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## **PERSPECTIVES IN IMAGINATIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH FICTION**

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Recent philosophical attention to fiction has focused on imaginative resistance, especially with respect to moral matters, and has concluded that moral attitudes are distinctively hard to shift, even in imagination. However, we also need to explain ‘disparate response’: readers’ ability and willingness to alter their emotional, moral and other evaluative responses from those they would have to the same situation in real life. I argue that a unified explanation of both imaginative resistance and disparate response needs to appeal to perspectives. Trying on a perspective involves more than imagining an experience or the truth of a set of propositions: it requires actually structuring one’s intuitive thinking in the relevant way. A perspectival account better comports with empirical evidence of malleability in readers’ responses to both fiction and non-fiction, and more accurately predicts when imaginative resistance and accommodation actually arise.

### **§1: Introduction**

In the last 25 years, philosophical attention to fiction has focused heavily on the phenomenon of imaginative resistance: the fact that readers are sometimes unable or unwilling to play along with an author’s instructions to imagine certain contents, especially about moral matters. Readers’ resistance in these cases seems puzzling, given that they are willing to imagine all sorts of implausible, even impossible things in other domains. Theorists have offered various

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explanations for resistance. Richard Moran (1994) argues that resistance arises because evaluative and emotional engagement with fiction requires more than merely imaging contents: it involves actual, robust responses, which are not the sort of thing readers can simply choose to do in response to an author's prescriptions. Kendall Walton (1994), Steve Yablo (2002) and Brian Weatherson (2004) argue that resistance arises because what readers can imagine is constrained by general metaphysical or conceptual principles. And Tamar Szabó Gendler (2000, 2006a) argues that resistance is driven by readers' unwillingness to 'export' alien moral principles or perspectives from fictions to reality.

Because they focus on resistance, these theorists all emphasize the limits of imagination, and specifically the ways in which engagement with fiction is constrained by one's sense of reality. But it is at least as notable how often readers' responses toward fictions differ from those they would have toward the same situation, narrowly construed, in reality. Thus, 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. And I root for Scarlett O'Hara to get her man and her mansion rather than to emancipate her slaves. This is what Shaun Nichols (2006) calls the problem of "discrepant affect," and what Gregory Currie (1997) calls the "problem of personality." I will call it the phenomenon of *disparate response*; in effect, it is the inverse of resistance.<sup>1</sup>

To explain imaginative engagement with fiction in a way that makes sense of both resistance and disparate response, I will argue, we need to appeal to *perspectives*. Trying on a perspective requires more than just imagining that a set of propositions is true, or even imagining experiencing something. Rather, it involves actually structuring one's thinking in certain ways, so that certain sorts of properties stick out as especially notable and explanatorily central in one's intuitive thinking. Because it involves actual patterns of attention and response, adopting a perspective is partly but not entirely under one's voluntary control. And even when we try on perspectives temporarily, in the context of fiction, doing so may have lingering cognitive effects. Recognizing the nuanced ways in which authors deploy perspectives makes it less puzzling both that fictions can produce responses that differ from those readers would have toward analogous situations in the real world, and also that readers are sometimes unable or unwilling to go along with these responses.

I begin in §2 by sketching a standard philosophical approach to fictional engagement. In §3, I offer my account of perspectives, which I apply to disparate response in §4 and imaginative resistance in §5.

## §2: The Standard Model

The intuition that perspectives play an important role in engagement with fiction is by no means new. Richard Moran (1994, 105) is particularly explicit in this regard:

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.

Similarly, Tamar Gendler claims that imaginative resistance reveals that “imagining involves something in between belief, on the one hand, and mere supposition, on the other” (2000, 56), which she calls a “point of view” or a “way of looking.” Walton (1994, 1997), Currie (1997, 2010), Dadlez (1997), Carroll (2001), Goldie (2003), and Gaut (2007) also make at least some appeal to perspectives, outlooks, frames, or seeing-as in explaining our emotional and evaluative responses to fiction. However, these authors rarely offer more than a passing specification of what they mean by these terms. More importantly, they rarely put them to systematic work in explaining resistance. Instead, they tend to rely heavily on an analysis of imagination as the representation of contents as if actual, where those contents may concern one’s own psychology as well as the world.<sup>2</sup>

## **2.1: Make-Believe**

According to a deeply entrenched — and highly productive — philosophical model, minds are primarily composed of attitudes, like belief and desire, directed toward propositional contents. Imagination is treated as a propositional attitude akin to belief and desire, often specifically as the “off-line simulation” of belief (and perhaps desire; Doggett and Egan 2007). This analysis establishes a satisfying parallel between belief about the real world and imagination about fiction, which Walton articulates thus:

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).

This parallel in turn allows us to deploy the standard machinery of propositional attitudes and possible worlds in analyzing fiction. In particular, philosophers like Walton and David Lewis (1978) investigate the ‘principles of generation’ by which readers amplify explicit prescriptions about what is fictional into coherent, well-rounded worlds. The simplest mechanism for generating implicit fictional truths is what Walton calls the “Reality Principle”: the assumption that fictional worlds are “as much like the real one as the core of primary [i.e. explicitly stipulated] fictional truths permits” (1990, 144).<sup>3</sup>

As Walton, Lewis and others take care to point out, the Reality Principle does not govern fictions in general: we don’t import all of our contemporary

beliefs about geography or biology into the *Odyssey* or *The Lord of The Rings*. Nonetheless, an influential explanation for imaginative resistance does invoke a restricted form of the Reality Principle: Walton (1994), Yablo (2002), and Weatherson (2004) all argue that constitutive relations between base-level and higher-order propositions — paradigmatically, moral propositions — are fixed across worlds. As Brian Weatherson (2004, 22) articulates the core assumption,

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.

Combining this claim with the assumption that the operative “opinions” are readers’ ordinary views about reality delivers what we might call the “Fixed Reality Principle”: that with respect to certain domains it is impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to make fictional worlds differ from the real one even by explicit stipulation. On this view, while authors can make it fictional, say, that infanticide is common or that people value nutmeg, they cannot make it fictional that infanticide really is moral, or that nutmeg really is the *summum bonum*. On such higher-level evaluative and interpretive matters, the view goes, the author’s opinions are “just . . . 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” (Walton 1994, 39). Moreover, as readers of fiction we tend to exercise that freedom of disagreement: “when it comes to moral matters . . . I am more inclined to stick to my guns . . . I don’t easily give up the Reality Principle, as far as moral judgments (moral principles) are concerned” (Walton 1994, 37).<sup>4</sup>

One of my main claims is that the Fixed Reality Principle is false — not just because it admits of a few counterexamples or posits impossibility instead of difficulty, but because it mis-describes the actual phenomena of imaginative engagement and mis-locates their source. Although some readers do resist some fictions, it is at least as remarkable how frequently readers take up evaluations and emotions that differ from those they would have if they encountered an analogous situation on their own terms in real life. *Lolita*, *Triumph of the Will*, *Natural Born Killers*, *Pulp Fiction*, *The Stranger*, and many of Philip Roth’s novels are frequently mentioned as cases of compelling but morally alien fictions. Alongside these we might also mention more popular examples like *The Shining*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, as well as less radically alien but more classic cases, like the *Iliad*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Brideshead Revisited*. We need to explain both imaginative resistance and disparate response, ideally in a way that predicts when each will

arise in a given reader. A propositionalist account like the Fixed Reality Principle lacks the contextual flexibility to explain these nuanced patterns.

## **2.2: Dramatic Rehearsal**

So far, I have described make-believe as a propositional attitude. While some theorists do advocate a “single code” model of cognition (e.g. Nichols and Stich 2000, Nichols 2004, Pylyshyn 2003), many philosophers emphasize that imagining also involves, as Walton (1997, 38) says, “imagining *doing* things, *experiencing* things, *feeling* in certain ways.” Because dramatic rehearsal has much of the phenomenal immediacy of perception, it plausibly helps to trigger robust affective responses. Further, insofar as dramatic rehearsal involves “empathetic re-enactment” of imagined scenes “through the eyes of characters within them” (Currie 1995, 256), it has a natural explanation for disparate response: imagining being some other person requires imagining having *their* emotional and evaluative responses. Finally, it also seems poised to explain imaginative resistance, insofar as readers will naturally balk at pretending to be too different from themselves.

While dramatic rehearsal is important, and importantly different from purely propositional imagining, I will argue that it too fails to explain disparate response and imaginative resistance. The fundamental problem, as Moran (1994, 76) emphasizes, is that dramatic rehearsal, like propositional imagination, is individuated in terms of contents: of *what* is represented in imagination, albeit in a concrete rather than an abstract modality. An adequate account, I will argue, also needs to appeal to ‘*how*’ that content is imagined. In §4, I argue that a model that explains disparate response as the mere simulation of someone else’s attitudes cannot explain the fact that distinct modes of presenting the same content can significantly alter readers’ emotional and evaluative responses to real situations.

## **§3: Perspectival Factors in Imaginative Engagement**

In this section, I spell out what perspectives are, how trying on a perspective differs from imagining a propositional content, and how perspectives are normatively constrained by the world and in turn constrain emotional and evaluative responses to it.

### **3.1: Perspectives**

Even granting that the most basic thing authors do is prescribe propositions as to be imagined, the propositions an author explicitly prescribes cannot be isolated.<sup>5</sup> At a minimum, the author must present those propositions in a way

that enables readers to amplify and connect them into a coherent representation of a world inhabited by robust individuals participating in complex events.<sup>6</sup> Many theorists have noted that the relevant species of coherence here is not just (or even) logical or metaphysical consistency, but psychological comprehensibility. In particular, to even know what to imagine, let alone to be motivated to imagine it, readers need to cultivate an intuitive species of understanding which enables them to amplify, recall, predict, and evaluate events in the fictional world. A perspective, as I understand it, offers just this. A perspective is an open-ended disposition to construct rich, intuitive representations of particular individuals and events, and of relations among them. An agent with a perspective “knows their way about” the world being interpreted, in the sense that they know how to assimilate, extrapolate from, and respond to particular bits of information as they come in, and how to navigate among the bits of information they already have.

So far, none of this should be especially controversial; the challenge is to specify what such talk of perspectives, intuitive representations, and “know how” amount to. On the most literal interpretation, a perspective is simply an imagined *point of view*: a spatio-temporal location from which an agent rehearses a sequence of events within an imagined scene. Such a literal interpretation doesn’t even begin to address questions of interpretation and evaluative response, while a minimal extension which treats perspectives as psychological points of view, by appealing to the perceptual, cognitive, and affective states of an embedded character, does (Currie 1995, 1997). However, the psychological points of view of embedded characters are still too restricted to capture the relevant sense of perspective, for at least three reasons. First, readers’ interpretive responses to particular individuals and events in the fiction don’t just depend on a specific character’s current cognitive states, but also on the wider situation, including facts of which that character may be ignorant.<sup>7</sup> Second, readers often have reason to step out of imaginative immersion within successive scenes, to adopt an ‘acentral’ and external perspective on the fictional world as a whole.<sup>8</sup> In particular, a crucial aspect of narrative understanding consists in comprehending a story “*sub specie aeterni*,” as an integrated, structured whole (Mink 1970). Finally, an adequate account of imaginative engagement needs to explain how the same perspective can apply to multiple worlds. Various theorists (e.g. Nussbaum 1992, Gendler 2000) have argued that fictions acquaint us with new perspectives on the real world; to even make sense of these claims, perspectives need to be extractable from particular scenes and stories.

Thus, we need a more abstract understanding of perspectives, as modes of interpretation that may be exemplified by particular persons, and that may be applied to particular events or scenes, but that are not essentially tied to any specific interpreter or subject. On my view, a perspective is an open-ended disposition to notice, explain, and respond to situations in the world — an ability to “go on the same way” in assimilating and responding to whatever information and experiences one encounters. As such, perspectives differ from propositional

attitudes, and trying on a perspective differs from imagining a content, in at least two related ways. First, a perspective determines no truth-conditions of its own: although some perspectives can be crystallized in frames or slogans like ‘Look out for number one’ or ‘Turn the other cheek’, these function as interpretive imperatives to be applied to whatever situations come along, rather than imposing cuts in possibility space themselves. Second, having a perspective is a matter of cognitive action rather than cognitive content: it involves actually noticing, explaining, and responding to situations in a certain way, and not just representing situations as ‘to be interpreted’ in that way. In slogan form, perspectives are tools for thought, not thoughts in themselves.<sup>9</sup>

To build up a more precise notion of a perspective, and explain how alternative perspectives can genuinely warrant alternative emotional and evaluative responses, I need to say more about the intuitive interpretations that perspectives produce when applied to particular situations, which I call *characterizations*.<sup>10</sup>

### **3.2: Characterizations**

Characterizations are closely akin to what psychologists call prototypes, stereotypes, and schemas (and sometimes, concepts). Like these more theoretically familiar cognitive structures, a characterization applies a collection of properties to some subject: for instance, my characterization of quarterbacks includes their being natural leaders, affable but rather dumb and shallow. In addition to general traits, characterizations also often include specific, experientially-represented properties — thus, I tend to think of quarterbacks as having a certain sort of square, clean-shaven jaw, gleaming teeth, and a ready smile — as well as embodied representations of how the subject tends to or should make one feel: admiration, say, or scorn.

My characterization of quarterbacks instantiates an entrenched (and very American) stereotype. But characterizations can also represent individual persons (e.g. Donald Trump or Barack Obama), objects (e.g. the Mona Lisa), and events (e.g. a faculty meeting). And where stereotypes are communally shared, characterizations can be idiosyncratic: my characterization of a romantic weekend excursion, or of our last faculty meeting, may not match yours; or we might build up a specific, joint characterization together over time.

The second major feature of characterizations, which strongly differentiates them from concepts, is that the features they ascribe do not determine what they are about; indeed, they don’t even require commitment to their subjects actually possessing those features. Thus, I’m under no illusion that quarterbacks are especially likely to have gleaming teeth or square jaws; and I’ve read that they tend to have above-average intelligence (unlike linebackers). In departing from endorsed truth in this way, characterizations are again akin to stereotypes, as well as to what Gendler (2008) calls *aliefs*.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, there is a species of commitment involved in my characterizing quarterbacks as I do: 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; and if I were to say someone ‘looks like a quarterback’, this is part of what I would likely be aiming to communicate.

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 relative to a more general type. While it might be theoretically satisfying if fittingness could be reduced to more familiar statistical norms, intuitions of fittingness appear to have an at least partly aesthetic basis, which Arthur Danto (1981, 207) articulates in connection with the notion of *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.

Intuitions of fittingness influence our characterizations of people, objects, and events generally but particularly in the context of fictions, where aesthetic concerns are especially prominent.

The third major feature of characterizations, which will be crucial in explaining disparate response and imaginative resistance, is that they don’t merely consist in collections of attributed features, but *structure* them in our intuitive thinking, along at least two dimensions of importance. Along the first dimension, some features are more *prominent* than others. Prominence is roughly equivalent to what Amos Tversky (1977) calls *saliency*, which he in turn defines as a function of *diagnosticity* and *intensity*. A feature is diagnostic to the extent that it is useful for classifying objects as belonging to a certain category, like the number of stripes on a soldier’s uniform, while 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. 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 to identify him.

Where prominence selects which features matter, *centrality* determines how they matter, by connecting features into explanatory networks. 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, why he’s a quarterback at all — than having a square jaw does. A decent measure of centrality is *mutability*: how much the agent’s overall thinking about the subject would alter or need to be revised if they no longer attributed a given feature *f* to the subject (Murphy and Medin 1985, Thagard 1989, Sloman, Love and Ahn 1998). Causal connections are a paradigm species of explanation, but we often



Figure 1. The Old Crone/Young Lady

intuitively connect features on grounds that are emotional or ethical rather than strictly causal: by the “tick-tock” of what would be fitting or right (De Sousa 1987, Kermode 2000).

Structures of prominence and centrality are intuitive and holistic, in a way that the oft-cited analogy with perceptual Gestalts makes vivid. Contrast the two ways of seeing Figure 1. On either way of seeing, the perceptual significance and function of each constituent element depends on the significance and function of many other elements. Switching between ways of seeing shifts the relative prominence and centrality of those elements dramatically, which can in turn alter the significance of the basic elements themselves, so that the same set of pixels comes to be seen as a nose, say, or as a wart.

So too with characterizations in thought: the same feature may be assigned different structural roles within the same overall set of elements, which can in turn imbue that feature with different affective, evaluative, and even conceptual significances. Thus, a spatio-temporally equivalent gesture can seem threatening or merely awkward, depending on one’s overall characterization of the person performing it, including especially demographic features like race and gender (Devine 1989, Duncan 1976).

Characterizations don’t just influence the attribution and interpretation of particular features; they also guide our emotional and evaluative responses to entire subjects and situations. A wide range of empirical evidence establishes that people’s intuitive characterizations are closely intertwined with their actual emotional and evaluative responses, and depend heavily on how the represented situation is presented. In particular, differential affective priming — for sadness, say, as opposed to anger — affects which features agents notice, what causal explanations they give for those features, and whether they assign blame (Keltner et al 1993, Tiedens and Linton 2001, Lerner et al 2003, Small et al 2006, Dasgupta et al 2009). Priming for specific emotions also influences the valence and intensity

of evaluative judgments, by altering which elements within a stereotype agents employ in evaluating an individual or group (Forgas 1990). In the other direction, how an agent characterizes a situation influences their emotional response to it.<sup>12</sup> And attentional factors like order and vividness of presentation influence evaluative judgments, such as willingness to classify consequentialist tradeoffs as morally acceptable.<sup>13</sup>

Further, it is highly plausible that the linkages among characterizations, emotions, and moral responses are not merely causal, but normative. Thus, at a minimum, characterizations provide what Danto calls “structures of justification” for emotions: “there are things we know we ought to feel given a certain characterization of the conditions we are under” (1981, 169). More robustly, many theorists hold that one of emotions’ key functional roles is to impose an intuitive “gestalt” on a field of constituent features, by focusing attention on what matters most relative to that emotion.<sup>15</sup> Most theorists (and ordinary people) would also agree that only certain emotions are ‘fitting’ in response to certain morally-loaded situations, and many theorists take moral circumstances to at least call for, or even to be partially constituted by, certain emotional responses (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000a, b). Other ‘non-cognitivist’ de-emphasize ‘sentiments’, but still hold that moral judgments are constituted or justified by non-emotive perspectives (e.g. McDowell 1988, Nussbaum 1992, Little 1997, Kupperman 2000). Thus, a wide range of theoretical views acknowledge some sort of intimate normative triangle among characterizations, emotions, and moral judgments.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to the more general analogy with seeing-as, the appeal to gestalts brings out the intuitive, holistic nature of characterizations, in a way that helps make precise how characterizations differ from propositional attitudes as standardly construed. Unlike perspectives, which are open-ended dispositions to interpret whatever one encounters, particular characterizations do have contents: they represent clusters of features as fitting for their subjects. These base-level features are, crucially, embedded in complex structures of attention and explanation. In principle these structural relations can also be specified in propositional terms — indeed, we do articulate them regularly in the course of debating our emotional and evaluative responses to politics, personal relationships, and art. Nevertheless, explicitly endorsing or entertaining such structural propositions is neither necessary nor sufficient for actually having the relevant characterization. Rather, as with the perspectives that produce them, characterizing involves implementing rather than just representing that structure, by having it actually govern one’s intuitive thinking.

Characterizing thus differs from canonical cases of belief in much the same phenomenologically striking and practically efficacious way as seeing-as differs from “looking plus thinking” in perception (Wittgenstein 1953, 197). With both perceptual and cognitive seeing-as, it is possible for an agent to believe, perhaps on testimonial grounds, that the operative structural relations obtain, in the sense of sincerely endorsing the appropriateness of the structure and desiring to

deploy it in their own reasoning, without that agent actually intuitively ‘getting’ or comprehending that complex as a whole. Further, in both sorts of seeing-as, getting the propositions to play the relevant structural role is partly, but not entirely, under one’s voluntary control. That is, often directing attention to a certain feature, or explicitly entertaining a specific concept in connection with a feature, helps to bring about the ‘click’ of holistic understanding. But sometimes the click never arrives, or dawns only gradually and flickeringly. And sometimes — as when one hears a slur or sees a stereotypical seduction scene in a movie — it intrudes unbidden, despite one’s wish that it wouldn’t.

### 3.3: Warranting Characterizations and Responses

The phenomenon of intuitive, shifting, only partially voluntary patterns of interpretation is ubiquitous in our cognitive and communicative lives, for better and for worse. Recently, it has received concerted theoretical attention by psychologists and philosophers, who appeal, *inter alia*, to frames, schemas, stereotypes, System 1 processes, and aliefs. Unlike many of those theorists, I have claimed not just that we are saddled with intuitive cognitive structures which sometimes depart from our settled propositional attitudes, and which frequently drive our actual emotional and evaluative responses, but also that distinct characterizations of the same scenario can warrant different emotional and evaluative responses. But this then raises the question of what justifies characterizations themselves, both in general and for fiction.<sup>16</sup>

At a local level, we can say that a characterization of an individual or event *a*, whether in the actual world or fiction, is warranted only if it includes all or most of the base-level facts specified as being true of *a*. However, especially in the case of fiction, where an author is largely free to stipulate the basic facts, where such a small proportion of the attributed facts are explicitly specified, and where so much of the imaginative action involves higher-level interpretive responses, such base-level consistency is a fairly minimal condition. The more important question is how readers amplify, structure, and respond to this schematic core.

Here, we can distinguish two general constraints, one more objective and one more subjective, on appropriateness for characterizations. On the one hand, the local features ascribed by a particular characterization occur against a global factual background, which includes at least broad statistical distributions of properties and patterns of causation. Relative to such a background, features that are in fact more intense should be assigned higher prominence, as should features that are actually diagnostic relative to a presupposed taxonomy. Likewise, features that are actually key causal difference-makers should be assigned greater centrality.

However, the constraints imposed by these objective patterns of statistical and causal structure are only partial. Minimally, because the statistical and causal structures in a world are subtle, complex, and multi-dimensional, divergent

assignments can almost always be legitimately be extrapolated from any limited set of explicitly stipulated data. More importantly, diagnosticity, intensity, and centrality all depend in part on one's cognitive interests, and specifically on one's classificatory and explanatory aims, where these are themselves driven by one's practical, moral, and/or aesthetic values. Thus, insofar as there is room for legitimate variation in interests and values, this generates variability in warrant for characterizations, and in turn for emotional and evaluative response.

Epistemologists and philosophers of science debate how wide this range of legitimate variability is in interpreting the actual world. Returning to our core topic, the question for us is how those limits change when applied to fiction. Many theorists hold that here, the range is significantly wider, and specifically that different readers can enact equally legitimate but radically divergent "performances" of the same text, by drawing on "the reservoir of [their] own past life and reading" (Rosenblatt 1978, 140). Depending on the theory of 'performance', such a view can acknowledge, and perhaps even celebrate, the fact that readers enact perspectives in fiction that diverge from those they bring to real life. However, I will argue in §4 that we also need to acknowledge the way in which perspectives on fiction are normatively constrained by the author's proposed project. A fiction is not just an invitation to play at whatever thoughts and feelings one wishes; but neither is it a prescription to imagine certain individuals and events, with the interpretation of them left largely up to one's own discretion. Rather, a fiction also integrally includes a prescription to adopt certain interests, values, and patterns of attention toward those individuals and events, and toward the fictional world more generally.

## §4: Disparate Response

### 4.1: Perspectivalism

In §3, I identified a range of factors that influence not just *what* but *how* readers imagine and interpret represented situations. In particular, a range of empirical evidence supports the claim that our intuitive characterizations and responses depend on the order, imagery, and point of view of presentation. It is also well established that even brief exposure to emotionally-charged verbal cues arouses physiological responses characteristic of the correlative emotion, and influences the rapidity and content of subjects' later responses to a range of topics.<sup>17</sup> Given that relatively minimal verbal framing and affective priming alter ordinary causal and moral judgments and emotional responses to descriptions of real-world situations, it is unsurprising that those responses shift more significantly in the context of fiction. As we might put it, fictions are highly sustained, intense, cleverly designed priming experiments, which readers participate in willingly, often at least in part for the purpose of trying on alternative perspectives.

The perspectival resources I laid out in §3 appealed to general features of cognition, and help explain both the diversity of and constraints on perspectives in application to the real world. Fictions exploit this basic set of resources in ways that simultaneously heighten the divergence between readers' construals of a common situation-type in fiction and the real world, and also tighten the constraints on which construals are warranted toward a given situation within a fiction.

That is, on the one hand, fictions bracket certain core constraints on the construal of reality. Where perspectives on reality are answerable to the actual global background, authors of fiction are freer to construct very different patterns of statistical distribution and causal structure. Different fictional worlds are inhabited by different sorts of people and objects, who tend to possess certain clusters of properties and be driven by certain sorts of motivations. Thus, actions, qualities, and causes that would be shocking or impossible in a Jane Austen novel, say, are unremarkable in the worlds of Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy, or J. R. R. Tolkien, and vice versa. Further, where perspectives on reality are strongly constrained by (at least) practical purposes and consequences, authors of fiction are free to pursue aesthetic concerns. So authors of fiction have perspectival freedoms that describers of reality lack.

But on the other hand, where the actual world is independently out there, free to be interpreted differently by agents with different concerns and commitments, most if not all authors of fiction present the cultivation of their preferred perspective as an integral part of their imaginative project. Thus, fully engaging with a fiction involves adopting its operative profile of concerns and commitments, and not just those the reader happens to find most natural or rewarding.

Authors of fiction manifest their perspectives in myriad and nuanced ways. In particular, although they sometimes explicitly stipulate high-level objective facts and interpretive commitments, style is at least as powerful and ubiquitous a mechanism of perspectival generation. Among other things, grammatical features like choice of pronouns and anaphors, word order, and aspect for tense indicate literal spatio-temporal and psychological points of view. Many words, like 'cop', 'brigand', 'debonair', or 'reckless', are conventionally associated with characterizations, while figurative tropes and allusions communicate characterizations in a non-conventional way. Clausal complexity, discourse structure, and degree of descriptive detail all indicate habits of cognitive attention and interest. Genres, such as mystery, *bildungsroman*, mid-century American realism, generate default objective global assumptions and interpretive profiles of concern and response, which authors then amplify and modulate in ways specific to their particular fiction.<sup>18</sup>

Such syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and generic stylistic elements function to supply particular characterizations, to generate assumptions about the global background, and to signal profiles of cognitive interests. More generally, they provide tangible expression of what Iris Murdoch (1956, 39) calls a "texture

of being”: an overall mode of encountering the world, in which cognitive and physical habits *fit* together to form a consistent style, as Danto says.<sup>19</sup>

Although the effects of expressive style as a principle of generation and interpretation are subtle and difficult to articulate, concrete stylistic cues are an essential factor in making literary fictions genuinely aesthetic constructions; and they play an integral role in readers’ imaginative engagement, by providing guidance and motivation in adopting novel perspectives.

## 4.2: Simulationism

We can get a better sense for the distinctive explanatory contribution of perspectives by contrasting perspectivalism with two of its orthodox alternatives. I discuss: simulation and the Fixed Reality Principle.

It might seem that simulationism is well-placed to explain disparate response.<sup>20</sup> After all, significant empirical evidence suggests that reading narratives activates experiential representations,<sup>21</sup> and specifically that readers process information from the spatio-temporal, cognitive, and emotional point of view of narrative protagonists.<sup>22</sup> So we have reason to think that many readers do simulate alternative perspectives in a fairly literal sense. Further, some simulationists, such as Currie (1997) and Weinberg (2008), include characterization-like “configurational features” within the scope of what is simulated. So perhaps we can pack perspectives within pretended contents — albeit at the authorial rather than characterological level, in order to make sense of ‘external’ perspectives in a way that permits them to be applied to multiple worlds.

While there are important similarities between the views, at least two facets of disparate response favor perspectivalism over simulationism. First, the empirical findings cited in §3.1 about the mutual interdependence among characterizations, emotions, and evaluations are not specific to fiction. In many cases, subjects were asked to recall actual emotionally charged situations, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; and even when the presented situation was a hypothetical one, there was no question of simulating another person’s psychology. Thus, a simulationist account of disparate response which retains the standard analysis of real emotions and evaluations should predict that in such cases, where subjects are employing their own actual psychologies, they should display a stable pattern of ‘genuine’ response. But this prediction is not borne out.

Second, the simulationist lacks a plausible explanation for imaginative “contagion”: the way in which imagining unreal contents affects one’s actual psychology at least temporarily.<sup>23</sup> Because simulationists treat imagination as a functionally encapsulated module, in which imagination is “quarantined” from one’s real psychology (Leslie 1987, Goldman 1992), they predict that, as Nichols and Stich (2000, 120) put it, “the events that [occur] in the context of the pretense have only a quite limited effect on the post-pretense cognitive state of the pretender.”<sup>24</sup>

Any external psychological effects, other than predictions delivered as output, are treated as the by-product of faulty “inhibitory mechanisms” responsible for ensuring encapsulation (Currie 1995, 258). But here too the postulated inhibitory mechanisms are faulty enough to blur the line between simulationism and perspectivalism. Among other effects, reading even short fictions lowers the rapidity and confidence of subjects’ subsequent judgments about things they know to be true, such as the speed limit or how J.F.K. died (Gerrig 1993); subjects who imagine or think about certain types of people (e.g. professors, soccer hooligans, the elderly) behave more like them on unrelated tasks (Bargh et al 1996, Dijksterhuis and Van Knippenberg 1998, Banfield et al 2003); subjects who imagine being in a large group exhibit ‘bystander apathy’ to a degree proportional to the size of the imagined group (Garcia et al 2000); and subjects who read juxtaposed passages about distinct but related topics (e.g. the social status of gay people and the persecution of left-handers) are more likely to recall ‘analogically constructed’ claims as having been explicitly presented (Perrott et al 2005). Although many of these effects are transitory, they can affect later performance: for instance, the perspectives deployed on initial encounter with an imagined scene affect subsequent recall and evaluation of that same scene.<sup>25</sup>

The simulationist will rightly point out that many of these effects are temporally limited. But crucially, this is not sufficient to establish simulationism. What distinguishes the view that an agent is merely simulating a certain perspective from the view that they are actually but temporarily trying it on is the simulationist’s claim that the perspective is quarantined within imagination even at the time of imagining; this is what explains the temporal restriction. And here, the pervasiveness of contagion supports perspectivalism. Even when we are fully aware that the contents we represent are not real, our characterizations of those contents are not merely simulated: while we are absorbed in reading a fiction, certain things really do jump out at us and others pass as filler; and we really do link individual elements into intuitive associative structures, which in turn motivate certain explanations and plot developments and trigger affective responses. When these interpretive structures are activated or constructed, they become part of our actual, operative interpretive economy at least for that time.

Dick Moran inaugurated contemporary discussion of imaginative resistance by stressing the importance of *how* contents are presented, by arguing that our interpretive and emotional responses to fiction are actual rather than imagined, and by emphasizing that emotional response involves a “context-dependent . . . quasi-perceptual appreciation of the situation . . . grounded in the relevance or relative importance of various factors” (1994, 102), in a way that is continuous across fictional and non-fictional narratives about situations outside the “actual here and now” (1994, 78). In all these respects, my account is an elaboration of his. At the same time, what simulationists get right, but Moran at least downplays and sometimes appears to deny, is the flexibility of our capacity to “enter into” highly alternative psychologies, even given full awareness that — indeed, sometimes

precisely because — they depart from those we would reflectively endorse or intuitively employ on our own. In this sense, it is not straightforwardly true that, as he claims, “the responses of laughter, lust, indignation, relief, delight in retribution, etc. [we have to fiction] are normally treated as expressions of genuine attitudes that we actually have” (1994, 93). Our ability to try on a perspective does reveal something about our “real temperament,” but what is revealed may be our imaginative flexibility (or brittleness), rather than the presence of a stable underlying character that I would endorse or display if I were to encounter the same situation, narrowly construed, in reality.

### 4.3: The Fixed Reality Principle

Proponents of the Fixed Reality Principle are committed to denying the ubiquity of disparate response: after all, their primary evidence for the Principle derives from a purportedly widespread refusal or inability to have disparate responses to fiction. But while there is room for disagreement about the comparative frequency of disparate response, it undeniably does occur; and so proponents of the Fixed Reality Principle need some way to explain it. Here too, it might seem that the Principle can simply incorporate perspectivalism, in this case because both views invoke ‘grounding relations’ between base-level and higher-order propositions. However, this structural similarity masks a deeper difference: where the grounding relations invoked by the Fixed Reality Principle involve *metaphysical* relations among *particular* propositional contents, perspectivalism appeals to global connections among statistical and causal profiles, cognitive purposes, and intuitive interpretive, emotional, and evaluative responses. Both differences, I claim, favor perspectivalism.

The most plausible way for a proponent of the Fixed Reality Principle to explain disparate response is to claim that authors *manipulate* their readers into imagining feelings that don’t fit what is really fictional, where the “really” fictional higher-order propositions are determined by cross-contextually stable metaphysical relations to base-level features. I think this constitutes a compelling diagnosis of at least some of the malleability of emotional and evaluative responses with respect to reality. But I don’t think the same conclusion follows for fiction. As I suggested in §4.1 and will argue below, well-crafted fictions can not merely license but demand emotional and evaluative responses that differ from those a reader would have to an analogous situation in reality. Given the pervasiveness of disparate response, and the intimate causal and normative connections between emotions, evaluative (especially moral) responses and evaluative (especially moral) judgments in general, sustaining the claim that authors of fiction lack the authority to make the propositions that correspond to those emotions, responses, and judgments fictional requires heavy reliance on a prior, independent theory about the alethic norms governing the target class of propositions; the phenomena of fictional engagement provide no independent support for it.

As I argued in §3, for both the actual world and fiction, the objective global background of statistical and causal facts imposes significant constraints on which characterizations are warranted, which in turn constrain which emotional and evaluative responses are warranted. In the actual world, those global facts are given, albeit difficult to recover from limited experience. Further, most of the local base-level features we attribute in actuality are intersubjectively accessible, at least in principle. This combination of global and local objectivity frequently allows us to make sense of the possibility that another interpreter has genuinely mischaracterized a certain object or situation. Moreover, even when we lack our own independent access to the relevant base-level features, often if we know enough about that interpreter's overall perspective, we can begin to filter out the perspectival aspects of their testimony. In short, for the real world, we can frequently draw the sort of robust distinction between description and interpretation that is required to underwrite the claim that "authorial authority . . . does not extend as far as saying which concepts are instantiated," as Weatherston (2004, 22) says. However, the same does not hold for fiction, for at least three reasons.

First, a fiction's base-level facts have no independent reality apart from the author's construction; and authors typically employ evocative, characterization-laden language in specifying those facts. As a result, it is often impossible to 'peel off' the author's interpretation, to determine the base facts independently of authorial say-so.

Second, in a well-crafted fiction the author's characterizations of the base-level facts are appropriately grounded in the global objective facts, over which proponents of the Fixed Reality Principle do cede authorial control. In *Gone with the Wind*, for instance, it is a background assumption that the slaves generally accept their social position. Further, because they are depicted as uneducated and innately lacking in intelligence, they are incapable of securing and performing more sophisticated jobs. They also sincerely care about at least some of the aristocrats. Many readers will rightly want to resist imagining that these things are true. But they are the sorts of things that *could* be true in some alternative possible world.<sup>26</sup> And once the fictionality of these global background propositions is granted, then it becomes significantly more plausible to treat slavery as part of the social background, unworthy of concerted interpretive attention. Again, this is not to say that the fiction is right to prescribe imagining this global pattern of facts and causes, only that it is an imaginatively coherent prescription which does fall within the author's ambit.

Third, in a well-crafted fiction the author's interests and concerns are so integral to the proposed imaginative project that one cannot engage substantively in that project without adopting them. A reader of *Gone with the Wind* who focuses exclusively on the slaves' plight, or a reader of *Pride and Prejudice* who insists on focusing on the Napoleonic War rather than the local parishioners' foibles, will likely respond in quite different ways, and make quite different moral judgments, than the authors of those fictions do. But such a reader doesn't merely differ from the author in his "personal sentiments" about a common set of basic

facts (Walton 1994, 39). Rather, by refusing to meet those novels in the terms their authors propose — in both cases, as romances exploring (and indicting) women’s established roles in aristocratic society — he disengages so thoroughly from their proffered games that he loses the standing to say *what* counts as important, or praiseworthy, or shameful in those fictions. Such ‘alternative’ readings can be important and illuminating imaginative exercises in their own right. But they are effectively rewritings or parallel constructions, along the lines of Alice Randall’s parodic *The Wind Done Gone*.

In this sense, substantial differences of interpretive opinion must be relatively local. Although we are always “free to disagree” with the author, as Walton says, pervasive perspectival disparity constitutes a form of opting-out which ultimately undermines our readerly authority about even apparently local, base-level facts.<sup>27</sup> Again, sometimes opting-out is the right thing to do. But it is something that can be done only holistically, not piecemeal.

I’ve focused on disparate emotional and moral responses. However, one of Yablo’s and Weatherson’s key arguments for a Fixed Reality Principle is that imaginative resistance also arises for a range of non-normative, metaphysical topics: thus, it is difficult to imagine fictions in which maple leaves are both five-fingered and oval (Yablo 2002, 485), or in which a knife and fork are observationally indistinguishable from a television and armchair (Weatherson 2004, 5). For these cases, disparate response is indeed much less pervasive, and it is much more plausible that the relevant higher-order judgments turn centrally on issues of metaphysical grounding rather than psychological attention and motivation. Even here, though, I think we should be suspicious of the Fixed Reality Principle. The comparative paucity of disparate response for such cases may reflect contingent current limitations in readers’ (and authors’) interests and imaginative capacities, which new literary genres and tropes may subsequently expand. Thus, math nerds inspired by *Flatland* to explore the phenomenology of mathematical spaces governed by merely topological, as opposed to geometrical, principles might well be willing to accept the outline of a five-fingered maple leaf as a circle, because it is a continuous closed one-dimensional space. More generally, the history of science suggests that we should reject general, *a priori* limitations on what we might be able to imagine (and discover) given sufficient context and effort. Some cases of imaginative expansion may shift assumptions that are so deep and central that they involve creating a novel concept denoting a distinct kind. But other cases are more plausibly described as shifts in the conception or characterization that surrounds a stable concept.<sup>28</sup>

## §5: Imaginative Resistance

Ultimately, despite their significant theoretical differences, Currie’s simulationism, and Moran’s affective realism, and Walton, Weatherson and Yablo’s metaphysical universalism all assume a stable self who either cannot or will

not actually take up alien emotional and evaluative responses toward the real world. In §4, I argued that this assumption of ‘real’ cognitive stability fails to explain the pervasive malleability of emotional and evaluative responses to both fiction and reality, as well as the way that fictions in particular can genuinely warrant alternative responses. In this section, I argue that perspectivalism also provides a better explanation of imaginative resistance. Walton, Weatherston and Yablo are right to point out that readers approach fictions with default interpretive assumptions, including especially assumptions about relations between base- and higher-order interpretive propositions. But resistance depends not primarily on *what* authors prescribe as fictional, either explicitly or implicitly, but rather on how skillfully they ground those prescriptions within a coherent and well-motivated imaginative project.

As I argued in §3, a successful fiction does more than prescribe imagining a set of propositions and experiences. Minimally, the objective local and global facts need to be internally coherent, and presented in a way that enables readers to form intuitive characterizations of robust individuals and events. Further, the prescribed emotional and evaluative responses must be warranted by characterizations that fit the local base-level facts, the global statistical and causal background, and the author’s overarching commitments and concerns.

Fictions may trigger resistance by being inconsistent in one or more of these ways. An author may prescribe responses that are not warranted by the fiction’s global background: for instance, decrying as heinous a type of action that is also presented as entirely commonplace and causing no harm. Or they may explicitly stipulate, without explaining or motivating, a global background that conflicts with the norms for the fiction’s genre (Liao 2016). A fiction may also be interpretively inconsistent even if objectively consistent; for instance, critics accused *Natural Born Killers* of glamorizing violence in its presentational style even as it explicitly decried media sensationalism. Some such interpretive inconsistencies are intentional: the explicit moralizing may provide a fig leaf for prurient interests; or the author may want to ‘seduce’ her readers into indulging those interests in order to bring home how dangerous they are (Gaut 2007). But unless readers can discern some plausible higher-order interpretive purpose, such objective and interpretive inconsistencies are likely to shake their trust in the author’s project.

Fictions without any internal inconsistency can also provoke resistance. The more radically a fiction’s operative perspective departs from a particular reader’s defaults, the more likely resistance becomes, as that reader loses the ability or desire to shift their ordinary cognitive dispositions in the prescribed way.<sup>29</sup> Getting readers to go along with alternative interpretive responses and judgments, especially but not exclusively moral evaluations, requires sustained, highly-skilled work: building up a rich, novel body of global assumptions, framing the described actions and events with appropriately expressive language and imagery, and enticing the reader to share the author’s commitments and concerns.

Further, because perspectives are ongoing intuitive dispositions to characterize, and only partly under voluntary control, readers must be trained into them and given compelling motivations to persist in them.

Given all this, we should not be surprised if short, stylistically flat fictions which explicitly stipulate interpretive propositions that are wildly contrafactual by the reader's lights — that is, the sorts of examples typically employed by philosophers when discussing imaginative resistance — generally provoke resistance.<sup>30</sup> But for this same reason, such cases do not constitute good evidence that those same propositions would be rejected if embedded within more complex, well-executed fictions. The pervasiveness of disparate response in engagement with actual fictions — and with actual reported scenarios — suggests the opposite. Rather than having a fixed moral compass, it appears that readers have something more like a moral center of gravity, with more imaginative and interpretive effort being required, especially for some readers, to displace judgments further from their default equilibrium — and with that effort being directed at least as much at *how* as at *what* is imagined.<sup>31</sup>

As Weatherson and Walton emphasize point out, the mere fact that readers judge that certain propositions are true in a fiction doesn't *ipso facto* establish that those propositions are indeed fictional. The author might have manipulated her readers, or author and reader might both be prejudiced in ways that lead them to turn a blind eye to internal inconsistencies. However, the broader the range of readers an author successfully induces to accept such judgments, and the greater the level of detail with which authors and readers can justify them, the less plausible it becomes to dismiss those judgments as mistaken. In §4, I argued that disparate response is so pervasive that endorsing a Fixed Reality Principle entails a widespread error theory about many readers' ordinary engagement with many fictions. By contrast, perspectivalism rehabilitates most reader engagement, while also better explaining the profile of cases where imaginative resistance does arise.

Even if many readers do willingly participate in perspectivally alien fictions, and even if authors do succeed in making the corresponding propositions fictional, readers might still have good moral, prudential, and/or aesthetic reasons not to try on those alien perspectives. Indeed, the non-propositional nature of perspectives makes morally alien fictions especially risky, since even temporarily trying on a perspective involves genuinely cultivating an open-ended disposition to notice, explain, and respond. Thus, as Gendler says, one important source of resistance is a desire not to add objectionable perspectives to our "conceptual repertoire" (2000, 77), because doing so may "render these undesirable patterns of response available even in the contemplation of actual [scenarios]" (2006a, 153), by leading us to "emphasize similarities we prefer to overlook" (2006a, 151) but which, once noticed, we cannot ignore.<sup>32</sup>

Obviously, I take this feature of perspectives — that they involve actual patterns of attention and response, only partly under voluntary control — to be

crucial; and I argued in §4.2 that it makes trouble for both Currie's simulationism and Moran's robust realism. However, Gendler's official explanation of resistance does not fully acknowledge this feature. Instead, she claims that morality fictions produce resistance when "the reader feels that she is being asked to export a way of looking at the actual world" (2000, 77). While intended exportation is certainly a contributing factor in generating resistance, exclusive reliance on a distinction between 'exported' and 'quarantined' perspectives in explaining resistance risks reinstating the standard distinction between real and merely imagined cognitive attitudes — a distinction that Gendler's own observations about conceptual repertoire and imaginative contagion show to be problematic.<sup>33</sup>

More importantly, the distinction between quarantined and exported perspectives fails to track actual patterns of engagement and resistance. On the one hand, many people are authentically moved by fictions, like *Paradise Lost*, which deploy alien perspectives that the author intends realistically, even didactically. Many readers also try on alternative perspectives outside fiction, in reading historical or autobiographical narratives like Augustine's *Confessions*, and in political and ethical debate. On the other hand, as Gendler acknowledges, we sometimes resist fictions we know to be intentionally distorted. And we do so for good reason: whether or not their perspectives are packaged for exportation, some distorting dystopic visions really are so demonic that we should balk at trying them on.

While we should acknowledge that the risks involved in trying on perspectives, whether intended for exportation or just for tourism, are real, I don't think the risks warrant across-the-board resistance. Alien fictions constitute an important potential source of knowledge, precisely because they enable us to comprehend deeply different perspectives from the inside.<sup>34</sup> This can help us interact more effectively with those who accept them. More importantly, we may ultimately embrace their perspectives for ourselves, deciding that our earlier rejection was prejudicial. Refusing to try on alternative perspectives protects us from the risk of moral perversion, but by cutting us off from potential moral growth.

Finally, in addition to explaining imaginative resistance by positing alethic failures and moral risks, various theorists have also argued that morally alien fictions are *ipso facto* aesthetically flawed, because they demand imaginative responses which "morally sensitive" readers are psychologically unwilling or unable to indulge (Walton 1994; Carroll 2001), or that it would be immoral to cultivate (Gaut 2007). Here too, I agree that alien perspectives raise the aesthetic stakes, but deny any systematic conclusions about aesthetic merit. Readers and critics regularly acknowledge that aesthetically meritorious artworks are challenging in other ways: by employing disruptive syntax, say, or eschewing traditional harmonies. If that challenging feature is sufficiently integral to the work — or "incorrigible," as Jacobson (1997, 191) puts it — then we typically don't count it as an aesthetic deficit.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, one might count the ability to draw readers into an alien perspective as an aesthetic virtue, given that doing so requires significantly greater skill.

## §6: Conclusion

What, in the end, do we learn from fictions? Hilary 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” fictions might provide, and the sense in which it is knowledge of a possibility. As Putnam says, it's not primarily knowledge that a certain proposition is, or could be, true. Rather, the species of possibility with which a fiction acquaints us is conceptual or cognitive in the sense of being a possible tool for thought. An integral aspect of the project proposed by an author of fiction involves actually, if temporarily, re-structuring our thoughts, by altering what we notice and care about, what explanations we assign, and what emotional and evaluative responses come naturally to us. In many cases, we drop these characterizing dispositions soon after we close the book. But often, there is at least some lingering effect. And sometimes, with or without our realizing it, these subtleties ramify to alter our interpretive judgments of analogous situations in reality.

At a more theoretical level, fictions show us that our ‘real selves’ are less stable than many people like to think. In motivating the Fixed Reality Principle, Steve Yablo (2002, 485) says that

It's a feature of [the class of resistance-producing concepts] that their extension in a situation depends on how the situation does or would strike us. ‘Does or would strike us’ *as we are*: how we are represented as reacting, or invited to react, has nothing to do with it. Resistance is the natural consequence. If we insist on judging the extension ourselves, it stands to reason that any seeming intelligence coming from elsewhere is automatically suspect.

Yablo is correct that for an interesting class of concepts, extension-determination depends in part on intuitive response. But he is wrong to conclude that resistance naturally follows. A well-executed fiction does not deliver authorial intelligence from “elsewhere”: it invites us in to its world and way of seeing, thereby temporarily altering us “as we are”. The idea that we bring a stable set of commitments to bear on our encounters with the world is deeply intuitive; but it is itself a partial fiction. Our real selfhood is better located in our ongoing, incremental decisions to cultivate certain habits of attention, explanation, and response over others.<sup>36</sup>

Perspectives influence our emotional and evaluative responses across the board, but especially in fiction, where, as Plato warned, we are tempted to think it safe to ‘let ourselves go’. The open-ended nature of perspectives makes the decision whether to even attempt to cultivate an alternative perspective especially

difficult. 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. We may think we are mere tourists, and the author may ask no more of us. But even such limited engagements can have deeper effects than we realize. And by the time we do realize, it may be too late: our engagement with the work of art may pervert us, as judged by our own previous standards, and then blind us to that perversion by cloaking it as enlightenment (Nehamas 2000). *Pace* Plato, however, there is no independently given standard for sorting perversion from enlightenment. We must each make that decision for ourselves, using our current best lights.

## Notes

1. Dadlez (1997), Posner (1997), Goldie (2003), and Kieran (2002, 2003) all also draw attention at least briefly to disparate response.
2. I distinguish content-oriented and perspectival varieties of imagination, and argue that poets frequently exploit both varieties in interesting ways, in my (2009).
3. Where the Reality Principle is a mechanism for generating fictional truths from explicit prescriptions to imagine, Friend (2017) defends a 'Reality Assumption' as an unavoidable starting point on which principles of generation then operate. While the Reality Assumption is significantly more flexible and plausible than the Reality Principle, it too is couched as an assumption about propositional contents.
4. Weatherson is slightly more cautious, saying that "there is a strong default assumption" that the standard "in virtue of" relations are imported into stories, which "is not easy to overcome" (2004, 17). Moran (1994, 99) makes a similar claim in more moderate terms: "We seem, then, to accept a role for the reader's . . . own sense of what is blameworthy or admirable in determining what is true in the fiction." However, he rejects an inter-level propositional analysis in terms of the Fixed Reality Principle, partly on the ground that it turns moral disagreement into "simple harangue" over the application of conflicting concepts (1994, 101).
5. One clarification: in keeping with most contemporary philosophical discussions of fiction, I will speak freely of authorial intentions (and opinions, as Weatherson and Walton do above). I endorse a species of hypothetical intentionalism, on which an 'author' is a character we construct in the course of reading (e.g. Nehamas 1987, Camp 2015b). The connection between this postulated authorial figure and the actual writer's mental states is a matter of debate, but largely orthogonal for current purposes; readers queasy about authorial intentions may frame the discussion in terms of what 'the text' demands from its ('model') readers instead.
6. In this respect literary fictions differ from many scientific and philosophical fictions.
7. Cf. Moran 1994, 91; Carroll 2001, 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 through music in film, violations of genre expectations, and so on.

8. Cf. Goldie 2003, 57; Currie 2010, 49. Film may differ from verbal fiction in how much viewers adopt external perspectives.
9. Although the theorists I cited in §1 as invoking frames and perspectives don't specify what they mean by these terms, what they do say is largely compatible with my account. Thus, Gendler (2000, 69) describes "ways of seeing things" as "focus[ing] 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). 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 "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 perceptual model in his earlier (1995, 1997) work. However, he still retains the perceptual model insofar as he defines narrative point of view in terms of *limitations* on an agent's awareness, conceptual resources, and capacities for action (2010, 89). As such, his model cannot account for the key fact that perspectives are something we can try on and advocate, and about which we can differ even given full agreement on a set of base-level facts and conceptual repertoire.
10. For a fuller account of characterizations and their relation to concepts, see Camp 2015(a). I discuss the role of characterizations and perspectives in the interpretation of metaphor in Camp 2006 and 2009; in the interpretation of slurs in Camp 2013, and in scientific inquiry in Camp forthcoming(a). I argue that perspectives and frames can make genuine, epistemically distinctive contributions to understanding in Camp forthcoming (b).
11. However, characterizations are also much more contextually fine-grained, informationally rich, and subject to voluntary control than at least paradigmatic cases of aliefs.
12. For instance, some cross-cultural differences in emotional response appear to be grounded in differences in the degree of responsibility and self-control that subjects assign to agents in a given situation-type (Mauro et al 1992). See Wallbott and Scherer 1986, Ortony et al 1988, and Smith 1989 for other discussions of connections between cognitive appraisal and emotional response.
13. On the effects of framing on evaluative response, see Tversky and Kahneman 1981, Bartels 2008, Bartels and Medin 2007. See Levin et al 1998 and Iliev et al 2009 for overviews of framing effects, especially in moral contexts.
14. 'Framing effects' are often invoked as distorting emotional and evaluative response. However, I take it that the distortion arises because inappropriate frames lead to mischaracterizations; apt characterizations are intimately, even essentially, tied to apt responses.
15. E.g. A. Rorty 1980, de Sousa 1987, Greenspan 1988, Calhoun 1994, Carroll 2001, Robinson 2005, and Currie 2010, 98.
16. See Camp forthcoming(a,b) for discussion.
17. See e.g. Klauer and Musch 2003 for an overview of affective priming.

18. For recent discussion of the role of genre in producing and dissipating imaginative resistance, see Nanay 2010, Weinberg and Meskin 2006, and Liao 2016.
19. Currie (2010, ch. 7) provides concrete illustrations of specific ways in which verbal style expresses personality and perspective; Moran (1994) and Goldie (2003) also emphasize the importance of expressive features in regulating emotional response.
20. For defenses of simulationism in fiction, see Goldman 1992, Currie 1995, 1997, 2002; Walton 1997; Nichols and Stich 2000; Nichols 2004, 2006; Weinberg and Meskin 2006; Weinberg 2008; Doggett and Egan 2008.
21. Tettamanti et al 2005, Speer et al 2009. However, there is considerable variability in how much imagery subjects report experiencing. See e.g. McKelvie 1995 for self-reports of experiential imagining; see Schwitzgebel 2008 for philosophical discussion of the unreliability of introspection and experiential self-report.
22. For instance, subjects are quicker at reporting the locations of objects described as close to or in front of the protagonist (Rinck et al 1996), and at interpreting sentences reporting emotions which match those implicitly felt by the protagonist (Gernsbacher et al 1992). See Coplan 2004 for useful philosophical discussion of empirical evidence and a defense of empathy in fictional engagement.
23. See Gendler 2006b for philosophical discussion of empirical research.
24. Friend 2003 also endorses this conclusion, though without explicitly endorsing simulationism.
25. Anderson and Pichert 1978, Baillet and Keenan 1986, Lee-Sammons and Whitney 1991.
26. Cf. Gendler's (2000, 73) example of the black and white mice.
27. As Gendler (2000, 63) puts it, responding 'That's what *you* think' (or 'That's your personal opinion') is "something which is always available as a last resort, but which, if overused, undermines the entire convention of which it is supposed to be offering local criticism."
28. For discussion of the interplay between limits on imaginability or conceivability and characterizations, see Camp 2004, 2015a.
29. Conversely, a fiction that too closely mimics a reader's standing assumptions and perspective also risks disengagement, either by failing to pique his interest or by reminding them too painfully of reality. Thanks to Marc Moffett for the latter point.
30. Liao (2016) also criticizes philosophers' restricted diet of examples. Weatherston (2004, 17) officially restricts his conclusions about puzzling fictions to such invitations, although much of his discussion suggests broader application.
31. Friend's (2017) treatment of the Reality Assumption as a default starting point for interpretation, rather than itself a mechanism of interpretation, nicely accommodates this 'center of gravity' model, although she retains the standard focus on assumptions about what is assumed rather than on modes of interpretation. Liao (2106) makes similar points about an evaluative 'center of gravity' by focusing on genre. While I agree that genre is an important factor in engagement and resistance, I think variation among the fictional projects proposed by different authors within genres, as well as variation in imaginative flexibility across readers, are at least as important.
32. Gendler connects perspectives in fiction with Moran's (1989) discussion of the 'compulsion' involved in metaphorical perspectives. In Camp (2017), I defend

- a restricted version of Moran's claim that this 'compulsion' lends metaphorical insults a distinctive rhetorical power.
33. Indeed, if the "undesirable patterns of response" that fictions inculcate were fully outside our voluntary control, as Gendler claims in the passages quoted above and in many of her discussions of aliefs, then whether a perspective is intended for exportation should be irrelevant: exportation should be inevitable. The theoretically puzzling feature of perspectives is the way in which they are partly, but only partly, voluntary.
  34. Kieran (2003) argues that this can constitute an aesthetic, and not merely instrumental, merit.
  35. Further, it is unclear how to determine when a fiction is aesthetically flawed because inaccessible: inaccessibility to a particular reader might reflect lack of imagination, or prudentially warranted caution. As Jacobson (1997) argues, it would be question-begging to assume that emotional or evaluative responses to fiction are aesthetically unmerited simply because immoral.
  36. I propose a perspectival account of literary characters, and of actual selves, in Camp (2011).

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