

The Evaluative Character of Imaginative Resistance

Dustin R. Stokes

Abstract

A fiction may prescribe imagining that a pig can talk or tell the future. A fiction may prescribe imagining that torturing innocent persons *is a good thing*. We generally comply with imaginative prescriptions like the former, but not always with prescriptions like the latter: we imagine non-evaluative fictions without difficulty but sometimes resist imagining value-rich fictions. Thus arises the *puzzle of imaginative resistance*. Most analyses of the phenomenon focus on the *content* of the relevant imaginings. The present analysis focuses instead on the *character* of certain kinds of imaginings, arguing that we resist in such cases given the rich evaluative character of the imaginings prescribed, and the agent-dependent constraints on imagining in such ways.

There is an asymmetry between two classes of imaginative prescriptions. A fiction may prescribe imaginings that a man metamorphoses into a giant cockroach, that a cat walks through walls, or that farm animals form governments. A fiction may prescribe an imagining that *it was a good thing* that Mrs. Grimley drown her newborn because the infant was a female. We generally comply with imaginative prescriptions like the former, but not always with prescriptions like the latter: we imagine non-moral fictions without difficulty but sometimes resist imagining moral fictions. Thus arises the *puzzle of imaginative resistance*, framed in terms of the following asymmetry:

(1) Imagining non-moral falsehoods *vs.* imagining moral falsehoods.¹

Why do we comply with prescriptions to imagine non-moral falsehoods and resist imagining moral ones?² Answers divide into two approaches. Kendall Walton, Tamar Gendler, and Derek Matravers assume that both classes of imaginings are make-beliefs and propose that imaginative resistance is resistance to make-believing morally deviant

contents. Kathleen Stock locates the resistance in a failure to understand or properly attend to, and thus to imagine, conceptually impossible contents. Call such approaches *content solutions*. An alternative approach, taken by Greg Currie, takes the asymmetry in (1) to be a consequence of an asymmetry between the *characters* of non-moral and moral imaginings. Moral imaginings involve desire-like imaginings which are optional in non-moral imaginings³. Currie's approach provides an example of a *character solution*, and is adequate only if the relevant desire-like character of moral imagining is connected in the right way to value.⁴

Imaginative richness and character

According to Currie, imaginative resistance occurs when an imaginative project is rich, involving prescriptions to form imaginings with a desire-like character and morally deviant content. So on this view, imaginative states have different *characters*.

We can distinguish a mental state's character from its content.⁵ This can be done along one of two dimensions, or a combination thereof. We might distinguish a mental state type by distinctive *phenomenology*. There is something it is like to have a (human) visual experience. There is something it is like to have an auditory experience. Thus we describe a visual experience in terms very different from an auditory experience, even if the two experiences are experiences of the same thing. The properties that we experience and the concepts we use to characterize them will be distinctively visual and auditory, respectively. The case is more controversial for propositional attitudes. Many philosophers of mind take attitudes like belief and desire to lack phenomenologies altogether, let alone distinctive ones. There is nothing it is like to be in a state of belief,

desire, or intention. Qualia, if we posit them at all, are reserved for perceptual experience, pain, and perhaps emotions, but not for propositional attitudes.⁶ The case could be made, nonetheless, that even these types of state are distinguished by qualitative feel: beliefs are perhaps characterized by a varying feeling of conviction, desires by a kind of pull or drive. We do, after all, say things like ‘how certain are you about *p*?’ and ‘how does it feel to want *q*?’, which would suggest that, in answering, we introspect the way such states feel.⁷

Many naturalists will remain suspicious of distinctive belief and desire phenomenology, opting instead for understanding attitude character in terms of *functional role*. Beliefs carry various consequences for action, as well as for other mental states like desire, intention, and emotions. Beliefs dispose us to act in certain ways: if situated in the appropriate context, I will assent to the truth of a proposition believed. Or, if coupled with the appropriate desires, I may perform actions in accordance with my beliefs. In Robert Nozick’s apt phrase, beliefs track truth.⁸ Desires serve a motivational function. This fact determines the nature of desire’s relation with other elements in the cognitive-behavioural system. Desires, when coupled with beliefs (or perhaps with other states: it depends upon whether or not one opts for a Humean theory of action) will motivate us to act. They may also cause or affect other mental states. We can of course distinguish perceptual state types by function as well: visual perception and auditory perceptions stand in a different set of relations with the cognitive-behavioural system of which they are a part.

So one can distinguish mental state types at the level of character in terms of either phenomenology, functional role, or both. Whatever one chooses, one can similarly

distinguish imaginative state types by character. Some imaginings have a belief-like character, others have a desire-like character, while still others have a vision-like character, others an auditory character, and so on. In each case, the imaginative state is characterized in ways similar to the ways its non-imaginative *counterpart* is characterized.⁹ Belief-like imaginings are similar to beliefs in terms of their inferential connections: a make-belief that ‘If P, then Q’ and a make-belief that ‘P’ licenses a make-belief that ‘Q’—as does believing the same propositions. Belief-like imaginings are also like beliefs in causing beliefs, desires, and emotions. Likewise, desire-like imaginings have effects similar to desires, contributing to pretend decision and action, the formation of other mental and emotional states. A vision-like imagining is similar to a visual percept: we manipulate and glean content from a mental image of a red tomato in ways similar to a visual perception of a red tomato. And so on for other varieties of imaginative character.

Imaginings are *rich* when they involve more than what we might call bare make-belief or mere supposition. We successfully imagine that female infanticide is good only if we limit our imagining to bare make-belief. We suppose, much like we would for a task of counterfactual reasoning, that such-and-such is the case. However, fictions generally trigger rich imaginings: we imagine not only the proposition in question, but the surrounding circumstances, consequent states of affairs, and so on. We thus form imaginings rich in both content and character. Compare: if asked to imagine that pigs can fly, I might baldly imagine that the proposition ‘Pigs can fly’ is true. Alternatively, as is usually the case when engaging with fictions, I might visually image pigs flying, pawing their hooves through the clouds, squealing in airborne delight, snorting at the windows of

skyscrapers; I might imagine havoc near airports, Iowa farmers in fits of confusion and outrage, a new kind of ‘game bird’ for our thanksgiving dinners. These states will connect with and cause other states until I am hoof-deep in a land of flying pigs. We can thus imagine more or less richly.

Rich imaginative projects often involve a desire-like component. Currie claims that resistance occurs only in rich imaginative projects that involve imaginings with a desire-like character. I resist make-desiring that Mrs. Grimley murder her female infant.¹⁰ I thus fail to imagine that Mrs. Grimley’s action was a good one and the imaginative project is derailed. Currie thus explains (1) in terms of another asymmetry:

(2) Successful belief-like imagining vs. successful desire-like imagining.

Bare make-belief does not induce imaginative resistance, and imagining non-moral falsehoods only requires these weaker imaginings. Imagining moral falsehoods, by contrast, comprises rich imaginings, in which make-belief is accompanied by a desire-like component.

The suggestion that there is a uniquely desire-like mode of imagination has invited scepticism.¹¹ There is significant room for interpretation here—for example, the desire-like mode might be characterized just by distinctive functional role, by distinctive phenomenology, or both—and thus significant room for Currie’s position to be finessed around such criticisms.¹² So let’s grant that the status of desire-like imagination remains an open question.

Even granting that some imaginings are desire-like, there are two problems with Currie's diagnosis. It is not a complete analysis: the conceptual connection between moral imaginings and desire-like imaginings goes unexplained. Moreover, the diagnosis construes the puzzle too narrowly: it fails to accommodate an expansion beyond moral cases. Clarification of the second problem illuminates the first.

Consider the following narrative.

Here comes Alvin, the town time traveller, with his talking pig. He spent this past week with Miles Davis and John Coltrane in New York City, Spring of 1959. The previous week was spent in Athens, 399 BC, with some philosophers in a precarious position involving a cup of poison. Alvin is nearly 250 years old now and the years of time travel are beginning to show. His skin, the colour of the yolk of a hard-boiled egg, is more wrinkled than not. He has little hair, the bit that he has usually sticking to his constantly perspiring head. His eyes are nearly shut as a result of the chronic nasal congestion—an unfortunate symptom of time travel—that swells his nose and cheeks. Through his grin, you can see his eleven teeth, each black with decay.

There is no difficulty imagining the truth of any of these propositions. We are able to imagine that Alvin travels through time and that his pig talks, despite their being physically impossible and far from believable. Now the narrator adds.

Alvin is very handsome.

No, he's not! We resist imagining that Alvin is a handsome lad. We have taken in the descriptive facts of the story in clean stride, but when the narrator suggests this last proposition, we resist. Note that here, as with the female infanticide case, the resistance that interests us is not to the proposition that people (fictional or actual) commit morally reprehensible acts or lack aesthetic merit or beauty, nor that someone (e.g. some character in the story or the narrator) judges or evaluates the (fictional) world in a certain way.

Rather, we resist imagining that the evaluative facts are as suggested—that Mrs. Grimley’s action *is* good, that Alvin *is* handsome. We resist the narrator’s invitation to evaluate, even if only imaginatively, the situation in said ways. The difference between the standard female infanticide case and the present case is that here the proposition resisted is not morally problematic but rather, aesthetically problematic.

Cases like this suggest that the puzzle of imaginative resistance be reframed in terms of the following asymmetry:

(1') Imagining contrary-to-descriptive facts vs. imagining contrary-to-evaluative facts.¹³

We readily comply with prescriptions to imagine facts that are contrary to the descriptive facts of the actual world and sometimes resist imagining those that are contrary to—at least what we take to be—the evaluative facts of the world. Framing the puzzle in this way is more comprehensive, accommodating both moral and non-moral imaginative resistance.

Is there an imaginative attitude that captures the evaluative nature of the offending propositions, that is, the ones that we resist imagining? Currie takes desire and its imaginative counterpart to be the relevant attitudes: first order desire is conceptually connected to evaluation. This connection is explained by appeal to an ideal spectator who, upon surveying some action or event from a sufficiently rational and sympathetic perspective, would desire an outcome if she judged it morally correct, and desire its non-occurrence if she judged it morally wrong. Thus when a fiction prescribes moral evaluation, it prescribes desire-like imaginings, and the latter must answer to the

imaginee's moral character. A careful reader, Currie suggests, attempts harmony between evaluations of fictions and desire-like imaginings, and can take on alien values only at the cost of such harmony.

The purported connection is amiss: some evaluations lack any connection with first order desires and desire-like imaginings. Consider aesthetic evaluation. There is a tradition in philosophical aesthetics that takes aesthetic evaluation to be *disinterested*—lacking any appeal to the evaluating agent's goals, desires, or personal gain.¹⁴ Although it is implausible that all evaluation is disinterested, surely some evaluations are. Were I to read about someone with Alvin's looks who is judged handsome in a fashion magazine, I would scoff at the author's bad taste. The author's judgment strongly conflicts with my values, which drive my judgment of Alvin's looks and the fashion writer's descriptions thereof. These judgments lack any appeal to my first order desires. The same goes in fictional cases: my resistance to imagining that Alvin is handsome is not a resistance to forming desire-like imaginings. I need not assume the position of ideal spectator, forming first order desires or desire-like imaginings in order to evaluate the looks of actual or fictional Alvin's. Thus (2) does not explain (1').

Nor does (2) fully explain Currie's intended target, (1): the conceptual connection between evaluation and desire fails for moral evaluation as well. Consider another non-fictional analogue. If the acts of female infanticide of an actual person like Mrs. Grimley are described in the newspaper as good, I would evaluate this person's actions and the newspaper's report thereof as morally reprehensible. Nothing about either evaluation requires appeal to my desires: I need not desire that such events not occur in order to evaluate them as reprehensible. We often value things that we do not desire and desire

things that we do not value. Engagements with fictions are no different in this regard: fictional events and characters may be evaluated independently of desire-like imaginings.¹⁵ Rather, these events, actual and fictional, simply conflict with the values I hold and again my judgments follow suit.

Given that the crucial feature of these propositions is that they are value-deviant in some obvious way, the relevant attitude is *value*: valuing, not first order desire, is conceptually connected to aesthetic and moral judgment. The offending fictions require us to imaginatively evaluate the world in a strange or foreign way, to form value-like imaginings. Just as many of our imaginings are belief-like or vision-like in character, many of our imaginings are evaluative in character. To put a finger on this imaginative characteristic is to put a finger on the culprit for imaginative resistance. The puzzle of imaginative resistance may thus be diagnosed in terms of the following asymmetry:

(2') Successful belief-like imagining vs. successful value-like imagining.

(2') explains (1'). We more readily comply in make-believing fictional facts that are contrary-to-descriptive facts. When the facts to be imagined are contrary-to-evaluative facts however, value-like imaginings enter into the imaginative project. These prescriptions for imagining require us to evaluate, in imagination, the facts in a certain way. This is precisely where we sometimes get stuck: failure to imagine that some proposition is true is a failure to form value-like imaginings.

Value and value-like imagining

David Lewis provides a useful account of valuing as a dispositional attitude directed towards whatever is valued. To value x is to be disposed to have a certain attitude towards, or stand in a certain relation with x . The relevant attitude for Lewis is second order desire.¹⁶ To value x is to desire to desire x . (It is convenient to reduce values to second order desires. A weaker claim still sufficient for present purposes takes second order desire as a necessary condition for valuing: I value x (e.g. money) only if I desire to desire x (money).) Why second order and not first order desires? Our desires often fail to agree with our values. Consider a bad habit. Every evening, Bob desires a box of jelly donuts and a supersized soda. It is part of his routine; it gives him instant satisfaction after a hard day's work. It also gives him a supersized gut, a bad case of indigestion and—his doctor tells him—high cholesterol. He longs for his donuts and soda, but he also values his health. Bob desires his routine but does not value it. This desire is one he would, all things considered, rather not have. In fact, he desires not to desire the jelly donuts and giant soda. Similarly, Lewis proposes,

The thoughtful addict may desire his euphoric gaze, but not value it. Even apart from all the costs and risks, he may hate himself for desiring something he values not at all. It is a desire he wants very much to be rid of. He desires his high, but he does not desire to desire it, and in fact he desires not to desire it. He does not desire an unaltered, mundane state of consciousness, but he does desire to desire it.¹⁷

Thus, Lewis concludes, we value what we desire to desire.

Lewis also provides insight on the intentionality of value. Desires may be about or directed at either a possible state of the world or some property of oneself. We may desire that some proposition be true of the actual world, say, that the world be beautiful. Or we may desire that we have or instantiate some property, say, that we be courageous.

The first is a desire *de dicto*, the second, a desire *de se*.¹⁸ Values thus divide into values *de dicto* and values *de se*. To value *de dicto* is to desire to desire that some possible state of affairs obtain in the world. If I value beauty, I desire to desire that a certain state of the world obtains such that things are maximally beautiful (or something like this). To value *de se* is to desire to desire that we be a certain way, to have a certain property or properties. If I value being courageous, I desire to desire that I be courageous.

Value-like imaginings are second order desire-like imaginings. To make-value is to make-desire to desire: to imaginatively desire that one desire such-and-such. Make-values, like values, divide into make-values *de dicto* and *de se*. A make-value *de dicto* consists in a make-desire to desire *de dicto*, where we imaginatively desire to desire that the world (fictional or actual) be a certain way. In compliance with the prescription of the narrative, we might imaginatively desire to desire that justice be served in the fictional world, that, for example, Luke Skywalker and the rebel forces succeed in overthrowing Darth Vader and the evil Empire. A make-value *de se* consists in a make-desire to desire *de se*, where we imaginatively desire to desire to be a certain way. For example, we might imaginatively desire to desire being as cunning and ruthless as Dr. Moriarty of the Holmes stories. So value-like imaginings are *second order* desire-like imaginings, directed at or about either a desire *de dicto* or a desire *de se*.

There is another important feature of the intentionality of value to which Lewis's view naturally lends itself, though Lewis does not discuss it. Values, in virtue of being second order desires, are necessarily egocentric. As we have seen, some values are directed at the world and some are directed at oneself; we may desire to desire *de dicto* or desire to desire *de se*. Notice that what renders the value *de dicto* or *de se*, according to

Lewis, is the intentional object of the relevant first order desire. What about the intentionality of the relevant second order desires? Consider a value *de dicto*. To hold such a value is to desire to desire that some proposition be true. It is to desire that one have a specific property, namely, a desire individuated by a particular (world-directed) content. Consider a value *de se*. To hold such a value is to desire to desire that one fit a certain description or be a certain way. It is, again, to desire that one have a specific property, namely, a desire individuated by a particular (self-directed) content. Consider *any* second order desire. A second order desire is a desire that one have a specific property, namely, a desire individuated by a particular content. All second order desires are thus desires *de se*. They are egocentric desires that one have a certain (first order) desire. (And they are egocentric irrespective of whether the embedded desire is *de dicto* or *de se*).

This illuminates a crucial difference between the intentionality of first and second order desires. The former divide into attitudes *de dicto* or *de se*, world-directed or self-directed, but the latter are necessarily *de se*, necessarily self-directed. Thus values are, in one sense, either *de dicto* or *de se*, since the first order desires they embed can be either world-directed or self-directed. In a stronger sense, however, values are necessarily *de se*, since as second order desires they are always self-directed. The same holds for second order desire-like imaginings and so, for value-like imaginings. In one sense, we make-value *de dicto* or *de se*, but it is only the first order desire here that is *de dicto* or *de se*. To make-value *de dicto*, is to imaginatively desire that one have some desire *de dicto*, and likewise, *mutatis mutandis*, for make-values *de se*. The relevant desire-like

imagining is second order and thus necessarily *de se*. So in another sense, all value-like imagining is self-directed.

We are now in good position to clarify the nature of value-like imagining. Analogous to belief-like imaginings and beliefs, value-like imaginings are similar in *character* to values. We acknowledged above that we can understand mental state character in terms either of functional role, phenomenology, or both. On the Lewisian view of value endorsed, values are second-order desires. They thus function in an egocentric way: they are attitudes *de se* and thus necessarily self-indexed. This, one might think, gives valuing a distinctive phenomenology: perhaps it feels distinctive to token desires with self-indexical content.¹⁹ Even if one shuns such phenomenological commitments, we have at the very least identified a unique functional role for valuing, namely, a necessarily egocentric motivational role. As its imaginative counterpart, value-like imagining will enjoy this same character, functioning and perhaps feeling different from other imaginative states. We extend this analysis by asking how various types of mental state are constrained as elements in the larger cognitive system.

Normativity: Belief, Desire, and Value

Values and value-like imaginings are subject to normative constraints that differ importantly from the norms that constrain belief. This difference depends upon the direction of fit and the *de se* nature of second-order desires as contrasted with belief. And it is this difference that is crucial to diagnosing imaginative resistance.

Belief and desire differ in their *direction of fit*. Beliefs aim to fit the world as it is, to track truth. Desires aim for the world to fit them; in desiring *p*, we are disposed to

make p the case.²⁰ Beliefs have a representative *function* that desires lack. A belief functions to represent truth or whatever is the case, while a desire does not *function* to represent anything.²¹ The norms that govern these respective attitudes will vary in virtue of this distinction.

Normative constraints on beliefs are provided by truth or the world (i.e. whatever is the case). My beliefs ought to correctly represent the world: I ought to believe whatever is the case. Successful belief, of course, varies with the agent and his epistemic habits. But this is beside the point. An attitude counts as a belief only if it is governed by norms that are provided and sustained by truth. Beliefs are thus governed by something that is objective, or *agent-independent*. The world is what it is independent of the norms that it provides for beliefs.²²

Since desire does not function to represent the world, we cannot take the world to provide the norms. However, desires are not entirely unconstrained. Our desires are normatively evaluable. We do in fact judge our own and others' desires rational or irrational, or at least consistent or inconsistent with overall goals and values. Consider the following example. Green is a die-hard environmentalist. He is a member of the Green Party, has taken part in late night eco-terror activities, spends many hours worrying about pollution, limited natural resources, parking lots that seem to sprout like weeds, and so on. Something has gone awry if Green were to desire, say, a gas-guzzling, air-polluting Cadillac. We, and likely he, would judge his desire unreasonable given his constitution. It is a desire he *should* not have. So desires are subject to normative constraints.

Desires are constrained by an agent's *value-system*. A value system is simply an agent's evaluative profile or value set, constituted by all of the evaluative attitudes and dispositions of the agent: her moral character, aesthetic tastes, sensitivities and dispositions, desires, likes, dislikes, and so on. A value-system plays the role for desire that truth does for belief, regulating the formation and maintenance of desires. Notice that the norm-provider here is subjective or *agent-dependent*. What is reasonable or unreasonable for an agent to desire will depend, quite simply, on the value-system of *that* agent.²³

This last suggestion needs qualification. We aren't very good at managing our desires. Bob cares about his fitness, but those jelly donuts have got his number. I need to finish this paper, but it's springtime. Green worries about air pollution, but that Cadillac is so powerful and sleek. Although Green is less likely to desire the Cadillac given his set of values versus some alternative non-environmentally conscious set of values, he might nonetheless desire one. We notoriously have desires that are inconsistent with the rest of our goals, projects, and other desires. So in one respect, the value-system is like a pretty good door-man at a posh night-club. The door-man has been instructed to permit only certain guests or guests that meet a certain description. But the door-man is only human and so sometimes he lets this policy slide. (Perhaps he has a soft spot for attractive women or surreptitiously passed twenty dollar bills). Value-systems generally do their job well but they are not perfect door-men: sometimes desires with contents that deviate from protocol get in the door.

Value systems more strongly constrain valuing in virtue of the egocentric nature

of the latter attitude. Perhaps our door-man is extremely efficient at refusing admittance to certain parties. The club has a dress policy: no jeans, no baseball caps, no sandals. These are easily identified features and so people wearing jeans and the like almost never get in the door. Value-systems are extremely efficient at restricting the formation of new *values*. Consider Green once more. He may desire the Cadillac but he is very unlikely to value it. Green the environmentalist does not want to be the kind of person that owns, or wants to own, a Cadillac. He desires not to desire the Cadillac. He desires to have a very different desire, perhaps to own a fuel-efficient automobile or better, to not own a car at all. This second-order desire is egocentric and is thus symptomatic of the kind of person Green is. Green's value-system restricts him from valuing gas-guzzling automobiles. So the stronger case can be made for normative constraints on value. Here, the constraints are strongly *agent-dependent* and rather effective.

Constraints on beliefs are largely agent-independent whereas constraints on value are largely agent-dependent. This gives us our third asymmetry:

(3) Agent-independent belief-norms *vs.* agent-dependent value-norms.

These constraints follow us into our imaginative projects, providing an explanation of (2'). Consider the imaginative project involved in reading a work of fiction. Belief-like imaginings are constrained by whatever fictional truths the story provides—the descriptive facts given by the fiction plus those safely inferred by the reader.²⁴ Value-like imaginings are constrained by value-systems *and* by the evaluative facts of the story.

At first glance, we might think that the normative constraints on value-like imagining simply issue from the imaginer. Since the norms for valuing seem to be overwhelmingly agent-dependent, *our* value-like imaginings will be constrained by *our* value-systems. But it isn't quite this simple. Our imaginative values do not always parallel our actual, real-life values. Value-like imagining cannot comply strictly with our value-systems or reading fiction wouldn't be much fun at all. A child's game of role play does not simply involve the child's putting *himself* in some pretended situation; that isn't what it means to play Superman! In like manner, imagining the point of view of Dimitri Karamazov surely involves more than just placing *oneself* in his unfortunate position.

So it is important to note that in engaging with fictions in richly imaginative ways we are willing and able to imaginatively 'try on' different perspectives and *background* our own.²⁵ These perspectives sometimes correspond explicitly to certain fictional characters, and are sometimes more subtly implied by the fiction. Put generally, a fiction will state or imply certain evaluative facts and prescribe that we imagine the truth of such facts. Imagining such facts consists in the formation of evaluative attitudes in imagination—value-like imaginings. It is in this sense that the evaluative facts of a fiction will constrain our imaginings. We are generally compliant with such prescriptions—backgrounding actual values that may conflict with those that are to be imagined. We thus take on alien values in imagination. But sometimes significant conflict arises: sometimes the *evaluative facts* to be imagined are too much at odds with our *value-systems*.

When these latter two constraints significantly conflict, imaginative resistance ensues: an agent's value-system sometimes trumps imagining radically deviant contrary-

to-evaluative facts. It is in this way that value-systems constrain our imaginative projects. Value-systems are invoked in virtue of the kind of attitude valuing, as contrasted with believing, is. Value-like imagining, like valuing, is egocentric in nature. It requires imagining something about oneself; it requires imaginatively desiring that one have a certain mental property, namely a desire *de dicto* or a desire *de se*. And again, even if the embedded desire is *de dicto*, the value-like imagining that embeds it (as a second order make-desire) is *de se*.

(3) explains (2'), which explains (1'). Our attempts to make-believe as the fiction prescribes are more successful in virtue of the agent-independent normative constraints on beliefs and their imaginative counterparts. If the facts to be imagined are clearly descriptive, we have little difficulty. If the facts to be imagined are evaluative, some of them perhaps contrary to what we take the actual ones to be, the imaginative project is enriched. Given a fiction that suggests for example, that 'Female infanticide is good' is true, we might merely suppose that the proposition is true. This is no different from the kind of supposition necessary for tasks of hypothetical or counterfactual reasoning: suppose there is a perfect island, that $2+2=5$, that Nixon was never president, etc. Embellish the story a bit, point out some of the monstrous entailments of the act of female infanticide, in short, make the imaginative project a rich one, and trouble may arise. (Of course, sometimes embellishment is just what's needed to enable a reader to make sense of the story so as to imagine the various propositions that compose it. For some then, it would seem, embellishment is what enables imaginative compliance rather than resistance. Explanations for this sort of relativity are offered below.) This kind of imaginative project involves more than bare belief-like imagining; it involves value-like

imagining as well—imaginatively desiring to desire that female infants be murdered, or some other desire *de dicto* with a relevantly similar content. Since this imaginative state, like valuing, is an attitude *de se*, one's value system is invoked. If one fails to imagine the prescribed value-like imaginings, it is in virtue of the constraints that one's value system places on one's imaginings. Very simply, we sometimes have difficulty imagining being a certain kind of person—being the kind of person who values the practice of female infanticide or people that look like the time travelling Alvin.

Objections and concerns

Currie's diagnosis of the puzzle of imaginative resistance, which centres around an asymmetry between belief-like imagining and desire-like imagining, (2), has been replaced by a diagnosis that centres around an asymmetry between belief-like imagining and value-like imagining, (2'). But if values just are desires to desire and value-like imaginings are just desire-like imaginings to desire, then the proposed diagnosis just collapses into Currie's: a failure to imagine is a failure to make-desire as prescribed. This objection would have bite if second order desires were similar in the relevant ways to first order desires, but they are not. There is a crucial difference between the intentionality of second order desires and thus second order desire-like imaginings, and the intentionality of first order desires and thus first order desire-like imaginings. Iterated desires are necessarily egocentric: second-order desires and second order desire-like imaginings are attitudes *de se*. First order desires are not exclusively *de se*: we may desire, and thus make-desire, *de dicto* or *de se*. Since Currie's diagnosis is in terms of

first order desire and its counterpart, a diagnosis of imaginative resistance in terms of value does not reduce to his.

A second concern has to do with realism: does a view that reduces values to desires entail commitments to an anti-realism about value? That is, if second-order desires are agent-dependent then values are agent-dependent. This, on the face of it, is inconsistent with any standard realism. There is plenty of conceptual space here. First, nothing that has been said implies a theory of *value*. The Lewisian account is one of dispositional evaluative attitudes, not of aesthetic or moral values *qua* properties of objects. These attitudes are subjective—physically realized in some way or other in human agents—and this fact is consistent with both realism and anti-realism about value. Second, the present diagnosis does not require us to reduce value to second order desire. It is enough to take second order desire as a necessary condition for value—so that A values *p* only if A desires to desire *p*. This is perfectly consistent with realism, since it merely captures the motivational component of value, while remaining neutral about what completes the analysis, on whether valuing involves a relation to abstract, mind-independent properties of some sort.

A third issue which has been looming in the background, is whether imaginative resistance is a case of *unwillingness* or one of *inability*. A *won't diagnosis* of the phenomenon says that our resistance is willed and rational.²⁶ A *can't diagnosis* says that our resistance is one of inability: we cannot imagine the propositions in question.²⁷ Both kinds of diagnosis may be nuanced in a number of ways. Choosing between them invites a battery of larger concerns—questions regarding the nature of rationality, the voluntariness/involuntariness of cognitive states like belief and desire, free will and

determinism, and varieties of modality. We have avoided handling these concerns by opting for a neutral *don't diagnosis*: we do in fact resist imagining certain propositions and this resistance can be explained without choosing between unwillingness and inability.

A final worry is that imaginative resistance is nothing more than a quirk of over-imaginative philosophers—a quasi-problem philosophers of imagination have cooked up for something to talk about. It should be acknowledged that these cases may not work for some persons: some may not (or at least claim not) to have any difficulty imagining as prescribed. Others will go so far as to claim that they cannot, try as they might, imagine as prescribed. This variety in response, call it *reader relativity*, is no challenge to the puzzle of imaginative resistance, but it motivates a constraint on any explanation of the phenomenon.

First, one may simply be mistaken about the content of one's imagining. Perhaps one thinks that one is imagining the goodness of female infanticide or Alvin's countenance, but is in fact just imagining the relevant descriptive facts without the evaluative ones. Second, one may be forming imaginings of impoverished character. So while I am attempting imaginings rich in character regarding the proposition(s) in question, you are merely supposing its truth. So you do not resist only for lack of rich engagement (either in terms of functional role, phenomenology, or both). Both explanations appeal to differences in richness, the first in content the second in character. Differences in response thus derive from the different degrees of richness of the two imaginative projects. This implies success conditions for imaginings and that certain readers do not satisfy them. So although the complying readers think they have imagined

some value-deviant p , they are in error and any ensuing disagreement derives from simple introspective fallibility. This kind of explanation accounts for many purported non-resistant responses to the standard cases.²⁸

But set this kind of explanation aside and consider the reader who complies with the narrative prescriptions versus the one who resists, both of them via rich imaginings. How does our diagnosis accommodate this difference? The simplest explanation for the difference is a difference in values. The reader who complies with the prescription to imagine the goodness of female infanticide is constrained by a relevantly different value system, thus allowing her to imagine something that my value system, say, does not. However, considering propositions like the one in question, this will not take us far. You and I are unlikely to have significantly different (actual) values regarding female infanticide, extreme cruelty, murder, etc. How else then do we explain the purported difference?

An important component of successful imagination is backgrounding: we background our actual cognitive states in order to imagine various counterfactual propositions. We thus background beliefs, desires, intentions, and importantly, values, among other states. If reader relativity is not explained in any of the ways suggested above, then it likely derives from a difference in backgrounding. This difference is reader relative. It might be explained by a difference in the strength of one's values, which in turn effect constraints (of different strengths) upon imaginative attempts. It could be explained by the salience of our actual values: perhaps you do a better job of putting your actual values well into the background when imagining. So while the descriptions of female infanticide or Alvin more readily trigger my actual evaluations and

derail my imaginative project, your project remains on track. Embellishment may thus affect readers differently. For some readers, perhaps a description of a land where faces like Alvin's are judged beautiful will make such an evaluative fact more, not less, imaginable. For others, just the opposite. This is nothing surprising: the same stimulus can trigger vastly different conceptual associations and cognitive states in different perceivers of that stimulus. Finally, the difference could simply be a difference in imaginative ability, in particular, the ability to imagine oneself as being different vis-à-vis certain evaluations of the world. This is consistent with a number of related facts: some of us are better at folk psychological mindreading, at empathizing, at remembering what it was like to once hold radically different views on social and political issues. What underwrites such abilities, and the ability to comply with value-deviant narrative prescriptions (if we in fact do), is a difference in the capacity for value-like imagination.

Imaginative resistance thus may not be a phenomenon consistent across readers, but it is no less real as a result. Reader relativity can be explained (or explained away) in a number of ways. The explanations above are all consistent with the diagnosis on offer, and some of them are in fact predicted by that diagnosis.

Imaginative constraints: Local and global

In diagnosing the puzzle of imaginative resistance, we have identified three constraints upon imagination. If we wish to imagine in accordance with a fiction we aim to make-believe all and only the descriptive facts of the relevant fictional world. Fictions also prescribe the imagining of evaluative facts. If we wish to comply with such prescriptions, we aim to form the relevant value-like imaginings. Belief-like and value-

like imaginings are thus constrained by the fictions that prescribe them. In reading a fiction, however, we may still imagine descriptive and evaluative facts not mandated by the fiction: we remain free to imagine in ways not authorized by the story. So these two constraints are merely *local constraints* on imagination. The third constraint is *global*. Value-like imaginings are constrained by agent-dependent value-systems in virtue of the *de se* nature of valuing. This norm is not bound to any one fiction or imaginative engagement.

The *puzzle* of imaginative resistance is to reconcile the fact that we resist imagining certain propositions with the ostensible and traditionally assumed fact that imagination is largely unconstrained. The present analysis casts considerable doubt upon the latter assumption: imagination is locally and globally constrained. It is recognition of the proposed global constraint that proves crucial in diagnosing imaginative resistance. And if this diagnosis is accurate, then the puzzle is not so puzzling after all.²⁹

Dustin Stokes, Centre for Research in Cognitive Science, University of Sussex, UK, BN1 9QH. Email: dstokes@sussex.ac.uk