

Problems to Appreciate: Aesthetics, Ethics, and the Imagination

by

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Chapter One

Meriting a Response: Accounting for “Seductive” Artworks[†]

I. An Attractive Claim

Many artworks use artistic techniques to elicit responses. In *Das Boot’s* final scene, for instance, the U96’s crew is strafed into oblivion following several treacherous months at sea. The scene does not merely prescribe that we imagine a U-Boat crew dock and be killed. It also attempts to elicit pity and despair from us. As Aristotle noted, these attempts are sometimes unsuccessful:

A perfect tragedy should [...] imitate actions which excite pity and fear [...]. It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; [...] it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls for pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would doubtless satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune of a man like ourselves. (Aristotle 1961, 75-76)

If the protagonist is poorly chosen, her downfall will fail to elicit pity and fear. Extrapolating from tragedy, ignoring the contemporary phrasing, and using ‘invite’ as shorthand for ‘attempt to elicit’, one may attribute to Aristotle the following principle:

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ELICITATION PRINCIPLE

A work that invites but fails to elicit a response in appreciators through artistic means is to that extent aesthetically flawed.

An obvious objection to this principle is that the failure might lie with appreciators, not the work; appreciators might be obtuse or in the wrong mood. Rephrasing the claim in normative rather than causal terms avoids the objection:

MERIT PRINCIPLE

A work that invites an unmerited response in appreciators through artistic means is to that extent aesthetically flawed.

Like Aristotle, recent proponents of the *Merit Principle* have also focused on ethical considerations bearing on a response's meritedness.¹ However, other types of consideration can render a response unmerited. Also discussing tragedy, Hume provides an example:

An action, represented in tragedy, may be too bloody and atrocious. It may excite such movements of horror as will not soften into pleasure; [...] Such is that action represented in the *Ambitious Stepmother*, where a venerable old man, raised to the height of fury and despair, rushes against a pillar, and striking his head upon it, besmears it all over with mingled brains and gore. (Hume 1757, 198-9)

Too much gore and the work will elicit disgust rather than the peculiar pleasure Hume thinks tragedy affords. But the point is general; for various reasons, "Horror fictions may be unfrightening, comedies unamusing, thrillers unthrilling" (Gaut, 1998, 194). Nor is the principle restricted to works inviting genre-specific responses. Works of all kinds can fall flat in this way, by inviting responses necessary to appreciate the work, yet undeserved. The *Merit Principle* captures a general respect in which works can

1 Berys Gaut is probably the most prominent contemporary advocate, whose interest in aesthetic moralism means he focuses on ethical cases. See Gaut (1998) and (2007). Gaut's forerunner, David Hume also discusses an ethical case in his famous remarks in *Of the Standard of Taste* about our inability to "bear an affection" as directed to characters we "plainly discover to be blameable" (Hume 1757a, 236-237). Noël Carroll, appears to support the same principle, though he disagrees with Gaut about which considerations bear on a response's warrant, and how; see especially (Carroll 1996, 233), (Carroll 377-380).

fail on their own terms.²

What does ‘merited’ mean in this context? For the *Merit Principle* to be plausible, considerations bearing on the kind of meritedness the principle concerns must be all and only those relevant to the aesthetic value of the work. At minimum, I should think this rules out so-called state-given, as opposed to object-given, reasons;³ if a kidnapper commands me to be amused at gunpoint, this may make amusement merited in *some* sense—e.g. when meritedness is determined by *every* kind of consideration—but not in the sense required by the *Merit Principle*. Which kinds of considerations are aesthetically relevant, and thus which count for the *Merit Principle* is a fraught question on which I take no position here. Nor need I, as we will see in §3.1. For, however we circumscribe these considerations, provided that *some* count, the problem I identify still arises. That said, for the sake of vivid examples, I will proceed as though ethical considerations count, even while acknowledging that this is far from settled.

The *Merit Principle* is both attractive and endorsed by important figures. Moreover, its truth is vital to the soundness of the best argument for “ethicism”, the most carefully worked out position in the debate concerning the relevance of ethical values to aesthetic ones in artworks.⁴ One should take it seriously for that reason alone. That notwithstanding, in the next section I argue that it leads to paradox. I consider some ultimately unsuccessful ways to solve the paradox in §3 and §4, before concluding that we should abandon the principle as currently formulated. I close by considering the art-critical challenge seductive works pose and by revising the *Merit Principle* to avoid paradox for those wishing to preserve it in spirit. According to this revision, it is insofar as a work attempts to *make merited*, rather than merely *elicit*, an unmerited response that it is aesthetically flawed.

Before I launch into the discussion, let me acknowledge two issues. First, I have phrased my discussion in terms of aesthetic value. I could just as well have phrased it in terms of artistic value. I am not thereby committed to thinking these kinds of values are identical (they are not), just that one can formulate essentially the same paradox for either. There are interesting questions about how these

2 Gaut, for instance, thinks of the failure in this way; see (Gaut 1998, 194) and (Gaut 2007, 231).

3 See (Parfit 2011, 27, 50-51, 420-432). We have to be careful with this distinction, however, since “object-given” suggests that the relevant art object must supply all the relevant considerations; but artworks sometimes legitimately rely on external objects to make invited responses merited. The film *The Motorcycle Diaries*, about Che Guevara’s early travels around South America, exploits the dramatic irony of Guevara’s ignorance about his profound future as a revolutionary to give a gravitas to some scenes that would otherwise be absent. The regard these scenes invite is clearly merited in part by features of Che Guevara’s actual life, not merely features of the work—at least not narrowly construed. The question, whether such “externally” supplied considerations are aesthetically relevant is touched on in (Thomson-Jones 2012, 283). Looking ahead, it is for this reason that I opt for ‘make merited’ rather than ‘merit’ in the final section of the paper.

4 I am referring to Berys Gaut’s Merited Response Argument (Gaut, 2007).

kinds of value relate, but they are not my questions here. Second, I am assuming that it is at minimum an epistemic possibility that aesthetic criticism, like other forms of normative reasoning, is amenable to general principles. Thankfully, this assumption is not wildly implausible, even though I understand why some may doubt it. To those who do, I will not offer any arguments to persuade them otherwise. They may treat the proceeding discussion in a lighter vein, encouraged by the knowledge that it includes lots of action, violence, and even carnal relations... albeit with a pig. Yes, I said a pig. Sadly, there are no explosions, except perhaps of readers' minds; the philosophy department did not have the budget for it.

II. Merit and “Seduction”: a Paradox

Ben is an overt misogynist, racist, and serial killer. He goes from house to house injuring and killing the inhabitants and stealing their valuables. A film crew records his crimes and matter-of-fact commentary. Ben is the protagonist of *Man Bites Dog*, a black comedy “mockumentary” whose comic premise consists in taking a style often reserved for documenting ordinary people’s day jobs and applying it, fictionally, to an eccentric psychopath. After a while, the fictional crew members become increasingly involved in Ben’s crimes before finally joining Ben in committing a sexual assault, making the victim’s partner watch at gun-point. The film is what I call a “seductive artwork”.⁵ Such works constitutively invite a response r_1 to depicted events or features, before inviting a repudiatory second-order response r_2 to r_1 —or so I claim. *Man Bites Dog*, for instance, invites amusement at Ben’s violence until the sexual assault sharply ends the revelry, inviting appreciators to feel shame about that amusement.⁶

Seductive works enable a *reductio* against the *Merit Principle*. Specifically, the principle entails, implausibly, that seductive works are necessarily aesthetically flawed. The argument is simple. To count as seductive, a work must invite a first-order response and a second-order response that repudiates it. In order for the second-order response to be merited, the first-order response which it repudiates must be *unmerited*. Therefore, seductive works must invite an unmerited first-order response. Thus,

5 The name is adapted from Berys Gaut’s (2007) term for the strategy such works employ: The “seduction strategy”. The genre is first invoked, as far as I can tell, by Matthew Kieran who also discusses *Man Bites Dog* to support his ‘cognitive immoralism’. See (Kieran 2006, 138-140).

6 This characterization is stipulative in the sense that there is a class of artworks I mean to capture by it, even though we naturally call other kinds of artworks “seductive”, such as those that merely get us doubt our responses, rather than repudiate them. But the characterization is *not* stipulative in that I could be persuaded, in principle, to characterize their structure differently.

according to the *Merit Principle*, they must be aesthetically flawed. But this seems absurd.⁷

The *Merit Principle* is compelling and enjoys a pedigree one should take seriously. So, we face a dialectical problem articulable as three independently plausible but jointly inconsistent propositions:

- 1) (*Merit Principle*) A work that invites an unmerited response in appreciators through artistic means is to that extent aesthetically flawed.
- 2) Artistically seductive works necessarily invite an unmerited response in appreciators through artistic means.
- 3) Artistically seductive works are not necessarily aesthetically flawed.

Consistency demands rejecting one of these propositions. Because the *Merit Principle* represents the threatened tradition, so to speak, I will devote the following two sections to considering objections to the other propositions. Moreover, since my account of seductive artworks represents the paradox-inducing innovation, my discussion principally concerns proposition (2). I note before proceeding that while I suggest a potential solution to the paradox in the final section, and consider solving it important, my main interest is in exploring the contours of the *Merit Principle*, seductive artworks, and the paradox they jointly generate. Vanishingly few mentions, let alone philosophical discussions, of seductive artworks exist. As such, the proposals I consider represent my attempt, without a literature to draw upon, to articulate *prima facie* plausible solutions to the paradox. Just one is attributable to an actual person.

III. Proposals: Rejecting Proposition (2)

3.1 The Autonomist Proposal

Rejecting (2) amounts to claiming that artistically seductive works need not invite an unmerited response. Perhaps most straightforwardly, one could deny the relevance of ethical considerations to

⁷ A small caveat. The entailment does not quite go through as stated. The *Merit Principle* says only that works using artistic means to invite unmerited responses are thereby aesthetically flawed. This is to exclude cases where, for instance, a painting invites sadness by tacking on a note reading 'Feel sad!'; such invitations (at least typically) would be insufficiently integrated to count as aesthetic flaws (Gaut 2007, 84-89). So one must restrict the claim to seductive works that employ artistic means to make their first-order invitations. Every seductive work with which I am familiar is like this, so the argument's scope is probably only logically diminished.

the meritedness of responses. One could embrace a kind of autonomism according to which whether a response to an artwork, or even just a seductive artwork, is merited is a “purely aesthetic” question in which ethics plays no part. Being amused by *Man Bites Dog*’s Ben, on this proposal, is merited in any aesthetically relevant sense, albeit ethically criticizable.

There are two faults with this approach. First, it only postpones the problem, since seductive works can exploit non-ethical considerations. Proposition (2) remains true of such works, generating an isomorphic paradox merely reduced in scope. Shaggy Dog stories (at least some of them) are seductive works that exploit epistemic considerations. Initially appreciators take narrators of such stories to be telling a story in good faith, until they realize that the story’s meandering plot leads nowhere and that they are the butt of an elaborate prank. Pliny’s *The Natural History* furnishes another example:

[Parrhasius], it is said, entered into a pictorial contest with Zeuxis, who represented some grapes, painted so naturally that the birds flew towards the spot where the picture was exhibited. Parrhasius, on the other hand, exhibited a curtain, drawn with such singular truthfulness, that Zeuxis, elated with the judgment which had passed upon his work by the birds, haughtily demanded that the curtain should be drawn aside to let the picture be seen. Upon finding his mistake, with a great degree of ingenuous candour he admitted that he had been surpassed, for that whereas he himself had only deceived the birds, Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist. (Pliny the Elder 1857, p. 251)

(Some) Shaggy Dog stories invite audiences (victims?) to feel curiosity at the first order and embarrassment about that curiosity at the second. One might understand Parrhasius’ painting as inviting a false belief about a curtain at the first order in order to invite the realization that this belief was precipitous (and premised on underestimating Parrhasius’ ability) at the second order. One could call such works “epistemically seductive works”. Could one not be an autonomist about epistemic considerations, too? Perhaps. But since seductive works might exploit many kinds of considerations—not just ethical and epistemic, but conventional, prudential, political, not to mention aesthetic, this move will work only if one excludes *every* kind of consideration from determining the meritedness of responses. This is hopeless for two reasons. First, it is absurd to exclude aesthetic considerations from determining a response’s aesthetically relevant kind of meritedness. Moreover, it is clear that seductive works can and do exploit aesthetic considerations. Many works parodying artistic practices get appreciators to see that their initial aesthetic judgements about the target practice are unmerited. A teenager recently placed his watch and sunglasses on the floor of the Dallas Museum of Modern Art

in order to fool visitors into thinking they formed part of an exhibit (Jones 2015). While not a full-fledged artwork, nor wholly seductive, one can see how such a display could be mobilized to create a seductive work. Indeed, much contemporary art going back to Duchamp's *Fountain* contains enough irony and anxiety about artistic legitimacy to offer the beginnings of seduction in my sense. A clear example of an aesthetically seductive work is furnished by a mid-90's UK advertisement for Boddington's Ale. The short film exquisitely imitates the ultra-aestheticized style of the era's Calvin Klein advertisements until a stern-faced Adonis, serenaded by operatic singing, turns in slow motion toward the camera with a fish on his head. It invites us, at the first order, to be awed by the decadent "beauty" of its hypersexualized black and white imagery, only to reveal the absurdity of that awe by exposing the style as pretentious and, indeed, comic. Second, eliminating every kind of consideration would leave us with none to determine a response's meritedness at all, meaning the merited/unmerited distinction would cease to track a difference. This approach would therefore not so much save the *Merit Principle* as render it unintelligible.

The second problem with the autonomist proposal is more fundamental than the first: preserving meritedness at the first order by banishing ethical considerations that undermine it merely relocates the difficulty. For, one rescues the first-order response only by deserting the second-order one. Consider *Man Bites Dog* again. If the first-order amusement is merited after all, the second-order response (shame about that amusement) is no longer merited. This is because this shame is only merited if its object, the amusement, is not. Thus, were the amusement merited after all, the work would still invite an unmerited response, only at the second order instead. In short, the autonomist's path away from (2) leads right back to it.

Of course, a work could exploit considerations not relevant to a response's meritedness in the aesthetically restricted sense in which I intend term. To see how, suppose for argument's sake that ethical considerations never bear on a response's meritedness. A work could, then, still exploit ethical considerations to induce a repudiatory response in its appreciators, without falling afoul of the *Merit Principle*. *Man Bites Dog* might invite perfectly merited amusement and then invite appreciators to recognize that the amusement is shameful because inappropriate in the broader sense that includes ethical considerations. That is, the amusement might be broadly inappropriate in a way that, *ex hypothesi*, has no bearing on whether it is merited. The possibility of such works, which we might call "quasi-seductive", does not undo the paradox however. As described above, there are *truly* seductive works in my sense that exploit meritedness-relevant considerations to execute their seductive strategy. The paradox remains for these works. Moreover, if we take the stipulation seriously—namely, that we are

engaged in an appreciative practice that holds ethical norms in abeyance—the idea that the appreciator’s amusement at *Man Bites Dog* is inappropriate, even broadly speaking, is somewhat strained. The appreciator might legitimately dismiss ethical criticism of her amusement, and any inclination to be ashamed of it, as beside the point. The response, she might legitimately insist, *is* merited according to the practice-internal norms of appreciation (even if the entire practice is itself ethically criticizable for spurning ethical norms). The extent to which it seems she cannot properly dismiss the finger-wagging, is probably the extent to which we cannot help but think that ethical considerations actually *do* bear those practice-internal norms—on meritedness—contrary to the stipulation. It is difficult to quarantine considerations widely thought to be categorical, after all, even for the sake of argument.

3.2 The All Things Considered Proposal

A different approach to rejecting (2) is worth considering in part because it will help sharpen up the *Merit Principle*. One might claim that seductive works need only invite a response flawed in some respect rather than unmerited all things considered, much as donating \$10 rather than \$50 can be legitimately criticized, yet permissible. A seductive work could then invite a sub-optimal but merited first-order response and a merited second-order response. This second-order response would just take the first-order response’s criticizable aspect as its object, accounting for the seductive work’s structure without paradox.

The proposal’s plausibility, however, presupposes an unsophisticated understanding of meritedness. True, responses can be merited *all things considered*, yet regrettable. But if one understands meritedness in subtler *pro tanto* terms such that, for instance, a response is unmerited *insofar as* it is unethical, the problem reappears. And clearly the most interesting reading of the *Merit Principle* invokes meritedness *pro tanto*, not meritedness all things considered.⁸ This is because a work is aesthetically worse, if at all, not (merely) for inviting responses unmerited all things considered, but *insofar as* a response it invites is unmerited. Many responses, and the extent to which they are merited, come in degrees. Flaws in comic timing, for instance, may make a joke less funny, and thereby aesthetically worse, without robbing it of all humour. Let me therefore clarify the *Merit Principle* as follows:

For any work *w* that invites a response *r* in appreciators through artistic means, *w* is aesthetically

8 The all things considered principle is strictly weaker than the *pro tanto* one. Only the latter suffices for Gaut’s influential Merited Response Argument for ethicism.

flawed insofar as *r* is unmerited *to any degree*.

3.3 The Merited All Things Considered Proposal 2.0

A different suggestion, in some respects analogous to the last, is that claiming a seductive work invites an unmerited first-order response presupposes too microscopic a view. The aesthetically relevant response a seductive work invites, on this proposal, is *to the work as a whole*, the response consisting in “seeing the error of one’s ways”, for instance; examining the work’s individual invitations to respond misses this important point. Successful seductive works are not necessarily aesthetically flawed because they successfully attempt to elicit a merited response to the work as a whole. Thus, in any theoretically relevant sense, such works do not invite an unmerited response at all.

One problem with the proposal is that some uses of the seductive strategy do not span entire works. Early in the cinematic version of *La Cage aux Folles*, for instance, the middle-aged homosexual proprietor of a Saint-Tropez drag club, Renato sends his star attraction and partner, Albin (“Zaza”) onto stage before returning to their apartment. Here he readies himself for a guest. He has a maid lay out champagne, tidies a bouquet of roses, applies powder, faces a photograph of himself toward the doorway, and dims the lights. As the dashing young visitor rings the bell, Renato checks his reflection once more and opens the door. The boy, Laurent enters. They embrace. Renato tells Laurent he is more handsome than ever, plays with his long hair, and kisses his forehead. Renato assures Laurent that Zaza is performing and that they will be alone for at least two hours. When Laurent tells Renato he is getting married, Renato rises from the couch and utters a crestfallen ‘Non!’. At this stage, we are seemingly to believe that Renato has lured this boy to his apartment while his oblivious partner is occupied elsewhere. However, shortly after, we learn that Laurent is not Renato’s lover but his son, and that what appeared to be erotic intimations were innocent displays of paternal affection. The film cleverly exploits widespread stereotypes, especially prevalent when released in 1978, of (male) homosexuals as promiscuous and pedophilic, thereby inviting us to think Renato a sexual predator. Upon accentuating Renato’s innocence, it invites us to feel shame at our hasty judgement. Importantly for my purposes, the film is seductive for only one scene. Therefore, even if the current proposal were plausible, it would not fit works like *La Cage aux Folles*.⁹

In light of this problem, one might insist on individuating responses at the level of the relevant seductive *portion* of the artwork instead, whether a scene or the whole work. But there is a more

⁹ I am indebted to Jamie Tappenden for this excellent example.

fundamental objection: why consider only such coarse-grained responses when evaluating seductive artworks? In other cases, an artwork's finer-grained invitations (at least of the right kind) are always relevant to its aesthetic value. A comedy, for instance, might succeed *on the whole* by amusing us. But if a poorly executed set of jokes—i.e. invitations for unmerited amusement—is among its contents, this ordinarily diminishes the work's overall aesthetic value. There are apparently no grounds for treating seductive works any differently, except that doing so resolves the paradox. Unsupplemented, this is entirely *ad hoc*.

3.4 The Shifting Standards Proposal

Perhaps the structure of seductive works requires more nuance than (2) suggests. I said that a seductive work is one that invites a response r to depicted events or features, and a second-order response that repudiates r . How can one amend this account?

The difficulty lies in the fact that it seems successful seductive works paradoxically make the unmerited merited, making it *in some sense* appropriate to respond in a way that is *in some sense* inappropriate. One way to make this intelligible, and thus to reject proposition (2), is by indexing meritedness to multiple standards. An analogy: the 1954 US overthrow of Guatemala's government was appropriate according to the *de facto* standards of the Monroe Doctrine, but not international law. Might different responses to artworks also sometimes answer to distinct standards?

§3.1 showed that placing considerations outside the work-internal standards of appreciation only postponed the problem of reconciling seductive works to the *Merit Principle*. A more promising approach posits multiple *different* work-internal standards. One possibility is that seductive works create multiple standards by executing a perspectival shift—for example, by altering operative genre conventions mid-work. *Man Bites Dog*, on this proposal, might switch from black comedy to realist drama, for instance.

This genre-shifting characterization of seductive works offers a promising way to preserve the *Merit Principle* while explaining how such works make the “unmerited merited”. Since seductive works shift from one set of genre conventions (g_1) to another (g_2), they realize two different work-internal standards. Seductive works, then, invite a first-order response (r_1) that is *merited* by the standard of g_1 , before switching to g_2 in inviting a second-order response (r_2). r_2 takes r_1 as its object and, by the g_2 standard, is merited provided r_1 is *not* merited; this provision is secured by the fact that r_1 is unmerited by the standard of g_2 . To illustrate, *Man Bites Dog* invites amusement merited by the black comedy standards operative as the work makes the invitation. The film then switches to a realist drama standard

in inviting shame about that amusement. This shame is only merited provided that its object, the amusement, is not. This provision is secured by the fact that the amusement is not merited by the realist drama standard. Thus each response a seductive work invites can be wholly merited according to its own standard, meaning seductive works need not be aesthetically flawed, preserving the *Merit Principle* without theoretical strain.

Is it not a problem that r_1 is unmerited by the standard of g_2 while g_2 is operative—that the amusement in *Man Bites Dog*, for example, is unmerited by the realist drama standard? For, there is still a response unmerited by one of the work-internal standards, reviving the paradox. A friendly amendment solves this issue:

TEMPORAL MERIT PRINCIPLE

For any work w that invites a response r in appreciators through artistic means, w is aesthetically flawed insofar as r is unmerited to any degree according to the standards of meritedness operative when r is invited.

Note that this alteration is not *ad hoc*. The motivation behind Aristotle's and Hume's claims is that lack of meritedness undermines one's ability to respond to a work on its terms. But the fact that a response is unmerited by a standard not even operative when the response is invited interferes in no way with this ability.

Sadly, however, the proposal does not work. Crucial to the proposal is the temporal separation of each invitation; the first-order invitation precedes the second-order one. However, nothing in the nature of seductive works or my characterization of them rules out their simultaneously inviting responses of differing orders. Indeed, some seductive works do just this. In 'The National Anthem', the first episode of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror*, an anonymous kidnapper abducts and threatens to kill a British Princess unless Britain's Prime Minister has sexual intercourse with a pig on live television.¹⁰ As the story progresses and the deadline nears, we witness the unthinkable demand become thinkable before finally, compelled by opinion polls and PR aides, the Prime Minister yields. A central theme of the episode is the enabling role contemporary technology plays in turning the debasing of a human being into an item of casual consumption and titillation. News of the demand quickly spreads via social media, and the humiliating act is broadcast nationwide, the entire country

¹⁰ I assure the reader the recent allegation that PM David Cameron put his genitals into a dead pig's mouth came, hilariously, after I chose this example.

gripped for its duration (“over an hour”, as one character reveals). Yet, crucially the show depicts many viewers as coming to realize the horror of their voyeurism.

As its title suggests, *Black Mirror* presents a dark reflection (as from a smartphone or flat-screen TV) of our own technologically saturated world. ‘The National Anthem’ does this principally through its seductive structure. As one watches the fictional citizens stare at their TV with unsavoury relish, so one realizes one is doing precisely the same thing. The work both invites one to indulge a voyeuristic desire to see the sordid act, and yet to also recognize, by witnessing others’ voyeurism, this desire’s perversity. Importantly, ‘The National Anthem’ invites both orders of response simultaneously; call it a “synchronic” seductive work.

Such works thwart the latest proposal. *Non-synchronic* seductive works invite the two orders of responses at different times. This allows one set of genre conventions (g_1) to operate while one response (r_1) is invited and another (g_2) when the other response (r_2) is. This accounts for how both responses can be merited at their time of invitation: r_1 is merited according to g_1 , r_2 is merited according to g_2 . That each invited response is unmerited according to a standard *not* operative at the time of invitation does not matter, since the meritedness of each response is indexed to its time of invitation. Synchronic seductive works, however, eliminate this temporal separation. Both g_1 and g_2 are operative simultaneously, rendering r_1 and r_2 unmerited according to g_2 and g_1 , respectively.¹¹ Thus, such works are necessarily aesthetically flawed on even the *Temporal Merit Principle*.

Why stop with temporality? Why not think that the indexing of a response to a standard is logical, say, rather than temporal? The answer is that in synchronic seductive works, appreciators must understand the first-order response’s unmeritedness while experiencing it in order to properly appreciate the work’s seductive point. So, separation of that response and the repudiatory standard can only be temporal. Some non-seductive works invoke different standards simultaneously, and invite responses that appreciators are to consider relative to just some subset of these standards. And some even place these responses in some kind of tension, as when Picasso’s *Guernica* invites both horror at the war scene depicted and pleasure in the masterful use of bold geometric forms. What distinguishes seductive artworks, however, is that the meritedness of one response (second-order) cannot be cleaved from the meritedness of the other (first-order). Even if we assign each response its own standard, the second-order response cannot be understood without grasping how the first-order response falls short of the standard aligned with the second-order response.

¹¹ I think a similar problem arises for non-synchronic seductive works that execute a gradual rather than sudden shift from one standard to another, such that during the shift, two different standards are operative.

A different worry: why not treat synchronic and non-synchronic works separately as raising distinct paradoxes? I am not wedded to thinking that they form a natural kind among artworks. For some theoretic purpose, it may be better to firmly distinguish them. However, one ought also to recognize that they share a very important feature: their seductive form. Moreover, distinguishing them will not restore the plausibility of a general, temporally nuanced *Merit Principle*. For, even if such a principle explains why non-synchronic seductive works are not necessarily aesthetically flawed, combining it with synchronic works still leads to paradox.

3.5 The Ontological Proposal

A different proposal in the same spirit as the last is that seductive artworks require a novel ontology. The discussion so far assumes seductive works invite two orders of response. The proposal is that what I have called the first-order responses are part of the seductive artwork itself. Thus, only what I have called the second-order responses are really responses that the seductive artwork invites. One can understand this roughly on the model of a work that merely depicts an appreciator responding to an artwork. Just as a photo depicting someone's response to an artwork does not thereby invite that response, so a seductive artwork does not invite the unmerited responses it "contains". Thus it is not flawed in virtue of the *Merit Principle*. It is natural to think of many artworks as including appreciators or their attitudes. The installation piece *21 Balançoires* by design studio Tous Les Jours, comprised a set of swings installed in Montreal's Quartier de Spectacles, each of which played a set of musical notes. The piece encouraged participants to cooperate by swinging in tandem, since this alone combined the sounds into pleasant melodies, as well as unlocking further melodic combinations. Christoph De Boeck's *Staalhemel* includes 80 steel plates suspended parallel to the ceiling. It uses a single appreciator's brain activity, detected via portable EEG, to cause small hammers to strike the steel plates while other appreciators look and listen on. Such participants might seem part of these "interactive" works, rather than mere appreciators, not least because they form part of what other appreciators not directly interacting with the work are invited to appreciate. Returning to seductive artworks, one might think that in responding as invited to their own attitudes, appreciators of, or their "first-order" attitudes toward, what I have been calling the "work" become part of a larger meta-work. Thus, while *containing* the unmerited responses, seductive artworks only *invite* the "second order" merited repudiatory responses. To illustrate, the proposal is that the work, *Man Bites Dog* consists not merely of a film, but of a film plus the appreciator's "first-order" amusement. The only responses *Man Bites Dog* invites are those of guilt or shame towards that amusement, which are merited, leaving the work unblemished as

regards the *Merit Principle*. Call this the “ontological proposal”.

If tenable as an account of interactive works, this proposal offers a promising escape from paradox perfectly suited to some seductive artworks. Brett Bailey’s *Exhibit B*, for instance, is an installation artwork depicting a fictional “human zoo” populated by actors racialized as Black.¹² On one attractive interpretation, the work aims at inviting a racially loaded objectifying gaze in order to get the appreciator to recognize her susceptibility to executing such a gaze, in particular, by meeting eyes with the otherwise objectified actors. The piece’s exhibition at the Barbican in London was cancelled following protests about its ethical character—protests with which I am largely sympathetic. Protests notwithstanding, *Exhibit B*’s effectiveness lies not merely in making a spectacle of the actors, but in making one of the appreciators (predominantly racialized as White) as they execute their immoral gazes. As with *21 Balançoires* and *Staalhemel*, the spectacle is one for both participants and third-party appreciators to behold.

Characterizing interactive works as “including the appreciator” is common but not inevitable. It is as plausible that interactive works do not include appreciators or their attitudes, even if the interactions they enable do, much as Stevie Wonder’s *Superstition* is not located on the set of *Sesame Street* in 1973, even if a performance of it is. The ontology of interactive artworks is still nascent, currently offering only two well-developed accounts. On one, interactions with interactive works token a type, where the type constitutes the artwork (Lopes 2001). On the other, interactions do not token the work type, but a display type—a kind of way that the work can be interacted with—where the work consists of all of its (possibly infinite) display types (Preston 2014). Notably, neither account includes appreciators or their attitudes among the artwork’s parts, though both include them in the interactions the artwork enables. That aside, even if on the final analysis interactive works do contain appreciators or their attitudes, and even if *Exhibit B* is among such works, it is dubious whether works such as *Man Bites Dog* are. If nothing else, participants cannot substantively alter the contents of these works or the appreciations they enable as they can with obviously interactive works. Thus, if *Exhibit B* shows anything here, it is only that some seductive artworks are interactive, not all.

There is further reason to doubt the ontological proposal, even ignoring the interactivity issue. Namely, the proposal appeals to something too common among artworks to plausibly sustain it. Its guiding thought is that seductive artworks integrally concern, and invite appreciators to respond to, the appreciators’ own intentional attitudes, and that one should therefore include those attitudes in

¹² I thank Nathaniel Coleman and James McGuiggan for alerting me to this work.

the work itself. The problem is that works integrally concerning, and inviting appreciators to respond to, things seemingly outside a work, including appreciators' attitudes, are all too common. Any work inviting its audience to reflect on the human condition will meet such a condition. But they do not thereby incorporate appreciators or their attitudes in the metaphysical sense the proposal requires—not unless one embraces a radically revisionist ontology of art in general.

3.6 The Seeming Proposal

A final objection to (2) I will consider, in part because its analogue will reappear when I consider how to revise the *Merit Principle*, is that it mischaracterizes what seductive works do. While it is true that the second-order response a seductive work invites is only merited if the first-order response it repudiates is not, a seductive work need not actually *invite* the first-order response, or so claims the proposal. It suffices for a seductive work to merely *seem* to invite an unmerited first-order response. Remembering that by *invite a response x* I intend *attempt to elicit x*, the proposal is that seductive works need only *seem* to attempt to elicit an unmerited first-order response. Since (2) claims that seductive works necessarily invite an unmerited response, this proposal amounts to a rejection of (2), thus blocking the implication that such works need be aesthetically flawed. For, the *Merit Principle* is silent on the aesthetic effect of *seeming* to invite unmerited responses. Hence, no paradox.

Unfortunately, there are only two ways a work can seem to invite an unmerited response, neither of which satisfactorily resolves the paradox. The first way is veridical: when what a work seems to do is what it in fact does. But clearly this is no help. If seductive works seem to invite an unmerited response by in fact inviting an unmerited response, then the paradox remains. The second way is illusory: when a work *merely* seems to invite the response. The problem here is that it is implausible that seductive artworks do this. Seductive works do not *merely* seem to invite—i.e. attempt to elicit—an unmerited first-order response; they *do* attempt to elicit such a response. For, without eliciting this response, the seductive strategy is doomed. Thus, neither way of seeming to invite will help.¹³

13 Berys Gaut adopts this proposal in (Gaut 2007). Given that the strategy is so transparently flawed, one might wonder why. The answer is that the strategy is more or less promising depending on what exactly one takes invitations to respond to consist in. My own view is that Gaut's preference for 'prescribes' over 'invites' in his version of the *Merit Principle* hides an ambiguity that makes the current proposal appear more promising than it is, and requires him to disambiguate along the lines I suggest at the very end. I return briefly to this point in a footnote at the end of the paper.

IV. Proposals: Rejecting Proposition (3)

If there are no more proposals for rejecting (2), the only remaining option for salvaging the *Merit Principle* is to reject (3). This amounts to gritting one's teeth and accepting that artistically seductive works are necessarily flawed. How might one motivate this?

4.1 The Minor Flaws Proposal

Seductive works, one might say, do indeed invite unmerited responses and are thereby aesthetically blemished. But as this small blemish makes the great achievement of indicting the appreciators' attitudes possible, it is obscured. The chief problem with this suggestion is that it turns achievement into failure. Successful seductive works are so commendable not merely because they subvert our complacent responses, but because they do so by skillfully obscuring matters just enough to get appreciators to respond in an unmerited way, but not so much as to undermine the second-order response (i.e. by rendering the first-order response fully merited). This is a great achievement and ought to count as an aesthetic merit, not a blemish. To insist that the first-order invitation must constitute a flaw is comparable to insisting that because some awful artworks are fascinating for how awful they are, then they must enjoy some aesthetic merit. It is to embrace implausibility in service of a prior philosophical principle.

4.2 Epistemic Privilege

Still, one might insist that, while getting appreciators to respond in unmerited ways can be an achievement, letting that fact settle whether seductive works are flawed fails to take seriously how this tactic compromises the work. For instance, take an appreciator who has been a victim of the kinds of crimes *Man Bites Dog* invites us to be amused by—violent burglary, say. Such an appreciator might be unable to appreciate *Man Bites Dog* at all, finding its initial invitation to amusement irredeemably tasteless. One temptation is to discount this appreciator's experience as idiosyncratically hypersensitive. But another is to conclude that her experience grants her an epistemic privilege with respect to representations of violent burglary. Her judgements are more, not less, authoritative. Those of us without this experience are being glib when we deny that making light of such heinous acts aesthetically blemishes the work.¹⁴

There is something to this suggestion, though more argument is needed. There is a question

¹⁴ Thanks to Victor Kumar for pressing this objection.

whether seductive works really make light of the objects of the first-order responses they invite. Another issue is how far the claim goes. If a depiction of domestic violence does not amuse a domestic violence victim, the claim that the depiction really is not amusing may be plausible.¹⁵ But where someone’s father, say, dies after being struck in the face by a pie, it is less plausible to think she enjoys some epistemic privilege with regard to which pie-gag responses are appropriate. Another complication is that where epistemic privilege lies is not always clear. Perhaps in general, privilege lies, if anywhere, with the victims of the represented offense, although this position leads to thorny questions about victimhood. To take one example, NWA’s *Fuck the Police* is both an expression of indignation at oppression by state power, and seemingly an uncompromising call to lethal violence against the police. Whose sensitivities should one privilege with respect to such a work—the oppressed person, or the victim of anti-police violence?¹⁶ Perhaps both? In any case, accepting the suggestion only immunizes certain works against paradox. Some seductive works, perhaps including *Man Bites Dog*, might be aesthetically flawed for the ethical reasons just described. But there is no reason to think *all* seductive artworks are. Seductive works inviting responses that are ethically unmerited to only a minor degree, or for non-ethical reasons, such as the Boddington’s advertisement, do not plausibly fall within this category.

* * *

Since my several attempts to solve the paradox fail, I propose one ought to reject the *Merit Principle* after all, counter-intuitive though this seems. Aristotle claimed that successful tragedies exploit the unmerited *misfortunes* of people like ourselves. It appears that sometimes, successful works exploit the unmerited *responses* of people like ourselves.¹⁷

V. The Challenge of Seductive Works

I have shown how a live evaluative principle leads to paradox by implausibly implying that what I have called “seductive works” are necessarily aesthetically flawed. I tried undoing the paradox in ways that preserve the principle, but because each attempt failed, I rejected it. In this section, I consider why

15 Again, for the sake of simplicity, I am ignoring deeper questions about whether ethical considerations are relevant to aesthetic value.

16 I am not suggesting these kinds of violence are morally equivalent, just that both parties can be victims of unjust violence.

17 Thanks to Peter Railton for this keen observation.

seductive works seem paradoxical and close with a revision that captures something of the *Merit Principle's* motivation while avoiding paradox. Whether the revision is ultimately defensible—in particular, whether it captures a specifically *aesthetic* failure—I leave to another occasion.

Ultimately, motivating the *Merit Principle* is an observation from actual artistic appreciation: works that do not move their audiences as intended fail on their own terms by failing to achieve their aims, and are to that extent aesthetically flawed. Note that this thought is couched in the causal terms of the *Elicitation Principle*, not the normative terms of meritedness. Seductive artworks, like any other, are made for actual audiences whose fallibilities artists reckon with. They depend on appreciators' capacities to be misled, to respond in ways they ought not to, and to recognize their mistake. When a seductive work secures both the first-order response and the second-order regret, it is to that extent successful. Abandoning the *Elicitation Principle's* causal register for the normative register of “merited responses” shrouds part of a seduction strategy's aesthetic achievement in mystery.

Putting this in terms of a Humean ideal appreciator may clarify the problem. Suppose a response r to x is merited if and only if an ideal appreciator has response r to x . Then the *Merit Principle's* problem is this: for seductive works to succeed, appreciators must be able to get things wrong. But Humean ideal appreciators are ones who always get things right. Therefore, just as our measure of aesthetic success cannot be determined (straightforwardly) by the responses of such an ideal appreciator, nor can it be (straightforwardly) determined by whether the invited responses are merited.

To digress briefly, one may wonder if appreciators really do have to get things wrong for seductive artworks to succeed. Inferring what is fictional in a work (that is, true at the work's fictional world), for instance, typically proceeds non-monotonically: when a work of fiction reveals new bits of information, it can thereby make p (seem) true in the fiction, when previously $\sim p$ had seemed true in it; a murder mystery might convince us of the butler's guilt before revealing that the vicar did it. Appreciators often draw conclusions from what would be very flimsy evidence at the actual world in a way warranted by the context of engaging with an artwork (Walton 1990, 161-168). Could one not explain seductive artworks—at least non-synchronic ones—as exploiting this fact? And, if so, would it not be right to say that both inferring that the butler did it, and that the vicar did it afterwards, are both merited given the evidence made available at the time?

The tone of this suggestion should sound familiar from my discussion of the “shifting standards” proposal. Still, it is worth considering insofar as it can help sharpen up one's understanding of seductive artworks. I think the answer to the final question is a qualified ‘yes’ (I will get to the qualification shortly). For this reason, one should not think of seductive artworks as executing an

evidential shift as the murder mystery does. For a work to be truly seductive in my sense, it must give the appreciator just enough rope with which to hang herself, rather than—to strain the metaphor—disguising the noose as a scarf. In order for the seductive work to have its distinctive effect, it must reveal to the appreciator how *she* falls short (in responding in an unmerited way), rather than that her epistemic position is deficient in ways for which the artwork is responsible. Compare this to a murder mystery that, for instance, exploits appreciators' racial prejudices to induce the belief that a butler conspicuously racialized as Black is guilty. To the extent that these prejudices prompt otherwise unmerited inferences, and the work exhibits all the other appropriate structural features, it counts as a seductive work.¹⁸

The qualification is that in one sense the belief that the plain murder mystery's butler is guilty is unmerited. Adopting the familiar distinction between *subjective* and *objective* norms of justification, one can say that although subjectively merited (all available evidence suggests the butler's guilt), the belief is objectively unmerited (it is false). Adopting these terms, I count as seductive only works exploiting *subjectively* unmerited response to execute the seductive strategy. But the distinction raises interesting questions: (1) Does the *Merit Principle* concern subjectively *and* objectively unmerited responses or just the former? (2) is a repudiatory second-order response toward a merely *objectively* unmerited first-order response ever merited, whether subjectively or objectively? Would regret, for instance, be merited towards having falsely believed that the plain murder mystery's butler “dunit”? To the first question I answer that the *Merit Principle* is more plausibly read as the weaker claim concerning only subjectively unmerited responses. Indeed, because of works like the plain murder mystery, the stronger claim is much more obviously implausible. To the second, I answer that there may be cases where a repudiatory response toward a merely objectively unmerited response is merited; if so, the class of seductive artworks will be larger than I have taken it to be. I will not argue for either answer except to note that (a) it is far more contentious whether regret, shame, embarrassment, etc. about a merely *objectively* unmerited response are ever thereby merited, and (b) settling either question does not alter the force of my preceding arguments; there is still a class of seductive artworks inviting *subjectively* unmerited first-order responses which, combined with the *Merit Principle*, generates a paradox. This is true even on the *Merit Principle's* more plausible weaker reading, as concerning only subjectively unmerited responses.

¹⁸ I think the examples I discuss are examples of seductive artworks understood in this way. But suppose one doubted this. Would the paradox go away? No. As long as the conceptual possibility of such a work exists, the problem arises—even if, as a matter of contingent fact, no such work exists.

Returning to the original thread, there is a more sophisticated and plausible response-dependent theory that appeals to ideal critics than the one considered above. It is one that appeals to a broader class of responses, especially judgements, as determining or at least indicating the properties a work has. It is more plausible because, while an ideal critic may not respond as a work invites her to, she may still judge the work to be such as to elicit the invited response from intended audiences, just as adults can often judge that a children's book is funny (to children) without being themselves amused. Appealing to this broader repertoire of responses closes the gap between a causal and a normative standard by making ideal critics sensitive to the responses that would be caused in intended appreciators. It thereby seemingly combines the normative benefits of the *Merit Principle* with the causal benefits of the *Elicitation Principle* in a hybrid standard. Moreover, this position appears to be Hume's own:

But to enable a critic the more fully to execute this undertaking, he must preserve his mind free from all *prejudice*, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his examination. We may observe, that every work of art, in order to produce its due effect on the mind, must be surveyed in a certain point of view, and cannot be fully relished by persons, whose situation, real or imaginary, is not conformable to that which is required by the performance. An orator addresses himself to a particular audience, and must have a regard to their particular genius, interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices; otherwise he hopes in vain to govern their resolutions, and inflame their affections. [...] A critic of a different age or nation, who should peruse this discourse, must have all these circumstances in his eye, and must place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgment. (Hume 1757a, 224-225)

Ironically, Hume's stipulation that an ideal critic be "cleared of all prejudice" (229) requires her to adopt, in some sense, some of the prejudices of the work's intended audience.

This new standard runs into a difficulty, however. The problem with a wholly normative standard is that it does not allow for the faultless exploitation of error that seductive artworks require; such ideal critics do not commit errors. The problem with a wholly causal standard is that while it, as it were, allows for error, it allows too much, since even the worst invitations might cause deficient appreciators to respond as invited, which by itself tells us nothing about a work's aesthetic value. The problem with the hybrid standard, meanwhile, is that it runs into the problem of trivially flawless works. Some art panders to humanity's most asinine dispositions. But if one characterizes the relevant

audience as explicitly asinine, such that asininity is one of the “prejudices” an ideal critic will have to embody to accurately evaluate the work, then these invitations will be aesthetically faultless. But presumably one wants to rule out such immunity to aesthetic failure. At least it should be *possible* for invitations that rely on wholly unwarranted attitudes for their success to count against a work’s aesthetic value, especially when the invited responses are not ultimately disavowed. Assuming for the sake of an example that ethical flaws can ground aesthetic ones, it is no good defending *Birth of a Nation* against aesthetic criticism because it was intended for White supremacists. The problem then is that while the hybrid standard can explain how seductive artworks need not be aesthetically flawed for inviting an unmerited response, it does so too easily; it fails to explain how many cases in which an unmerited response is invited *does* blemish the work.

Causal principles of the kind we are after are too weak; they fail to mark some flaws as flaws. Moreover, their total lack of normative constraint makes them unworkable. If one is to find a credible principle, therefore, it will have to be captured in normative terms. But the fully normative principles I have discussed are too strong; they mark as flaws things that are not. I believe the problem arises from the focus on attempts to elicit—*invitations*. As seductive artworks show, merely attempting to elicit a response does not commit the artwork to the response; the response can be disavowed. And it is through this possibility of disavowal that seductive artworks can successfully exploit unmerited responses. Therefore, something stronger than invitation is needed. I think a more promising principle emerges once one couches matters in terms of a work’s *endorsing* rather than merely *inviting* responses. For, endorsement cannot be disavowed in the same way. In the next section I consider just such a principle.

VI. A Solution?

Here is a suggested revision to the *Merit Principle* that avoids the paradox I have described. If instead of attempts to *elicit* an unmerited response, the principle focusses on attempts to *make* such a response *merited*, a solution presents itself. That is, if one moves from...

MERIT PRINCIPLE

A work that *attempts to elicit* an unmerited response in appreciators through artistic means is to that extent aesthetically flawed.

To...

REVISED MERIT PRINCIPLE

A work that *attempts to make merited* an unmerited response in appreciators through artistic means is to that extent aesthetically flawed.

One can avoid the paradox, specifically, by applying the analogue of the “seeming proposal” outlined in §3.6. While seductive works clearly do not merely *seem* to attempt to elicit an unmerited response, they do merely seem to attempt to make such a response merited. Seductive artworks acknowledge and exploit the unmeritedness in the first-order responses they attempt to elicit; it therefore makes little sense to think that such works try to make these responses merited, even if they seem to do so. What exactly does it mean to say that a work “attempts to make a response merited”? I intend this cumbersome phrase to express the *endorsing* of a response. I retain the phrase only because it more explicitly shows the revision’s relation to the original principle. Recall that the *Merit Principle* tries to capture one way a work can fail on its own terms. The *Revised Merit Principle* would show exactly how a work does so—by literally attempting to make the unmerited merited, even if not under that description.

The revision avoids paradox. But does it capture a specifically *aesthetic* failure? Is it tenable? For, while it is plausible that a work’s attempting to make an unmerited response merited is thereby flawed, it is less clear it must be aesthetically flawed specifically. I will not take up this question here, except to note that the *Revised Merit Principle* seems no worse off than its original counterpart in one important respect. Namely, I suspect that a failure—whether to elicit or make merited—can only be aesthetic when the response is itself “aesthetic”. If a work attempts but fails to elicit (as per the original principle) or to make merited (as per the revision) a response concerning its financial value, for example, then this may not be a specifically aesthetic failure.¹⁹ Known forgeries, for instance, plausibly fail in attempting to elicit and make merited responses concerning their financial value; but these failures seem orthogonal to their aesthetic success. If a work attempts to elicit or make merited an unmerited response concerning the work’s gracefulness, however, then this may plausibly be an aesthetic failure (at least when the work is not a seductive work in the case of attempting to elicit).²⁰

19 A similar point is made in (Stecker 2005, 145-146).

20 I do think there are reasons to be skeptical that a work’s endorsing an unmerited response renders it aesthetically flawed, though I do not discuss them here. If they are overriding, this raises an interesting worry about Berys Gaut’s ethicism, which is premised on a version of the *Merit Principle* put in terms of *prescribing* unmerited responses, rather

If my suspicion is right (though I have said little to support it), then both principles would need clarification to avoid counterexamples, such as works that attempt to elicit or make merited unmerited responses concerning their financial value. As we saw in §3.1, for all the counterexamples, there will still be some considerations (e.g. beauty) that bear upon the meritedness of responses (e.g. judgements of beauty) that are obviously aesthetically relevant and that seductive works can exploit (e.g. by attempting to elicit judgements of beauty beyond what is merited). Thus, if my suspicion is correct, clarifying the principles would have to consist in restricting ‘responses’ to aesthetic responses, leaving us with a slightly more scope-restricted version of the same paradox in the case of the *Merit Principle*. With all that in mind, the *Revised Merit Principle*, suitably restricted, would capture something important about the original *Merit Principle* while avoiding paradox. Determining its truth-value must wait for another time.

than *inviting* them. Gaut’s “prescribe” is ambiguous between ‘invite’ and ‘endorse’ in a way that may undermine his “Merited Response Argument” for ethicism, which tries to tie the aesthetic failing of prescribing an unmerited response to the ethical failing of doing so. For, if the aesthetic failing consists in inviting the unmerited response, and the ethical failing consists in endorsing it, then the apparent logical connection between the two failures depends upon the equivocal ‘prescribe’. I develop this argument elsewhere.

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Chapter Two

Imaginative and Fictionality Failure: a Normative Approach[†]

I. Introduction: Two Puzzles

In Goethe's *Faust* it is true in the fiction—or *fictional*²¹—that the Devil makes a bet with God and transforms into a poodle. Readers have no trouble imagining this state of affairs. Generally, we cooperate imaginatively with written fictions, and what their authors²² describe as being the case in their stories becomes fictional. But suppose you encounter the following line in a novel:

Giselda

In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; *after all, it was a girl.* (Walton 1994, p. 37).

Or consider the following story:

Death

Jack and Jill were arguing again. This was not in itself unusual, but this time they were standing in the fast lane of I-95 having their argument. This was causing traffic to bank up a bit. It wasn't

† My thanks to those who have helped with this paper in its various incarnations: Brian Weatherson, Ken Walton, Margot Strohminger, Jonathan Payne, Sarah Moss, Derek Matravers, Sam Liao, Dan Jacobson, Rob Hopkins, Danny Herwitz, Dom Gregory, Gregg Crane, Sarah Buss, Aili Bresnahan, Paloma Atencia Linares, two anonymous referees, and the editorial team at Philosophers' Imprint. Thanks also to audiences at the University of Sheffield's Postgraduate Seminar (2009), the University of Michigan (2014), Michigan's Aesthetics Discussion Group (2010), and the annual meetings of the British Society of Aesthetics (2014), the American Society for Aesthetics (2014), and the American Philosophical Association (2014). Finally, thanks to the UK and US public, whose investment in research made the paper possible; long may that investment continue.

21 What does it mean for *p* to be “fictional”? I follow the most influential theory of fiction in aesthetics outlined in Kendall Walton's (1990), according to which, for *p* to be fictional in a work *w* means, roughly, that *p* is to be imagined by appreciators of *w*, and that when such appreciators state '*p*', ordinarily (a) they express a proposition with the logical syntax, 'fictionally, *p*'; and (b) fictionally, they say something true. For more details of this view, see Walton (1990) and (2015). For a quick (though imperfect) gloss of how the theory works, see (Stear, 2009, pp. 24-28).

22 I will mostly ignore narratological subtleties as to whether we should understand this authorship as actual or implied. For those interested, (Booth 1961) and (Nehamas 1981) offer classic accounts of “implied”, or “postulated” authorship.

significantly worse than normally happened around Providence, not that you could have told that from the reactions of passing motorists. They were convinced that Jack and Jill, and not the volume of traffic, were the primary causes of the slowdown. They all forgot how bad traffic normally is along there. When Craig saw that the cause of the bankup (*sic*) had been Jack and Jill, he took his gun out of the glovebox and shot them. People then started driving over their bodies, and while the new speed hump caused some people to slow down a bit, mostly traffic returned to its normal speed. So Craig did the right thing, because Jack and Jill should have taken their argument somewhere else where they wouldn't get in anyone's way. (Weatherson 2004, p. 1)

Passages like these, which I will call “puzzle cases”, are widely thought to give rise to two failures. First, appreciators fail to imagine a proposition they express. Call this phenomenon *imaginative failure*. Second, they fail to make a proposition they express fictional; it is not true in the stories that Giselda or Craig did the right thing. Call this *fictionality failure*. These phenomena give rise to two corresponding puzzles:²³

The Imaginative Puzzle

Why do puzzle cases induce imaginative failure?

*The Fictionality Puzzle*²⁴

Why do puzzle cases induce fictionality failure?

To generate these puzzles, it is not enough that a text include some proposition p resulting in something like our two failures. After all, a work may express p intradiegetically—in the voice of an unreliable narrator or a character, for instance. Alternatively, a work may express p non-assertorically—ironically, perhaps. Nor does temporarily stumping a reader suffice. Many fictions deliberately puzzle

23 Kendall Walton first noticed these puzzles (Walton 1990, pp.154-155), though he credits Hume with observing something similar (Hume 1757/2007, p.253). Twenty-five years on, a lively literature has emerged that occasionally bundles the two phenomena together as “imaginative resistance”, a name introduced by Richard Moran (1994, p. 95), becoming the official *Kunstbegriff* with (Gendler 2000). The catch-all name is unfortunate, since while both phenomena may share an explanation—indeed, I will argue they do—we should not presume this. Moreover, as others have noted, to characterize imaginative failure as “resistance” is tendentious, since whether it results from unwillingness or inability (or anything else) is disputed. Finally, the name suggests both phenomena implicate the imagination, which fictionality failure need not.

24 This is the same as Brian Weatherson’s “alethic puzzle”, unless we take the potential scope of the puzzle to extend beyond fiction and include (literary) representations generally—see (Weatherson 2004), (Matravers 2014).

readers in order to induce “hermeneutic recalibration”, whereby appreciators resolve their difficulty by settling on a new stable interpretation (Liao 2011, pp. 27, 27n., 98-99), (Liao 2013, pp. 7-8). Puzzle cases, therefore, are those in which on the best interpretation(s) a work attempts to prescribe *p* by expressing it explicitly, but appreciators fail to imagine *p* and/or *p* fails to be fictional, where these failures persist through proper and complete appreciation of the work. Such cases may become conspicuous by simply stumping a reader permanently. Alternatively, they may do so by forcing readers into an unstable interpretative strategy, as when the previously effaced narrator seems to become an unreliable one, moving from extradiegetic to intradiegetic narration.²⁵

Recently some have denied that the phenomena are puzzling.²⁶ I begin in §2, therefore, by explicating and criticizing the most sophisticated defence of this denial. In §3, I switch gears and examine the best extant attempt to solve the puzzles, showing where *it* falls short. In §4, I propose an alternative solution, tease out some subtleties not given their due in the existing literature, and motivate the proposal by showing how it avoids a tricky objection that superficially similar proposals do not.

I should note before proceeding that I am sympathetic to much of what the authors I go on to criticize have written. My arguments owe a great debt to theirs.

II. Is there a Genuine Puzzle?

In (Todd 2009), Cain Todd argues that puzzle cases are not genuinely puzzling as follows:

Imaginative failure is real, but not genuinely puzzling (p. 188).

(from 1) If there is a genuinely puzzling phenomenon among the two described, it is fictionality failure.

Our only reason for positing fictionality failure is by inferring it from cases of imaginative failure (enthymeme).

We are not warranted in inferring fictionality failure from cases of imaginative failure (pp. 199-203).

(from 3, 4) There is no fictionality failure.

(from 2, 5) There is no genuinely puzzling phenomenon.

²⁵ A phenomenon sometimes referred to as “pop-out”, following (Gendler 2006).

²⁶ See, for instance, (Stokes 2006, pp. 402-405), (Millgram, unpublished manuscript), and (Todd 2009), whose paper I discuss here at length. (Nanay 2010, p. 587) is also a candidate. A name has even emerged for this denial: imaginative resistance *eliminativism* (Liao & Gendler forthcoming).

(1) and (4) are the controversial claims Todd must defend.²⁷ Todd supports (1) by arguing that imaginative failure results from appreciators' differing theoretical commitments. He supports (4) by arguing that what we are able to imagine does not constrain what can be fictional. I lay out these arguments now after introducing what I call "qualifying contexts".

2.1 Reinstating the Imaginative Puzzle

Interestingly, authors can avoid puzzle cases by supplying contexts that vindicate the otherwise problematic claim. Suppose *Giselda* continued in the following way:

*Giselda**

In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; *after all, it was a girl*. Since the *Patriarchy Party* had seized power, all girls faced horrific lives of state-sponsored sexual slavery. Giselda felt nauseous killing her child; doing what's right isn't always easy.

I take it that any imaginative difficulty *Giselda* induces, *Giselda** does not. We have no trouble imagining Giselda's actions are right, albeit awful, in *Giselda**. Addressing herself to the imaginative puzzle, Kathleen Stock makes just this point. Shy of conceptual impossibilities, she says, authors can render any claim imaginable using a qualifying context (Stock 2005).²⁸ In fact, her claim is stronger; not only may authors write in qualifying contexts, but *readers* may supply them in imagination. This suggests a natural solution to the imaginative puzzle: imaginative failure results from a reader's contingent failure to think up a qualifying context (Stock 2005, pp. 619-620).

A conclusion Todd draws from Stock's discussion is that, if she is right, imaginative failure "is not as puzzling with respect to authorial authority as first thought" (Todd 2009, p. 192). One way to understand this is as follows. Initially, we thought puzzle cases denied authors the power to make certain claims fictional. However, if authors need only add qualifying contexts to remedy such cases, they are hardly impotent; nothing prevents them from doing so. Indeed, if per Stock's stronger claim the *imaginee's* inadequacy causes imaginative failure, authorial authority remains untouched. The author is no more impotent before our feeble imaginations than a musician is before a deaf audience.

Todd is skeptical that things are so straightforward, and denies that we can supply qualifying

²⁷ Is (3) not controversial, too? Not if we take it as merely restricting the scope of inquiry to puzzle cases, rather than ruling out other possible reasons for inferring fictionality failure.

²⁸ Gendler acknowledges similar mechanisms for causing puzzlement to "evaporate" in her discussion of distorting and non-distorting fictions (Gendler 2000, pp. 75-81).

contexts for *any* puzzle case and *any* imaginer. Some puzzle cases, he thinks, will consist in attempted prescriptions to imagine that contradict exceptionless theoretical commitments, such as an appreciator's conceptual commitments, particularly involving thicker moral concepts subject to strong descriptive and evaluative conditions.²⁹ Todd's idea here is straightforward. Objects and events fall under concepts. Deliberately killing someone against her will (and not in self-defence), for instance, falls under the concept *murder*. Now suppose Persons A and B differ as follows: for A, *murder* is an essentially negatively valenced thick concept (unlike *euthanasia*, say), while it is not for B. A will deem a "good murder" conceptually incoherent; no context could render a murder good as such. For B, meanwhile, good murders (perhaps where victims are superlatively nasty) are a coherent possibility and pose no problem—at least, no *conceptual* problem. Therefore, a story describing a murder as good, *even within a qualifying context C*, will induce imaginative failure in A but not B. Put differently, *C* will count as a qualifying context for B but not A. Todd thinks this holds generally. People with less flexible theoretical commitments will be more prone to experiencing imaginative failure.³⁰

Put puzzle cases involving inflexible theoretical commitments to one side for now. Todd accepts that the possibility of qualifying contexts dissolves the imaginative puzzle. According to Stock, either authors or appreciators can supply a qualifying context, the former by writing it into the story, the latter by imagining it. However, that authors can supply qualifying contexts, useful though this insight is, does not satisfactorily dissolve the imaginative puzzle. The imaginative puzzle asks why we cannot imagine some proposition(s) a work attempts to prescribe, particularly since authors get us to imagine myriad claims, even bizarre ones, without relying upon any special context. Pointing out that imaginative failure vanishes from puzzle cases supplemented by qualifying contexts, therefore, side-steps the issue. Why some cases but not others require a qualifying context looks like a puzzle as difficult as the one with which we started.³¹ And the claim that appreciators may supply their own

29 Todd does not focus only on conceptual commitments—see (Todd 2009, p. 196). The arguments I go on to make cover the other commitments he considers as well.

30 Todd appears to think his view a departure from Stock's. If so, this is a mistake. As mentioned—indeed, as Todd himself notes (p. 192)—Stock does not take her solution to cover cases of conceptual impossibility (Stock 2005, p. 623). And since, as he also notes, the kind of failure he describes constitutes a kind of failure-by-conceptual-impossibility (Todd 2009, p. 196), it meshes nicely with the ambitions of Stock's solution. Todd's discussion of imaginer-relative conceptual dependencies echoes earlier ones in (Walton 1994) and (Weatherson 2004, p. 21)

31 Todd might seem to acknowledge a similar point, citing Gendler's claim that "the issue is why making some sorts of propositions imaginable takes a different kind of effort than making other sorts of propositions imaginable" (Gendler 2006, p. 158n), (Todd 2009, p. 193). However, I take Todd (and Gendler) here to be stressing the difficulty with which we imagine puzzle cases in order to then motivate their ideas about what affects imaginability (in Todd's case, the effect of theoretical commitments; in Gendler's, the effect of ethical commitments). My point is not that puzzle cases are still puzzling because difficult to imagine, or that Stock misses this point (she does not). Rather, my point is that puzzle cases still pose a puzzle if, unlike non-puzzle cases, they require authorial intervention to render them unpuzzling.

qualifying contexts, at least in puzzle cases falling short of conceptual incoherence, is untenable. According to Stock, when *Giselda* induces imaginative failure in us, this is because we are unable to think up what could possibly make Giselda's act of female infanticide right. But, on reflection, this is not terribly plausible. All but the most imaginatively stunted will be able to generate a qualifying context for cases like *Giselda*. One need simply imagine something worse that would occur were Giselda to refrain from infanticide (indeed, this is what *Giselda** prescribes).³² One might object that thinking up qualifying contexts seems simpler than it is because I am drawing on years of philosophical practice. Philosophers are trained in many comparable imaginative tasks, such as finding counterexamples, constructing thought experiments, and reasoning counterfactually about normative matters. But non-philosophers may not find it so straightforward. Here I need only point out that imaginative failure is the brainchild of professional philosophers who experience it themselves. Were imagining a qualifying context all one needed to undo the failure, it would be mysterious why philosophers discuss puzzle cases at all.

In fact, Stock's suggestion seems appropriate for close cousins of puzzle cases, namely riddles. Consider this old chestnut:

A father and his son are in a car accident. The father dies instantly. The son, badly injured, is rushed to the nearest hospital. At the hospital, the surgeon enters the room and exclaims "I can't operate on this boy."

"Why not?" the nurse asks.

"Because he's my son", the surgeon responds.

How can this be?

The riddle exploits pervasive gender associations embedded in our social schemata—in this case, maleness in our surgeon schema. The solution is that the surgeon is the boy's mother, and upon realizing this, any mystery evaporates, never to return. Puzzle cases are different. After reading *Giselda**, I am not relieved of any imaginative failure when returning to read the original, *Giselda*.³³ Yet this is what Stock's solution predicts. Although after reading *Giselda** I now have a qualifying context in hand, *Giselda* still induces imaginative failure in me. Were Stock's solution right, this would not be the case.

32 Sethe, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, finds herself in a situation analogous to Giselda's in which she kills her two-year-old daughter to save her from slavers. Many puzzled by cases like *Giselda* will already be familiar with Morrison's story and would have it to draw upon. I thank an anonymous referee for reminding me of this work.

33 I am simplifying matters a little here. I address complexities later in the paper.

How about the claim that imaginative failure is induced by an appreciator's inflexible theoretical commitments? Todd writes,

If one holds that certain, or even all, general moral principles are unconditionally and necessarily true, such that nothing could legitimate claims like 'murder is good', then perhaps one will be unable to imagine or will more readily resist imagining that murder *qua* murder could *ever* be good or justified. [...] If, however, one holds certain expressivist positions, or is a subjectivist, or a relativist about moral truth, then there seems to be no reason why one should not find it possible to imagine a world or a context in which it is true that murder is good or can be good. (Todd 2009, p. 196)

The suggestion that imaginative failure is probably more likely for people with realist meta-ethical views is odd, since there is a difference between the *normative* (and modal) content of moral claims and their *cognitive* or *metaphysical* status; only the former seems relevant to the kinds of cases Todd considers. Meta-ethical relativism may be the exception insofar as we take it (perhaps wrongly) to entail a constraint for normative ethics: that purely moral facts differ in different places.³⁴ In any case, the implication is that without such inflexible commitments, one will not experience imaginative failure to begin with (ignoring the improbable case where one cannot think up a qualifying context). But this thought leads to difficulty, since we *do* experience imaginative failure in cases like *Giselda*, regardless of the flexibility of our theoretical convictions. To see this, consider someone who experiences no imaginative failure when reading *Giselda**; probably, you are such a person. It follows from the claim under consideration that this person cannot have any relevant inflexible commitments—i.e. such a person must think female infanticide acceptable in *some* cases. But this person may still experience imaginative failure when reading *Giselda*. Thus, whatever is causing her to suffer imaginative failure, it cannot be the inflexibility of her theoretical commitments; it must be something else (even if in addition to this 'something else', an appreciator's inflexible commitments can overdetermine imaginative failure in other cases). The claims that imaginative failure will not occur if appreciators think up a qualifying context, or that otherwise it must be due to the inflexibility of an appreciator's theoretical commitments, are untenable, leaving us with a puzzle: whence imaginative failure?³⁵

³⁴ In fairness, Todd acknowledges that an expressivist with firm moral convictions may be as prone to imaginative failure as a realist with looser moral convictions. However, I fail to see how meta-ethical commitments bear any relevance to moral cases of imaginative failure such as *Giselda*.

³⁵ Could Todd not just attribute imaginative failure to a more comprehensive inflexible theoretical commitment—e.g. a

2.2 Reinstating the Fictionality Puzzle

People experience imaginative failure. And premise 3 in the argument above tells us that fictionality failure may only be legitimately inferred from imaginative failure, if at all. Therefore, to deny that there is a fictionality puzzle, one must show that imaginative failure never licences an inference to fictionality failure. Todd offers three arguments to this effect.

The first argument is that limiting what is fictional by what appreciators are able to imagine “seems to deny authors the very power that makes fiction possible in the first place”. He continues:

One who refused to read a work of fiction because it violates all sorts of metaphysical, logical and conceptual ‘truths’ which one could not fully imagine would manifest at the very least a very odd attitude to fiction. Refusing to allow that a work can make it fictional that the pig in the restaurant at the end of the universe tries to persuade the guests in perfect English that he desires to be eaten would be an indictment of the reader’s view of fiction, not of the fiction itself. (Todd 2009, p. 199)

Todd’s argument is a simple *reductio*: imaginative failure is imaginer-relative; therefore, if one can legitimately infer fictionality failure from imaginative failure, then fictionality failure is also imaginer-relative; but if what is fictional is relative to different imaginers, then authorial authority fails; but authorial authority cannot fail; therefore, one cannot legitimately infer fictionality failure from imaginative failure. This conclusion is then used to establish Todd’s ultimate claim that there is no puzzle.

For clarity, let us call the failure of authorial authority ‘authorial failure’. And since fictionality failure just is the failure of a work, and thus its author, to make something fictional despite explicitly attempting to prescribe it, for the purposes of discussing Todd’s argument, authorial failure and fictionality failure come to the same thing. But now the argument clearly begs the question. For, it says that we cannot infer fictionality failure from imaginative failure because this would mean that there was authorial failure, which cannot occur. But since authorial failure just is fictionality failure, this amounts to saying that because authorial authority cannot fail, authorial authority cannot fail.

commitment to the wrongness of female-infanticide-in-ordinary-circumstances rather than female-infanticide-*simpliciter*? Yes. But then we are owed an explanation as to why appreciators do not just import non-ordinary circumstances—i.e. a qualifying context—to accommodate the author’s otherwise puzzling judgement. My own explanation in §4 does this. Thanks to Sam Liao for this worry.

Todd's second argument is that an appreciator's imaginative capacities might fall short of the author's powers of fiction-making. For instance, consider a story in which a super-villain, Dr. Quantum occupies two distant places at once by exploiting quantum super-positions. Amilie, unfamiliar with quantum mechanics, might fail to imagine the proposition because she fails to understand how something could in any sense occupy two distant places at once. Yet Amilie's imaginative inability does not undermine that fictionally, Dr. Quantum does just that. The point is compelling. Fictionality failure certainly does not follow from imaginative shortcomings of this sort. And so one can grant the general point that imaginative failure, understood very broadly, does not imply fictionality failure. However, it is not clear that this undermines the inference from imaginative to fictionality failure in all cases—that is, from certain kinds of imaginative failure. It is of course true that one should not require that *all* appreciators be able to successfully imagine p in order for p to count as fictional, since appreciators can be deficient, as our example shows. One should not determine what is fictional on the evidence of such appreciators any more than one should determine a painting's quality by the judgements of the colour-blind. Amilie's failure to imagine does not licence an inference to what is fictional because the deficiency is so clearly with Amilie and not the work. However, when imaginative failure still occurs systematically across a set of sufficiently proper cases of appreciation, i.e. where no explanation in terms of the deficient conditions of appreciation is forthcoming, we have perfectly reasonable grounds for inferring fictionality failure.³⁶

A different difficulty arises from Kendall Walton's point that the fictionality of some proposition p is neither necessary nor sufficient for imagining that p . It is not sufficient, since one may recognize that p is fictional without imagining it. Nor is it necessary; one may engage in fanciful imaginings not authorized by a work (Walton 2008, p. 51). I might imagine, for instance, that James Bond experiences crippling erectile dysfunction without it being fictional in the work that he does. These kinds of cases also clearly fall short of proper engagement and so can be dealt with as above. However, Walton also claims that not only what *is* fictional and what we *do* imagine can come apart, but that it is possible for a proposition to be fictional even if we are *unable* to imagine it. This poses a different difficulty for the rebuttal I just made to Todd, for Walton intends this claim not for deficient cases of appreciation, like Amilie's, but for appreciation in general. It might also seem a strange claim for Walton to make since on his theory p 's being fictional in w is true just in case appreciators of w ought to imagine p . And, put

³⁶ Hence, my appeals to what “we” can imagine, and “our” responses should be read with a sufficient degree of idealization in mind (except where this is obviously not my intention). I will not delve into aesthetic idealization *per se* since this would take us too far afield, though I discuss aspects of it at the end of the paper.

together, these two claims appear to be inconsistent with the principle of *ought implies can* (Walton 2008, p. 56).³⁷ Walton gets around this by pointing out that the ‘ought’ here is conditional: we ought to imagine *p* if we are to “fully appreciate” *w*. But we may simply be unable to fully appreciate *w*.

Walton is here mooted the possibility of a work that systematically induces imaginative failure across non-deficient appreciations, but without inducing fictionality failure. Call this an “unimaginable-yet-fictional” work. As it stands, it is merely a theoretical possibility, though I have no overriding reason to rule it out. Suppose such a work existed. We might find it especially valuable; many artworks exploit contingent “weaknesses” in our psychology to great effect; *trompe l’œil* paintings are one example, Leonardo Da Vinci’s use of *sfumato* in *La Bella Principessa* and, more famously, *Mona Lisa* to create an ambiguous smile is another.³⁸ Unimaginable-yet-fictional works might be another. Would such a work contradict my claim that cases inducing imaginative failure systematically across proper appreciations give us good grounds to think they also exhibit fictionality failure? I do not think so. One ought to be a pluralist about failures to imagine what a work prescribes, or merely attempts to. Some cases of imaginative failure are explained by the deficiency of the appreciator, some by the deficiency of the conditions under which she appreciates, and some, if unimaginable-yet-fictional works are possible, by systematic deficiencies across appreciators, however ideal. But, in addition, there will be cases where what explains imaginative failure is not plausibly a deficiency in appreciation. And thus, must be explained by the work. On these occasions, imaginative failure gives one at least defeasible grounds on which to infer fictionality failure. Puzzle cases such as *Giselda* and *Death* present just such occasions. And provided the reasons *why* these puzzle cases exhibit fictionality failure are not obvious, we have the fictionality puzzle.

2.3 Normative, not Psychological Puzzles

In the previous subsections, I have tried to not only show that there are interesting puzzles here, but to use Todd’s observations to motivate a new way of thinking about them and how they connect. In particular, by eliminating cases of imaginative failure for which appreciators evidently bear sole responsibility, we are left with cases for which a different kind of explanation is due. Of course, one might worry that restricting one’s attention in this way misses the point. We have two puzzles; one concerns the imagination, the other concerns fictional truth. Insofar as one is concerned with the first

³⁷ In the interest of space, I am ignoring here the problems raised in (Walton 2015) concerning propositions we are prescribed to imagine that are not fictional.

³⁸ For recent empirical work into the technique and how it works, see (Soranzo & Newberry 2015).

puzzle, one might think, surely one ought *not* restrict one's attention. After all, do we not want to capture and explain regular appreciators and the failures they experience? I agree we do, provided we understand the problem to be explained here as purely psychological. But notice that, approached in this way, Amilie's failure to imagine what happens in *Dr. Quantum* is just as (un)puzzling as, say, a Kantian's failure to imagine a morally right murder. Both demand an equally simple explanation—i.e. very simple; this, I take it, is precisely Todd's point when he denies that imaginative failure is puzzling. So, in one sense Todd is right about imaginative failure. Provided we look at such a failure in terms of the imagination in general, as a psychological capacity whose engagement with any particular work is incidental, there will be little to puzzle over.³⁹ At least, any remaining puzzle will not be our original one. In contrast, if we construe imaginative failure as premised on engaging with a *work* of fiction, a different problem space emerges. Construed this way, each case of imaginative failure raises the question: what is responsible for the failure, the work or the appreciator? Todd appeals to cases in which responsibility lies with the appreciator to argue that imaginative failure does not beget fictionality failure, and thus does not bear on the limits of authorial power. But it is implausible to think there are *no* constraints on authorial power and that these constraints never explain an appreciator's inability to imagine. To take an extreme and obvious case, an author, and thus her work, cannot make everything that is fictional in *1984* fictional in another work by simply writing "Sausage", not in most art-historical contexts anyway. This shows that there must be a point at which the burden of responsibility for imaginative failure shifts from appreciator to work—presumably somewhat further down the literary scale than the sausage story. Hence my argument for restricting our concern to cases of proper appreciation. Instances in which appreciators bear (sole) responsibility for imaginative failure are unpuzzling; this restriction removes them from our theoretical ambit.

Have I reneged on my earlier claim that the imaginative puzzle is genuine? No. I have made two consistent and related claims. First, there are cases of imaginative failure for which appreciators do not bear sole responsibility; these present a real puzzle. Second, *if* we approach imaginative failure as a pure failure of the imagination, divorced from proper engagement with a work of fiction, *then* our attention will be restricted to the kinds of failures for which appreciators bear sole responsibility, which are not especially puzzling.

So, the *puzzle* of imaginative failure does not lie with the imagination as pure psychological capacity, but as properly engaged with a work of fiction. Proper engagement is engagement subject to

³⁹ Dustin Stokes also seems to be saying something along these lines in his discussion of global and local constraints on imagining in his (2006, pp. 404-405). Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me see this.

normative constraints determined by the particular work of fiction. I therefore suggest we understand the imaginative puzzle not as psychological but as *normative* in character. Since a work's failure to normatively licence the appreciator's imagining that *p* just *is* her failure to make *p* fictional, this normative understanding reveals a fruitful approach that connects our two puzzles: once we explain fictionality failure, an explanation for imaginative failure drops out for free. Another way to put this is that imaginative failure is a datum we must explain, and fictionality failure is the theoretical posit via which we explain it. I will show how this works in §4 when I lay out my positive proposal.

III. Dependence

Imaginative and fictionality failure were originally thought to arise when works attempt to prescribe morally deviant claims, as in *Giselda*. However, it soon became clear that the puzzles extend to evaluatively deviant claims generally.⁴⁰ On this characterization, the puzzles consist in explaining an asymmetry between descriptively deviant claims that do not generate puzzle cases (e.g. that farm animals carry out, and then betray, a revolution) and evaluatively deviant ones that do (e.g. that some actually terrible poem is fictionally good). More recent discussion has revealed that puzzle cases stretch beyond cases of narrowly evaluative deviance.⁴¹ Take this case:

Oval

They flopped down beneath the great maple. One more item to find, and yet the game seemed lost. Hang on, Sally said. It's staring us in the face. This is a maple tree we're under. She grabbed a five-fingered leaf. Here was the oval they needed! They ran off to claim their prize. (Yablo 2002, p.485)

One might think puzzle cases result from attempting to prescribe impossibilities. It is impossible, one might argue, for female infanticide to be moral, or a five-fingered leaf to be oval. As it stands, however, this is too crude. For one, we would need to specify the relevant kind of impossibility. Physical impossibility will not suffice, for example, since then *Superman* would constitute one long puzzle case.

40 See (Hume 1757/2007), (Walton 1990), (Moran 1994), (Walton 1994), and more recently, (Gendler 2000), (Weatherson 2004), and (Stokes 2006).

41 See especially (Weatherson 2004) for several candidate cases. Where these cases involve *imaginative* failure (as opposed to one of the other three failures Weatherson considers), this puts strain on those who look to our evaluative or conative attitudes to solve the imaginative puzzle, such as (Currie 2002) and (Stokes 2006). For Stokes' response, see (Stokes 2006, p. 403n)

Princes turning into frogs (and preserving identity), time travellers interfering with their parents' first courtship, the eternal ascent of M.C. Escher's stairs, or of Shepard tones, are all examples that show metaphysical impossibility will not do either.⁴²

Kendall Walton has tentatively suggested puzzle cases arise when works violate certain dependence relations, although which relations and why "is still a mystery" (Walton 1994, p. 44). So, for instance, *Giselda* is a puzzle case because the story violates a dependence relation between moral properties and "natural" ones. Brian Weatherson has developed this suggestion, calling the relevant dependence relation "virtue"; this is the relation between a set of "higher-level" facts *H* and "lower-level" facts *L*, where the truth of propositions in *H* is not primitive but holds *in virtue* of the truth of propositions in *L*. On Weatherson's view, puzzle cases arise when an author attempts to prescribe a set of higher-level propositions *H* and lower-level ones *L*, where the truth of propositions in *L* rule out the lower-level facts required for the truth of the propositions in *H*. Weatherson uses virtue to produce a solution for each puzzle. When a work violates virtue relations we believe obtain, imaginative failure results. When a work violates virtue relations that actually obtain, fictionality failure results (Weatherson 2004, p. 21). Weatherson says virtue relations are fundamental; we "import" them automatically into fictions such that authors cannot easily cancel them by mere say-so (Weatherson 2004, pp. 16-17, p. 22n).⁴³ Why is this? Weatherson appeals to a general fact about concept application; authors can completely determine their stories' lower-level facts. But having done this, they enjoy no epistemic privilege regarding which concepts apply there (Weatherson 2004, pp. 22-23).⁴⁴

Does Weatherson's solution work? There is an obvious objection. And although Weatherson has a ready reply, it reveals a significant problem. To see this, recall the notion of a "qualifying context". In the case of *Giselda*, for instance, adding the qualifying context to transform it into *Giselda** removes the story from the class of virtue-violating cases as well as puzzle cases, just as Weatherson's solution predicts. But, runs the objection, why do readers not always resolve violations of virtue in this way, by simply imagining a qualifying context (as per Stock's proposal)? Weatherson's response is that fictions come with a "That's all" clause. He writes:

42 For more on these issues see (Moran 1994, pp. 100-101), (Yablo 2002), (Stock 2006), especially pages 118-119. See also (Kung 2014) for an anti-Kripkean argument for imagining impossibilities that appeals to stipulation and, of course, (Kripke 1980), especially pages 156-158.

43 Though he concedes authors may be able to cancel them in works longer than the toy examples discussed in the literature.

44 Weatherson's solution is to that extent closer than it might seem to Derek Matravers' "report model" solution. See (Matravers 2003).

[...] the instructions that go along with the fiction forbid us from imagining any relevant lower-level facts that would constitute the truth of the higher-level claim. We have not stressed it much above, but it is relevant that fictions understood as invitations to imagine have a “That’s all” clause. We are not imagining *Death* if we imagine that Jack and Jill had just stopped arguing with each other and were about to shoot everyone in sight when Craig shot them in self-defence. The story does not explicitly say that wasn’t about to happen. It doesn’t include a “That’s all” clause. But such clauses have to be understood. So not only are we instructed to imagine something that seems incompatible with Craig’s action’s being morally acceptable; we are also instructed (tacitly) not to imagine anything that would make it the case that his action is morally acceptable. (Weatherson 2004, p. 20)

Weatherson’s “That’s all” clause says that we are not allowed to imagine that any relevant lower-level propositions—that is, any propositions relevant to the truth of the higher-level claim(s) beyond those explicit in the text—are fictional in *Death*. But while the permissibility operator here clearly takes the narrowest possible scope over the proposition *we imagine relevant lower-level propositions*, it is unclear whether the universal quantifier falls under the negation’s scope or vice versa. That is, it is unclear which of the following to identify as Weatherson’s “That’s all” clause:

TA1: For every relevant lower level proposition, it is not the case that we are permitted to imagine it is fictional.

TA2: It is not the case that for every relevant lower level proposition we are permitted to imagine it is fictional.

The first sentence in the quotation could be read as endorsing TA2—i.e. that we are not allowed to imagine that any old virtue-preserving lower-level proposition we please is fictional; there are some that are forbidden by proper engagement (though there may be some that are not). The last sentence, however, suggests TA1 is the better reading—i.e. that there is no virtue-preserving lower level proposition that we are permitted to imagine is fictional. TA2 clearly won’t do the job of Weatherson’s clause because readers do not need to be able to imagine *any* relevant lower-level propositions they please in order to supply a qualifying context. One set of propositions will suffice. So that leaves us with TA1. But TA1 is far too strong as a general principle for literary fictions; there are plenty of

lower-level propositions we do import and imagine when engaging with literary fictions, and as I will show, crucially, some of these are relevant lower-level ones, i.e. virtue-preserving propositions. I will briefly discuss importation in fiction in general before demonstrating that TA1 is false as a general condition on appreciating literary fictions.

In perhaps the simplest case, the “Reality Principle” governs which propositions are imported into a fiction.⁴⁵ The principle states that *ceteris paribus* the fictional world is like the real world: we are to import and thus imagine (should the question arise) any propositions true in the actual world that mesh with the fiction’s explicit content. Consider this passage from Orwell’s *Burmese Days*, to illustrate:

There was a thunderous roar from the road, and such a shower of stones that everyone was hit, including the Burmans on the path. One stone took Mr MacGregor full in the face, almost knocking him down. The Europeans bolted hastily inside and barred the door. Mr MacGregor’s spectacles were smashed and his nose streaming blood. (Orwell 1934/2009, p. 276)

Since Mr MacGregor is human and his world much like ours, we may import the proposition that he dislikes being hit in the face by a stone. This, in turn, allows us to pity Mr MacGregor without the author needing remind us that stones to the face hurt, Mr MacGregor does not enjoy pain, and gratuitous pain, even to a colonial officer, warrants pity. The Reality Principle thus allows in certain important “generic” assumptions from the actual world. Stones can be tiny and Mr MacGregor could be anaesthetized or a masochist. But unless the author says otherwise, we may assume the stone to the face hurts and that Mr MacGregor dislikes it.

Returning to TA1, suppose the following appeared in a naturalistic novel:

⁴⁵ Sometimes, especially with historical fictions or works in special genres, the Reality Principle gives way to a different principle. On this, see (Walton 1990, pp. 144-161) and (Lewis 1978). Stacie Friend has suggested to me, persuasively, that we should accept what she calls the “Reality Assumption” instead of the Reality Principle, which she thinks is similar to Gareth Evans’ “Incorporation Principle” (Evans 1980, pp. 354-356) and Marie-Laure Ryan’s “Principle of Minimal Departure” (Ryan 1991, pp. 48-60).

Denise

Denise went to bed complaining of a strong headache. Her friends and family wished her goodnight. Three days later they buried her in the grounds of the old church. In the circumstances, it was the proper thing to do.

Wait! They buried Denise alive? And the author thinks killing by live burial is acceptable!? Well, no. Presumably, it is fictional that Denise died of whatever ailed her and the burial was her funeral. The author need not state it explicitly—we import it into the fiction and imagine accordingly. Importantly, notice that Denise’s dying counts as a relevant virtue-preserving lower-level fact relative to the passage’s judgement of propriety. Similarly, if a story reads “Henry died, but it wasn’t at all sad” then usually we may import the proposition that something about Henry or his death explains why his death was not sad.⁴⁶ So TA1 does not help either.

If I had to speculate, I would guess that where Weatherson goes wrong here is in thinking that where authors make true some lower-level facts that explicitly, if defeasibly, rule out some higher-level claims, to attempt to import lower-level propositions that will make those higher-level claims kosher again is *ipso facto* to cease engaging with the same work. *Denise* shows that this thought is mistaken. Still, Weatherson is right that something like a “That’s all” clause governs our engagement with puzzle cases. But since the kind of case just considered shows that it cannot be equivalent to TA1, any such clause will have at most a limited jurisdiction, like TA2. Invoking a “That’s all” clause, therefore, does not blunt the objection. Behind the invocation lies a puzzle as difficult as the one the clause is meant to help solve: why do puzzle cases forbid importation of the qualifying kind while non-puzzle cases allow it?

A tempting answer is that the Reality Principle’s preference for default propositions from the actual world explains why we may import the proposition that Denise died suddenly, but not that Giselda, say, lives in a dystopic world. If we are told that a person retired to bed feeling ill and was “properly” buried three days later, it is reasonable to assume she died. But where a person “rightly” commits female infanticide, we might think the Reality Principle dries up. A bizarre dystopian state or a divine order that sends child-killers and their victims to Heaven: these additions are too exotic, or perhaps too *ad hoc* for import, even if an author could make them fictional by explicit means.

Does this reply work? True, in reading *Giselda* we cannot just import any old crazy propositions.

⁴⁶ I discuss this kind of non-specific or promissory importation shortly.

But this is hardly necessary to render the story a non-puzzle case. Fictionally, there is some-mechanism-or-other by which Superman flies, though we know not what it is, and there is no particular mechanism such that fictionally *it* is the mechanism. And this point generalizes: propositions appreciators may import are typically non-specific—i.e. to be logically analyzed as *de dicto* rather than *de re*. Thus, to claim that puzzle cases resist the qualifying contexts they require because these would be too exotic is implausible; were that the only barrier, we could always import non-specific contexts instead. So we are still left with a question: what about puzzle cases prevents us from importing even such non-specific qualifying contexts?

If we are to solve our two puzzles, we must answer two questions. (1) Why do puzzle cases require qualifying contexts to make the propositions they attempt to prescribe fictional and imaginable? (2) Why can we not import such contexts into puzzle cases? Weatherson’s solution addresses (1) but not (2). In what follows, I describe a framework for answering both by using two central concepts, *adequacy* and *exhaustivity*, and sharpening them up by considering the subtleties surrounding their application.⁴⁷

IV. Claims and Their Grounds

Let us understand ‘grounds’ in ‘*p* are the grounds for *q*’ in the neutral sense—i.e. as *putative* or *supposed* grounds; let grounds for a claim *C* be *inadequate* whenever they fail to ground *C* in the normative sense—i.e. fail to make *C* true, fail to explain *C*; and let grounds be *exhaustive* whenever there are no additional grounds available (that is, true) that will ground *C*.⁴⁸ *C* is then inadequately and exhaustively grounded when (a) *C* requires adequate grounds (i.e. is not primitive), (b) grounds for *C*, if any, are inadequate, and (c) there are no further grounds available that will render *C* adequately grounded. My positive proposal is this: fictionality failure occurs when, on the best interpretation(s), a work attempts to prescribe a claim that, fictionally, is *inadequately* and *exhaustively* grounded. That is, fictionality failure arises when a work purports that: it is fictional that *C* on grounds g^1, \dots, g^n , if any, but (a) it is not fictional that: g^1, \dots, g^n adequately ground *C*; and (b) it is not fictional that: there is a proposition g^* , such that g^* is true and *C* is adequately grounded by $g^1, \dots, g^n + g^*$. Of course, when grounds for *C* are exhaustive, this does not rule out the importation of *any* further propositions not made explicit by the work, since many *ceteris paribus* facts not bearing on the truth of *C* will still be importable (for reasons discussed

⁴⁷ Answering questions (1) and (2) fully would require laying out complete theories of fictional grounding and import, respectively. This is something I am neither able to do, nor optimistic could ever be done, for reasons I will clarify in the following section.

⁴⁸ I am thinking of grounding as requiring only what is sometimes called *partial* grounding: namely that grounds g_1, \dots, g_n ground *C* in conjunction with the background facts.

in the previous section). Exhaustivity merely rules out the importation of relevant propositions that will ground *C*. Inadequacy explains the need for a qualifying context; existing grounds do not ground *C*, yet the work attempts to prescribe *C* on the basis of those grounds. And exhaustivity explains why qualifying contexts cannot be imported; such contexts introduce new propositions that would ground *C*—precisely what exhaustivity rules out.⁴⁹ In that respect, exhaustivity plays the role Weatherston intended for his “That’s all” clause.

As for imaginative failure of the genuinely puzzling sort, I propose it occurs in the same cases as fictionality failure. This is because, as I argued in §2, the modal strength of ‘imaginability’ is normative, rather than psychological or alethic. To say we *cannot* imagine some proposition a puzzle case attempts to prescribe is to make a normative claim about proper engagement, not our imaginative capacity *simpliciter*. This much is clear from comparing *Giselda* and *Giselda**. We cannot imagine a qualifying context in *Giselda* in the same way we cannot imagine Dr. Faust breakdancing; it is not beyond us, it simply falls outside of proper engagement with Goethe’s play (at least, as traditionally staged). My proposal, therefore, not only solves both puzzles, it does so with a single solution that explains the connection between them.

To illustrate the solution, consider *Giselda* again. The passage makes a moral claim and describes a fact about Giselda’s daughter that is supposed to ground that claim. The lack of further information combined with the locution “after all” make these grounds exhaustive on a best interpretation. Being exhaustive, we cannot supplement them by importing anything that would amount to a qualifying context. Lacking such a context, the daughter’s gender is inadequate grounds for the claim, inducing both fictionality and imaginative failure.

Actually, this oversimplifies somewhat, but the complication reveals a strength of my proposal. The complication is that we are consulting intuitions about vanishingly small passages, which we should treat with caution. We know how to engage with traditional works of literary fiction. The terms of engagement for these toy cases are murkier, however. This does not mean our intuitions about them are worthless. But it does mean those intuitions are more volatile than I have let on.⁵⁰ When Walton first introduced *Giselda*, he did not specify the fictional context in which it figures—its position

49 Brian Weatherston has suggested to me that *exhaustivity* also explains why gratuitous authorial evaluations feel odd. When an author gives us *prima facie* sufficient and exhaustive grounds to conclude that, for instance, Katharina is small, there is something off-putting about the author then telling us explicitly that ‘Katharina is small’. Exhaustivity secures Katharina’s smallness, making any explicit claim otiose.

50 That said, accusations that the short examples are artificial and so worthless for theorizing literary fiction are often overblown, if only because there is a genre of extremely short literary fictions: micro fiction.

in the text, the story's genre etc.—but these factors shape how we view the case. I suppose *Giselda* is meant to appear in the middle of a naturalistic story, and seen this way it is surely puzzling. However, suppose it was a novel's opening line. Under this aspect, one might wonder whether *Giselda* counts as a puzzle case. Compare the famous opening from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...

On a literal-minded reading, Dickens simply contradicts himself repeatedly. And if this passage ended the book, it might perplex us. But coming early in the book, we anticipate that any incoherence will be explained. And it is:

...in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. (Dickens 1857/2008, p. 1)

The same holds for *Giselda*. Provided we are warranted in anticipating that there is an explanation to come—a qualifying context—*Giselda* seems less puzzling. So, we must be cautious. The brevity of our toy examples may make them abrupt enough to convey a sense of finality that encourages a puzzling reading. Considered under a different aspect, they may require a different reading.⁵¹ My proposal predicts this effect. I claim that it is only when inadequate grounds for a claim are best interpreted as exhaustive that they induce our puzzles. Insofar as a putative puzzle case under one aspect makes the best interpretation one on which we should anticipate further explanation for a claim, we treat existing grounds as non-exhaustive. Thus, considering our toy examples under such an aspect should align with less puzzlement, which it does.

What, in a given fiction, makes some truths adequate grounds for another? In general, as said

⁵¹ Cain Todd clearly approaches *Giselda* under this kind of open-ended aspect. He writes “On first encountering [*Giselda*] my only clear instinctive reaction was to try to imagine in what fictional context this claim might be coherently asserted. It certainly wasn't to resist imagining it in any clear sense.” (Todd 2009, p. 191)

above, a claim is adequately grounded when its grounds explain it (in some sense) by making it true. And when a work is of a naturalistic sort, the standards will be identical with those at the actual world. But, and here my grounding relation parts ways with Weatherson's virtue relation, adequacy in fiction, like exhaustivity, is determined by factors more sensitive to context than Weatherson's *virtue*. Returning to a passage's position in a text, early passages containing claims that appear to be inadequately and exhaustively grounded (in the fiction) might make it more probable than later passages that the standards of adequacy in the fiction are different to those at the actual world. Other relevant factors might include the genre of a work, the explicit claims already made by the author, the remaining canon of which the work forms a part, pragmatic conventions applicable to works of its kind, the ends the work seems to have and how deliberately paradoxical they seem, the kinds of claims we think the flesh-and-blood author is (un)likely to have false beliefs about, and so forth. One important consequence of accommodating these nuances in the grounding relation is that *p*'s grounding *q* doesn't require anything as strong as *p*'s making *q* true as a matter of metaphysical necessity.⁵² To see this, consider the following non-moral *Giselda* analogue:

Leaves

All across Sussex, the deciduous trees were clothed in luxuriant green foliage; after all, it was late autumn.

Putting aside earlier worries about toy examples, I think *Leaves* as puzzling a case as *Giselda*.⁵³ But notice that it violates no entrenched metaphysically necessary grounding relations. It is metaphysically possible for a late English autumn to explain the presence of green leaves. Moreover, if virtue relations are ones that "an author cannot cancel [...] by saying so" and invitations to imagine them violated are ones "we cannot easily follow", then virtue does not explain why *Leaves* is a puzzle case. The normal dependence relations in *Leaves* are easily cancelled by beginning the story like so: "Once upon a time,

52 This marks an important difference between the kind of grounding relation Kit Fine and other metaphysicians have in mind and the notion at play here: for Fine, the grounding relation combines a modal component and a determinative component (the latter being needed to prevent the fact, say, that the US invaded Panama in 1989 from grounding the fact that $2+2=4$). See (Fine 2012, p. 38). But there could in principle be a fictional world *w* (or speaking more carefully: fictionally, there could be a world *w*) where none of the worlds accessible to *w* have the same grounding relations. It would be a world where grounding is in some sense contingent. I take it this is not a possibility for the metaphysician's notion.

53 We may be less inclined to *resist* imagining it, since it does not contradict our cherished moral beliefs. But this difference is not germane given that these motivational barriers to imagination are not my concern here. For more on this, see (Gendler 2000), (Weinberg & Meskin 2006), (Brock 2012, pp. 449-451), and especially (Gendler 2006), where she cogently distinguishes two different sources of difficulty.

trees only sprouted verdant leaves in the autumn...”. In this context, being late autumn would suffice to ground the otherwise (potentially) puzzling claim. Now, one might question whether beginning the story in this way really *cancels* ordinary dependence relations, or whether it just introduces a qualifying context. To see that there is more than mere qualifying-context-smuggling going on here, notice that the addition to *Leaves* stipulates a new dependence relation, and cancels an old one. Beginning *Leaves* with “Once upon a time, trees only sprouted verdant leaves in the autumn...” is equivalent to beginning *Giselda* with “Once upon a time, committing female infanticide was the right thing to do”. This is not a qualifying context but a straightforward cancellation of ordinary dependence relations by mere say-so—precisely what Weatherson’s virtue relation rules out.

I have largely proceeded as though a work’s explicit claims, even those that are not simply explicit denials of dependence relations, do not bear on whether some particular claim satisfies the standards of adequacy. But what is fictional, including what the dependence relations are, is determined interpretatively, not investigatively. That is, a work of fiction does not offer a fully-formed world to discover, but rather a body of mutually constraining considerations that an interpretation must reconcile. The fact that a claim appears inadequately grounded, therefore, can itself alter the facts of the fictional world, including the world’s dependence relations, just as inconsistent statements sometimes establish that a narrator is unreliable, rather than that the world is contradictory.⁵⁴ Otherwise inadequately supported claims might establish, stipulatively, that what are usually inadequate grounds *are* adequate after all. The strange claim in *Giselda*, for instance, could make it fictional that *Giselda*’s is a morally fantastical world where female infanticide is morally required. If I am right about this, then contrary to some people’s suspicions, we can create “morality fiction” on the model of science fiction. I see no problem with embracing this possibility. Only one in the grip of a philosophical theory would deny that 12 is not the sum of two primes in Tamar Gendler’s *Tower of Goldbach* story.⁵⁵ Making some moral equivalent of this story fictional does not seem to pose any special theoretical problem, even if it would require greater imaginative exertion—or more writerly craft to transport the appreciator, just as with works that get us to really see a world from a character’s morally perverse perspective.⁵⁶ At the very least, intuitions about this possibility are probably not firm enough

54 Cain Todd argues this point forcefully, citing Peter Lamarque. See (Todd 2009, pp. 205-206) and (Lamarque 1990/2002). There is also a good discussion of related issues by Daniel Nolan (2007) discussing Graham Priest’s *Sylvan’s Box* story; see (Priest 1997).

55 See (Gendler 2000). Kathleen Stock denies it in (Stock 2003).

56 This is a huge area that I cannot do justice to here. Matthew Kieran offers some excellent examples of fictions where the moral facts seem to be successfully perverted in (Kieran 2003, pp. 69-71). A full defence of my permissive notion of imaginability will have to wait for another time, or author. (Kung 2014) comes very close to my thinking.

to reject it outright.⁵⁷ One might worry: if the standards of adequacy can be so straightforwardly altered, why are there puzzle cases at all? Bearing in mind the above caveats about toy examples, the answer seems to be that some passages are subject to interpretative constraints, some of them listed above, such that reading these passages as stipulating new dependency relations is simply interpretatively inappropriate.

Accepting that my proposal explains cases like *Giselda*, does it explain those involving conceptual impossibility like *Oval*? They can be handled in the same way as the others. While the story does not say that the object found was an oval because it was a five-fingered maple leaf, clearly being five-fingered is the putative ground for the claim. Without any fantastical stipulation to the contrary, being five-fingered is inconsistent with, and *a fortiori* inadequate grounds for, being oval. My proposal says that to be a puzzle case the grounds must be not only inadequate but exhaustive. I hope to have shown by now that exhaustivity, like adequacy, depends upon a number of contextual factors that our toy examples disguise. Insofar as *Oval* forms part of a conceptually fantastical story whose details we are yet to discover, the grounds are not exhaustive and the story no puzzle case. Insofar as we should interpret the relevant content of *Oval* as final, the grounds are exhaustive and the story a puzzle case.

A benefit of my proposal is that it is immune to counterexamples recently introduced by Anna Mahtani against so-called “conflict” solutions to the imaginative puzzle that superficially resemble my own. These solutions appeal to a conflict between an author’s claim and an appreciator’s belief. An example is Walton’s suggestion that puzzle cases arise when authorial attempts at prescription violate dependence relations as we take them to be. Mahtani offers *The Story of Lucy* as a counterexample to such views. The story describes a morally ambiguous action by the protagonist, Lucy, followed by an authorial pronouncement that the action was right. The purported problem for conflict solutions is that while *Lucy* is a puzzle case, it does not appear to involve conflict; it is unclear whether Lucy did the right thing, but she may have done. To say that she did, therefore, does not conflict with anything appreciators believe (Mahtani 2012).

For *Lucy* to count as a theoretically interesting case that induces imaginative failure, a sufficiently ideal appreciator must find Lucy’s action either (a) morally unclear or (b) not morally right. How case (b) would induce imaginative failure on my view requires no elaboration, so I will focus on (a). Suppose that to engage in proper appreciation one must be morally omniscient. If Lucy’s action is morally unclear to such a morally omniscient appreciator, this merely shows that the action’s deontic character

⁵⁷ Of course, imagining comes in many strengths and it is surely true that we cannot imagine Gendler’s story with the ease and vivacity that we can imagine, say, Maaza Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*.

is genuinely indeterminate. Thus it will present a puzzle case, since the work will then claim that a morally indeterminate action is morally right. Barring any special features of the literary context, such a work will have offered inadequate (and exhaustive) grounds for a claim. If, on the other hand, proper appreciation merely requires minimal moral competence, rather than omniscience, such that one sufficiently ideal appreciator might deem Lucy's action morally unclear, while another deems it morally right, then the example would seem to be a puzzle case for the former but not the latter. Does this pose a problem for my proposal? It does not, as I will explain.

One might worry that accepting the possibility of sufficiently ideal appreciators who disagree is just to accept Todd's relativity worry—i.e. the worry that imaginative failure is imaginer-relative due to varying theoretical commitments. But this worry is unwarranted. The cases to which Todd appeals to divorce fictionality from imaginability all involve obvious deficiencies on the part of the appreciator. But where sufficiently *ideal* appreciators disagree, this suggests we finesse our understanding of what is fictional, not revise the connections between fiction and the imagination. Returning to *Lucy*, if these appreciators disagree about whether or not Lucy's action is right, then it seems we have two options. The first is to conclude from the disagreement that Lucy's action is morally indeterminate. This would be akin to the way in which 'x is F' lacks a truth-value according to supervaluationism whenever F is a vague predicate and x is a borderline F-case (i.e. 'x is F' is true under some precisifications of F and false under others). On this picture, Lucy's action would be right (or wrong) only if all sufficiently ideal appreciators judged it right (or wrong); pursuing the supervaluationist analogy, this would be akin to a vagueness case in which 'x is F' is *supertrue* (or *superfalse*)—i.e. true (false) under all precisifications of F. Otherwise, so long as not all the sufficiently ideal appreciators agree, the action is morally indeterminate. How plausible this approach is to settling on what is true in a fiction will depend in part on which requirements remain constant across proper appreciations; the greater the variability across such appreciations, the fewer things one will be able to determine are fictional.

If this first strategy is consonant with a form of critical monism, the second is pluralist. According to the second strategy, we embrace a new and equally privileged interpretation of *Lucy* for each different moral judgement made by sufficiently ideal appreciators regarding Lucy's action. On some of these interpretations, her action will be right, on others it will be indeterminate, or wrong, giving us at least three interpretations of what the story makes fictional.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Can fictional actions still be morally ambiguous but not indeterminate? Moral ambiguity strikes me as an epistemic notion, so it is not clear that the fictional world can *be* morally ambiguous, even if it may *seem* so (usually because it is morally indeterminate). Works that defy a stable judgement, or which make understanding how the work induces moral disagreement among (sufficiently ideal) appreciators important will be aptly described as morally ambiguous. David

Importantly, whichever of these two strategies we employ, my account remains unblemished. If the first strategy is preferable, then *Lucy* and cases like it are puzzle cases; sufficiently ideal appreciators disagree as to the rightness of Lucy's action, thereby indicating that it is morally indeterminate. Should the work therefore claim that Lucy acted rightly, that claim will be inadequately grounded. And assuming, as I have been, that these grounds are also exhaustive, we will have a puzzle case. Alternatively, if the second strategy is preferable, then we may have at least two interpretations—two mutually incompatible but equally legitimate accounts of what is fictional in the work. The interpretation on which Lucy's action is morally indeterminate receives the same treatment as on the first option: *Lucy* thusly interpreted will constitute a puzzle case. The interpretation on which Lucy's action is morally right will, however, not present a puzzle case. On this interpretation, the work's claim that Lucy acted rightly will be adequately grounded, hence unpuzzling. In short, insofar as *Lucy* and cases like it present a puzzle case, my account can explain why.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I had three main aims. First, I defended the claim that puzzle cases present two real puzzles: the imaginative puzzle and the fictionality puzzle. Second, I showed how both puzzles are connected: imaginative failure of the puzzling kind is the result of a normative constraint on imagining laid down by what is fictional in the puzzling work. Third, I used this connection to articulate a common explanation for the central puzzling phenomena, imaginative and fictionality failure: both arise when authors offer grounds for claims that are inadequate and exhaustive.

Mamet's play *Oleanna* might be like this latter case insofar as it exploits gender to encourage different moral judgements of John's and Carol's respective actions in differently gendered appreciators.

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Chapter Three

Is Sport Make-believe?[†]

*Was ist die Lust der Welt? Nichts als ein Fastnachtsspiel,
So lange Zeit gehofft, in kurzter Zeit verschwindet,
Da unsre Masquen uns nicht haften wie man wil,
Und da der Anschlag nicht den Ausschlag recht empfindet,
Es gebet uns wie dem, der Feuerwercke macht,
Ein Augenblick verzeht oft eines Jahres Sorgen;
Man schaut wie unser Fleiß von Kindern wird verlacht,
Der Abend tadelt oft den Mittag und den Morgen*

- Christian Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau, 'Die Welt'

In late 1941, as German bombs began falling around Britain, marking the beginning of the *Blitz*, an incredible list of “temporary rules” attributed to London’s Richmond Golf Club began circulating in British and American newspapers. The rules stipulate how to proceed with a game of golf given certain hazards of war. Rule 2, for instance, instructs players that “during gunfire or while bombs are falling, players may take shelter without penalty for ceasing play.” Rule 6 states that “A player whose stroke is affected by the simultaneous explosion of a bomb may play another ball under penalty of one stroke.” The document’s veracity is unclear; different sources trace it to different places, even different years. It might be genuine, tongue-in-cheek, or mere propaganda, symbolizing a British “stiff upper-lip”. Regardless, the rules supply a caricature of the apparent absurdity all competitive games share: sometimes, we appear to care *intensely* about their outcomes, even as bombs fall around our feet,

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while acknowledging that those outcomes do not by themselves matter. This, in germ, is what I will call the *Puzzle of Sport*.⁵⁹

In this paper I consider a solution to this puzzle according to which our puzzling attitudes to competitive game outcomes (CGOs) are explained in terms of make-believe. I argue that the solution faces a number of theoretical challenges. In §1, I define the Puzzle of Sport precisely and describe the make-believe solution. In §2, I criticize this solution, before sketching alternatives in §3. I close by considering whether make-believe still plays a role in these alternative explanations; I conclude that it might.

I. The Puzzle and the Solution

1.1 What are Competitive Games?

Why do we often (appear to) care so much about CGOs, such as who wins, or whether a record is broken, while simultaneously denying that these outcomes are important? This discrepancy in attitudes demands explanation. One possibility is that make-believe—as understood by Kendall Walton—explains it. Just as we engage in a normatively constrained imaginative activity when participating in children’s games of make-believe and appreciating works of traditional fiction, the claim goes, so we sometimes also engage in this activity when participating in competitive games. Call this claim about sports ‘SMB’ (for ‘Sports as Make-believe’).

What does it mean for sports⁶⁰ to be, in Walton’s words, “occasions for make-believe”?⁶¹ The claim is not that sports are imaginary; during a football match, there really are people kicking a ball around a field. The claim is that *participation* in competitive games, whether as player or spectator, is the locus of make-believe (Walton 2015, 75-76), though, not that participants⁶² pretend to play or spectate by acting out roles as mimes do. Rather, spectators’ pretence—their engagement in make-believe—consists in adopting certain attitudes toward CGOs. Specifically, SMB claims, though participants may not actually believe the outcome matters, they engage imaginatively in a make-believe game in which it is fictional—true in the game—that it matters a lot.

⁵⁹ The puzzle is discussed most recently by Kendall Walton (Walton 2015) and Paul A. Taylor (Taylor manuscript). Close cousins of the puzzle also appear in (Feezell, 2004), (Morgan, 2007).

⁶⁰ For readers familiar with Bernard Suits’ distinctions on this score, my use of ‘sport’ differs from his. ‘Sport’, for Suits, is a subdivision of ‘game’, and refers, roughly, to games played seriously, rather than ‘just for fun’. My use of ‘sport’ follows Walton’s usage, which is more or less interchangeable with Suits’ ‘game’. See e.g. (Suits 1988) and (Schneider, 2001).

⁶¹ Throughout, I use ‘make-believe’, ‘fiction’, and grammatical variants more or less synonymously, though they do come apart in subtle ways of no concern to us here.

⁶² I use ‘participate’ and its grammatical variants throughout to refer to both competing and spectating.

Let me anticipate three tempting mistakes concerning SMB's scope. First, the relevant activities are ones with competitive outcomes. So, although traditionally non-competitive sports such as hiking or rock-climbing might not appear relevant, this relies on a crude distinction between the competitive and non-competitive. Two hikers may race each other up a hill, for instance. Similarly, while competitive sports like football and basketball *are* typically competitive, they need not be. A group absent-mindedly passing a ball around might be said to be playing football, given permissive criteria for individuating sports. Second, the puzzle includes competitive games in general, whether or not these count as sports, such as board games, and some children's games, not just sports. Third, competitive games need not involve more than one participant; an individual participant may compete against herself, or establish other conditions of success, such as climbing to a certain rock.⁶³

So what is a competitive game? I will leave this question without a rigorous answer. A necessary condition upon x 's being a competitive game is that x be an activity played with success conditions in mind. These success conditions—often given by what Bernard Suits calls 'preludory'⁶⁴ goals—are needed to generate the puzzle. Pointing to paradigmatic examples also helps anchor the notion: common varieties of football, tennis, and basketball, as well as 'It', 'Pooh Sticks', 'British Bulldog', and similar children's games count. Making toast, waiting for the bus, filing one's taxes do not, even if we perform some of these activities with success conditions in mind.⁶⁵

1.2 SMB

A putative analogy between our engagement with fiction and our engagement with sport motivates SMB. Both activities can seem similarly puzzling. First, we easily recover after experiencing tragedy in sport, as in fiction, even when the tragedy moves us greatly. Walton writes:

⁶³ I will switch between 'sport' and 'competitive game' throughout, though I intend all competitive games, unless this clearly is not my intention.

⁶⁴ A preludory goal is the overarching aim of a given game that can be articulated independently of the game. The preludory goal of basketball, for instance, is to get the ball in the hoop (and prevent your opponent from doing the same).

⁶⁵ An important caveat here is that making toast and filing one's taxes on time *could* be competitive games, embedded in the right kind of context. Clearly, a lot hangs on what falls under the concept GAME. Unfortunately, giving a successful account of *this* concept is notoriously tricky, as Wittgenstein famously noted in his discussion of "family resemblances". Bernard Suits (1978) has a thorough and sophisticated account of the concept, though I have concerns about how successful he ultimately is. Discussing these, however, would take us too far afield. So, for the purposes of this paper, we must again be satisfied with an intuitive understanding of the notion. Whatever turns out to be the correct account of what games are, provided it is not horrendously revisionary, can be plugged into the discussion.

Many forget the game quickly after it is over, much too quickly for people who care as much as they seem to care during the game [...] It is hard to resist comparing the avid sports fan to the playgoer who sheds bitter and voluminous tears over the tragic fate of Romeo and Juliet, and twenty minutes later has a jolly good time with her friends at an espresso bar. [...] Afterwards, like the playgoer, she steps outside of the make-believe and goes back to living her life as though nothing much had happened—even if the home team suffered a devastating and humiliating defeat. It's just a story; it's just a game. (Walton 2015, 77)

A person undergoes the emotional pitch and roll of a theatrical performance. The final curtain falls, her tears dry, and life continues unperturbed. A sports fan shouts with joy as her team take the lead and agonizes when they later relinquish it. The game ends, she heaves a sigh, and life goes on unperturbed. Both spectators, according to SMB, engage in make-believe during the spectacle, only to return to actuality once it ends. Because of the unique way that make-believe attitudes operate in our psychological economy, they promise to explain our odd ability to appear to care greatly about something at one moment and be suddenly unconcerned with it at the next.

Second, our behaviour while participating in competitive games, as when engaging with fictional events, suggests we care greatly about their outcomes. Yet, at a calmer hour, we frequently concede that those outcomes do not really matter, (at least, not as much as our participatory behaviour suggested). Walton again:

Why should people care about the Yankees or the Red Sox? Their fortunes on the field have no obvious bearing on the welfare of most fans. Why does it matter whether the home team wins or loses? Life will go on just as it did before, regardless. But the spectators, some of them, scream their hearts out during the game, as though it is a matter of life and death. Some people pick which players to “like”, which ones to root for, more or less arbitrarily, on whims [...]. Yet they may let themselves be carried away during the game, as though genuine and substantial values or self-interest is at stake. (Walton 2015, 76-77)

To facilitate expression, I will say the extent to which we are moved to excitement by a CGO evinces our *caring attitudes* toward that outcome. The extent to which we explicitly (dis)avow the importance of a CGO evinces *prima facie* the amount we *believe the outcome to matter*. Thus, one can phrase the puzzle like so: why is it that participants' caring attitudes towards CGOs are so intense, when they do not

believe those outcomes matter? Of course, it is worth noting an important qualification here. Some CGOs can and do matter to us—*really* matter. CGOs can matter to us instrumentally because consequences of real importance depend on them (Walton 2015). The Iraq national football team under Uday Hussein had good reason to care about their performances; Hussein would motivate them “by threatening to amputate their legs if they lost” (Kuper & Szymanski, p. 278) among other outrages. So, the question applies only to some instances of participation, if any.

The loosely analogous puzzle in the case of traditional fiction is known as the Puzzle (sometimes “Paradox”) of Fiction:

- (1) Things that we believe do not exist cannot be the intentional objects of our emotions.⁶⁶
- (2) We believe that fictional events or characters *per se* do not exist.
- (3) Fictional events and characters *per se* are the intentional objects of our emotions.⁶⁷

To resolve the puzzle, one must reject one of the three propositions, assuming there is no ambiguity. But this is tricky. Claim (1) looks undeniable; it seems impossible to emote about something one believes does not exist (notwithstanding intuitions to the contrary generated by the case of fiction

⁶⁶ There might be Frege-puzzle type cases involving unknown identities that falsify (1). Suppose Amilie believes that George Orwell exists and that Eric Blair does not. If Amilie loves George Orwell and thus, George Orwell is the intentional object of her love-attitude, then one might be tempted to say Eric Blair is also the intentional object of her love-attitude, falsifying (1). I think something like a requirement that the intentional object be intentional *under some description* makes this apparent problem disappear. Indeed, the whole theory of Fregean senses is premised on such a move; it allows that terms can differ in cognitive significance (non-denotative meaning) despite sharing a referent.

As it stands, it is unclear why this is a puzzle at all; arguably, proposition (1) is clearly false: possible events can be the objects of an intentional attitude, as when I fear what someone *might* do to me. Radford, who offers what is widely regarded as the original formulation of the puzzle (see footnote 10), acknowledges this much but points out that what is distinctive about fictions is that the intensity of our responses to fictional events, say, does not track probability as our responses to possible events do. Ordinary appreciators get just as worked up about fictional events *knowing* that they are not and, often, *could not be* actual. But ordinary people contemplating possibilities, insofar as they are rational, get more or less worked up as a possibility becomes more or less likely, respectively. Those cases in which we get worked up about far-flung possibilities are too close to the explanandum to supply a counterexample (Radford 1975, 73-74).

⁶⁷ The puzzle has been posed (sometimes implicitly) in the following way:

1. We respond emotionally to a thing only if we believe the thing to be real.
2. We do not believe the events or characters in fictions to be real.
3. We respond emotionally to the events and characters in fictions.

However, this is an ambiguous formulation of the paradox, even though I think it is, for example, Radford’s. See (Radford 1975), (Stear, 2009, 26). “Respond emotionally to” can be read causally—e.g. that fictional entities and events can *cause* our emotions—or intentionally—that fictional entities can be the intentional objects of our emotions. (1) is obviously false on the causal reading, since beliefs can be false and an emotion’s cause need not be its object; lack of sleep might cause me to be angry at my brother, for instance.

itself). Claim (2) is likewise difficult to deny, since, for all the talk of “suspending disbelief” we clearly do not doubt Sherlock Homes’ non-existence, for instance. But claim (3) looks right, too to anyone who has engaged with a work of fiction. After all, we speak naturally of despising James Bond (at least we *ought* to!), feeling sorry for John Flory, and admiring Jane Eyre. Pre-theoretically, this talk appears quite literal.

There are doubts about whether Walton’s theory of make-believe really addresses the Puzzle of Fiction as it has been framed in the literature, and how important solving this puzzle is to motivating the theory (by my lights, it is not very important).⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the way I have framed the Puzzle, and how the theory solves it, provides a useful way of clarifying the theory and its relevance to the Puzzle of Sport. These caveats aside, Walton’s solution is to deny claim (3). The proposal is that it is not *literally* true that, for instance, I loathe James Bond, since I know there is no James Bond. Rather, it is *fictional* that I loathe him. Correspondingly, my utterance ‘I find James Bond loathsome’ does not assert a proposition (not the obvious one at any rate), but is instead a move in the game making it fictional that I assert that I find James Bond loathsome. In other words, the speech-act conceals a fictionality operator that takes scope over the whole sentence.⁶⁹ Similarly, when I feel the urge to gag as Bond oozes yet more misogyny, it is not literally true that James Bond disgusts me (even if I literally experience feelings of disgust); it is fictional that he does. What *is* literally true—true at the actual world—is that the film causes me to feel certain physiological sensations, such as the need to gag. Whether or not one counts these among the instances of genuine emotion, they are examples of what Walton calls “quasi-emotions”, physiological states (prompted by a work of fiction) that resemble the physiological states of genuine emotions, even if they lack their motivating force (Walton 1990, 195-204). Walton’s profound insight is that these quasi-emotions act as “props” in make-believe games, “playing the part” of real emotions. To return, reluctantly, to James Bond, the actual gagging sensation combines with what Walton calls a “principle of generation”—a function from true propositions to fictional ones—making it fictional in the game I play with the film that James Bond disgusts me. This works in much the same way that a toy might be a prop that ‘plays the part’ of a car in a child’s game, or the toy-car’s *actually* sliding into a cereal box makes it *fictional* that a real car has crashed into a wall.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, (Matravers 2014), especially chapter 8.

⁶⁹ This explains why my loathing James Bond feels like a *de re* attitude about a particular individual I have in mind, James Bond, even while I know that there is no such individual. For while it is not the case that there exists an individual such that, fictionally, he is James Bond and I think him a cretin, it is true that fictionally, there exists an individual such that he is James Bond and I think him a cretin. Fictionally, my attitude is *de re*.

The sporting case appears to throw up an analogous puzzle. Let a *caring-attitude* toward x be an attitude that explains⁷⁰ various emotional dispositions toward x typical of a state of caring—dispositions to worry about, dread, and feel joy etc. toward x . Then, as a first approximation, one might capture the present puzzle as follows:

- (1) Things that we believe do not matter cannot be the intentional objects of a caring-attitude.⁷¹
- (2) For some CGO o , and some agent s , s does not believe that o matters.
- (3) s has a caring-attitude of which o is the intentional object.

The analogous solution would seem to be to deny claim (3); S does not *literally* care about o , she does so *fictionally*. However, while the ability to have emotional attitudes toward fictional entities is an all-or-nothing affair—you either can or cannot have them—how much something matters to someone admits of degrees. For instance, it matters a lot to me that my dog not be endangered. It also matters to me, though less, that she not soil the carpet. The existence of x , by contrast, admits of no degrees,⁷² (the question ‘how much does x exist?’ is barely intelligible). In competitive games, therefore, make-believe is needed (if at all) not merely when the outcomes are believed not to matter, but also when they are believed to matter less than our participatory behaviour suggests.

One ought to reformulate the puzzle like so.

- (1) The amount to which we *care* about a thing cannot exceed the amount we believe the thing *matters*.
- (2) We care a great deal about some CGOs
- (3) We do not believe those CGOs matter very much, if at all.

More rigorously, for any event e , and any agent s :

⁷⁰ Whether this explanation is causal or constitutive is not terribly important.

⁷¹ There might be counterexamples, again, to this, but not ones that should worry us. See above.

⁷² I am ignoring doxastic talk couched in terms of partial credences here. This is not because I think such talk is unavailable to a theorist of fiction. It is available to her, and admitting such talk in the case of fiction would render the two puzzles more perfectly analogous. Rather, I find it deeply implausible to think we ever have credences (except perhaps in aberrant cases) about the existence of fictional entities greater than naught. We are not *unsure* whether Sherlock Homes exists, for instance. Walton argues this point cogently in his (1990, 197-198).

(1) If s has caring-attitudes of degree n toward e , then s believes e matters to (at least)⁷³ degree n .

And For some agent s , some CGO o , and some values j, k such that j is strictly less than k :

(2) s believes o matters to degree j .

(3) s has caring-attitudes of degree k toward o .

Since claims (2) and (3) rely on relative values, one might think that rejecting either amounts to the same thing. But there is an aspectual difference between rejecting one rather than the other. To reject (2) is to revise s 's belief about how much o matters up to the level of s 's caring-attitude towards o . It is to reject s 's calm 'concession' that she does not believe o *really* matters (that much). To reject (3), by comparison, is to revise the level of s 's caring-attitude toward o down to the level of s 's belief about how much o matters. It is to reject the appearance of intense caring as genuinely evincing the extent to which s cares about o . SMB, then, amounts to this. On those occasions where caring-attitudes appear to outstrip a belief in a CGO's importance, this appearance is explained by make-believe (at least, where the participant is not simply irrational). *Fictionally*, the participant cares about o to greater degree k (because fictionally she believes the outcome to matter to degree k), though *actually* she cares about the outcome only to degree j , since *actually* she believes o only to matter to degree j . The imagination bridges the gap, so to speak, from the belief to the caring-attitude, from j to k .

II. Evaluating SMB

In this section I advance objections to SMB that, cumulatively, cast doubt on its plausibility. In §§ 2.1 and 2.2, I argue that two reasons for adopting SMB overgeneralize, committing one who accepts SMB on these grounds to one of two options:

- A. Apply the same make-believe analysis to these other activities.
- B. Do not apply the same make-believe analysis.

If one opts for B, one faces two more choices:

⁷³ I am leaving open the possibility that we can care about x to a degree *strictly less than* is warranted by how much we believe x matters.

- B1. Identify a salient difference between these other activities and competitive games.
- B2. Do not identify such a difference.

I argue that neither A nor B1 are attractive, leaving B2. By *modus tollens* this gives one grounds to reject SMB. In §2.4-2.6, I consider other problems that the SMB proponent must address.

2.1 Caring about That which does not Matter (Enough)

Appealing to make-believe to explain our apparently disproportionate caring attitudes concerning CGOs may be too quick, for such apparent disproportionality is common in other cases that do not plausibly involve make-believe. Some examples: narrowly managing to catch a bus for which one was running late, or missing one; losing a distantly espied but desirable parking spot; finishing a very long book like *War and Peace*; having the radio cut out, or threaten to, in the middle of the broadcast of a gripping anecdote that one chanced upon; making a green (or yellow) traffic light; settling a petty argument; having the last word; finding out some item of trivia once brought to one's attention. Generally, these kinds of events are not believed by their agents to be important enough to warrant total attention, cheering, or agonizing, yet cause them to focus, cheer, or agonize. Nor do they intuitively involve anything like make-believe.

Hobbies furnish more examples. A stamp collector may devote a great amount of time and energy to her collection, even doing so to her financial detriment, while conceding that collecting stamps probably is not very important.⁷⁴ Train-spotting is a pastime in which the spotter keeps a record of the trains she has seen by recording the model or number, typically with the intention of seeing all the trains, train types, or train carriages of a given company or region. Train-spotters often pursue their pastime at great expense, braving long journeys, financial burdens, and driving rain to scribble a number into a notebook. They meet the sight of some trains with great delight, and the missing of others with great regret. Were a sufficient number of obstacles placed in the train-spotter's way, she might even scream and sob with joy. Nevertheless, even a train-spotter would surely admit that seeing

⁷⁴ Walton touches on rareness in another paper, suggesting there that we may only pretend—that is imagine—that rareness is valuable in itself. As with the case of sports, my intuitions pull me much the other way. Indeed, besides the common observation that rareness increases a thing's (exchange) value (think of supply-demand curves), there is psychological research that may support the claim that we find rareness valuable. A recent study, building on a wealth of prior supporting data, shows that subjects rate chocolates introduced as the "last chocolate" more highly than identical chocolates not so introduced (O'Brien & Ellsworth, 2012). Being hard-wired or socialized to value rareness would explain this data. Moreover, it seems plausible to think that humans would have evolved to more greatly appreciate a scarce resource. Of course, systematic make-believe that rareness is valuable would also explain this phenomenon—but the burden of proof is on the make-believe theorist to motivate her less straightforward account.

some train and pencilling down its number is not really important. Another example: a traveller might sincerely cheer when she finally visits the last of all the capitals of Europe.

The possibility these examples raise is that the same mechanism underwriting our disproportionate excitement concerning CGOs occurs in many activities that are not obviously games, and, partly for that reason, are not as amenable to being analyzed along the lines of SMB. Moreover, even if the examples are not decisive (perhaps there is something game-like to what the traveller and stamp-collector do), they appear to be on a continuum with other activities that surely do not involve make-believe.

Take the case of someone building an elaborate sandcastle for her own amusement. After several failed attempts to erect the grand spire, she suddenly finds herself having erected most of it with only a few more centimetres to go. The tension builds as the last few dollops are carefully patted into place, just as it does for a team guarding a narrow lead in the dying minutes of a game. She becomes profoundly aware that the slightest error could topple the structure. As she finally inserts the crowning toothpick flag, she gives a fistpump. Or think of the gradual epiphany as a logical puzzle and its solution become suddenly understandable. While skills in logic might be worthwhile developing, the problem-solver might acknowledge that her understanding any particular solution does not really matter. She could drop the puzzle and move on with her life unperturbed. And yet, as she finally grasps how the solution works, she might throw the paper and pencil up in the air with delight, especially if the problem is difficult. The solution could be to a sophisticated derivation, or to a Sudoku puzzle, and yet elicit the same reaction. Practical jokes furnish excellent examples to consider. Two friends have set a trap by placing a cup of water precariously on the top of a front door that is cracked ajar. They hear the third friend approach the door, completely oblivious. The tension rises—what if she notices the cup, spoiling the prank? What if the cup misses its target? Suddenly, the butt of the joke takes the door handle, only to release it again upon realizing she has left something in her car. The pranksters release an involuntary, pained squeal and hear her walk away again. The wait is agonizing. Finally, just as it seems the oblivious target will never open the door, she does. The cup falls, the victim is drenched, and the pranksters cry with laughter. Clearly, the pranksters' reactions far exceed a level warranted by their beliefs about the importance of the prank's success. Nor is this kind of phenomenon restricted to relatively unusual cases furnished by practical jokes, logic puzzles, or building sandcastles. There is also completing a passage on a musical instrument, building a house of cards, completing all one's chores. Indeed, mundane examples in which caring-attitudes seems to outstrip beliefs about how much something matters abound. Think of the agonized lunges and yelps

we perform when spotting a glass of wine topple onto the floor, even an easily cleaned floor, or a cup of tea slip off a breakfast tray, or a puppy adopting that all too familiar squat on the carpet. These often elicit the kinds of apparently “life and death” reactions any sports fan of the relevant kind exhibits. Nor need these moments be sudden and intense. We frequently find ourselves engrossed in the most banal activities as though little else mattered. In 2010, I waited in line for President Barack Obama’s Commencement Day speech at Michigan Stadium. Standing among the motionless throngs waiting to enter the Big House, a woman was having trouble with the zip on her fleece. As she and her partner took one futile turn after another to fix it, a small crowd began to form around them to watch—swapping notes on fixing zips, even predicting the eventual outcome of the present attempt. Here then were tens of adults and a couple of children fascinated by the fortunes of some unknown person and her rogue zip. I never did see her repair it. But had she done so, one could imagine a cheer going out, or perhaps a round of applause, from the crowd, and not necessarily a tongue-in-cheek one. I am inclined to think that what is going on in most if not all of these examples involves no make-believe. Why not? These examples’ proximity to (or identity with) ordinary unproblematic cases of caring mean that explaining them in terms of make-believe threatens to apply the notion too generously; if they all involve make-believe, then one begins to lose one’s grip on how caring in imagination about some actual thing differs, even in principle, from actually caring about it. The worry, in a tendentious slogan, is that if make-believe is everywhere then it is nowhere. For the same reason, applying a make-believe analysis to these examples also undermines the extent to which sport is supposed to present a particular puzzle. I return to this point shortly. If I am right to decline a make-believe analysis of these examples, then whatever they do involve may also cover the case of sports, rendering SMB unnecessary.

2.2 Recovering after Tragedy

Another motivation for SMB is the apparent incongruity between how much we appear to care about CGOs and how quickly we “get over” disappointing outcomes once the contest finishes. This resembles cases in which we are moved by works of fictional tragedy, but get on with our lives unruffled shortly afterwards. However, eerily quick recovery times are not limited to engagements with sport and fiction. Regarding matters of the utmost gravity, we often exhibit a similar ability to put them out of our minds very quickly. Take the familiar example of the evening news. We frequently see how lives are destroyed by war, repression, and (un)natural disasters. This may hit us hard and

move us deeply. Yet, often, we put down our smart-phones, turn off our televisions or radios, and find our concern quickly lost in the dust of mundane activity.

The proponent of SMB has a rebuttal. Bad news may not continue to affect us in such cases because we are able to put it out of mind. But often, if we remain vividly aware of the news, or are reminded of it later, it may continue to affect us emotionally. Sports “disasters”, on the other hand, are not like this; continued vivid awareness, or later reminders, are likely to fail to affect us—at least some of us, some of the time. Moreover, whereas the tragedies that induce our concern through the news often involve distant and unfamiliar people, only sporting cases that directly affect us ever move us to express a similar degree of apparent concern. (Walton 2015, 77n).

Responding to these points in reverse: first, even conceding that concern for CGOs is typically egocentric, there are exceptions. When Oscar Pistorius, a South African double leg amputee, competed in the 2012 Olympic alongside able-bodied athletes, many were delighted to see him finish second in his qualifying heat, and devastated by his eighth place finish in the semi-finals. The reasons for this interest are probably multiple with both symbolic and instrumental aspects to them. But I suspect it did not entirely reduce to Pistorius’ role as symbol of, or catalyst for, disabled achievement. And it is implausible that it is explained by fans’ well-established investment in Pistorius; many had not heard of him until the 2012 Games. Rather, the interest seems also to have concerned his simply doing well at the Olympics and winning his races, for their own sake. Similarly, millions felt tremendous pity when hosts Brazil were “humiliated, humbled, and taken apart” (BBC 2014) by Germany in the semi-final of the 2014 World Cup. Brazil lost 7:1, five of the goals coming within half an hour of kick-off.

It is important when testing one’s intuitions against these kinds of case-comparisons that one compare “like with like”. There are innumerable many factors determining the affective profile and perceived significance of any one event. These factors influence the depth and longevity of our emotional responses to it, often in ways not obvious to introspection. These include, but are not limited to, our spatiotemporal proximity to the event, our ties to those involved, how engaged we and our wider communities are to the circumstances to which the events relate, and so forth. The observation that we recover quickly from a sporting tragedy would only be evidence for SMB if the following holds (a) we recover slowly following non-make-believe tragedies and (b) these tragedies have similar affective profiles to the sporting tragedies with which we compare them. It will do no good, for instance, to point out that we recover quickly following defeat in an impromptu game of Noughts-and-Crosses, but recover slowly on hearing that our sibling’s house has burned down; the two events have drastically different affective profiles. One must also take care making these

comparisons, since whether the affective profiles of two events are comparable is informed by judgements about the extent to which make-believe might plausibly play a role in attitudes about those events. This is because how quickly people typically recover from the events in question is precisely the kind of datum used to determine both (a) whether SMB applies to the event, and (b) how significant the event is. Quick recovery can be taken to show that event 1 matters less to the agent than event 2, from which there is no quick recovery, and that thus events 1 and 2 are not comparable. Alternatively, one can point to the quick recovery as evidence of the agent's engaging in make-believe, thus restoring the comparability of the two events' affective profiles. Using such comparisons to adjudicate SMB's plausibility, therefore, runs the risk of vicious circularity.

Putting this difficulty to one side, and returning to the imagined objection that SMB's proponents might raise, it is unclear that a bad story on the evening news will continue to affect us any more than a comparable sporting tragedy. Certainly, if a team I loosely follow loses a regular match, I will easily put this out of my mind. But similarly, if a country with which I am vaguely familiar suffers a small misfortune, this will not continue to affect me much either, even if it ought to. Moreover, while it is true that bad news that is 'close to home' will often continue to move me, this is clearly true of some sports outcomes, too. I have a friend around whom, a year after the event, I dared not speak of the Vancouver Canucks' defeat to the Boston Bruins in the Stanley Cup final. For me, Germany's 5-1 defeat at the hands of England in 2001 is something I still wish had turned out differently, even if the game was only a World Cup qualifier. The extent to which my friend and I consider these defeats "philosophically" is only the extent to which one might consider any setback with which one has "made peace" in such terms. Of course, these cases are not decisive because SMB employs an existential rather than a universal quantifier; the claim is that *some* sports participation involves make-believe, not necessarily *all*. But these kinds of cases do remind one that our relationships with sporting events are not always as easily distinguished from our relationships to other events as suggested.

A different objection a proponent of SMB might offer is that the boundaries of the class of activities falling under the make-believe analysis are hardly clear. Thus, it begs the question to claim that activities such as watching the news do not involve make-believe, and to use these activities to discredit SMB.⁷⁵ Perhaps. But I think one can plausibly assume that certain activities (like watching the news) do not involve make-believe in any way relevant to the discussion. This is because presumably *some* activities must not involve make-believe in the relevant way. Otherwise, SMB would be almost

⁷⁵ Thanks to Derek Matravers for this objection.

vacuously true, and its proponents' focus on competitive games arbitrary. Competitive games were supposed to present a particular puzzle; but if make-believe of the kind in question is almost everywhere, this would cease to be the case.⁷⁶

A different datum the SMB proponent can point to is the notable similarity in how we reassure participants in both make-believe and competitive games: “it’s only a game” (Walton 2015, 75). However, on reflection, such consolations are not restricted to competitive and make-believe domains. Imagine: two friends get out of a taxi. After a few steps, one begins frantically patting herself down, searching for the thank you card she was delivering, containing £100. She realizes, panicked, that it must have slipped out of her pocket in the cab. Both turn, crying out for the taxi to stop, only to see it turn a corner, out of sight. Seeing her friend despondent, the second remarks, “Oh well, it’s only money”, prompting a resigned sigh. Now imagine two friends at a bar. The first gazes tearfully into his beer, as he contemplates his recent break-up. “Come on”, says the second, “don’t cry over a girl!”. Or take two colleagues at an award ceremony. One, nominated for the Grand Prize, listens with giddy anticipation as the winner is announced. She does not win. Her colleague, seeing her friend’s disappointment, chimes in: “Cheer up! It’s only a stupid award!”. It is not just estimations of importance or value that invite such remarks either. Judgements about how appropriate attitudes and emotions are invite them too: “Don’t be scared, it’s just a spider”, “Don’t be angry, it’s just a small setback”, etc. Clearly, consolations of the form “it’s just a story” occur in numerous contexts as plausibly devoid of make-believe as any.

Of course, the SMB proponent has a response: the spectator is caught up in the make-believe that the game’s outcome is important, and the consolation functions by shaking her out of her pretence, as it were, and returning her to reality. In cases like the ones in my examples, however, the consolation merely reminds the sufferer of the “bigger picture”—that the object of her concern is less significant than she thinks. In other words, the consolation reminds the sport spectator, as the story-listener, to move from one world back to another, whereas, in the other cases, it merely corrects an incorrect belief, or value-judgement.⁷⁷

Is the response persuasive? Whether one finds it persuasive depends in large part on one’s position on SMB. But, as this is the very view in contention, one cannot rely on one’s position on pain of

⁷⁶ Thanks to Sarah Buss for helping me see the force of this reply.

⁷⁷ Another possibility is that consoling the story-listener might be part of the game being played. If so, the consoling friend would *fictionally* be correcting a false belief, or value-judgement.

begging the question. Still, it is worth acknowledging that the SMB proponent has *some* response to the criticism.

* * *

If abandoning SMB seems unattractive, the alternatives are given by A and B1, above. On A, one bites the bullet and extends SMB to my examples. One philosopher's *ponens* is another's *tollens*, as they say. On B, one identifies a theoretically relevant difference between my examples and the competitive game cases. I do not know of such a difference, although nothing I have said rules it out. At minimum, I have offered a burden-shifting argument in §§2.1 and 2.2 for SMB advocates to identify what that difference is.

2.3 Competitive Games with Mimetic Content

A different consideration that might lend plausibility to SMB is that many competitive games—chess, whack-a-mole, video games—are representational in a way that clearly involves make-believe. However, I think on further consideration, the mimetic elements in these games are orthogonal to their being competitive. To see this, it is instructive to consider certain bona fide sports and conjecture as to their origins by performing a little armchair anthropology.

Many sports must have been developed with a clear use of make-believe. Fencing, for example, has its roots in recreational swordfighting. And recreational swordfighting, might have begun as a method to prepare warriors for fighting of the more real, life-threatening kind. Wrestling, archery, and shooting, might also have functioned as preparation for violent combat as much as recreation. Plausibly, many of these activities would have begun as simulations incorporating make-believe for the development of “real-world” skill-sets. Swordfighters might have imagined engaging in real duels, wrestlers in real fights, and archers in real attempts to shoot their enemy.

But though these simulative origins may appear to support SMB, once one considers what is required for such simulations to become full-fledged sports, this appearance fades. Gradually, perhaps even instantly, these proto-athletes would have learned that the value of their simulations was not merely parasitic on the activities they simulated; they would have come to value, enjoy, and seek out the activities for their own sake. Thought would have been devoted to refining the competition itself, with the introduction of rules and conventions to define courses of action available to the competitors.

It is this moment, I suggest, at which the original element of make-believe, the simulation of real-world activity, becomes merely ancillary to the activity. The competitors' sense of which actions are appropriate is no longer guided by the principles of generation of a make-believe game (that they are "fighting to the death", or "shooting an enemy", or whatever). Instead, their actions are guided by fixed rules that determine not only how the game can be won, but also which means to victory are permissible. Think of two children playing a make-believe game of swordfighting with small planks. In the heat of "battle" one may grab the other's "sword" and throw it aside or use the breadth of the "blade" to "scoop dirt" into the other's eyes. Any of these activities count as playing the game because they make sense given the operative principle of generation—that the planks are swords and the children swordfighters. Likewise, the proto-athletes, simulating a real fight, might have allowed themselves such improvisational flourishes as sword-grabbing and dirt-scooping (perhaps even where there was no actual dirt), supposing the object of the simulation to be to 'defeat' the opponent by whatever means necessary.⁷⁸ Fencers, by contrast, enjoy no such liberties. They are playing a sport whose object is to meet a stipulated success condition without flouting any of the stipulated rules. The fact that their instruments resemble swords and that they engage in "lunges" and "attacks" is only of anthropological or sports-historical interest. It tells one little about what they are doing *qua* competitors.

Another game may help drive this point home. Chess looks like the perfect example of a competitive game suffused with make-believe. A chessboard is effectively a pretend battle field for two advancing armies. The pieces are all clearly politically and militarily representational; there are pawns (foot soldiers), knights, bishops, rooks (these typically look like fortifications), Kings, and Queens. And their strengths as pieces more or less fit their rank (the King is the obvious exception, though perhaps one is to imagine that he is past his prime). But this layer of make-believe is quite superfluous to the game. One could easily substitute non-representational pieces, like those used in draughts, while remaining otherwise identical. If anything, the nature of the chess pieces may establish what Walton calls a "prop-oriented game". These are games in which our interest is drawn to the props themselves rather than the fictional content of the "game-world" (Walton 1993). The mimetic content helps one distinguish pieces in a way that is unnecessary in draughts. Still, this has no bearing

⁷⁸ Of course, some rules might have been introduced to encourage a certain type of skill to be utilized. Had the army general known that there would be no dirt or sand at the next battle, he might have prohibited dirt-scooping during practice to better prepare his warriors, for instance. This might then constitute a hybrid game—part simulation, part sport; there's no reason to think that a game must be entirely one or the other.

on whether chess or similar games involve make-believe in the respect intended by SMB—*qua* competitive games.⁷⁹

There is a further issue concerning the normative force of rules chosen and sustained more or less arbitrarily by players of competitive games. And here, make-believe may play a role. It is the issue of what it even means to say a player “can’t” perform a certain action, or that she “should not” break a rule—questions concerning the semantics of deontic modals. One nominalist response to these questions is that this normative language describes a useful fiction in which rightness, goodness, correctness, etc. exist. This is the position, or one variant of it, known as ‘fictionalism’.⁸⁰ Yet, though the whole world may, if fictionalism is right, be engaged in a kind of elaborate make-believe game by talking normatively, this sort of make-believe is not relevant to SMB, since it would render *any* norm-governed practice an occasion for make-believe.

2.4 Reasons to Care

It is clear that competitive games and traditional fictions typically differ in their representational content. While novels, plays and representational paintings, for instance, supply us with rich fictional “worlds”, the same is not ordinarily true of sports.⁸¹ On Walton’s account of fictionality, *p* is fictional in a work *w*, or *w*-fictional, just in case one ought to imagine *p* in the relevant context in order to fully appreciate *w*, should the question arise (Walton 1990, 39-41, 57-61). Which propositions are sports-game-*x*-fictional? The propositions true in the fiction, if any, are more or less the same propositions true of the contest at the actual world. In other words, the fictional world of the sports game is almost fully coincident with the actual world of the sports event. This phenomenon of coincidence, between fictional worlds and the actual one, is common enough; *War and Peace* makes it fictional that there is a country called Russia, which is invaded by Napoleon and so forth, all of which is or was true of the actual world. But, evidently, competitive games are not representational in the same way *War and Peace* is. The players do not “stand for” characters, as an image of Orson Welles stands for the character Charles Foster Kane (or two-dimensional screen projections stand for Orson Welles). Or consider “Pro-Wrestling”. When WWF wrestler Bret “the Hitman” Hart takes to the stage and addresses the

⁷⁹ I suppose a fencer, for instance, might pretend to be a sword-fighter in order to perform better. This could work in something like the way that an actor might improve her performance by pretending to be the character she is playing. But this certainly is not necessary, or even central, to fencing or sport generally. Nor, as I will show, can this kind of make-believe plausibly confirm SMB.

⁸⁰ For more on fictionalism in normative discourse, see (Joyce, 2001) and (Kalderon, 2005).

⁸¹ As I have just shown, some sports may incorporate representational elements; on this, see (Wertz 1985, 15-16).

crowd, Bret Hart *really* takes to the stage and addresses the crowd, or speaks at any rate. Yet, it is always apparent that Bret Hart is playing a kind of send-up of himself, a fictional counterpart who “fights” his wrestling “opponents”. Compare this with tennis, say. When Serena Williams serves an ace, she really serves an ace. There is seemingly no more to it.

Appearances can be deceptive, however, and one cannot expect participation in make-believe to always be transparent to experience. And where a fictional world is almost identical to the actual world, one can only presume that it will be harder still to separate what one engages in literally from what one engages in as part of a game of make-believe. According to SMB, the fictional world one engages with in participating in a competitive game differs from the actual world in that the outcome of the game is incredibly important, or at least more important than is actually the case (Walton 2015, 78). This will derivatively make any events causally related to the outcome (individual tackles, shots, refereeing decisions etc.) more important in turn.

A worry with this proposal is that it appears to raise a puzzle as perplexing as the apparent one it is intended to solve. The old puzzle is this: how can we care about something we do not believe matters—i.e. CGOs? The new puzzle: how does *this* kind of make-believe motivate the behaviour SMB is intended to explain? Consider fictions of the more ordinary kind. In reading a comic, for instance, one might cheer on Superman and wish ill upon Lex Luther. There is nothing terribly perplexing about this. Admiring Superman and despising Lex Luther makes sense given that Superman is a good guy trying to save the world and Lex Luther is a vain plutocrat bent on evil. In the case of sport, things are different; there is no fictional world that makes sense of participants’ responses, or rather, what fictional world there is that might explain the CGO’s importance is the same as the actual world. There are no “facts” in the fiction that could rationalize our attitudes towards the game’s outcome beyond the *actual* facts that could. How, then, does positing such a fictional world help explain our apparently incoherent attitudes towards CGOs? As Walton notes, “there are no ready-made good guys and bad guys in sports”. He continues:

[S]ports fans are free to choose for themselves; each has his or her own personal heroes and villains. [...] you are not getting anything wrong if you root for the Tigers instead of the Blue Jays, or the Blue Jays instead of the Tigers. If your choice suffers miserably in the competition, you may regard the event as something of a tragedy [...] but for the other fans it will have a wonderful happy ending. Tragedy is in the eyes of the beholding fan. (Walton 2015, 80)

Typically, then, there is no fact of the matter in the fictional world of the game to determine which teams or outcomes deserve our support. Granting this, how is it that anyone manages to “care” about any of the teams or outcomes at all—not merely make it fictional that one cares, but enough to move one to the heights of enthusiasm SMB is meant to explain? One possible answer is that sports participants treat certain insufficient reasons as sufficient ones for cheering one way rather than the other; that is, while the “workworld”, if there is one, of the competitive game does not offer facts about who to support, the “gameworld” of the participant does.⁸² Such reasons might be that a team’s jersey is heroic, that we dislike the way a team plays, or that we share a name with a competitor. In the event that we are ourselves competing, this fact may by itself function as the reason. This raises a further question. If we (fictionally) treat weak reasons as strong ones, or even non-reasons as reasons, why are typically not more creative in this endeavour? It is interesting that spectators do not pretend (in “normal” sports participation at least), for instance, that their team must win to avert nuclear disaster, or being shot, or to secure world peace. If sports spectatorship really were a game of make-believe, it seems such interest-enhancing imaginings might be warranted, even commonplace. The details of gameworlds embellished in *this* way would (fictionally) give one reason to prefer certain outcomes over others.

2.5 Any Old Make-believe?

It is worth considering an uncontroversial example of using a competitive game to engage in make-believe in order to see how it differs, if at all, from the kind of make-believe just appealed to. At times, when stuck in an airport for instance, I find myself watching a football match between two teams I barely know, one of whom is playing in black and white (Germany’s colours). So, I amuse myself momentarily by pretending that Germany (a team I support) is playing, provoking a mild make-believe interest in the game that was otherwise absent. But sustaining this imaginative project is difficult and, in any case, never arouses the same passions that *really* watching Germany play affords. I think it is clear that this kind of make-believe game does not confirm SMB, since it is the kind of make-believe game one could play with any event or object at all (because, in principle, anything could be deployed as a prop and combined with any principle of generation to generate any fictional truth whatsoever).⁸³

⁸² The terms ‘workworld’ and ‘gameworld’ are Walton’s. A workworld is the set of propositions made fictional by a work. A participant’s gameworld is the set of propositions made fictional by a participant’s interaction with a work, where this will standardly include all the things made fictional by that work. See (Walton 1990, 58-63).

⁸³ It is for this reason that I am unsure what evidential weight to give comments friendly competitors make to each other in jest. Walton points to cases in which one player might say to the other “You rat!” or ask “What did I do to

So call this kind of non-SMB-confirming make-believe *illegitimate* make-believe, as opposed to the *legitimate* kind that would confirm SMB. Now one can ask: how do legitimate and illegitimate make-believe differ?

SMB relies on the possibility that one can choose one's favoured teams and players for inadequate reasons—even “on whims” (Walton 2015, 76). However, it is more plausible that one must have some positive (and actual) reason to opt for one rather than the other. In addition to CGOs that arrest us, there are others that fail to pique our interest at all. Sometimes this is for reasons that explain comparable failures in appreciating traditional fictions. A film, say, might fail to get one to care about what happens because it is poorly put together, has wooden acting, a dull narrative, etc. This does not establish that the film is not a work of fiction. It merely shows that it is not a *good* work of fiction. But the case with sports seems different. I may exhibit intense caring attitudes towards the outcome of a game between Germany and Spain, while failing to do so with respect to the outcome of a Barcelona v Real Madrid match. Yet this discrepancy is not (always) explicable by appeal to the quality of the two matches, or other details of the matches that parallel a film's production, acting, and narrative. The matches might involve an equal amount of incident, have an equal number of interpersonal rivalries, and so forth. And yet it might still be the case that one engages me while the other does not. How does one explain this? The obvious answer for most cases is that there is a salient difference—namely, that I am a Germany fan and not a Barcelona fan, or that I am from Germany and not from Madrid or Barcelona, or that I have friends who are German but not friends who are Catalan or Madrileño. These are the kinds of facts from which fans are born. But notice that these all look like *actual* reasons for preferring one team's victory over the other. They are comparable to the reasons one has for preferring that one's own child win a prize over another's child. If asked why one has this preference, what is one to say? “It's my child!” counts as good an explanatory reason as any (even if it is not universally normative).⁸⁴ At least, this reply does not only fictionally report the parent's reason. The alternative, that one merely *fictionally* has reasons—perhaps one imagines one is from Barcelona, or that severe consequences proceed from a defeat—just looks like the illegitimate kind of make-believe I engage in when I imagine some non-German team is Germany. It is important that the SMB

deserve this?” etc. in the course of a friendly competitive game (Walton 2015, 82-83). This kind of banter certainly involves make-believe. But because this kind of banter can be superimposed onto *any* activity whatsoever, the question arises whether this banter is part of what we are trying to explain, or simply an ancillary form of make-believe competitors sometimes engage in (much like the military make-believe of chess), and a very general one at that.

⁸⁴ I intend ‘my’ here at the level of content rather than character; it is less plausible to think everyone has an obligation to care about *my* (i.e. Nils’) child's success, although she is *very* cute.

proponent have a way to distinguish the illegitimate from legitimate kinds of make-believe, in the sense intended. The former would count as very tame proof of the truth of SMB; but if it cannot be distinguished from the latter, tame proof will be all there is.

2.6 Authenticity

A final consideration that challenges SMB is that it is important in sport that players *really* try. In this respect, sport is very different from theatre or film, say, in which the actors are expected to dissemble. In cases where players feign effort, or play toward a pre-arranged outcome, participant interest disappears (or changes entirely).⁸⁵ This is why sport-lovers so detest match-fixing. Match-fixing scandals damage the integrity of sports not merely by being deceitful, but because they undermine the authenticity of the spectacle. I suggest that this explains why “sports” whose outcomes are known to be predetermined must be integrally supplemented with other forms of entertainment to make them watchable. In Pro-Wrestling, for instance, elaborate soap-stories hold the various “fights” together. The Harlem Globetrotters must incorporate freakish feats of skill, pranks, and the use of non-regulation props such as trampolines to generate interest in their games. This supplementation is needed in the same way that a broader narrative is needed to sustain interest in more traditional fictional sporting encounters (e.g. the *Rocky* film series). This need for authenticity is interesting for my purposes precisely because nothing comparably authentic is (ordinarily) required to enjoy traditional fictions. If sports participation involved make-believe, one would expect authenticity to be irrelevant to one’s ability to get behind a competitor. This suggests that our relation to sports differs psychologically and affectively from our relation to conventional fictions.

A possible response is that what fictionally the spectator cares about is that her team or competitor actually wins a genuinely contested encounter. However, this just looks like a restatement of the difference between sports participation and engagement with traditional fictions that I have identified. And as it does not explain *why* sports spectators require authenticity, whereas fans of traditional fiction do not, the restatement is dialectically unhelpful. A different response is to contend that traditional fictions and make-believe games *do* require authenticity. Many make-believe games involve props that play an important, if not essential, role in generating fictional truths. A child that merely tells her playmates to “imagine the car crashes into the wall” in lieu of actually guiding the toy car into the cereal box, or a sadomasochist “top” who merely tells the “bottom” that she is whipping him, rather

⁸⁵ Former US tennis star, Andy Roddick captured this nicely in a post-match interview: “There is no script in sports, you know. I think that is what makes it the best entertainment in the world.” (Telegraph, 2012)

than actually doing it, probably fails at something important to the others' make-believe. Are these comparable cases of inauthenticity? In some respects, yes, but they still strike me as importantly different; the analogue to these cases is not authentic competition—competitors really trying—but rather “competitors” really acting out the “competition” as the Harlem Globetrotters do, instead of merely describing their doing so or utilizing props in some other way. Yet, what the Globetrotters do is not authentic in the same sense that genuine competition is.

The SMB proponent can also appeal to competitive games that rely predominantly, even exclusively, on chance to question the importance of this kind of authenticity. When two people wager on which raindrop will reach the windowsill first, or which “horse” will win a race determined by dice throws, talk of authenticity is strained. Indeed, SMB strikes me as more plausible for these kinds of games, as opposed to full-fledged sports, which probably is no coincidence.

III. Alternative Accounts

SMB faces some fairly serious difficulties, many of which result from undercutting the puzzle SMB purportedly solves. That sport presents no *special* puzzle is a serious possibility. That said, the idea that something about our engagement with competitive games needs explaining is hard to shake, even if this oddness extends beyond engagement with such games. Competitive games do still elicit incredible excitement about events that seem trivial (consider kids racing to the next lamppost and so on).

My fear that accepting SMB commits one to embracing a similar analysis for lots of other activities does not stem from a general scepticism about whether make-believe extends beyond works of traditional fiction or children's make-believe games. I am thoroughly persuaded that make-believe is at the heart of a number of other practices, such as metaphor, irony, and mental simulation, and am sympathetic to fictionalist forms of anti-realism about a number of domains of discourse couched in terms of make-believe. Nor am I persuaded by some of the sillier criticisms directed at make-believe theory in general. For instance, the fact that participants in competitive games do not think of themselves as engaged in make-believe, or that they “*really* feel” sad, happy, or whatever, is utterly unpersuasive evidence against the view.⁸⁶ The chief worry, to recall §§2.1 and 2.2, is that the make-believe analysis threatens to overgeneralize to other activities that seem (I think obviously) not to involve make-believe. Such events—suffering an erratic radio signal during the broadcast of a compelling anecdote, losing a parking spot, lunging for a falling cup, etc.—are continuous with or

⁸⁶ This kind of criticism is levelled at Walton's theory of fiction in (Carroll, 1990, 74).

identical to activities in which we care perfectly literally about something, but where our caring attitudes appear overcooked. And so, whatever explains this appearance here can explain them in the case of competitive games. Given the additional worries raised in §§2.4-2.6, one is owed an argument for extending the make-believe analysis instead of withholding it altogether.

* * *

If one should reject SMB, then what are the alternatives? I consider two in the final section. The first proceeds from the assumption that there *is* something distinctive about our attitudes to CGOs. I assess whether these attitudes are explicable in terms of *play* attitudes generally, rather than make-believe specifically. The second proceeds from the assumption that there is nothing distinctive about our attitudes towards CGOs, in that they are continuous with attitudes we exhibit toward more “ordinary” outcomes. I consider whether the appearance of oddness that our attitudes towards all these outcomes exhibit can be explained in terms of a general volatility of our caring attitudes. I end by considering whether make-believe might still play a role in either of these alternatives to SMB.

3.1 Play

Let us suppose that there is something puzzling about our attitudes towards CGOs that demands explanation. This puzzle resembles another problem that has stubbornly persisted in the philosophy of sport. This problem concerns reconciling the fact that we think sports (not just CGOs) are trivial with the fact that we confer so much importance on them. Randolph Feezell offers a nice gloss on this problem:

It is a truism to note the widespread interest in, or perhaps we should say obsession with, sports. [...] Yet the involvement, indeed the obsession, with sport is paradoxical, since in most cases sports involve activities arbitrarily and artificially constructed for no apparent external purpose. In an important sense, sports do not really matter, yet we often participate in and view sports as if nothing mattered more (Feezell 2004, xi).

One possibility is that this purported problem arises from a misconceived way of looking at sport, which in turn stems from a misconceived way of looking at play. Participating in sport is a form of

play.⁸⁷ And it is clear, on reflection, that the puzzle Feezell discusses is just one aspect of a broader question about play. Just as Feezell says of sport, likewise play does not really matter “in an important sense”. Indeed, interestingly, it is thought to be central to play that the purposes it serves be at best secondary considerations in the minds of players. As one scholar of play puts it, “if its purpose is more important than the act of doing it, it probably isn’t play” (Brown 2008).

It is this insight that offers a way of undoing what is paradoxical about our interest in play. When one tries to understand play as one understands other instrumental activities, paradox emerges. These activities, whether grocery shopping or booking a doctor’s appointment, serve fundamentally as means to other ends. Understanding them consists in discovering which ends they serve, and whether these ends deserve our consideration. But play, *qua* play, is not undertaken as a means to some further end. Play is its own end. Michael Novak expresses this sentiment poetically:

Play, not work, is the end of life. To participate in the rites of play is to dwell in the Kingdom of Ends. To participate in work, career, and the making of history is to labor in the Kingdom of Means. The modern age, the age of history, nourishes illusion. In a Protestant culture, as in Marxist cultures, work is serious, important, adult. Its essential significance is overlooked. Work, of course, must be done, but we should be wise enough to distinguish necessity from reality. Play is reality, work is diversion and escape (Novak 1976, 40).

While one need not endorse Novak’s complete inversion of the importance of work and play, his description of play as the “Kingdom of Ends” and practical life as the “Kingdom of Means” provides a useful metaphor for understanding play. To try to understand play as one understands practical activities is to misplace it in the Kingdom of Means. And the same is true of sport, insofar as it is a form of play. Play belongs in the Kingdom of Ends, and will not make much sense until one puts it there.

The original puzzle, assuming there is one, might rest on a similar mistake. The puzzle, and thus SMB, is motivated by contemplating CGOs through an instrumental lens. Consider again this passage from Walton, for instance:

⁸⁷ Actually, sport can be just business. In these cases, it is questionable whether sports even count as play. But, it is precisely the uncontaminated sports participation—the participation that *is not* just business that is of interest. This kind of sports participation is play. For more on these distinctions see (Suits 1988) and (Schneider, 2001).

Why should people care about the Yankees or the Red Sox? *Their fortunes on the field have no obvious bearing on the welfare of most fans.* Why does it matter whether the home team wins or loses? *Life will go on afterwards just as it did before,* regardless. But the spectators, some of them, scream their hearts out during the game, *as though it is a matter of life or death.* [...] Are fans irrational? Do they believe, falsely but sincerely, that it really is a matter of life and death? (Walton 2015, 76-77) (emphasis added)

The thought is that if the screaming fans do not believe the desired outcome will lead to any real benefit and are rational then their behaviour is puzzling. The current proposal is that this inference is made more plausible by an inappropriately instrumental view of participation in competitive games. If play's importance is reduced to its contribution to external ends, its emotional force and interest will remain mysterious. This point also applies to the thought that play (and sport) is essentially a means to pleasure. Randolph Feezell addresses this point:

Play is enjoyed for its own sake, but the enjoyment or pleasure that arises when participating in playful activities supervenes on the activity. The end is not the pleasure or enjoyment or “fun”, separate from the activity. A view of sport that stresses play is not reduced to hedonism. That would be yet another form of reductionism that reduces sport to something else that is good (Feezell 2004, xiii-xiv).

Feezell over-creams the coffee a little. We frequently do engage in play because it will be pleasurable, and it will often be hard to tell exactly whether pleasure is a motivating end or mere side-effect. But the germ of truth here is that pleasure is not *necessary* for our engaging, or desiring to engage, in play. Play can be exploratory, whimsical, arbitrary, and frequently need not elicit any great degree of pleasure if any. To repeat the earlier point, play is an *autotelic* activity that supplies its own motivating end, even if there are additional motivating ends, such as its concomitant pleasures.⁸⁸ Some heightened emotional responses we experience in participating in sports will, I suggest, be left unexplained by means-ends analyses. In play, and so in sport, we often jump, cheer and scream for no *practical* reason. Why we play in this way is another question—one for anthropologists, evolutionary biologists, or neuroscientists, I suspect.

⁸⁸ This view of play is one endorsed by a number of scholars of play. See, for instance, (Brown, 2008), (Huizinga, 1938/2003, 7), (Kretchmar, 2007, 2-3), (Morgan, 2007) and (Suits 1988, 2).

Of course, SMB appeals to play: make-believe play. So how does this proposal differ from SMB? Make-believe is only one species of play. Therefore, while engagement with sport typically involves play, this does not entail that it typically involves make-believe. I do not profess to be able to lay out a complete taxonomy of the various types of play, nor offer a fully worked out theory as to what relates and distinguishes them. However, that there are many types of play other than make-believe is, on reflection, quite obvious. The Institute for Play recognizes at least seven main types (NIIP 2009).⁸⁹ Animal play is one example, though animals themselves exhibit many different kinds of play, at least some of which should not be confused with make-believe. There is also the kind of play that is exhibited through the creative arts, as well as physical “body” play. Often, when we create music or paint, for instance, we are engaged in a kind of play that need not involve make-believe. Juggling, picking flowers, splashing bath water, skimming stones, whistling a tune, dancing, blowing bubbles, sculpting—all of these activities typically involve different forms of play that do not necessarily, or even typically, involve make-believe.

Two caveats. First, this proposal is susceptible to some of the worries about SMB. In particular, there remains an apparent continuity between our interest in CGOs and other more “ordinary” activities. Acknowledging the puzzle and appealing to play stand at odds with this continuity. That said, the proposal is at least no worse off than SMB. And insofar as it appeals to a broader set of play attitudes, it becomes more probable that it successfully explains some of these ordinary activities. Second, even accepting that the proposal provides a framework for dismissing SMB, it clearly does not show that SMB is false by itself. There surely are kinds of play that do not involve make-believe, but this mere fact does not show that participation in competitive games is among them. The SMB proponent has a good story to tell about a kind of play, or *the* kind, that competitive games involve. In playing sports one might behave as though one were invested in its outcome. What does it mean to behave *as though* this were the case? A natural answer is: Make-believe. SMB is still subject to the objections I have advanced, of course. And there are other kinds of play that involve passionate immersion in some activity, which might explain the ‘as though’ (the kind of creative play we engage in when designing a room or learning an instrument, for instance, or the physical play we engage in when cliff-diving or dancing, both of which might involve make-believe but need not). Assuming any kind of play is explanatory here, there may also be cases where it is too difficult to say which kind is

⁸⁹ Though, I suspect these means of dividing play into types may cut across more philosophically interesting distinctions, just as distinguishing flowers by their colours cuts across more interesting biological distinctions.

operative in a competitive game participant. More radically, it may even be that in some cases, there is just no fact of the matter.

3.2 Volatile Attitudes

A different proposal begins by denying that there is any puzzle to begin with. This suggests that what explains our behaviour when participating with competitive games is something general—or more general—across a range of activities in which we participate. One possibility is that our motivational attitudes, including what I have called our “caring-attitudes”, are more volatile than the apparent puzzle suggests. On this line, when someone is caught up in some activity, including competitive games, the things they care about experience a more or less violent shift. Different contexts can cause certain motivational attitudes to become salient, or grant us completely new concerns. Competitive games, if we let them, can supply such contexts. One way to account for the discrepancy between our sober proclamations about a CGO’s importance and the extent to which those outcomes move us as participants, then, is to appeal to the volatility and context-sensitivity of our motivational attitudes.

Attitudinal volatility is familiar on reflection. In addition to the examples from §§2.1 and 2.2, adherence to popular fads, concern for others present and others absent, and passing flirtations with new hobbies all seem to exhibit the phenomenon. Sexual desire is like this for many people. One has to get “in the mood” and when one is, it can be as though little or nothing else matters. If the moment passes without gratification, so eventually will the mood and with it the intense orientation of one’s motivational attitudes. But the phenomenon goes beyond the bedroom. Some of these cases exemplify straight irrationality (sexual desire might be such a case), but not all. Take a political activist who works for months agitating against the passage of some proposed legislation. After time, she drops out of the activist world because of new responsibilities. Later, after the vote, she does not even know whether the bill became law. Does this show that the concern was insincere, or the product of irrationality? Only if one has implausible demands built into one’s theory of sincerity or rationality. Participating in sport exhibits a similar attitudinal volatility. For a brief moment, or several seasons, a sports participant comes to care about a relatively narrowly-focused set of outcomes, unencumbered by questions about whether these outcomes are *ultimately* justified by the ends to which they are connected, let alone some final end. Later, she ceases to care, or care as much.

One intriguing possibility is that our ability and tendency to focus our concern in this way might be (an evolutionarily adaptive) trait built into the very architecture of human action and affect. Indeed, one can mobilize a kind of transcendental argument for its necessity to human investment. If many

people have no idea of a final substantive end or ends (to adopt an Aristotelian picture of practical normativity), and yet also care about and take the means towards goals, then it cannot be a *requirement* of an agent's performing an action, or caring about something, that she do these under the description of serving some substantive final end, explicit or implicit; I say 'substantive', because agency might require a belief that one acts, or an intention to act, toward an un(der)specified 'good'.⁹⁰ This suggests that the teleological story we bear in mind when we act or feel concern is often a more or less truncated one; the substantive ends are only a few links in the justificatory chain removed from the action being undertaken. The CGOs we care about, and the means toward them, are cases in which this truncation reaches its lowest limits; the CGOs are only one or two degrees—or where there is no further end, *no* degrees—removed from the ends toward which we take them to contribute. This explains why caring about CGOs strikes us as more paradoxical than caring in typical cases. In typical cases, such as meeting my boss' deadline, the chain of means and justificatory ends is more protracted. Why should I care about meeting my boss's deadline? Because otherwise the shipment will not be processed on time. Why should I care about *that*? Because otherwise the delivery will not be made. Why should I care about *that*? Because it will jeopardize the company's relationship to the customer? Why should I care about *that*? Because this increases the probability that the customer will take her patronage elsewhere. And so on. This chain of justifications (actually, more likely a web), will peter out somewhere, *who knows where*? Whereas, in the sporting case it peters out obviously and immediately, or almost immediately. This makes caring about the outcome appear more obviously bizarre and arbitrary.

Why should an abrupt chain of justificatory reasons seem more absurd than a long one? In his now famous article on "the Absurd" (Nagel 1971), Thomas Nagel describes the "backward step" we are able to perform when we reflect on the significance of a particular situation. A situation will seem absurd when pretension and reality clash, as, to use Nagel's example, when someone's trousers fall down as he is knighted. When we reflect on our individual endeavours, as we frequently do, we often take this backward step to a vantage point from which we examine and assess the point of the endeavour as a whole. One's job for instance, may be important from the perspective of the corporation's well-being. But one can also consider whether the corporation itself serves a legitimate purpose, thereby reflecting on the point of one's job from "further back". In the ordinary case, the assessment is done against a particular standard for what makes such an endeavour significant or

⁹⁰ It might be that the volatility of our caring-attitudes is partly explained by our ability to act and care without appeal to final ends. The idea is that to the extent that I undertake many, if not all, of my projects without seeing how they serve some substantive final end, those projects are susceptible to being abandoned or rekindled in surprisingly volatile ways (think again of the political activist).

worthwhile. One can think of this as a kind of zooming out process on a chain of justificatory reasons, each backward step allowing us to see increasingly more ultimate reasons, at least as one takes them to be. Nearing its limit, this process will bring one to the grandest purposes against which one can judge an endeavour's significance, such as "service to society, the state, the revolution, the progress of history, the advance of science, or religion and the glory of God" (Nagel 1971, p 720). Where a situation or endeavour in which one is seriously invested falls short according to a grander standard of significance revealed by such a backward step, one is faced with absurdity. This standard reveals how one's motivational attitudes outstrip the importance of their objects. But, in addition to these ordinary backward steps, one can also take the process to its extraordinary conclusion by taking what, in the spirit of Nagel's discussion, one might call the *philosophical* backward step. This is the backward step one takes when one questions the ultimate standards by questioning it *all* and seeing it "with that detached amazement which comes from watching an ant struggle up a heap of sand" (Nagel 2013, 720). What differentiates this backward step from the others is that it reveals no further standards of significance, just that there *is* no further standard and that nothing outside the whole package of life and its endeavours can justify it; the package has to justify itself; everything and nothing appears equally meaningful, or meaningless. Yet, despite our seeing things from this dizzying skeptical vantage point, we remain just as invested in the projects it surveys anyway. And herein lies the profoundest kind of absurdity: not in the juxtaposition of a seriously undertaken endeavour and standards of which it falls short, but in an inescapable juxtaposition between all seriously undertaken endeavours and *no standard at all*.

Our investment in CGOs is susceptible to a similar "backward step" to standards of seriousness from which it falls short. This begins to explain the appearance of absurdity and paradox. My suggestion is that this explanation is completed by the observation that only one or two such backward steps is required to bring this particular investment into doubt. Thus, caring about CGOs more easily strikes one as absurd in the way that, ultimately, *any* activity is. This suggestion yields an interesting, and I think correct, prediction. *Ceteris paribus*, caring about CGOs embedded into larger structures of CGOs (and other outcomes) to which they relate as means and end will strike us as less absurd than doing so towards CGOs that stand alone. The idea is that, for instance, scoring points in order to win a game, in order to win a league, in order to qualify for a playoff, in order to become a Champion, etc., and caring about doing this will seem less obviously absurd than caring comparably about merely scoring a single point for no further end.

My suggestion is not that our motivational attitudes freely appear and disappear. This is not the only way to capture the psychology behind volatile motivational attitudes. It is consistent with this volatility that the attitudes remain fixed where they are in our psychological economy, but become more or less behaviourally influential in different contexts. David Velleman describes the possibility that this volatility be explained by a form of meta-desire for one's actions to "make sense", the desire being to accommodate one's behaviour in a running narrative of the self. On this picture, the attitudes that explain one's caring do not disappear so much as take a back seat while other attitudes are "reinforced by the agent's conception of what he is doing". (Velleman 2002, 97-98). The desire to make sense of what one is doing combines with a self-conception to promote or relegate one's motivational attitudes to a guiding centre or an (at best) restraining periphery, respectively. But it does not thereby create or destroy these attitudes in the agent's psyche; it just plays them up or down. Velleman gives the example of a person pressing a point in argument. Insofar as the agent gets "carried away", she conceives of herself exclusively as someone pressing a point (rather than as a polite human being, or conscientious colleague), and the attitudes that might otherwise motivate her to acknowledge her interlocutor's annoyance are muted (but do not disappear). She has only two hopes in such a case, according to Velleman. The muted motives might act as "unreflective restraint" on action "from the outside". Velleman pictures this as happening in something like the way my desire to avoid colliding with things constrains my actions when I rush down a crowded street, say. Alternatively, her other motivational attitudes—such as her desire to maintain good relations with colleagues—might "obtrude" themselves on her attention in such a way that she revises her self-conception by coming to see that she "has more than one end at stake".

If Velleman is right, then it suggests one attractive, if highly metaphorical, way of explaining our seemingly exaggerated interest in CGOs that need not appeal to make-believe. We adopt a self-conception of playing the game, supporting the team, being a winner, etc., however consciously or not. This self-conception combines with a desire to make sense of our behaviour to put those attitudes that most chime with this self-conception (e.g. desires to cheer or try hard, or the disposition to feel the sting of defeat) in the driving seat. Those attitudes that do not (e.g. desires to be fair, be a good parent, or whatever) are consigned to a restraining role—the role of road signs and markings on the agential highway. This can work via the same means by which an agent adopts the self-conception of one who is pressing a point in argument, thereby emphasizing and de-emphasizing attitudes in her psychology. I think this is at least roughly what happens when we "get into" a competitive game. It also offers a psychological metaphor to complement the metaphor of Nagel's backward step. Taking

a backward step reveals broader evaluative standards from which to consider a given goal, action, or practice. Adopting a less narrow self-conception allows a broader set of attitudes to play a driving, rather than merely restraining role in action.

Velleman's account rings true for at least one case I personally experienced involving a competitive game. In 2007, my brother and I, lifelong devotees of the German national football team, attended a match in the newly built Wembley Stadium. The game was between old rivals, England and Germany. It's hard to convey how significant matches between these two teams is for two Germans who grew up in England in the 90's, when second World War xenophobia still trickled through the generations, compounded by years of built up resentment (Germany knocked England out of the World Cup in 1970 and 1990, and the European Championship in 1972 and 1996) and the cruelty of schoolchildren. In short, the game was momentous for us for a number of reasons. And the game was momentous for the England fans too, with whom we were forced to sit. The game was in such demand that the only seats I could get were not with the high-paying middle-class fair-weather fans, nor with the travelling German support, but up in the rafters with England's true working class supporters. Having been subjected to violence and abuse from England fans before because of our German nationality, my brother and I spent the entire game on our guard, lest we give away our loyalties. When England scored the early opener, we defied our usual instincts by standing and applauding politely, (cursing under our breath). The fans around us, meanwhile, erupted, at one point even ruffling our hair, confused as to why we were not also jumping up and down for joy. When Germany eventually equalized and later scored the winner (predictably), we had to remain seated so as not to betray our elation. Something I will never forget about the game was how numb I was to its outcome by the end. We had been so focussed on our self-preservation that the match was drained of most of its significance for us. In Vellemanian terms, our self-conception was so overwhelmingly one of being covert trespassers in genuinely dangerous territory, that those attitudes concerning the match's outcome were entirely relegated to the periphery.

Is SMB finished then? Not quite. This is because, broadly speaking, the Vellemanian story is compatible with SMB. Among the ways one can adopt a self-conception is by using one's imagination. Velleman gives the example of a smoker who, unable to quit, imagines himself full-time to be a non-smoker, thereby adopting a self-conception as such, in order to facilitate turning down the next cigarette. The self-conception is false in this case, but places the agent's non-smoker motivational attitudes in the foreground, making not smoking a matter of "going on as normal" rather than interrupting a current (and satisfying) habit. The pangs of withdrawal, meanwhile, come to be

understood as irritations to be ignored rather than urges to smoke (Velleman 2002, 99-102). Eventually, all going to plan, the smoker becomes a non-smoker, rendering the once merely imagined self-conception true. In another paper, Walton describes the case of the philosopher David Lewis, who claims to have imagined caring about a cricket team in order to cultivate a genuine interest in their fortunes over time (Walton 1994, 72, 72n), which bears obvious similarities to the smoker's attempt to quit (there are differences, too).

Adopting a conception of oneself in imagination that foregrounds one's motivational attitudes towards CGOs—in Lewis' case (almost?) exclusively fictional motivational attitudes—may, therefore, explain our participatory behaviour towards them. Still, the explanation runs into the challenges I raised in §2. One might insist for these reasons that it is only to the extent that participants like David Lewis no longer have to imagine supporting their team that they *legitimately* do so (the imagining being an illegitimate form of support as discussed in §3.4). Still, the SMB proponent can take solace in the fact that this discussion has revealed the beginnings of an answer to at least one of those challenges that was not available at the beginning of the paper. If the Vellemanian account of David Lewis' and the smoker's attempts to alter their motivational attitudes is accurate, then the worry that SMB overgeneralizes is assuaged slightly. It might be far-fetched to claim that our interest in “ordinary” activities involves make-believe, but it is not far-fetched that some of our literal interest in them might originate in this kind of imaginative exercise, as the smoker's case shows.

IV. Conclusion

I began by teasing out the claim that participating in sport involves make-believe by building upon Walton's suggestive paper. I showed how SMB relates to a loosely analogous solution to the so-called Puzzle of Fiction, before identifying difficulties for the view. First, our apparently odd attitudes to CGOs are continuous with our attitudes toward a number of more ordinary activities and ends that are not especially puzzling. Second, our apparently remarkable ability to recover from tragic CGOs is continuous with our ability to recover from ordinary tragedies. Both of these difficulties suggest that SMB inadvertently overgeneralizes. Third, a *prima facie* plausible defence of SMB that appeals to the mimetic content in many games is unpersuasive. Fourth, the “facts” at the fictional world a competitive game would instantiate (according to SMB) would not rationalize participants' caring attitudes any more than facts at the actual world. As such, positing such a world is otiose. Fifth, it is unclear how SMB's proponent can distinguish between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” games of make-believe participants might play with competitive games. Lastly, competitive games require a particular kind of

authenticity from their players that other make-believe games do not, which would be odd if our interest in their outcomes was at least partly, and sometimes wholly, imagined.

I finished by sketching two possible alternatives to SMB. The first took the puzzle at face value and appealed to a general capacity for play (rather than make-believe specifically) to explain our purportedly incongruous attitudes. The second dismissed the puzzle and appealed to our motivational attitudes' general capacity for volatility to explain why we can become invested in events that appear trivial from certain perspectives. I considered whether both of these alternatives might still involve make-believe. I concluded that they might, although any claim to that effect would still be faced with the challenges from earlier in the paper. Much remains to be said on the matter. I will leave it to another occasion, and perhaps another author, to say it.

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