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Perspectives in Imaginative Engagement with Fiction[*]

I take up three philosophical puzzles about our emotional and evaluative responses to fiction which are often discussed in relative isolation: the puzzles of *fictional emotions*, *imaginative resistance*, and *disparate response*. I argue that a consistent solution to all three puzzles requires appealing to a "perspective" on the fictional world. Perspectives are tools for organizing and coloring our thoughts, and guide our emotional and evaluative responses. "Trying on" a perspective requires actually, albeit temporarily, organizing one's thoughts in a new way, and can produce real, and lingering, cognitive effects.

§1: The need for perspective

Three puzzles about our emotional and evaluative engagement with fiction have recently received a fair amount of philosophical attention, although rarely at the same time. The first problem is how we can have emotional responses to fiction at all, given that as readers we realize that the depicted characters and events don't exist. Many philosophers believe that emotions are essentially connected to belief, desire, and action; as Kendall Walton (1978, 21, fn. 15) says, "it is plausible that…pity, worry about, hate, and envy are such that one cannot have them without believing that their objects exist, just as one cannot fear something without believing that it threatens them". Likewise, it might seem that I cannot genuinely hate or fear something unless I'm disposed to act in certain ways toward it. But these connections to belief and action are absent in fiction. This is the puzzle of *fictional emotions*.[1]

One solution to this puzzle, advocated most prominently by Walton, is that we don't really have emotional responses to fictional characters and events, but merely imagine doing so. But if that is right, it begins to look strange that we would ever refuse to play along with the author's instructions to imagine having certain emotions. The same question arises for normative evaluations: why should we be unwilling or unable to even imagine that certain claims about what is right, beautiful, or funny are true,

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[1] Cf. e.g. Walton 1978, Levinson 1997.

given that we happily play along in imagining many other highly implausible, even impossible, things? This is the puzzle of *imaginative resistance*.[2]

It's natural to respond that the second puzzle arises only if we solve the first by relocating our emotional and evaluative attitudes to fiction within the scope of what is imagined. Many people find this absurd; they think a full engagement with fiction requires having genuine emotional and evaluative responses to the characters and events it depicts. And that's just not the sort of thing that I can choose to do willy-nilly, in response to an author's demands (Moran 1994).

But if that's right, then we confront a third puzzle: the responses we have to characters and events in fiction often differ considerably from those we would have if we confronted them in real life. I find it funny rather than cruel that the Three Stooges bop each other over the head with heavy implements. I find the events in a Stephen King novel thrilling rather than disgusting. I root for Scarlett O'Hara to get her man and her mansion rather than to emancipate her slaves. This is the puzzle of *disparate response*.[3] So *something* imaginative must be going on here; and this makes it look like our emotional responses to fiction can't really be genuine after all. And this seems to send us right back where we started.

We need to explain our imaginative engagement with fiction in a way that handles all three puzzles. I will argue that to do this, we need the notion of a perspective on a fictional world. A perspective requires more than just imagining that a set of propositions is true, or even imagining experiencing something. Rather, it involves structuring one's thinking in certain ways, so that certain sorts of properties stick out as especially surprising, notable, or explanatorily central. I will argue that it is this structuring of thoughts, rather than belief or disposition to action *per se,* that most directly underwrites emotions, and in turn, evaluative responses. Our responses to characters and events in a fiction will differ from our normal responses whenever the fiction leads us to structure our overall understanding of the narrated facts differently than we normally would. Works of fiction give us an

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[2] See especially Hume 1757/1985 and Gendler 2000. As several authors have noted, this label encompasses a family of related puzzles, which I discuss in §5.
[3] Shaun Nichols (2006, 464) discusses what he calls the problem of 'disparate affect', which is one species of the puzzle of disparate response. Currie 1997 calls it the "problem of personality."

important kind of knowledge by affording us intimate, experiential access to alternative perspectives. But we are not always willing or able to structure our thinking as the author wants, nor should we always try.

The intuition that perspectives, and not just propositions, play a crucial role in explaining our engagement with fiction is not new. Richard Moran is particularly explicit about the need for perspectives:

> Imagination with respect to the cruel, the embarrassing, or the arousing involves something more like a point of view, a total perspective on the situation, rather than just the truth of a specifiable proposition. And imagining along these lines involves something more like genuine rehearsal, "trying on" the point of view, trying to determine what it is like to inhabit it (1994, 105).

Similarly, Tamar Szabó Gendler claims that the puzzle of imaginative resistance reveals that "imagining involves something in between belief, on the one hand, and mere supposition, on the other" (2000, 56): something she calls a "point of view" or a "way of looking." Walton (1994, 1997), Currie (1997, 2010), Dadlez (1997), Carroll (2001b, c), Goldie (2003), and Gaut (2007), among others, all make at least some appeal to perspectives, outlooks, frames, orientations, or seeing-as in explaining our emotional and evaluative responses to fiction.

The problem is that it's not at all obvious what a perspective is, or what it might mean to "try on" an alternative one. Perspectives are messy and amorphous – arguably the aspect of our mental lives that most eludes specification in precise, propositional terms. By contrast, talk about imagining propositions to be true is admirably clear. We have an *attitude*: imagined belief (or desire), toward a *content*: a proposition. This way of talking fits nicely into a standard model of the propositional attitudes, and promises a unified analysis in terms of a "single code" operating in distinct but parallel systems (Nichols 2006). As Walton puts it,

> Principles of generation…constitute conditional prescriptions about what is to be imagined in what circumstances. And the propositions that are to be imagined are fictional. Fictionality has turned out to be analogous to truth… Imagining aims at the fictional as belief aims at the true. What is true is to be believed; what is fictional is to be imagined (1990, 41).

Few theorists would insist that imagining is always exclusively a matter of entertaining propositions.[4] In particular, Walton emphasizes that participation in a fiction involves "not just imagining *that* such and such is true of ourselves," but "imagining *doing* things, *experiencing* things, *feeling* in certain ways"; and he decries the "surprisingly prevalent assumption that imagining…can be only a clinical, antiseptic, intellectual exercise" (1997, 38). But even when philosophers like Walton do appeal to non-propositional forms of imagination, they still typically construe it in terms of content: of *what* is done, experienced, or felt. By contrast, perspectives depend at least as much on *how* one interprets or construes a given content as on what one imagines. Unless we can articulate a sufficiently precise notion of perspectives which captures this feature, talk about "trying on perspectives" will seem like an illegitimate dodge into obscurity. But without perspectives, I think the three puzzles will continue to appear puzzling.

§2: From Characterizations to Perspectives

2.1: Literal and Metaphorical Perspectives

Our first task, then, is to make the notion of a perspective precise enough to do real explanatory work. A natural place to start is by treating talk of "adopting a perspective" quite literally: say, in terms of Richard Wollheim's (1984, 74) notion of iconic, central imagining, in which I imagine a sequence of events in a dramatic manner, by placing myself at some location within the scene.[5] *Prima facie*, this offers a straightforward explanation for both fictional emotions and disparate response. If I imagine, in a vivid and robust way, being in some highly charged situation, then I am also likely to imagine having certain correlative emotional responses imagined. And if I imagine being some other person in that situation, then I will naturally imagine having their responses instead.

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[4] Pylyshyn (2003) is a notable exception.
[5] Cf. Walton's (1990, 29) discussion of *de se* imagination; Moran's (1994, 104) suggestion that the appropriate imaginative engagement with fiction is "dramatic"; Currie's (1995, 1997) descriptions of empathy in terms of simulation, "empathetic projection" or "imaginative role-playing"; and Murray Smith's (1995, 80) appeal to Wollheimian central imagining in engagement with film. I discuss Currie (1995, 1997) more fully in §4.

Despite its initial plausibility, such a simple account is clearly inadequate. First, my emotional responses to a character's adventures depend upon my beliefs about the fictional world as a whole, where this often includes facts of which that character is ignorant: thus, I fear for the heroine fixing a late-night cup of hot chocolate precisely because I know, as she doesn't, that a burglar is hidden in the pantry, or that there will be a horrible gas explosion.[6] Second, and more generally, in reading fiction I often don't, or don't only, locate myself imaginatively inside each successive scene, whether as myself or as another.[7] Instead, I adopt a perspective on the fictional world as a whole: my perspective is acentral and *external*.[8] Finally, and most importantly, we need to explain how a single perspective can apply to multiple situations or even multiple worlds, including the real world. So, for instance, Gendler argues that imaginative resistance arises "because in trying to make that world fictional, [the author] is providing us with a way of looking at *this* world which we prefer not to embrace" (2000, 79). To make sense of this sort of talk, we need to understand perspectives in a way that allows them to be extracted from particular characters and scenes and transported across worlds. But precisely because iconic central imagining is so intimately tied up with the particular scene being imagined, it cannot accommodate this.

I think we can achieve a clearer understanding of the relevant sort of perspective by directing our attention to a range of uses of the imagination that also invite talk of perspectives, but where it is quite clear that this talk cannot be taken literally. Thus, consider the following sequence of ways in which I might present a thought to you.[9] Suppose I tell you that Bill, a mutual acquaintance, was a high school quarterback who dated the captain of the cheerleading team. I might tell you this with several possible aims. Minimally, I might just want to give you some information about Bill: to add to your stock of

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[6] Cf. Moran 1994, 91; Carroll 2001a, Goldie 2003. Further, as Tamar Gendler (p.c.) points out, I can learn such things through a wide range of cues: most obviously, non-linearity and foreshadowing in narrative, but also music in film, violations of genre expectations, and so on.

[7] This may be different for film, which does seem to involve locating oneself at the margin of the depicted scene. There also appear to be significant differences across individuals in the degree to which they cultivate an "internal engagement" with fictions, by putting themselves into characters' shoes.

[8] Cf. Goldie 2003, 57; Currie 2010, 49.

[9] Gendler (2006) also identifies a parallel between metaphoric perspectives and perspectives in fiction. In my (2008), I contrast the way perspectives are deployed when we present a proposition in a parable, as a true telling detail, and as a metaphor; in my (2009), I contrast the way perspectives are deployed when we present a proposition as a false but revealing just-so story and as a metaphor.

beliefs about him. More robustly, though, I might want you to take this fact to be especially typical or revealing of him – to treat it as a "telling detail." If that is my intent, then I might introduce it by saying: "Here's what you need to know about Bill", or "Bill's just the sort of guy who…"   Further, I might present this same story, in the same revelatory spirit, while adding a crucial disclaimer: "Actually, Bill never really was a quarterback. But he might as well have been – that's exactly the kind of guy he is." With that addition, we've moved from fact to fiction: the telling detail has become a "just-so story." This change has important ramifications for what information you should take away from my story, of course. But it doesn't much affect my basic communicative purpose, which is to lead you into the best overall way of thinking about Bill, to give you an overall sense of the kind of guy he is. Finally, we can move from fiction to metaphor: by telling you, "Bill is the quarterback in our department," I might inform you that he plays the sort of role in our department that quarterbacks play in football. In this case, whether or not Bill ever was a quarterback is irrelevant to my point, which concerns the kind of person he is, and how he interacts with those around him.

In all three of the latter cases, in contrast to the first, minimal one, I'm asking you to use your way of thinking about quarterbacks to organize your overall thinking about Bill. In order to have a non-metaphorical term for thought in which one mental representation structures another, much as a concept structures perception in literal cases of seeing-as, I'll refer to it as *aspectual thought*. And in order to have a theory-neutral term for the 'ways of thinking' on which aspectual thought operates, I'll call them *characterizations*.[10] As a first pass, we can say that a characterization is a stereotype or schema, and that a perspective assimilates one's thinking about a particular subject (e.g. Bill) to a more general stereotype (e.g. of quarterbacks).[11] But that's just a rough approximation, and one that leaves the role of perspectives in fiction mysterious. A more adequate story requires a more detailed account of characterizations, aspects, and perspectives.

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[10] For a fuller account of aspectual thought and its application to metaphor, see my (2003).
[11] This is roughly how Glucksberg and Keysar (1990) claim that metaphors work. I offer some criticisms of their view in my (2006b).

2.2: Characterizations, Aspects, and Perspectives

Characterizations are the cognitive materials on which and with which perspectives operate. Three main features of characterizations will be important for addressing our puzzles: their content, the sort of endorsement they require, and their structure. First, characterizations, like concepts and stereotypes, have contents insofar as they apply collections of properties to a subject. For instance, my characterization of quarterbacks includes their being natural leaders, affable, and a bit shallow. In addition to such general traits, characterizations also often include more specific, experientially-represented properties: thus, I think of quarterbacks as having a certain sort of square jaw, gleaming teeth, and ready smile. Some such properties, like certain ways of walking or talking, are so specific and experientially dependent that we lack established expressions for them, and can only refer to them demonstratively or metaphorically.[12] Importantly, these include affectively-laden properties concerning how the subject tends to make one feel, such as the terror of encountering a stern professor in the hall, or the awe of walking into a sunlit cathedral.

So far, none of this distinguishes characterizations in principle from either stereotypes or concepts. But where stereotypes are ways of thinking about *types*, characterizations can also represent individual persons, objects, and events, such as George W. Bush, the White House, or Barack Obama's inauguration; although it obviously makes an enormous difference for other cognitive purposes, the sort and specificity of the entity that a characterization represents makes no difference to the characterization's internal structure and constituents. Further, where stereotypes are communally-shared ways of thinking, characterizations can be quite idiosyncratic: my characterization of quarterbacks may not match yours, and I might have a characterization of something the rest of the community doesn't notice, such as my route to work. Thus, stereotypes should be seen as a special case of characterizations.

The second major feature of characterizations, which strongly differentiates them from concepts (but not stereotypes), is that they don't always require commitment to their subjects actually possessing

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[12] I argue that metaphors sometimes provide our only access to such properties in my (2006a).

the properties ascribed to them.[13] Thus, I'm under no illusion that quarterbacks are really more likely to

be affable or to have square jaws. Still, there is a species of commitment involved in my characterizing

quarterbacks in this way: I take those features to be *fitting* for them. If I were casting a quarterback in a

movie, for instance, I would look for an actor with those features. Similarly, some features in my

characterizations of individuals might be 'just-so' or apocryphal facts which I take to be fitting even while

admitting them to be false in actuality. Conversely, I may also acknowledge that a subject actually

possesses certain features which I marginalize as not fitting. For instance, I might think that Bill's

miserly concern with precise equitability in dividing the bill doesn't fit with his reckless enthusiasm for

life, and that a more carefree generosity would be more fitting (if less prudent) instead.

When assessments of fittingness do come apart from how we take a subject to actually be, it's

often because we believe that an individual is exceptional or aberrant for its type. (In particular, because

stereotypes allow for exceptions because they have generic force.) However, intuitions of fittingness also

have a normative, aesthetic basis. Arthur Danto (1981, 207) invokes the relevant notion of 'fit' in

connection with style:

> The structure of a style is like the structure of a personality…This concept of consistency has little
> to do with formal consistency. It is the consistency rather of the sort we invoke when we say that
> a rug does not fit with the other furnishings of the room, or a dish does not fit with the structure of
> a meal, or a man does not fit with his own crowd. It is the fit of taste which is involved, and this
> cannot be reduced to formula. It is an activity governed by reasons, no doubt, but reasons that will
> be persuasive only to someone who has judgment or taste already.

If we were more fully rational, we would sharply distinguish what we take to be fitting from we believe to

be actual or even probable. But in fact, we often allow intuitions grounded in stereotypes to drive our

beliefs about probability and actuality, with highly problematic results. In fiction, where the central

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[13] Many philosophers have argued that concepts are distinct from prototypes – or what psychologists
typically call 'concepts' – in part because some features encoded in prototypes don't determine category
membership. The point is even clearer for stereotypes. See especially Rey 1983, Fodor and Lepore 1996,
and Laurence and Margolis 2000.

concern is more with aesthetic satisfaction than factual accuracy, fittingness plays an even more pervasive, and less obviously insidious role.[14]

The third major feature of characterizations, which will shoulder the bulk of the explanatory work to come, is that characterizations don't merely consist in collections of properties, but structure those properties in a complex pattern that varies along at least two distinct dimensions of psychological importance. Along the first dimension, some features are more *prominent* than others. Prominence is roughly equivalent to what Amos Tversky (1977) calls *salience*, which he in turn defines as a function of *intensity* and *diagnosticity*. A feature is intense to the extent that it has a high signal-to-noise ratio: it sticks out relative to the background, like a bright light or a hugely bulbous nose. A feature is diagnostic to the extent that it is useful for classifying objects as belonging to a certain group, like the number of stripes on a soldier's uniform. Both intensity and diagnosticity are highly context-sensitive: in a room full of bulbous noses, or on a heavily scarred face, an ordinary bulbous nose will not stand out; and in such a room, knowing that the man I'm looking for has a bulbous nose won't help me to identify him.

Along the second dimension, some features are more *central* than others, insofar as one treats them as causing, motivating, or otherwise explaining many of the subject's other features.[15] For instance, I take a quarterback's being a natural leader to explain more of his other features – why he's popular and confident, why he smiles so readily, indeed why he's a quarterback at all – than his having a square jaw does. A good measure of centrality is how much else about the subject one thinks would change if that feature were removed.

Assignments of prominence and centrality are highly intuitive and holistic, in a way that the analogy with seeing-as helps to make vivid. Contrast the two ways of seeing Figure 1 below. On either way of seeing the figure, the role that each constituent element plays depends on the roles played by many

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[14] D'Arms and Jacobsen invoke a notion of fittingness, but understood as "a relation analogous to that between a true belief and the world" (2000, 68) tailored specifically for emotion: an emotion is fitting insofar as it has the right 'shape' and 'size' for its object, independent of broader, moral or prudential concerns. While their notion is important, not just in general but in the current context, I also think we need to recognize the role of fitting as Danto, I, and others construe it.

[15] Cf. Thagard 1989, Sloman et al 1998.

other elements. When I switch from seeing the figure one way to the other, the relative prominence and centrality of those various elements shift dramatically. Further, this causes the basic elements themselves to represent different things: for instance, the same set of pixels comes to be seen as a nose, or as a wart.

Figure 1: The Old Crone/Young Lady

Much the same effect applies to characterizations: the same property can take on markedly different significances – especially, different emotional and evaluative colorings – depending on the larger structure in which it's embedded. Thus, if I take Bill to be at root a sociable guy, then his teasing remarks are likely to seem like harmless attempts at bonding; while if I take him to be motivated primarily by a desire for control, those same remarks will appear malicious and manipulative.

Armed with this sketch of characterizations, we can now turn to aspects and perspectives. In place of our earlier rough approximation, I can now say that aspectual thought involves using one characterization to structure another: for example, using your characterization of quarterbacks to structure your characterization of Bill, or your characterization of Napoleon to structure your characterization of George W. Bush. I think this restructuring works by taking the most prominent and central features in the framing characterization (e.g., of quarterbacks), seeking matches for them within the subject characterization (e.g., of Bill), and then raising the prominence and centrality of those matched features of the subject's.[16] Like characterizations themselves, the process of restructuring one characterization in

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[16] This is roughly the way Gentner (1983, 2001) claims we understand analogies; see my (2003) and (2006b) for discussion. The basic process is the same whether we take the thought as a telling detail, a just-so story, or a metaphor. Note that because the restructuring depends on both characterizations, the

light of another is holistic, intuitive, and often largely unreflective: we come to 'see' Bill as a quarterback, much as we come to see an old crone in Figure 1, without knowing quite how we did it. When we do think of something under an aspect, our thinking about it gains a new, overall coherence. This brings significant cognitive benefits, including ease of navigation among constituent features and an increased ability to predict further features and future behavior. But it can also have important disadvantages, such as causing us to ignore causally efficacious or diagnostically relevant properties that don't find salient matches.

Finally, perspectives. Recall from §2.1 that for perspectives to do the explanatory work we need, they must be general enough to apply across multiple scenes and worlds. Thus, perspectives need to encompass an overall way of approaching and interpreting the world at large, and not just particular things within it. I suggest that the best way to understand perspectives in this broad sense is as a general disposition to form certain sorts of characterizations of whatever particular entities one encounters – that is, to notice certain sorts of features, and so to treat them as prominent while ignoring others; to seek certain sorts of explanations, and so to assign certain structures of centrality; and to find certain combinations of features especially fitting.[17]

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same framing characterization produces different effects when applied to different subjects: for instance, if we think of Juliet or of Louis XIV under the aspect of the sun. And because characterizations are highly context-dependent, both in their constituents and in their structure, the same pair of characterizations can produce quite different effects in different cognitive contexts.

[17] Although the theorists mentioned above don't specify what they mean by perspectives, what they do say is largely compatible with my account. Thus, Gendler (2000, 69) describes "ways of seeing things" as "ways that focus on some elements of the situation while ignoring others," and says that "framing things in certain ways activates certain behavioral dispositions and affective propensities" (2006, 151), with stereotypes constituting one instance of this phenomenon. Walton (1994, 33) describes an "orientation," which is "distinct from one's beliefs and can vary independently of them," as having "a lot to do with the organization, salience, and accessibility of what one believes." Moran (1994, 100) says that "There are more ways of changing someone's mind than changing his or her beliefs… much of what [philosophy and literature] aim at is not on the level of specifically altered beliefs but rather…changes in the associations and comparisons one makes, differences in the vivid or 'felt' appreciation of something already known, or changes in one's habits of attention and sense of the important and the trifling." Finally, in his (2010), Currie develops a notion of narrative 'point of view' which is more abstract than the model in his earlier (1995, 1997) work, and which is substantively largely compatible with my view. However, he preserves his original perceptual model in defining narrative point of view in terms of an agent's *limitations* in awareness, conceptual resources, and capacities for action (2010, 89); more specifically, he claims that "if [two people's] points of view are distinct, then there must be at least one

2.3: Perspectives and Propositions

Suppose you are willing to grant that we do employ something like the three sorts of mental structures I've just described: characterizations, aspects, and perspectives. In what sense do they provide an alternative to the propositional, content-based analyses of imagination that I criticized in §1?

At least three of their crucial features can be captured propositionally. First, although some theorists (e.g. Novitz 1987, 120) describe beliefs and other mental states that require experiential acquaintance with a direct object as 'non-propositional', it is relatively uncontroversial that demonstrative concepts can bring direct objects within the scope of propositional attitudes and inference. More people might be inclined to claim that assessments of fittingness are non-propositional, given their essentially normative character. However, it seems clear that normative concepts, including fittingness, need to be treated propositionally in order to capture their role in thought, logic and conversation, and especially their intimate interaction with purely descriptive contents.[18] Finally, assignments of prominence and centrality can easily be modeled as higher-order, context-dependent relations between individuals or kinds, and (fitting) properties, perhaps further relativized to cognitive goals.

Instead, the crucial sense in which characterizations are non-propositional depends, not on their representational content, but on the role they play in thought. We rarely explicitly entertain or endorse higher-order propositions about fittingness, prominence, and centrality. But even when we do, this isn't equivalent to characterizing the relevant subject in the relevant way. Characterizing requires actually structuring one's thinking so that the relevant lower-order features play an appropriately prominent or central role in one's thinking. In perception, there is a phenomenologically striking and practically efficacious difference between "seeing-as" and "looking plus thinking" (Wittgenstein 1958, 197): for instance, I might know that *this* feature in Figure 1 represents the old crone's nose, and *that* one a wart,

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thing which one of them could see or hear or tell or do which the other could not" (2010, 90). As such, his model cannot account for the fact that perspectives are the sorts of things we can actively embrace and advocate to one another, and about which we can differ even given agreement in the base-level facts.
[18] See Schroeder 2008 for recent discussion.

without successfully seeing the figure *as* (a picture of) an old crone. So too in the case of characterizing in thought. Suppose John tells me, in detail, about his characterization of Bill: which features he takes to be especially important, their explanatory relations, and so on. I might endorse all of these propositions, because I trust John's judgment about Bill, without ever managing to 'get' the relevant characterization, because the relevant features don't intuitively leap out as prominent or central in my own mind. Further, just as with literal seeing-as, getting the relevant propositions to play the relevant organizational role in thought is partly, but not entirely, under one's willful control: I can make it easier to see or characterize something in a certain way by directing my active attention toward some features and away from others, but ultimately the 'click' of holistic understanding is something that just happens to me (or doesn't).

This basic point extends with added force to aspects and perspectives. Aspects are indeed crucially concerned with propositions – for instance, the proposition *that Bill is a quarterback* – but explicitly entertaining the relevant proposition is neither necessary nor sufficient for applying the correlative aspect. Rather, one must actually use the characterization associated with the framing topic (e.g. quarterbacks) to structure one's overall thoughts about the subject (e.g. Bill). An aspect is thus more aptly described as a *tool* for thinking than as a thought itself: rather than adding a new belief, it gives us a new way to organize and manipulate beliefs we already had. Applying an aspect may lead us to entertain or endorse new propositions, either about the fittingness, prominence, and centrality of known features, or about new base-level features. But it might merely enable us to navigate more efficiently among the existing base-level facts, and to assimilate or reject new information more easily. Finally, where an aspect is at least a way of using the characterization associated with a proposition's predicate to structure one's characterization of its subject, a perspective is even more open-ended and amorphous, insofar as it applies to indefinitely many subjects, and need not be associated with any particular proposition at all.

Despite their non-propositionality, we can still endorse, reject, and argue about characterizations, aspects, and perspectives. Endorsing a characterization amounts to accepting that its assignments of fittingness, prominence, and centrality are both consistent with the objective distribution of properties in the world (modulo discrepancies introduced by fittingness) and conducive to achieving one's current

cognitive goals. Endorsing an aspect amounts to accepting that a useful, insightful characterization of the subject can be generated via matching to prominent and central features of the framing characterization. And endorsing a perspective amounts to committing oneself to cultivating an ongoing disposition to structure one's thoughts in a certain way: to noticing and being interested in certain sorts of features, to assigning certain sorts of explanatory structures, and to responding experientially, emotionally, and evaluatively in certain sorts of ways.

§3: Characterizations and the Puzzle of Fictional Emotions

Our emotional responses to fiction are *prima facie* puzzling: phenomenologically, they are nearly as vivid as ordinary emotions, but they are also disconnected from action, and in some sense voluntarily undertaken despite being often painful. In this section, I argue that we have independent reason to think that emotions are more directly connected to characterizations than to beliefs; and that recognizing the role of characterizations in emotional response removes the primary obstacles to classifying our responses to fiction as real.

Many theorists have treated emotions as perspectival, in ways that talk of characterizations helps make precise. For instance, Noël Carroll (2001, 224) says that "[t]he emotions focus our attention. They make certain features of situations salient, and they cast those features in a special phenomenological light. The emotions 'gestalt', we might say, situations."[19] Both characterizations and emotions are perception-like in imposing an intuitive, coherent structure on a field of constituent features in a way that involves active attention but is not fully under voluntary control. But the connection between them is tighter than just a mutual analogy to perception: they are closely linked causally, insofar as different characterizations of the same set of facts produce, and are produced by, different emotions. Thus, if I am

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[19] Likewise, Eva Dadlez (1997, 102) writes,
    [E]motions can be characterized as ways of entertaining or experiencing thoughts….Here, emotions are treated as selective ways of attending to the contents of one's thoughts. Emotions become modes of attending, each of which is governed and informed by a different conception of salience and each of which involves a focus on a different set of characteristics.
Cf. also Rorty 1980, de Sousa 1987, Calhoun 1994, Robinson 2005, and Currie 2010, 98.

angry with Bill for being late, then other occasions on which he has done similar things will become especially prominent in my mind, and I am likely to interpret them as all explained by the same quality: negligence, say, or self-centeredness. By contrast, if I decide that his actions are explained by confusion and an overcommitted desire to please, then I will focus on different past events and character traits, and am likely to feel more pity than anger.[20]

Characterizations don't automatically produce emotions.[21] We can characterize certain subjects, such as philosophical views, without any emotions at all, and we can attend to our beliefs about emotionally-laden subjects while bracketing both our characterizations and emotions. But the gap between characterizations and emotions is considerably narrower than that between belief and emotion. In particular, when our emotional responses are out of kilter with our reflective beliefs, this is typically because those beliefs conflict with our operative characterizations: we can't help but think of the subject in a way we know not to be fully accurate; and we attempt to modulate those emotions by recalibrating the characterization.[22] Further, it considerably more difficult to imagine someone thinking about an emotion-relevant topic by way of the intuitive, holistic modes of attention that constitute characterizations without responding emotionally than it is to imagine someone coolly reflecting on their beliefs about that same topic. Finally, in addition to these causal connections, there are also important normative relations between characterizations and emotions: as Danto (1981, 169) says, "like beliefs and actions, …emotions…are embedded in structures of justification. There are things we know we ought to feel given a certain characterization of the conditions we are under." In part because the same set of factual beliefs can justify distinct emotional responses when embedded in distinct structuring characterizations, our arguments about the appropriateness of emotions often turn more on differences of interpretation – prominence, explanation, and fittingness – than on bare differences of fact.

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[20] Characterizations and perspectives also affect what we remember. Lee-Sammons and Whitney (1991) show that readers' recall of facts in a narrative is significantly influenced by the perspective they adopt: for instance, whether they are asked to read a story about a "fine old home" from a homeowner's perspective or a burglar's.
[21] Thanks to Ishani Maitra for pressing this point.
[22] This is a natural interpretation of cognitive behavior therapy.

Thus, we have good substantive reasons to think that characterizations play a more direct role in underwriting emotional responses as beliefs *per se* do. Further, from theoretical perspective, introducing characterizations allows us respect the representational or cognitive dimension of emotions while avoiding 'judgmentalism' – the view that emotions are, or essentially require, beliefs. It is virtually undeniable that emotions have some essential representational or cognitive dimension; and it can easily seem that beliefs are the best candidate for capturing this dimension, given the inadequacy of the other standard candidates. On the one hand, entertaining propositions regularly fails to engage emotion (Moran 1994, Nichols 2006). Moran (1994, 104), Currie (1997), Walton (1997) and others suggest dramatic rehearsal as a more plausible alternative; but at least without more elaboration, this is also inadequate, both because we often have occurrent emotional responses to people and events without actively rehearsing specific scenes involving them, simply in virtue of bringing facts about them to active awareness; and also because we can mentally rehearse many scenes, even emotionally sensitive ones, in a cool and dispassionate way.

However, judgmentalism is also implausible, not only because it stipulatively rules out the possibility of genuine emotions toward fiction, but also because it fails to explain how we can be capable of entertaining beliefs about subjects that matter deeply to us in a cool, dispassionate way. Characterizations provide another option. Characterizing a subject does not require believing that it possesses the attributed features, since one can endorse those features' fittingness while denying their actual application. More importantly, one can 'try on' a characterization without actually endorsing even the fittingness of its constituent features, by structuring one's thoughts about the subject in the relevant patterns of prominence and centrality. Nor is there any reason to assume that one must believe the subject to exist; all that is required to have a characterization is to structure a complex collection of features together in an intuitive whole, as applying to a single individual or type; as I said in §2.2, whether that characterization is of a genuine individual or a type makes no difference to the characterization's internal

structure and content.[23] At the same time, though, even 'trying on' a characterization constitutes a robust

mental state that has significant practical cognitive effects, and that one cannot summon at will.[24]

We can now pinpoint what is and is not real about our emotional engagement with fiction. On

the one hand, our emotions are real insofar as they have palpable physiological and affective qualities,

which are causally and normatively grounded in a cognitive state that is not itself merely imaginative or

imagined. Characterizing a subject involves actually structuring one's attention to its constituent features

in the relevant pattern, and not merely imagining that one is doing so, or even imagining doing so. The

realist about fictional emotions can thus insist that characterizations and affective/physiological responses

together constitute genuine emotions, and that these can be directed toward characters and events we

know to be fictional. On the other hand, our emotional engagement with fiction also differs from typical

emotions, insofar as both our emotions and our characterizations are also normally grounded, causally and

normatively, in beliefs about how the subject really is, and insofar as they are evolutionarily designed to

produce action. The anti-realist can insist that these connections, which are absent in the case of fiction,

also partially constitute genuine emotions.[25]

My own view is that our cognitive and affective responses to fiction are sufficiently continuous

with our ordinary emotions to warrant being classified as real. They display the same basic affect, the

same basic interactions between thought and affect, and the same specificity and directedness. Further, as

various theorists have pointed out, we respond emotionally to a wide range of non-fictional situations that

we don't believe to be actual and/or toward which we can't act: we become angry imagining the

possibility of being unfairly denied a promotion, or feel hope as we read the history of an endeavor we

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[23] Presumably one cannot have (non-empty) singular thoughts about nonexistent subjects; but one can collect multiple quantificational thoughts about someone with a certain name into a single mental file.
[24] Cf. Moran 1994, 93.
[25] Even here, characterizations are helpful, insofar as they help to explain why we have *quasi*-emotional responses to fiction. (Walton (1978, 14, fn. 10) acknowledges that his account lacks a solution to this problem.) Quasi-emotions are mental states which are physiologically identical to real emotions but with imagined belief in place of genuine doxastic commitment. Because physiological responses are generally involuntary, they are not something an author can prescribe her readers to have; and we've seen that merely imagining propositions to be true, and even dramatic rehearsal, can fail to trigger these responses.

know to have failed.[26] Anti-realists about fictional emotions don't usually want to treat all of these cases as unreal. They also typically allow that we can have genuine emotional responses to *types* of situations and people in virtue of reading fiction.[27] Thus, I think we lack the sort of principled, causally and normatively relevant distinction that would be needed to override ordinary readers' vehement commitment to the reality of their emotional responses. But I also think that once we've gotten clear on the relevant causal and narrative connections, the remaining issue is largely terminological.[28]

§4: Perspectives, Personalities, and The Puzzle of Disparate Response

The question of how and why we respond differently to fiction than to real life is especially pressing if one endorses the reality of our emotional responses to fiction; it seems more natural to predict that we should be incapable or unwilling to respond differently to fiction than to reality, and so that when authors demand alternative responses imaginative resistance should ensue. At the same time, it is clear that ordinary readers do often engage fully with fictions which invite them to respond in ways that depart significantly from the way they would if they encountered the same situations in real life. Specific examples are likely to be controversial, but many people cite *Lolita, Natural Born Killers*, *Pulp Fiction*, *The Stranger*, and many of Philip Roth's novels in this context. Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is

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[26] Moran 1994, 78; Goldie 2003, 56. Some specific emotions may require a direct connection to belief and/or action; fear *of* some object *for* oneself seems like the most plausible candidate here (thanks to Kent Bach for discussion). But many other emotions, like irritation or awe, don't seem to involve any direct connection to belief or action. (Moran (1994, 81) emphasizes the variety of emotion in this respect; see also D'Arms and Jacobson 2003.)

[27] E.g. Walton 1997, 38. Thanks to Richard Eldridge for emphasizing this point.

[28] Walton (1997, 46) almost agrees. A related puzzle to whether we can have genuine emotional responses to fiction is how it can be rational for us to respond emotionally to fiction (e.g. Radford 1995, Gendler and Kovakovich 2005, Matravers 2005). Here, we can say that an emotion is rational (or fitting, in D'Arms and Jacobson sense) insofar as it is grounded in an appropriate correlative characterization, which itself accurately reflects the represented facts. Emotions toward fictional characters and events are not (typically) unfitting or irrational in this sense. Nor is it irrational to engage emotionally with fictions as a whole, even to have affectively negative emotions toward fictions, insofar as doing so helps one to become a richer person, and as it is an integral part of our overall pleasure in engaging with the fiction. (Further, Gendler and Kovakovich (2005) argue on empirical grounds that practical decision-making requires emotional response to situations which are known to be non-actual.) Perhaps there is a sense in which it is irrational to care about something to which we have absolutely no practical connection, even a future one. But from this perspective, much of our emotional, imaginative, and cognitive lives are irrational. (Thanks to Andrew Cortens for pressing me to address the question of rationality.)

my own favorite example. We can also cite many less radical examples from the literary canon: speaking for myself, the *Iliad*, Augustine's *Confessions*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Don Giovanni,* and *Pride and Prejudice* all invite or demand emotional responses that differ from my own natural ones, but that I indulge fairly easily within the context of reading them.[29] Further, these emotional responses typically bring correlative evaluations along with them: while engaged with the fiction, we take acts of wartime vengeance to be glorious, or the conspicuous punishment of flagrant sinners to be righteous, or the preservation of chastity to be a virtue. Although recent philosophical discussion has focused on cases in which we resist cultivating disparate evaluative responses, it has largely ignored the wide range of cases in which we happily, even effortlessly, go along.

To explain how we can have emotional responses to fiction that are both genuine and different from those we would have in real life, we need to broaden our attention from characterizations of particular characters and events to the fiction as a whole. Our characterizations of individual characters and events are not isolated: they hang together in an overall characterization of the fictional world as a place inhabited by certain sorts of people and objects, who are governed by certain sorts of causes and motivations, and in which certain sorts of events are especially interesting or surprising. Thus, actions and qualities that would be shocking or impossible in a Jane Austen novel are unremarkable in the world of Phillip Roth – and vice versa. We bring some expectations about what characterizations will be appropriate to our initial encounter with most fictions, based on our knowledge of the genre, author, and work, and of course, the real world. As we refine these general expectations to fit the specific fiction, we become increasingly adept at extrapolating nuanced characterizations from sketchy information, in ways that are borne out – or intentionally subverted – by the fiction's later developments. Soon enough, if all

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[29] Note that not all of these are cases of fiction. Various theorists, including Currie (1997), Dadlez (1997), Goldie (2003), Kieran (2002) and Nichols (2006), have drawn attention to the phenomenon of disparate response. In addition to the examples mentioned in the text, Matthew Kieran cites Graham Greene's short story "The Destructors" as luring us in to rooting for a pack of boys destroying the home of an old man who has been kind to them (2002); he also imagines a lapsed Catholic reading Waugh's *Brideshead Revisted* with admiration and awe despite her confirmed atheism (2003). Currie (1997) reports sympathizing with Jago, the protagonist of C. P. Snow's *The Masters*, even though he would find such a person distasteful in real life.

goes well, we will have tuned in to the fiction's operative perspective. The characterizations that result may differ dignificantly from those we would form on our own, and may in turn produce alternative emotional and evaluative responses.[30]

I argued in §3 for a close causal and normative connections between characterizations, perspectives, and emotions. It is also fairly widely agreed that our moral and aesthetic evaluations are tightly connected to both emotions and characterizations, though it is a matter of considerable debate whether that connection is more than merely psychological, and in particular whether characterizations or perspectives can justify or even constitute moral or aesthetic evaluations.[31] At a purely intuitive level, however, it should be uncontroversial that we often sketch characterizations to persuade others of our moral and aesthetic attitudes, and often advocate moral and aesthetic perspectives in the form of high-level mottos and epigrams such as "Less is more," or "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."[32]

In explaining the phenomenon of disparate response in terms of an altered overall mental economy, my view is related to 'simulationist' models of fictional engagement, exemplified perhaps most prominently and elegantly by Gregory Currie (1995, 1997).[33] Like me, Currie argues that engaging with

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[30] Cf. Goldie 2003, Currie 2010.

[31] For recent discussion of the connection between emotion and moral evaluation, see D'Arms and Jacobson 2000. Some theorists also posit a direct connection, relatively independent of emotion, between characterizations or perspectives and moral or aesthetic evaluation; see e.g. McDowell 1988 and Kupperman 2000 on moral evaluation, and Harrison 1960 on aesthetic evaluation. Even staunch moral (or aesthetic) realists might assign characterizations an epistemological role in helping us to discern the objective causal and explanatory structures that ultimately constitute moral or aesthetic value. Humor is another important class of evaluative response, which I take to be sufficiently complex and different from moral and aesthetic evaluation to warrant separate discussion.

[32] I return briefly to the question of justification in §5.

[33] See Walton 1997, Nichols and Stich 2000, Nichols 2006, Weinberg and Meskin 2006, and Egan and Doggett 2007, among others. (In fn. 36 below, I mention some important differences between Currie's (1995) and (1997) views and his (2010) view.) Most simulationists appeal only to the simulation of belies and desires. Weinberg (2008) comes closest to a perspectival view with his talk of the "configurational features" of the imagination, which "bring to the fore" and "downplay" various assumptions and beliefs. However, his only stated resources for explaining these "configurational features" is through interactions between distinct encapsulated modules, including most saliently "IB" (imagined belief) and morality. I am skeptical that there are enough (independently motivated) modules to explain the nuanced differences in configuration needed to explain the puzzle of alternative personality;

fictions requires taking on, not just an alternative set of beliefs and desires, but also "relatively long-term, stable, and personality-fixing preferences" (1997, 72). However, my view differs fundamentally from simulationists', insofar as I take the most important 'adjustments to one's mental economy' to be actual, albeit largely temporary. A simulationist model is relatively plausible for the propositional attitudes and experiential states we imagine in response to fiction.[34] But our characterizations of those propositions and experiences are not merely simulated. While absorbed in reading fiction, certain facts really do jump out at us and others pass as mere filler; and we really do link individual features and facts into patterns which govern our inferential and associative trains and thereby make certain explanations and future developments seem natural. Further, these cognitive effects linger after we stop pretending, contrary to what we would predict if our responses to fiction were quarantined within an encapsulated module, with imagined beliefs and desires only bought "on-line" by faulty inhibitory mechanisms.[35]

This key difference between our views is highlighted by the fact that Currie and other simulationists claim that disparate affect is generated via iconic, central imagining – through the "empathetic re-enactment" of the depicted scenes "through the eyes of characters within them" (Currie 1995, 256). By contrast, I have emphasized that we often don't engage in central, empathetic re-enactment, and that even when we do, our emotional and evaluative responses are typically governed by

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but if Weinberg does allow for configurational features within IB itself, then I suspect that his view approximates to mine, minus my appeals to centrality and fittingness.

[34] However, I am less confident than many simulationists that our everyday understanding of other people is underwritten by an encapsulated cognitive module for simulation. One reason for skepticism is that insofar as the person being simulated has a very different psychological make-up, determining the appropriate 'start state' for simulating their responses requires detailed input from a representational theory, including just their beliefs and desires, but also their characterizing dispositions. Thus, simulation cannot be sharply distinguished from a "theory theory" of psychological understanding. Further, humans make systematic errors in predicting other people's behavior which suggest they are not simply pretending to undertake the relevant action themselves, but are relying at least in part on folk psychological assumptions (Saxe 2005).

[35] For instance, subjects performed worse than normal on games of Trivial Pursuit after imagining – not even pretending themselves to be – a soccer hooligan, and better than normal after imagining a professor (Dijksterhuis and Van Knippenberg 1998). See Gendler 2006b for a survey of recent empirical research on "imaginative contagion." Indeed, even propositional attitudes like belief are somewhat vulnerable to 'contagion': the presentation of even very short fictions significantly lowers the rapidity and confidence of subjects' judgments about things they manifestly know to be true, such as "The speed limit is 65 m.p.h", or "John F. Kennedy was assassinated" (Gerrig 1993).

an external perspective on the fiction as a whole.[36] Merely encountering a scene through the eyes of a character doesn't always lead us to empathize with them or to simulate their emotional and evaluative response; we typically do so only if the character is presented sympathetically – that is, only if the author 'deputizes' that character as someone whose perspective should be adopted.[37]

But this raises a question for me: how can we pick up on the alternative perspectives that generate disparate response, if not through empathetic dramatic rehearsal? I claim that our iconic rehearsal of characters' adventures, our characterizations of them, and our overarching perspective are all guided as much by how the author presents the depicted scenes as by what she presents. As we might put it, the author's abstract perspective is grounded in an authorial personality, which is given concrete expression in a verbal style: in her use of words, allusions, figurative tropes, syntactic structures, rhythms, assonances and disruptions, levels of formality, and so on. In real life, a person's way of representing the world is intimately intertwined with their non-representational style: for instance, a strong handshake, clipped speech and hair, and blue button-down shirts all *fit* together, not just with each other, but also with a concern for objectivity, focus on essential details, and a practical interest in getting the job done. These

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[36] Goldie (2003) criticizes Currie (1997) for the same assumption. In his (1997), Currie allows that the relevant character may be a narrator, and he acknowledges (1997, 76, fn. 16) that a fully general analysis would include cases where we take up the perspective of the implied author. In his (2010), Currie offers a theory of "point of view" which focuses on external narrators (or what many people would call implied authors), on the grounds that this is "the highest level most authoritative point of view manifested by the narrative; this is the point of view on which the framing effect of the story, considered as a whole, depends…." (2010, 92). These narratorial perspectives are not primarily picked up through empathetic re-enactment, but rather through the imitation of the way of thinking expressed by the narrator's verbal style (2010, 130), precisely as I argue below. Thus, Currie's recent view appears to be highly compatible with the explanation for disparate response that I offer here. However, Currie doesn't explicitly address the puzzle of disparate response in his later work. I criticize his earlier view in the text because it is exemplifies a prominent and comparatively nuanced version of the general simulationist model which many theorists do endorse.

[37] Throughout, unless otherwise noted, by 'author' I mean the implied author, who is constructed or postulated as the creator of this fiction, and whose mental intentions may diverge from those of the actual historical writer. On the notion of an implied author, see e.g. Booth 1961, Nehamas 1987, Eco 1992. Currie (2010, ch. 4) argues that there is no useful distinction between implied authors and external narrators, while Goldie (2003) focuses on external narrators without discussing authors. Although I think there can be important differences between real authors, implied authors, and external narrators, for current purposes the distinction is largely moot.

sorts of cognitive, sartorial, and verbal features combine to form what Iris Murdoch (1956, 39) calls a "texture of being":

> When we apprehend and assess other people…we consider…their total vision of life, as shown in their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words, their assessments of others, their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive or praiseworthy, what they think funny: in short, the configurations of their thought which show continually in their reactions and conversation. These things…constitute what…one may call the texture of a man's being or the nature of his personal vision.

In fiction, we lack access to the author's physical presentation. But we gain an intimate, sustained access to her thoughts, filtered through an attentively cultivated verbal style. By putting flesh on a perspective's abstract bones, authorial style gives us something concrete to impersonate even when we aren't dramatically placing ourselves in the shoes of a specific character.[38]

Many people might agree that philosophers should pay more attention to the effects of expressive style on imaginative response. But it might also seem that talk of impersonating an author is overly Romantic, reminiscent of Plato's claim in the *Ion* that in listening to poetry we are possessed. Even if I become more Nabokovian while reading *Lolita*, I don't gain Nabokov's creative ability to construct fictional worlds, plots, and patterns of speech.[39] And while I may be more sympathetic to Humbert Humbert than I would to a real pederast, I still find many aspects of his actions and self-justifications deeply unsettling. Moreover, as I admitted in §1, perspectives are themselves messy and amorphous. Perhaps, then, "perspectivalism" is too radical, and we ought to find a more minimal explanation for the phenomenon of disparate response. In the remainder of this section, I'll argue that an adequate account of our engagement with fiction does need to recognize authorial perspectives, insofar as they interact with the determination of content to form a single overarching imaginative project.

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[38] As Jenefer Robinson (1985, 227) puts it, "the verbal elements of style gain their stylistic significance by contributing to the expression of [a] personality, and they cannot be identified as *stylistic* elements independently of the personality they help to express." Moran (1994) and Goldie (2003) also emphasize the importance of expressive features in regulating emotional response; Currie (2010, ch. 7) provides concrete illustrations of specific ways in which verbal style expresses personality and perspective.

[39] Thanks to Eileen John for emphasizing this point.

In effect, the minimalist should claim that a "Reality Principle"[40] governs characterizations: that the author controls the fiction's base-level facts, but that we are free to import our ordinary assumptions about prominence, centrality, and fittingness into the fiction. Brian Weatherson (2004, 22) advocates the operative principle in a related context:

> The fact that it's the author's story, not the reader's, means that the author gets to say what the underlying facts are. But that still leaves the possibility for differences of opinion about [which higher-order concepts to apply to those facts], and on that question the author's opinion is just another opinion. Authorial authority extends as far as saying which world is fictional in the story; it does not extend as far as saying which concepts are instantiated there.[41]

As we'll discuss in §5, this principle offers a natural explanation for imaginative resistance. But how should such a view explain disparate response? The most natural course is to point out that authors constrain our attention in ways the actual world doesn't.[42] According to the minimalist, we might say, an author offers us a lens onto the fictional world, and thereby controls *what* we get to see; but we see the portions of the fictional world that do appear with our own eyes, and we both do and should respond with our ordinary dispositions to characterize.

Manipulation of attention clearly does make an enormous difference to our characterizations. In watching *The Three Stooges*, we see their pratfalls and hysterical gestures, but not the blood and scars that would result; and so we're more likely to experience the scene as funny than cruel. In reading *Gone with the Wind,* we spend more time attending to the joys and travails of the white aristocrats than to the indignity and suffering of the black slaves; and so we're more likely to root for Tara's resurrection than for the construction of a just society. So far, this observation is compatible with – indeed, a crucial component of – a perspectivalist view. To resist perspectivalism and uphold the Reality Principle, the

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[40] Cf. Walton 1990, 145; 1994, 36. Walton himself does not assume the Reality Principle applies in general, but does accept it for moral judgments.
[41] Cf. Walton (1994, 39): "The moral sentiments expressed by narrators are just that, it seems, their own personal moral sentiments; we are free to disagree, even though it is the moral nature of the fictional world, not the real one, that is in question."
[42] As Eva Dadlez (1997, 95) puts it, an author "manipulates our attention in such a way that making certain construals is virtually a foregone conclusion…[A] pattern of attention...is guaranteed, since those are the only situations we get, and there is little else to attend to."

minimalist must claim that this is the *only* way in which the author affects our characterizations, and further, that this control is merely causal, not normative.

On this view, that is, if we know that some facts obtain in the fictional world which we've only fleetingly glimpsed, then we ought to assign those facts the same prominence and centrality we would if they were real. For instance, we should not merely acknowledge the slaves' unjust circumstances and root for the construction of a just society instead of Tara's resurrection, but should devote a much more significant portion of our imaginative attention to the slaves than Mitchell does. In effect, the simple minimalist view suggests that the imaginative game we ought to play with Mitchell's novel should be much closer to the one proffered by *The Wind Done Gone,* Alice Randall's parodic retelling from the slaves' point of view. But, while there are clearly important moral and aesthetic insights to be gained from playing revisionist games of this kind, we also need to acknowledge that this sort of engagement diverges markedly from ordinary readers' usual approach to the novel.

A hard-line minimalist can insist that in cases like this, we have been manipulated into playing a game with the novel that is unwarranted precisely because it demands that we cultivate an alternative perspective.[43] In effect, this response would concede the causal influence of authorial perspective, but advocate an error theory about the normative basis for ordinary readers' normal patterns of attention to the novel; but it's not clear on what independent basis this error theory is justified. A more concessive minimalist response would grant that authorial authority encompasses the allocation of attention as well as the base-level facts, but insist that how we characterize and evaluate those elements that are focalized is still up to us.[44] However, I think this moderated view still mischaracterizes the norms that govern ordinary readers' engagement with fiction, because it assumes that we can cleanly separate the allocation of attention from the rest of our characterizing activities. The minimalist should be willing to grant that authorial authority also includes at least the determination of how common or exceptional focalized

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[43] I discuss a propositional version of this line in §5, in the context of what Weatherson calls the alethic puzzle."
[44] Thanks to Ishani Maitra for extensive discussion here; thanks also to Francis Howard-Snyder and Sarah McGrath for emphasizing the role that focus does, and perhaps should, play in our cognitive and moral engagement with real life.

properties are in the rest of the fictional world, and at least some facts about causal structure. But these high-level, objective patterns strongly constrain appropriate assignments of prominence and centrality, and these in turn causally and normatively motivate correlative emotional and evaluative responses. Further, the large-scale distribution of these objective patterns is often signaled to the reader only implicitly, via the author's expressive style and perspective; as a result, the very principles of generation that govern the story's propositional contents are themselves importantly dependent on authorial perspective.

Because the modified minimalist view must deny these intimate interactions between objective global facts, which the author does largely control, and her "mere opinion" about how to interpret those facts, it predicts that when a neglected situation or feature is brought into focus, our normal dispositions to characterize and respond will, and should, reassert themselves.[45] And surely, there is a greater likelihood of resistance to alternative characterizations of focalized than background features. But most of us are also familiar, either directly or on a testimonial basis, with fictions that draw us into perspectives which actively focus on and celebrate the very features we find troubling in real life.[46] Authors also sometimes implicitly signal that the focalized events are not genuinely important,[47] or that the explicitly presented characterizations are not truly warranted.[48] Grasping what is interesting about fictions with unreliable narrators requires experiencing the conflict between the narrator's and author's perspectives, and not merely recognizing the disparity between the narrator's perspective and our own.

The general moral is that as readers, we recognize that the author directs her attentional lens where she does because this reflects what she takes to be surprising, diagnostic, explanatory, or praise- or

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[45] Cf. Walton 1994, 41.

[46] A further example, in addition to at least some of those cited above, is V.C. Andrews' *Flowers in the Attic*, which describes a passionate romantic and sexual relationship between abused twins. (Thanks to Christina Van Dyke for reminding me of the latter novel in this context.)

[47] Thus, we can imagine a parody of *Gone with the Wind* along the lines of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, in which the spotlight remains relentlessly on Scarlett's romantic travails, but the author conveys that the truly profound conflicts over human dignity and liberty are transpiring in the shadows. (Thanks to Andy Egan for the example.)

[48] Examples include Maria in Joyce's "Clay" (in *Dubliners*), Benjy Compson in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and Charles Kinbote in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*.

blame-worthy. We also recognize that she intends for us to adopt these characterizations for ourselves, and to do so because we recognize that she is advocating them to us. These characterizing intentions are unlikely to be fully determinate, and are rarely explicit; most authors' intentions are more like invitations to improvise on a common theme than instructions for the construction of an exact model.[49] But the overall imaginative project that the author proposes for us almost invariably encompasses both the determination of the fictional facts and the adoption of a perspective on them; and neither can be cleanly separated from the other.

Of course, we may not follow the author's lead. We may disagree with the author's characterizations, and even hold that these lead to distortions in the plot, as Gore Vidal claimed about Henry James's character Charlotte Stant.[50] More generally, it can be aesthetically, critically, and morally worthwhile to read "against the grain," by systematically attending to features that are present in the fiction but neglected by the author. The point for now is just that reading against the grain is precisely a form of imaginative resistance, and that the author's advocated perspective is not "just another opinion" on the story's objective facts, but an integral part of the overall fictional enterprise – one which readers are often willing to go along with.

§5: Perspectives, Resistance and Reality

In §4, I focused on the fact that readers often do engage in imaginative projects that demand disparate emotional and evaluative responses. The puzzle of imaginative resistance is the converse: why do we sometimes refuse to go along with an author's demand for a certain imaginative response? As Weatherson (2004) and Walton (2008) emphasize, there are at least three distinct puzzles here. The *alethic* puzzle is why readers sometimes refuse to allow that certain sorts of propositions are true in the

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[49] The degree of authorial control can vary; Eileen John (1998) argues persuasively that some authors want their readers to come up with their own interpretations, and refuse to advocate any single characterization.

[50] Cited in Moran 1994, 99. Likewise, Wayne Booth (1961, 79) says that D.H. Lawrence misinterprets the characters and events in *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, despite his own voluble insistence that it is immoral for the author to "put his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection."

fiction, given their general willingness to grant the author broad stipulative authority over what is fictional.[51] The *imaginative* puzzle is why readers are unwilling or unable to actively imagine the truth of propositions they acknowledge to be fictional, or refuse to imagine having certain sorts of responses to the fiction. And the *aesthetic* puzzle is whether a fiction which attempts to make such claims fictional, or which demands such responses, is for that reason aesthetically defective.

To address these questions about disruptions in our engagement with fiction, we need to review what must be in place to support full imaginative engagement. First, the author must present a coherent body of base-level facts. As many theorists have noted, the coherence in question need not amount to logical or even metaphysical consistency, so long as any inconsistent propositions are sufficiently segregated from one another or downplayed in prominence. Second, the author must describe those base-level facts in a way that suggests a larger world with a stable higher-order distribution of properties and patterns of causation, so that readers can form intuitive expectations about what is (and is not) likely to happen. These expectations may be upended, of course; but surprise, as opposed to mere confusion, requires operative background assumptions about how things generally work in that world.[52] Third, the basic-level facts must include at least some events, which are connected to one another in something approximating a narrative. Although causal connections are common (Carroll 2001d), narrative does not require that its constituent events all be causally connected, so long as they hang together in a satisfying, fitting arc – one which arguably depends on the completion of an emotional cadence (Velleman 2003). Fourth, the author must offer some reason for her readers to invest their cognitive and emotional energy in imagining this world and following these characters and events: perhaps curiosity about the plot or the true explanation for a mysterious event, or desire to experience the concluding emotional 'tock', or exploration of an interesting mind or world. And finally, she must present the base-level and global facts and events in an expressive style that embodies a psychologically plausible and fitting personality, so that readers can inhabit the operative perspective in an intuitive way.

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[51] Walton 2008 calls this the fictionality puzzle.
[52] And aesthetically satisfying surprise requires the recognition that the surprising element be fitting in a larger sense.

When all of these conditions are met, then the author has constructed a coherent, motivated imaginative project, and it should be possible for at least some suitably equipped readers to form particular characterizations that are underwritten by an overarching perspective and that in turn support correlative emotional and evaluative responses. But when any of these five conditions are not met, then there is at least a risk of resistance, or at least the need for some kind of repair. (Of course, as we'll see, these conditions are at most necessary; no set of such conditions is likely to guarantee engagement.)

If all this needs to go right for imaginative engagement to succeed, the various puzzles of resistance show us how things can go wrong. First, an author can fail to specify a coherent body of base-level facts, or to embed them within a larger world about which stable higher-order propositions can be extrapolated. In some cases, the author stipulates, either explicitly or implicitly, the truth of a higher-order proposition without providing any way to imagine the corresponding base-level facts; we then have what Weatherson (2004) calls an *alethically puzzling* fiction. Walton (1994), Yablo (2002), and Weatherson (2004) all argue that alethic puzzles arise because although authors are largely free to stipulate the fiction's base-level facts, they are not free to stipulate the higher-order facts that obtain "in virtue of" them (Weatherson 2004, 16).[53] In effect, that is, they take a Reality Principle to govern "in virtue of" inter-level relations but not the base-level facts; at a minimum, Weatherson (2004, 17) says, "there is a default assumption that these ['in virtue of'] relations are imported into stories or imaginations." When there is an alethic failure, they claim, readers 'repair' the fiction by retaining the explicitly stipulated base-level facts, along with further base-level facts produced via standard principles of generation, and replace the objectionable higher-order proposition by one generated via our default assumed 'in virtue of' relations (Weatherson 2004, 23).

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[53] I am eliding differences in the specific sort of inter-level relations Walton, Yablo, and Weatherson take to be operative; all agree that they are tighter than supervenience, in a difficult-to-characterize way. The alethic failure may arise because there is no possible way in which the relevant higher-level proposition could be true (Walton 1994, 37), or because we cannot imagine a configuration of base-level facts which would make it true (Walton 1994, 46), or because every way we could imagine the higher-level proposition being true requires filling out the base-level facts in a way that generates a (salient) inconsistency with some other base-level fact which the author has implicitly or explicitly made fictional (Weatherson 2004, 20).

I agree with Weatherson et al that there are important inter-level constraints on fictional truth, and that inter-level conflicts are often resolved by preserving both the base-level facts and our default 'in virtue of' assumptions, while rejecting the author's explicitly stipulated higher-order propositions. But I deny that this is always true. In some cases of explicit inter-level conflict, the rest of the fictional world and operative perspective are sufficiently coherent that we decide that the authorial error lies at the basic level: a certain described behavior may be so out of character, or a certain course of events so manifestly unfair by the lights of the operative perspective, that we decide the author should have made something else happen instead. These cases are more difficult to repair, but in extreme cases fans have been known to rewrite fictions to alter the described course of events.

More importantly, I deny that a Reality Principle always governs inter-level relations. Weatherson, Walton, and Yablo emphasize that not just normative propositions, but also propositions concerning a wide range of topics, including shape and ontology, can be alethically puzzling. For many of these cases, the relevant 'in virtue of' relations may indeed be fixed across worlds. However, in the context of actual fiction, we are unlikely to find many cases of alethic failure far outside the normative realm, precisely because most cases where people do diverge markedly in their opinions about the application of concepts, and where the topic is itself sufficiently imaginatively engaging to be salient, are normative. And here, as we have seen, characterizations and perspectives do have a role to play, in a way that undermines a straightforward appeal to the Reality Principle.

As I noted in §4, robust, attentive endorsement of normative propositions, whether real or imagined, is normally correlated with certain characterizations and perspectives, and often with certain emotions as well. Thus, for a reader to be willing to grant that a moral proposition is true in the fictional world, she must also normally be willing and able to structure her thoughts into a justifying characterization of the relevant base-level facts, and to cultivate a correlative emotional response; and as we've seen, this is not something that readers can do at will. Inducing a reader not merely to overcome his default assumptions about inter-level 'in virtue of' relations, but to actively mold his mind in a certain structure requires considerably more work on the author's part than stipulating that a single proposition is

true, or leaving open the possibility of a consistent body of base-level facts. As a result, we should expect more imaginative resistance toward normative, especially moral, evaluations than toward base-level propositions or even many other higher-level propositions, such as those concerning causal structure, that implicate a less rich set of characgterizing assumptions. We should expect that very short, stylistically unexpressive fictions which stipulate (what are by our lights) contrafactual high-level propositions will often appear alethically puzzling.

But as I also argued in §4, often enough authors do succeed in writing morally alternative fictions that don't provoke widespread imaginative resistance: fictions that otherwise sensitive, informed audiences, whom we have no independent reason to treat as morally impaired, engage with and respond to emotionally and evaluatively, but differently than they would in real life. A hard-line defender of the Reality Principle for 'in virtue of' relations can insist that fictions which call for endorsing contrafactual moral propositions are always alethically puzzling, and that the characterizations and emotional responses which cause ordinary readers to endorse those propositions within the context of the fiction can never genuinely justify either the truth or fictionality of those propositions.[54] However, just as with the debate about authorial authority over focalization, it is not clear that such a theorist has independent evidence for this view, apart from a prior theoretical commitment to the Reality Principle in general and perhaps to the modal robustness of moral propositions.

So far, I've been concentrating on cases where the author fails to present a coherent body of base- and higher-level facts. In other, more interesting, cases, the author does present a psychologically coherent perspective and world, which it is at least possible to engage with imaginatively; but because the operative perspective is morally alien, many readers resist full imaginative engagement. We now need to ask why this should be: why aren't readers willing to indulge in "morality fiction" when it is competently executed?

In effect, Tamar Szabo Gendler (2000) argues that a weakened version of the Reality Principle

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[54] For instance, Weatherson (2004, 21) argues that a story which claims someone to be moral in virtue of giving meat to the villagers is alethically puzzling, given the assumption that in fact, gratuitous meat-eating is immoral.

explains resistance in these cases. As I have, she rejects the Reality Principle in its general form, arguing that we are typically willing to go along with morality fictions that are obviously "distorting," in the sense that the author employs "distancing mechanisms" to signal that the operative evaluative principles are not intended to be realistic (2000, 78). However, she argues that morality fictions do produce resistance when "the reader feels that she is being asked to *export* a way of looking at the actual world" from the fiction (2000, 77, emphasis added). The primary reason she thinks we resist in these cases seems to be that we have "a general desire not to be manipulated into taking on points of view that we would not reflectively endorse as authentically our own" (2000, 56). Thus, as we might put it, Gendler attributes resistance to perceived violations of the Reality Principle *for reality itself* – a principle that should surely seem plausible.[55]

Gendler is clearly right that authors can intend for us to export perspectives from fiction,"[56] and that exportation can occasion resistance to competently-executed morally alternative fictions. However, I think that even Gendler's weakened Reality Principle still accords too much systematicity to readers' willingness and resistance to engage with alien perspectives in fiction. On the one hand, we don't always resist *non*-distorting fictions which advocate emotional and evaluative attitudes that "we would not reflectively endorse as authentically our own" (Gendler 2000, 56). Sometimes we fail to resist because our reflective evaluative judgments are out of kilter with our gut imaginative and emotional responses, as with my staunch feminist friends who relish the guilty pleasure of a Harlequin romance. Sometimes we are tricked into adopting morally repugnant perspectives by a manipulative author, so that resistance

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[55] I think we should put aside Gendler's mention of being manipulated, since we often balk at being manipulated even for ends we endorse – as when our pleasure turns to disappointment when we discover that the nightingale's song we have been enjoying is artificially generated (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* §42; thanks to Paul Guyer for discussion.)

[56] Cf. Wayne Booth: "It seems to me self-evident that the implied author of any *didactic* work, at least…would be distressed if, after I put down the work, I said to myself, 'Well, now I can go back to my previous beliefs about overweening pride or about how the ways of God are to be justified.' But is it not equally true that some of the norms of even the most fully purified *non-didactic* works are clearly seen by the implied author as not simply taken up for the duration and then dropped?…[S]ome beliefs and norms are for the implied author fixed…he implies that some not only can be applied in the real world but should be (e.g. in *Ulysses*, sensitivity to delicate distinctions of verbal tone is important, and that sensitivity is not to be shucked off when we stop reading)" (Booth quoted in Iser 1993, 59).

comes too late.[57] But beyond these cases lie those where we are genuinely moved by perspectives which are alien to us, but which the author intends realistically – Philip Roth being a characteristic example for many readers.

On the other hand, we sometimes resist even when we know that the perspective is intentionally distorted.[58] "Trying on" a perspective involves genuinely cultivating the correlative cognitive propensities to find certain things notable, to make certain sorts of classifications, and to seek certain sorts of explanations. Even if we do have the imaginative wherewithal to work our way into the relevant perspective, some distorting dystopias are so demonic that we really should balk at trying on their perspectives, even temporarily and just on the fictional world.

At other points, however, Gendler offers a rather different explanation of imaginative resistance, one that doesn't depend on exportation or reflective endorsement, but instead on an unwillingness to add certain perspectives to our "conceptual repertoire" (2000, 77). We are unwilling to even entertain these perspectives, she claims, because, like the aspects involved in metaphor, they "emphasize similarities we prefer to overlook" (2006, 151), such as the similarity between our Aunt Ruth and a walrus (2000, 80), or between kindergarteners and cockroaches (2006, 151). Once we have noticed those similarities, we cannot go back and *un*notice them, or even deny that they exist; we are stuck with a way of thinking we abhor, but that we cannot reject or get out of our heads.[59] Thus, entertaining such perspectives even just within the confines of a fiction is still dangerous, because doing so "may render these undesirable patterns of response available even in the contemplation of actual [scenarios]" (2006, 153).

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[57] Gaut (2007) argues that many apparent cases of morally alternative fiction, such as *Lolita*, are actually employing a "seduction strategy" to show us how tempting a perspective which is, by the author's own lights, immoral, can be. While the seduction strategy is real, it also risks backfiring, by seducing the reader too completely. It is also arguable that many fictions which authors present as employing the seduction strategy really do endorse the immoral perspective, and that the author is deceiving or deceived about his true purposes, as Blake claimed of Milton.

[58] In addition, as Marc Moffett pointed out (in conversation), we may resist because the perspective and/or the depicted individuals and events are not distorting *enough* – because they are too painfully close to our own reality.

[59] Gendler mentions here Moran's (1989) discussion of the 'compulsion' involved in metaphorical perspectives; as he puts it, "If someone is described as having all the charm of a damp kitchen sponge, it's no good simply to *deny* it, after he or she has registered an appreciation of the phrase" (1989, 91).

This explanation invokes the feature of perspectives that I have been most concerned to emphasize: that they require cultivating an actual capacity to configure our thoughts and responsive dispositions in certain structures. And I agree with Gendler, and with Hume and Plato before her, that this makes fiction dangerous. Indeed, I would emphasize that the perspectives we get from fiction are especially dangerous in comparison to the single-subject aspects involved in metaphor, because they are ongoing dispositions to characterize large swaths of the world. Further, precisely because they are so general and amorphous, involving nuanced proclivities to notice, interpret, and respond rather than the outright acceptance or rejection of determinate propositions, it is often difficult to identify precisely how such perspectives alter our thinking.

However, I don't think it follows, as Hume says, that I should invariably be "jealous" of my moral standards, and refuse to "pervert the sentiments of [my] heart for a moment in complaisance to any writer whatsoever." Such fictions can also provide us with important moral knowledge, by enabling us to comprehend an alien perspective in a lived, experiential way.[60] Not only can this help us interact more effectively with those who embrace it; we may ultimately embrace that perspective for ourselves, deciding that our earlier rejection of it was prejudicial. Refusing to try on alternative perspectives because they are alien protects us from the risk of moral perversion, but at the cost of cutting us off from the potential for moral growth.

Such prudential considerations aside, it is also possible that we derive enough overall aesthetic pleasure from this intimate experiential access to a very different mind, or from other aspects of the fiction such as its formal beauty or plot, that our moral discomfort is compensated for. Various theorists have argued that the very fact that a fiction is "inaccessible" to "morally sensitive" readers itself constitutes an aesthetic flaw, because it demands imaginative resources and emotional and evaluative responses that those readers are either psychologically unwilling or unable to indulge (Walton 1994; Carroll 2001c), or which it would be immoral for them to cultivate (Gaut 2007). I think it is true, and important, that morally alien fictions raise the aesthetic stakes, by forcing the fiction's readers to expend

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[60] Kieran (2003) argues that this can constitute an aesthetic, and not merely instrumental, merit.

significant imaginative and cognitive effort toward a goal that is inherently unpleasant. But again, I deny that we can draw systematic conclusions about the overall aesthetic consequences of this fact. First, unless we insist that it is always impermissible even to try on morally deviant perspectives, it is unclear on what independent grounds we can identify the "morally sensitive" readers who are to serve as arbiters for when a fiction is aesthetically flawed because inaccessible: inaccessibility to a particular reader might just reflect a lack of imagination on their part, or a prudentially warranted but aesthetically irrelevant wariness.[61]

Second, the fact that a fiction places high imaginative demands on its readers needn't itself constitute an aesthetic flaw. We regularly acknowledge that aesthetically meritorious works of art are challenging in all sorts of other ways: in virtue of employing novel, disruptive language, say, or eschewing traditional harmonies. If the challenging feature is not gratuitous, but sufficiently integral to the work – if the work is "incorrigible," in Daniel Jacobson's terms – then we don't usually count that feature as an aesthetic deficit (Jacobson 1997, 191). Indeed, the very fact that a fiction manages to present an immoral perspective in a way that draws in at least some readers may constitute an aesthetic merit. One mark of aesthetic value is an artwork's capacity to draw previously unequipped readers into its perspective. Precisely because an author who presents an alien perspective must support it with a body of relevant base-level facts characterized in an intuitively accessible way, because she cannot rely on her readers' default characterizing dispositions but instead must train them into a new perspective, and because she must provide them with sufficient motivation to overcome their own, often deeply held perspectives, it takes extra skill to create engaging morality fiction. We shouldn't be surprised, or automatically judge it a demerit in the work, if many readers are not willing to invest the extra effort required to engage fully; instead, we might decide to be impressed by the fact that the fiction draws in as many readers as it does.

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[61] As Jacobson (1997) argues, it would be question-begging to assume that emotional or evaluative responses to fiction are aesthetically unmerited simply because they are immoral: they might still be *fitting*, in D'Arms and Jacobson's (2001) sense of appropriately matching their target.

6. Conclusion

What, in the end, do we learn from fictions? Putnam says that in reading Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night*,

> I do *not* learn that love does not exist, that all human beings are hateful and hating (even if – and I am sure this is not the case – those propositions should be true). What I learn is to see the world as it looks to someone who is sure that hypothesis is correct…Being aware of a new interpretation of the facts, however repellent, of a construction…that can be put upon the facts…is knowledge of a possibility. It is *conceptual* knowledge (1978, 89-90, emphasis in original).

We now have a better understanding of what sort of "conceptual knowledge" this might be. As Putnam says, it's not knowledge that a certain proposition is, or even could be, true.[62] Of course, we do export some propositions from fictions to the real world. But fictions rarely offer us what Weatherson (2004, 7) calls "simple direct invitations to imagine" general evaluative propositions like "Love does not exist," or "Killing babies is justified." To the extent that real fictions do advocate such general claims, they are typically embedded within, and emerge out of, a complex nexus of patterns of thinking about and evaluating particular individuals and situations.

Rather, the perspective with which a fiction acquaints us is cognitive or conceptual in much the way a metaphor can be: as a possible tool for structuring our thoughts, by determining what we notice and dismiss, what sorts of explanations we seek, and what emotional and evaluative responses come naturally. Fictions train us into such perspectives by deploying them in application to a particular world of characters and events, and by embodying them expressively in the author's choice of words and syntax. "Trying on" a perspective involves more than merely imagining either a proposition or an experience: it requires actually structuring one's thinking in the relevant ways. In some cases, we may drop these temporary characterizing dispositions soon after we close the book. But more often, there is at least some lingering effect. This may not involve any obvious shift in propositional attitudes; rather, it may consist of more subtle changes in predilections to notice, explain, and respond. But these subtleties can

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[62] He goes on: "To think of the novel itself as presenting us with some kind of nonscientific knowledge of man is making it all somehow too much like propositions" (1978, 91). Similarly, Danto (1981: 167) says that it is "one of the main offices of art less to represent the world than to represent it in such a way as to cause us to view it with a certain attitude and with a special vision." Cf. also Michael Tanner (1994, 58).

ramify significantly, to alter the high-level evaluative judgments we form of analogous situations in the real world. [63]

The subject-general, open-ended nature of perspectives makes the decision about whether to even attempt to cultivate an alien perspective especially difficult. Many morally alien fictions fail to support their perspectives with a relevant set of appropriately characterized base-level facts. But some do present coherent, well-grounded perspectives in a fitting and engaging expressive style. They may initially draw us in through other virtues, or they may make the perspective itself so intriguing that it becomes the focus of our interest. Some may offer perspectives which would be morally illuminating, but which we lack the imaginative resources to access, while others may be so seductive that we falsely take them to be illuminating.

Although we may have our suspicions, we can't really know what a fiction's perspective will be until we are deep in its midst. But by then, it may be too late: we may have been altered, in ways we cannot fully recognize or independently evaluate. Alexander Nehamas (2000) argues that this is precisely what makes art in general so attractive, but also so dangerous:

> Like everything that beckons, beauty is risky and dangerous. It may disappoint and hurt. Worse, it may cause harm by fulfilling its promise….Spending time with such a thing, with other things like it, with other people who like it as well will have an effect on me which I cannot predict in advance. Once that effect is in place, I may have changed into someone I would not have wanted to be before I began. But I may now no longer be able to see that what I am, perhaps, is perverted. How can I tell if I have followed the right course? Which standards should I apply to myself?

An author initially convinces us to spend time with her by inviting us into a compelling alternative world. We may think that we are confining our commerce with her to just that world, and she may ask no more of us than this. But even such limited engagements can have broader and deeper effects upon us than we realize. As with any friendship, its ultimate influence may be for the better or for the worse. Which it is we cannot determine in advance, and may not be able to recognize after the fact. Not living in Plato's Republic, we must decide for ourselves which fictions are worth the risk, on a case-by-case basis.

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[63] Cf. Moran (1994, 100), Walton (1994, 34).

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