s horse, Shane. The torso, and the body in question are tropes, or rather, have tropes, really existing in the world. My mind has the power to imagine a combination of abstract particulars that does not actually exist in the world, just as it has the power of perceiving a combination of tropes, that does so exist. Even when I imagine such combinations, their components, namely the tropes that my mind grasps, exist and are objects of my external senses.

For this proposal to work, imagination should be construed as being quite analogous to perception. On this view, the building blocks we use to construct imaginary objects are representations of things once perceived and now remembered.¹⁸ If we believe that Burge (2010, p. 415) is correct, and that organisms endowed with perceptual mechanisms have three perceptual sense modalities, by analogy, organisms endowed with imagination, narrowly construed, will have analogous imag-

¹⁸Or, rather, they are a small subset of the things perceived. There are things that are perceived without us being aware of perceiving them. (The literature on the phenomenon of change-blindness makes a good case that this is possible, as discussed, for instance, by Block (2007)). Such things are probably not available to be used in constructing an imaginary object.

inary sense modalities. In this context it is better to talk about visualizing, “tactilizing” and “hear-arizing”, and not simply about imagining, since the idea is that an imaginer will use the abstract particulars derived from perceptible tropes to imagine nonexistent objects.

To better understand this constraint on imagination, let us consider an example. Suppose that we think about two different knights: Sir Gawain and Sir Peter (Strawson). If trope theory is correct, a particular instantiation of knighthood is among the tropes Sir Gawain had, while a different one is among the tropes that Sir Peter had. What would happen if someone were asked to imagine the knighthood trope associated with Sir Gawain, but not the one associated with Sir Peter? Our imaginer would be placed in a difficult situation: he would need to identify the distinguishing trait of the knighthood trope associated with Sir Gawain, such that he would not confuse it with the knighthood trope associated with Sir Peter. The issue here is that it is not easy to know what this specific difference is supposed to be.

One reason for this difficulty is that there is nothing particularly visual, or tactile, or aural about knighthood. Knighthood is not the kind of thing that can be sensed. Although it is true that different knights instantiate the universal knighthood and thus have the appropriate tropes among their qualities, such tropes cannot, strictly speaking, be perceived; hence, neither can they be imagined. To help an imaginer “construct” a fictional knight, one would need to provide some props, specific abstract particulars, which are usually associated with knights: shining armor, a horse, a knighting ceremony, etc. This would work better when trying to imagine a Medieval knight, like Sir Gawain. To imagine a knight like Sir Peter, however, one might not have enough to go on, in addition to imagining that he was a person. To get the desired effect, one might need a trick, for instance, to explicitly say something like, “oh, and by the way, this imagined person is a knight”. Or, one could imagine Sir Peter in the middle of his knighthood ceremony, or one could imagine people calling him “Sir”, etc. Doing any of these things would ensure that we imagine Sir Peter as a knight, after all, but it would not ensure that we imagine his knighthood; we only imagine certain behaviors that we conventionally associate with knights, even of the modern era.

Knighthood is not perceived in the same way in which colors, shapes or sizes are, where a

perceiver is in direct contact with a particular shade of a color, over and above the object having that color. Better still, in some sense, knighthood is not perceived at all: what we do perceive, in such instances is people filling certain social roles, just like when we encounter people filling the role of being an accountant, a medical doctor, or a judge. There are certain insignia that are conventionally associated with social roles like these, such that when someone is imagining a lady with a crown on her head that person can be said to be imagining a queen. But what one is actually imagining in this case is a lady wearing a crown; queenhood can no more be imagined than knighthood can. Some tropes are not perceivable: instances of queenhood and of knighthood are like that. Tropes like these cannot be imagined either. If we let etymology guide us here, for illustrative purposes only, since ordinary language is not a perfect guide to philosophical distinctions, as Reid himself was well aware, we should note that there is no specific image that one can produce whenever one is told to imagine a queen. After all, everyone would agree that even without wearing a crown Queen Elisabeth II is still the Queen of England. Social roles like these can be filled by people not displaying any of the stereotypical symbols, and this is where the distinction between perceivable tropes and non-perceivable ones can be found. To emphasize, for perceivable tropes, there are specific images that one could produce whenever one is told to produce an image of redness, or squareness, etc.

On the current proposal, one can only imagine tropes of the right kind: only perceivable ones. This is a restricted notion of imagination, but the restriction in question is not arbitrary. Rather, it is determined by a similar restriction on perception, even though it might seem that imagination can be employed more freely than perception. However, my proposal is inspired by a common artistic practice of representing knights and other characters filling social roles like these by associating them with their respective insignia. This is because knight-tropes, unlike color-tropes, are not part of our perceptual vocabulary, and we need to appeal to “tricks” like the ones described above to make them explicit in our representations.

Fans of fantasy fiction need not be worried at this point: I don’t mean to deny that there are stories describing the wonderful deeds of knights, wizards, or warrior princesses. The point to

emphasize is that, according to the view under discussion, *imagination* has no role to play, if we try to think of knighthood on its own, without the usual associated knighthood paraphernalia. We can *conceive* of such characters and their exploits, but, since we would be unable to know, just upon encountering them, what social role they perform, our imaginative powers would not be stimulated by their fictional knightly existence. A knight, divested of his shining armor, horse, and squire, is just a regular looking man. The distinction I'm drawing between imagining and conceiving is not ad-hoc.¹⁹ Knighthood, just like virtue, or courage, is a human construct; its essence is fully known to us, and in cases like these, whenever we attempt to think about such notions, conception takes the place of the imagination.

3.2 Did Reid Hold This View?

I believe this is Reid's considered view: we imagine nonexistent combinations of abstract particulars, based on the sense-experiences we have of the respective tropes. To support this claim, I first show that Reid was a trope theorist, in the relevant sense, and then I argue that only on such a view can one think, as he did, that Don Quixote is an individual.

The following passage constitutes evidence that Reid thought that the properties of existing individuals are tropes:

[T]he whiteness of this sheet is one thing, whiteness is another; the conception signified by these two forms of speech are as different as the expressions: The first signifies an individual quality really existing, and is not a general conception, though it be an abstract one: The second signifies a general conception, which implies no existence, but may be predicated of every thing that is white, and in the same sense. (*EIP* V. 3, p. 367)

He argues that *the whiteness of this sheet of paper* belongs only to *this* sheet of paper, and that it is not shareable by other substances. The conception we have of such a trope is both individual and abstract, to use his terminology; or, in contemporary parlance, the whiteness of a particular sheet of paper is represented in the mind by an abstract particular. More evidence that Reid is a

¹⁹As it becomes apparent in the next section, this distinction is inspired by Reid's view.

trope theorist is provided by his view that qualities of objects are objects of sense (e. g. *EIP* II. 17, p. 200). To be such objects, they must be individuals, because Reid argues that only individuals can be objects of sense. Universals cannot be perceived, in part because they are not individuals; they are general notions, formed by abstracting away from the tropes we encounter.

Reid's belief that only individuals can be objects of sense helps him find a solution to a serious problem. The problem is generated by his idea that only objects of sense can be imagined. Other types of objects, for instance universals or even non-perceivable tropes, can be conceived, but not imagined, as he points out in *EIP* V. 6, p. 394. Does this mean that centaurs, unicorns and our favorite medieval fictional knight are objects of sense? Reid seems to be forced to say "yes", if he is committed both to the idea that only objects of sense can be imagined, and to thinking that fictional objects and characters can not only be conceived, but also imagined. Not only does this idea sound absurd, but, in addition, a very simple valid argument seems to show that centaurs are universals:

1. All and only objects of sense can be imagined.
2. Centaurs aren't objects of sense (because they don't exist.)
3. Therefore, centaurs can't be imagined (Conclusion 1.)
4. All and only universals can't be imagined.
5. Therefore, centaurs are universals. (Conclusion 2.)

Is Reid's view inconsistent, since he seems to think that centaurs are and are not objects of sense? No, I argue. If we could show that (3) above is false, (5) will not follow, and the argument will thus not be sound. To show that (3) is false, we need to give up either (1) or (2). I believe that (2) is intuitively true, so I propose to reject (1) instead and modify it to better fit Reid's view. Here is how: if I wanted to imagine a centaur, I could construct it in my imagination, starting from several individual qualities of bodies, or tropes, with which I am acquainted from perception.²⁰

²⁰This picture has a flavor which is somewhat similar to the one developed in Kripke (2013); however, abstract particulars are quite different from Kripke's abstract objects. Kripke offers even less details than Reid regarding the construal of abstract objects: we are given some guidelines, according to which the abstract objects that are found in fictions are supposed to be more like nations than sets, or numbers. The differences between the picture I'm

Whenever I imagine a centaur, I am said, for example, to imagine a *certain* human head and torso joined to a *certain* body of a horse. Both the human body-parts and the horse body-parts are individual parts of individuals. The centaur I'm thus imagining will be an *individual* centaur, since it is "constructed" out of individuals, not universals. Is the resulting centaur an object of sense? No; for that to be possible, it would have to exist, and my constructive act of imagination, no matter how creative, cannot result in a flesh-and-blood animal. However, the imagined centaur should be understood to be a compound of objects of sense, namely "the upper parts of a (certain) man", which are joined by my imagination in a different manner than they actually are, to another object of sense, namely "the body of a (certain) horse."

Reid would have to endorse this picture of how imagination works to connect us with nonexistent objects, for his claim that one can *imagine* centaurs to have any traction. On this assumption, we can modify the first premise of the argument above like this: "All and only things that are either objects of sense or combinations of objects of sense can be imagined." Here's the new argument to the conclusion that centaurs can be imagined:

- 1'. All and only things that are either objects of sense or combinations of objects of sense can be imagined.
- 2'. Centaurs are such combinations.
- 3'. Therefore, centaurs can be imagined.

On this picture, a centaur is imagined as a cluster of individual qualities or tropes, but it is not an object of sense in the same way a real table is, simply because this centaur does not exist.

This, then, is the view I am attributing to Reid: fictional characters and objects are collections of tropes, combined in ways in which nature did not intend to combine them. The tropes themselves inhere in real substances and exist in virtue of these substances' holding them together. It is, however, in virtue of the imaginer's acting in a certain way that those abstract particulars are combined and held together. I want to emphasize that Reid does not explain in any detail how

attributing to Reid and the one that Kripke developed are greater than the similarities; hence, I chose not to discuss Kripke's picture in this paper, which is focused less on how fictional proper names refer, and more on how imagination allows us to engage with fictional objects. Answering this particular question was not one of the purposes of Kripke's essay, so addressing his theory in the current paper would have taken us too far from the present concerns.

all this comes about. I am attributing this view to him based on two features of his theory: (i) he thinks that there are tropes and that one can think about them, singling them out, by a process of abstraction; and (ii) he argues that only objects of sense can be imagined. Unless we want to violate common sense and say that centaurs and the like cannot be imagined, we must either say that they are objects of sense (which is absurd!) or explain how closely related they are to objects of sense. The picture I presented here does the latter: it explains how centaurs are “made up” of objects of sense, without being objects of sense themselves.

3.3 Advantages of This View

If fictional characters and objects are related to imagination in this way and thus they must be construed as complexes of abstract particulars, we can recuperate a notion of singular thought that would apply to nonexistent objects. On Reid’s view, to have a singular thought just is to have an individual conception of something. The contrast here is with general thoughts, which are general, not as acts of the mind – they still are singular mental acts – but in virtue of the objects thought about. Having argued that, on the view I’m attributing to Reid, one can imagine individuals, like Pegasus, Sir Gawain and Don Quixote, I will now draw the obvious conclusion that one can thus have *singular imaginings* of Pegasus, Sir Gawain, and Don Quixote.²¹

These are not to the exclusion of having general conceptions of winged-horses or comical-medieval knights. One can still conceive of centaurhood as a universal. On the view I’m attributing to Reid, however, one can do more: one can conceive an *individual* nonexistent. Someone might

²¹In arguing against fictional realism, Everett (2013, p. 183-188) targets the possibility of having any kind of singular imaginings, especially in “the initial stages of unreflective or semi-reflective fiction-making” (p. 184). He argues that in these initial stages of fiction-making, we, as imaginers, do not have any type of relevant cognitive fix on any sort of fictional object. I would like to point out that Everett’s argument holds against “traditional” fictional realism, where fictional objects are thought to be abstract, Platonic, particulars. His argument, however, does not work against a view like the one I’m advocating here. If it is a question about how unreflective imagination starts the process of fiction-making, the view I’m attributing to Reid has an answer here: the somewhat unconscious combining of abstract particulars our mind has a cognitive fix on, from perception, results in the fictional creation of a combination of instance-properties. Such combinations are themselves particulars. This is all the answer a view like the one discussed here can provide. It could probably be extended to explain how such objects (or singular combinations) are referred to, but Reid was not after such an explanation. And developing the theory in this direction would take us too far from the scope of the present investigation.

wonder why this is important. I will mention one reason why this result, which cannot be obtained on the alternative view, is advantageous. If we think a moment about how logic and reasoning work, we begin to see that it's important to have an explanation of how we can "reason consequentially" about creatures of fancy (*EIP* IV. 1, p. 302). To be able to do it, we must think about the same thing during our act of reasoning; the identity of the subject – the value of the variables under an assignment – must be kept fixed throughout this activity. Even if we thought that this is not needed, strictly speaking, because we could reason well about properties and complexes of properties, being able to think about nonexistent individuals gives us more. Without allowing for nonexistent individuals to populate our domain, we would be unable to use the existential or universal instantiation rules; from a logical point of view, we need objects to instantiate properties like centaurhood, or winged-horsehood. If we accepted the model proposed here, we could be said to have something like objectual place-holders: individual combinations of tropes. Only if we adopt what I argue to be Reid's view, do we have real reference to nonexistent particulars. In this way, we can imagine Ronan, Bane, and Magorian of the *Harry Potter* novels as being three different centaurs. This is impossible on the complex universal view.

Another advantage of this view is that it does not give rise to a creation problem, similar to the one engendered by the complex universal view. On the current view, the combinations of tropes we are imagining are not made up of eternal properties. Nonexistents turn out to be combinations of abstract particulars, which *do* exist in the real world, inhering in various substances. It takes some mental effort to tease tropes apart, single them out as abstract particulars and then re-combine them according to unnatural laws, entirely at the discretion of the imaginer. Without a Cervantes, there would not have been a Don Quixote, even though the tropes Don Quixote was imagined to be made up of did really exist at the time when Cervantes was writing his story.

The converse of this idea is that, just as fictional characters come into existence, by being imagined by their authors, they can also go out of existence. If all copies of *Don Quixote* were destroyed and everyone familiar with the story died, Don Quixote himself could be said to die as well. There will be no one left behind to imagine this character and his heroic exploits. This idea

should be neither surprising, nor disturbing. Or, at least, it should not be more surprising than the fact that natural languages die out with their last native speakers.

4 Conclusion

Let us take stock. In this paper, I argued that there are two views that can explain what it is that we imagine when we imagine nonexistents: (i) the complex universals view, and (ii) the complex tropes view. Based on direct textual evidence and overall philosophical commitments, I attributed the latter view to Reid. My interpretation is an alternative to the standard interpretation of Reid, which attributes inconsistent views to him, and should be replaced by an interpretation that better explains his insight. In addition, by discussing the advantages of the view I proposed, I showed that its philosophical strengths recommend it over the other one.

Some questions will remain open, even if we adopted a view like the one advocated here. This is to be expected, and should not be regarded as worrisome, since the view I attributed to Reid does not fare any worse than other views about fictional discourse and the metaphysics of fictional objects. Some of the issues it raises, however, are interestingly difficult. It should be obvious that we do have an individuation problem, given that the fictional objects we are talking about are nonexistent. Differentiating between two nonexistents, on the current proposal, is a voluntary act, and it depends solely on the imaginer: he must choose different tropes with which he is acquainted to “create” the combination that is Ronan, which ends up being different from the one that is Bane – again referring to two of the centaurs talked about in the *Harry Potter* novels. This proposal gets things right in ways in which the complex universals view does not. On the complex universal view, for instance, a certain color universal is the same, no matter how one chooses to use it, so it would be really difficult to distinguish two brown centaurs on a view like this. If nothing else, one can be a lot more specific when describing a centaur on the view I attributed to Reid.

It is not surprising, then, that the complex trope view must face some version of the individuation problem, just as any other view attempting to explain how we interact with nonexistent

objects must. However, on the present view the reverse situation can arise: suppose that you and I live close to each other and our daily experiences will result in our being acquainted with pretty much the same objects. Given that we interact mainly with the same tropes, we might end up having the same (or sufficiently closely connected) abstract particulars in our mental arsenal. So, we might think that you and I will use the exact same tropes to constitute our own Sherlock Holmes that we end up imagining while reading some of the Conan Doyle stories. The two combinations of tropes are qualitatively the same (at least up to a point), so we might think that they are not two, but just one – on the hypothesis that qualitative identity is the only kind of identity we can work with in the case of nonexistent objects. These two combinations, however, are distinct, because one of them is imagined by me, while the other is imagined by you. I do not see this result as especially problematic, but more work needs to be done to clarify the details here. In a way, this is to be expected: we do not interact with real substances here, so we should not expect to have numerical identity hold whenever we have qualitative identity holding. Numerical and qualitative identity do coincide for actual objects, but there is no deep metaphysical reason requiring that they coincided for nonexistents, too.

Given this situation, one might think that the greatest advantage of this view is lost and that no singular imaginings of different nonexistents are possible. After all, if J. K. Rowling writes her novels having a certain centaur complex trope in mind, but when I read her novels, I will not have that same complex centaur trope in mind, what ensures that there is a connection here, between my complex trope and hers? Put differently, what ensures the continuity of singular thought across time? I suggest that this connection – between us and the author – is not grounded on the same complex trope, and that it is a mistake to expect it to be so grounded. There are similarity relations between the seminal tropes and her later ones and between the seminal tropes and ours: after all, they are all *man-horses*! There is nothing precluding us from using general elements in our imaginary singular thought, just like we are using general elements in our perceptual singular thoughts. The suggestion here is that our complex tropes are of the same kind as Rowling's because of a historical chain, going back to the seminal complex trope, or, if we like this idea better, because

she wrote the novel and we read it.²²

On the current picture, the proposal is to think that the stories give us a core to work with, and we, as active members of the audience of these stories, use our imagination to mold that core into something that is unique to each and every imaginer. This is a proposal that should be developed further, and the reasons favoring the complex trope view recommend that we do indeed develop it.

Primary Works

- Berkeley, G. (1975). *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *Philosophical Works*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons. (Original work published in 1710).
- Hume, D. (2000). *A Treatise of Human Nature*. (David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, Eds.) Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published in 1740).
- Locke, J. (1979). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. (P. Nidditch, Ed.) Oxford: Clarendon Press. (Original work published in 1700).
- Reid, T. (1997). *IHM – An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. (D. R. Brookes, Ed.) Edinburgh: University Press. (Original work published in 1764).
- Reid, T. (2002). *EIP – Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. (D. R. Brookes & K. Haakonssen, Eds.) Edinburgh: University Press. (Original work published in 1785).

References

- Block, N. (2007). Consciousness, Accessibility and the Mesh between Psychology and Neuroscience. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 30, 481–99.
- Burge, T. (2010). *Origins of Objectivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, K. (1983). Abstract Particulars and the Philosophy of Mind. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 61(2), 129–41.
- Deutsch, H. (1991). The Creation Problem. *Topoi*, 10(2), 209–225.
- Everett, A. (2013). *The Nonexistent*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gallie, R. (1997). Reid: Conception, Representation and Innate Ideas. *Hume Studies*, 23(2), 315–35.
- Kail, P. J. E. (2010). *Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²²I thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for pointing out that this is an issue worthy of attention. And I thank Alex Radulescu for helping me see the beginning of a solution to this problem.

Kripke, S. (1980). *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Kripke, S. (2013). *Reference and Existence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lamarque, P. (2010). *Work and Object: Explorations into the Metaphysics of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parsons, T. (1980). *Nonexistent Objects*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Radford, C. (1975). How can we be moved by the fate of anna karenina? *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplemental Vol. 49*, 67–80.

Russell, B. (1967). *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*. Baltimore: Penguin Books. (Original work published in 1940).

Walton, K. (1990). *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Wolterstorff, N. (2001). *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zalta, E. (1983). *Abstract Objects. An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics*. Dordrecht: Reidel.