

Logic and Language

Empty/Fictional Names

Evaluate the following argument: "If it's true that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, then Sherlock Holmes exists; but Sherlock Holmes doesn't exist. So it's not true that Sherlock Holmes is a detective."

Essential Reading

- Terence Parsons, "Referring to Nonexistent Objects", *Theory and Decision*, vol. 11 (1979), pp. 95-110
- Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1982), chapter 10
- Nathan Salmon, "Nonexistence", *Nous*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1998), pp. 277-319

Additional Reading

- Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions", *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 75, no. 1 (1978), pp. 5-27
- David Lewis, "Truth in Fiction", in his *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1983)
- David Braun, "Empty Names", *Nous*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1993), pp. 449-69
- Mark Sainsbury, *Reference Without Referents*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005)

Past Paper Questions

- 2000, Q6: If "Vulcan" does not refer, how can "Vulcan does not exist" be true?
- 2003, Q2: Can a name have meaning even though it does not refer?
- 2005, Q12: Does it make sense to say that there are things that do not exist?
- 2007, Q3: Is the sentence "Hamlet does not exist" true?
- 2009, Q6: Is the sentence "Sherlock Holmes is a detective" true?
- 2011, Q3b: Does the name "Sherlock Holmes" have a referent?
- 2013, Q5: "Sherlock Holmes is more famous than any living detective." Could this sentence be true?
- 2014, Q5a: "If names are not disguised definite descriptions, we cannot account for the meaning of names such as 'Sherlock Holmes'." Discuss.