

# Imaginary Desires

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I, Jack Frank Davis, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## **Abstract**

*This thesis assesses the case for introducing an imaginative counterpart to desire. The first chapter considers what an imaginative counterpart is, and some initial worries related to introducing an imaginative counterpart to desire. The second chapter considers whether our third person mindreading abilities, and a puzzle about what mental states motivate children's pretend play, give us reason for introducing i-desires. The third chapter considers whether we have to introduce i-desires to make sense of the desires we apparently direct towards fictional characters. I will argue that introducing i-desires deepens the puzzles related to these three cases, and that genuine desire-based solutions do a better job of making sense of them. I will thus conclude that desire does not have an imaginative counterpart.*

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## Introduction

In this thesis I am going to argue that desire has no ‘imaginative counterpart’ – that there is not a form of imagining that is ‘desire-like’ in character. Defenders of the existence of desire-like imaginings, or i-desires as they tend to be called, argue that their introduction is warranted because they help to explain our third person mindreading abilities, what motivates children to engage in games of pretence, and why it looks like we can direct desires towards fictional characters. I am going to argue that these activities are better explained by relying on explanations invoking ordinary desires, not i-desires.

Before we consider the puzzles related to desire that mindreading, pretend play and our engagement with fiction give rise to, we will need to get a better idea of why philosophers usually introduce imaginative counterparts, and how they are thought to behave. This will be the subject of chapter 1. I will make three central claims about how imaginative counterparts behave and when we are justified in introducing them.

Firstly, I will argue that there are two types of imaginative counterpart. The first type is where one wilfully enters into a mental state that is in some sense similar to an ‘actual’ mental state. The second is where a real world action or feeling constitutes a fictional action or feeling. In light of this distinction, we should not presume that imaginative counterparts must always be under the control of the will, since one can allow that a mental state has a counterpart in the second sense whilst denying that it has a counterpart in the first sense.

Secondly, I will argue that noting an instance of a real world action constituting a fictional action is not a sufficient justification for introducing an imaginative counterpart. I will bring this out in section 1.7 in relation to amusement, since it looks like one can be described as being amused within the scope of pretence even though amusement has no imaginative counterpart. It is made true that one is fictionally amused by one being really amused.

Thirdly, I will propose that there are two related sorts of arguments we can give to justify the introduction of an imaginative counterpart. The first sort of

argument involves noting constraints on being in a particular mental state, and then noting a case where one appears to be in that mental state when these constraints have been violated. We can then justify the introduction of an imaginative counterpart to explain this discrepancy. The second sort of argument works by looking at a specific case where it seems puzzling to think a genuine instance of a mental state is involved, and then moving to suggest that we should introduce an imaginative counterpart to make sense of this puzzling case.

In relation to these three claims and desire, I will note that it is unclear whether we can make sense of imagining desiring something at will, and as such if desire has an imaginative counterpart it will be one where real world actions or feelings constitute fictional actions or feelings. I will conclude chapter 1 by noting that it is unclear what constraints are operative on our desires, and that we therefore cannot justify the introduction of a counterpart merely by considering the nature of desire. As such, we will need to focus on why specific cases where an imaginative counterpart to desire has been introduced are thought to be puzzling. This will be task of chapters 2 and 3.

In chapter 2, we will discuss mindreading and pretend play. In relation to mindreading, simulation theorists like Currie (1995) have argued that our ability to predict peoples' actions and ascribe mental states to them is based on an ability to simulate their mental states. More specifically, simulation theorists claim that mindreading depends on an ability to simulate *beliefs* and *desires*, and Currie (1995, pp. 157-160) argues that these simulated mental states are best thought of as imaginative counterparts.

These sorts of imaginative counterparts are counterparts in the first sense I noted: they are similar to another mental state and can be entered into at will. Against this picture, I am going to argue that it is unclear that we can always enter into a mental state with desire-like character at will. Furthermore, we can give an alternative explanation of mindreading by allowing that we can either form belief-like imaginings about others' desires, or beliefs about others' desires. I will also note that the counterpart to desire that is supposed to be involved in pretend play and our engagement with fiction appears to be

distinct from the one involved in mindreading, since it is not similarly under the control of the will. This rules out justifying the introduction of desire-like imaginings to explain mindreading on the grounds that they are an accepted part of our cognitive architecture.

In relation to pretend play, the puzzle that an imaginative counterpart to desire is meant to solve relates to difficulties specifying the kinds of mental states that motivate pretend actions. For example, if a child is playing cops and robbers and raises a finger towards her playmate and says 'bang you're dead', what sort of desire can explain this action? It appears that it cannot be a desire to actually kill the playmate, and it also looks like it cannot (merely) be a desire to raise their finger and utter these words. Thus, some philosophers have proposed that we should say in this case something like the child *i-desires* to kill the robber (Doggett and Egan 2007).

However, this leaves a crucial element of the pretence unexplained: how the child is able to match up their real world action (finger raising) with a fictional action (shooting the robber). I will argue that the best way to make sense of this is to propose that children desire to make it fictionally true that such-and-such occurs when they engage in games of pretence. This will allow us to explain pretend play without introducing an imaginative counterpart to desire.

In chapter 3 I will consider a puzzle about how our desires can relate to fictional characters. One might think it is problematic to hold that we can have genuine desires related to something known to be fictional, and as such some philosophers have suggested that when we engage with fictions we actually have desires about the fictions themselves, rather than fictional characters (Nichols 2004b). However, this appears to be problematic in relation to some genres, like tragedy, since this view will construe us as having conflicting desires: desiring, for example, that a tragic heroine both does and does not die in the fiction. As such, some philosophers have proposed that we need to introduce *i-desires* here. They suggest we *i-desire*, for example, that Juliet avoids her fate whilst genuinely desiring for *Romeo and Juliet* to have a tragic conclusion (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, Doggett and Egan 2011).



In response, I will argue that it is unclear why we should feel forced to move from desires about fictional characters to desires about fictions, which weakens the justification for introducing i-desires here. I will then consider a further problem case from Currie (2010), which is supposed to be inexplicable in terms of desires about fictional characters, and thus is said to force us into accepting either the desires about fiction explanation or the i-desires explanation.

In light of this, Currie argues that since the desires about fiction account sometimes problematically construes us as having conflicting desires, an i-desire based account of our engagement with fiction is preferable. I will end this chapter by questioning whether his argument forces us to abandon an explanation that allows for desires about fictional characters, and by noting some reasons for thinking real desires have explanatory value in the fiction case.

Having considered these three cases in detail, I will conclude that we are not warranted in introducing i-desires into our cognitive architecture. I will also bring out that even if one found the arguments for introducing them in one of these three cases compelling, we still cannot justify their introduction in all three cases, since it looks like i-desires have to behave differently in each case. In turn, if i-desires can only explain one of these cases, it looks like they have a limited explanatory role, which will further weaken the case for introducing them.

Having set out the structure of the thesis, we can now begin chapter 1, where I will set out my claims about the nature of counterparts and our justification for introducing them.

# Chapter 1: Imaginative Counterparts

## 1.1 Introduction

In order to determine whether desire has an imaginative counterpart, we must first get clearer on what it means to say that a mental state has an ‘imaginative counterpart’ and why philosophers have proposed their introduction. In pursuing these issues we can establish three principles, which will be central to establishing whether desire has an imaginative counterpart:

- 1) There are (at least) two kinds of imaginative counterpart a) where we enter into at will a state that is similar to a genuine mental state, and b) where real world actions or feelings constitute fictional actions or feelings.
- 2) Noting a case where a fictional action or feeling is constituted by a real world action or feeling is not sufficient justification for introducing an imaginative counterpart.
- 3) To justify the introduction of an imaginative counterpart, we either need to establish a) that there are constraints on being in a mental state that necessitate the introduction of a counterpart, or b) note a case where positing a genuine mental state is involved leads to puzzles.

I will begin to establish these three claims by setting out Walton’s (1973, 1990: Ch. 1) make-believe account of our engagements with fiction. Having set out Walton’s account, I will then consider two relatively uncontroversial cases of mental states/activities that are thought to have imaginative counterparts: belief and seeing. Philosophers introduce these two counterparts since it looks like there are constraints on what it takes to be a genuine belief or episode of seeing that necessitate the introduction of an imaginative counterpart.

The discussion of seeing and Walton’s (1973) account of depiction will bring out the first central claim of this chapter viz. that there are at least two types of imaginative counterparts at play in philosophical discussions of the imagination: one subject to the will, and the other arising when certain real-world actions and feelings constitute a make-believe action or feeling.

Having established this claim, we will then consider a more controversial case – the emotions. Some philosophers, such as Walton (1978), have suggested that constraints on feeling a genuine emotion necessitate the introduction of ‘quasi-emotions’. If this is right we then have to introduce counterparts like quasi-fear, quasi-sadness, quasi-pity, etc.

However, philosophers such as Carroll (1990: Ch. 1) have rejected the idea that emotions have an imaginative counterpart. I will remain neutral on this issue, and will instead attempt to bring out why controversy abounds in this case, and why emotions cannot be treated as straightforwardly as belief and seeing.

Most importantly, I will note that quasi-emotions are said to be imaginative counterparts in the sense of being real-world feelings that constitute fictional feelings: they are not necessarily subject to the will. This discussion will also help to clarify the third claim I want to defend in this chapter: that to justify the introduction of a counterpart we have to look at the constraints on being in a genuine mental state, and the puzzles that arise from saying a genuine mental state is involved in an activity.

In light of this, we should not assume a principle like ‘X is a mental state therefore X has an imaginative counterpart’ holds. I will back up this point by noting three mental states that do not appear to have imaginative counterparts: understanding, thinking and amusement.

In relation to understanding, I will set out a controversy that arises from Evans (1982, p. 344), who introduces what appears to be an imaginative counterpart to understanding, which he calls ‘quasi-understanding’. The introduction of quasi-understanding is controversial but this is for different reasons as compared to the introduction of quasi-emotions. The two central issues are that introducing quasi-understanding gives us odd conditions for when one quasi-understands something, and that it deepens puzzles related to our engagement with fiction. This discussion will thus demonstrate a case where introducing an imaginative counterpart is unwarranted because it deepens puzzles rather than makes sense of them.

There are also some mental states philosophers have not been tempted to introduce counterparts to in the first place. I will consider two types of mental states that are generally taken to have no imaginative counterpart – thinking and amusement – to get clearer on when there is no temptation to introduce an imaginative counterpart.

This discussion will bring out my second central claim: that being a real world action or feeling that constitutes a fictional action or feeling is not sufficient for justifying the introduction of an imaginative counterpart. It is true that we can be fictionally amused, but this does not appear to be because of any sort of counterpart. Our real amusement makes it the case that we are fictionally amused.

Having established these three claims and got clearer on the sorts of reasons that have led to philosophers introducing and rejecting various imaginative counterparts, I will consider whether desire is, *prima facie*, the sort of mental state that should be thought of as having an imaginative counterpart. We will do this by looking at whether constraints on genuine desires point towards the introduction of a counterpart.

I will argue that attempting to justify the introduction of a counterpart to desires in this way will prove problematic, since there is no consensus about what the nature of desire is, nor about what constraints are operative on our ordinary desires. As such, in line with my third claim, we will have to consider what puzzles the introduction of an imaginative counterpart to desire is supposed to solve to establish whether we are justified in introducing a counterpart to desire.

## **1.2 Walton on Fictional ‘Truth’**

When we engage with fictions, we often make puzzling statements. For example, when talking about the Harry Potter novels to a friend we might say:

‘Harry Potter is a wizard.’

This statement is puzzling because we also tend to accept the negative existential claim that ‘Harry Potter doesn’t exist’. But, *a fortiori*, if Harry Potter doesn’t exist then ‘he’ cannot be a wizard, since being a wizard entails being a concrete particular of some sort.

Thus, if we accept that Harry Potter doesn’t exist, we seem to have to accept that the sentence ‘Harry Potter is a wizard’ is at best neither true nor false, and possibly just false (Friend 2007, p. 143). However, this doesn’t capture the fact that sentences about fictional characters don’t always strike us as merely expressing a falsehood or something neither true nor false.<sup>1</sup>

Walton (1973, p. 30) suggests that these utterances are similar to the ones children might make when engaging in games of pretence. For example, a child who is pretending that three globs of mud in front of him are three pies might say:

‘There are three pies in front of me.’

‘I had four pies, but that stupid man stepped on one.’

Once again these statements, understood literally, appear to be false, or neither true nor false. There are no pies in front of the child, and there weren’t four pies in front of the child previously. And, in both the fiction case and the pretence case, one could also make statements involving propositional attitudes that are similarly puzzling. For example:

‘I believe Harry Potter is a wizard.’

‘I was upset when Dumbledore died.’

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<sup>1</sup> Some philosophers respond to this issue by suggesting that fictional characters are real, such as Van Inwagen (1977) who argues that they are abstract objects. For present purposes I will set aside discussion of the ontology of fictional characters since participants in debates about imaginative counterparts tend to accept that fictional characters are not real (e.g. Walton 1990: Ch. 10 and Doggett and Egan 2011, p. 185). Furthermore, accepting that fictional characters are abstract objects doesn’t solve all the issues raised by utterances like ‘Harry Potter is a wizard’. For example, we still have to explain how an abstract object can be a wizard.

‘I wanted Snape to escape from Voldermort.’

‘I believe there are three pies in front of me.’

‘I was scared that stupid man might step on the other pies.’

‘I want to eat these pies later.’

Walton (1973, p. 287) suggests that we should think of these two cases as being analogous. In both cases, the odd utterances people make should be thought of as being true *in fiction*. Walton thus introduces the concept of something being fictional, or fictionally true. To express that a sentence is fictional he uses the notation *\*P\** (it is fictional that *P*, it is true in fiction that *P*, it is fictionally true that *P*, etc.). In other words, these sorts of sentences are only meaningful within the scope of our games of pretence. And, Walton argues, our engagements with fictions and the games played by children are both instances of engaging in games of pretence.

On this view, when we say that ‘Harry Potter is a wizard’ whilst engaging with the novel *Harry Potter*, we pretend that the name ‘Harry Potter’ has a referent, and that sentences containing the name can be true. When engaging in such pretence, it will therefore be fictionally true that Harry Potter is a wizard (*\*Harry Potter is a wizard\**).<sup>2</sup>

That being said, the notion of ‘pretending’ at play here is a special notion. Walton is generally understood as not proposing that we consciously decide to pretend that sentences like ‘Harry Potter is a wizard’ are true. The sort of game we play with the *Harry Potter* novels is supposed to be to some extent an automatic response to reading the words of the novels.

We should also note that for Walton fictional truths are only fictional relative to a particular fictional ‘world’. *\*Harry Potter is a wizard\** is true relative to the world of the *Harry Potter* novels, but false (or neither true nor false) in other fictional worlds. It is not fictionally true that Harry Potter is a wizard in the

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<sup>2</sup> We should note that the point that we are merely pretending that statements about fictional characters are true is crucial for understanding Walton’s approach – fictional truths aren’t a species of truth, we pretend that some sentences about fictions are true.

world of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Nevertheless, whilst this helps us to make sense of statements of ‘fact’ about fictions, we have not yet got to a position where we can make sense of utterances related to our attitudes towards fictive propositions and fictional characters, such as ‘I believe that Harry Potter is a wizard’ or ‘I was upset when Snape died’.

Walton’s answer to this problem is to suggest that when we engage with fictions we create a ‘game world’, which consists of the fiction we are engaging with combined with our own responses to the fiction. So, in the game I am playing with *Harry Potter*, I ‘pretend’ that I believe Harry Potter is a wizard, or (controversially, as we shall discuss shortly) I pretend that I am upset when Snape dies, and this makes it fictionally true that I believe that Harry Potter is a wizard, and that I was upset when Snape died (Walton 1978, 1990: Ch. 6).

Having stated the bare bones of Walton’s approach, questions still abound. For example, how are fictional truths decided? What makes it fictional that Harry Potter is a wizard rather than a pirate?

Walton’s suggests that what is fictionally true in a fiction is what we are *prescribed* to imagine by said fiction (Walton 1990, p. 39). So for example, the *Harry Potter* novels prescribe imagining that Harry is a wizard, and so it is fictionally true that Harry Potter is a wizard. Of course, one could imagine otherwise – one could imagine that Harry is a ninja, or a samurai or a pirate, etc., but the novels do not prescribe these imaginings, and so even if one imagines that Harry Potter is a ninja, this will not make it the case that \*Harry Potter is a ninja\*.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, Walton holds that something can be made fictional in part by facts about the actual world and the rules of the game of make-believe we are

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<sup>3</sup> Or at least, this will not be the case relative to the world of the *Harry Potter* novels. It may be fictionally true that Harry Potter is a ninja relative to a world we create by imagining this to be so.

playing. As such, merely imagining something to be the case is not always sufficient for making that something fictional. Consider, for example, a game where children pretend that tree stumps are bears. If there is a stump near to the children that they haven't noticed, then it remains true that \*there is a bear nearby\*, even though none of the game's participants are aware of this fictional truth (Walton 1990, p. 37).

In this game, participants are prescribed to imagine a bear when they see a stump, thus a bear's presence in the game depends not on whether the children playing the game imagine a bear to be present, but on whether a stump is present. The children's awareness, or lack of awareness, of the stumps in their vicinity does not impinge on fictional truths about the number of bears nearby (though of course their awareness, or lack thereof, of nearby stumps will generate truths related to what it is fictional that they are aware of).

But whilst what one is prescribed to imagine in games of pretence such as bears is usually fairly clear, it is not always so clear how to set out what fictions, such as novels, films, and plays, prescribe imagining. For example, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* prescribes imagining that Gregor Samsa transforms into some sort of bug but it is unclear precisely what bug we should imagine him to have transformed into (Friend 2011, p. 183).

We can note in response to such worries that we also sometimes have difficulty setting out how we should decide whether something is true of the actual world, and this is not usually taken as showing that we simply cannot tell what is true or false. Likewise, it looks like we can generally decide between what is fictionally true and what is fictionally false – between what we are prescribed to imagine and what we are not prescribed to imagine. In practice then, an inability to set out clear rules governing what is and isn't fictional shouldn't be viewed as a problem for Walton's theory.

Having set out Walton's approach to understanding our engagement with fictions, we can now move on to consider why this approach naturally leads to the introduction of some counterpart states. To begin, we will consider the relatively uncontroversial case of belief-like imaginings to see why we must



introduce them, and how they are said to behave as compared to beliefs.

### 1.3 Propositional Imaginings

If we accept Walton's account of fictional truth, the imagination will play a central role in our engagement with fictions and children's pretend play. This is because on his account we are said to 'imagine', as opposed to believe, it to be the case *that* 'Harry Potter is a wizard' or *that* 'there are three bears in the woods' (Walton 1990, pp. 35-43.)

It has been suggested that these sorts of imaginings are imaginative counterparts to belief, which Currie and Ravenscroft (2002, pp. 11-19) call 'belief-like imaginings', and which many philosophers call 'propositional imaginings' (Nichols 2006, pp. 1-2).<sup>4</sup> In other words, it has been proposed that when we say 'Harry Potter is a wizard' we imagine this to be so in a belief-like way: we take an attitude towards the proposition that is something like genuinely believing it but that falls short of being a genuine belief.

At this point one might wonder why we need to introduce a belief-like form of imagining. Why not just suppose that people have certain kinds of beliefs when they engage with fictions, perhaps beliefs that such-and-such is fictional?

The usual answer to this sort of question is that there are functional differences between beliefs and propositional imaginings, even though the two mental states share some common features. One way of spelling out this idea is by noting that there are several features beliefs and propositional imaginings appear to share, and several features that only one of the two states exhibit. In light of these similarities and differences, it is suggested that the two states have a different functional role (Nichols 2004a, p. 130).

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<sup>4</sup> In what follows I will follow this trend and usually refer to belief-like imaginings as propositional imaginings. That being said, we should note that Currie and Ravenscroft (2002) use 'propositional imaginings' to refer to both belief-like and desire-like imaginings.

The first shared feature is that both our beliefs and our propositional imaginings can play an inferential role in our reasoning (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, pp. 13-15). If one imagines that Harry Potter is a wizard, then this will entail that one imagines that Harry Potter has magical powers. A similar sort of inference would also hold if one genuinely believed that Harry Potter was a wizard.

This sort of inference-preserving role of the propositional imagining is well documented by psychological studies of children's pretend play, and is often called 'mirroring', in the sense that imaginings mirror the inferential chains of beliefs. It has been demonstrated, for example, that if one tells a child that an empty cup is filled with tea, and this cup is then upturned, the child will, when prompted, express that the cup is now empty (Leslie 1994, p. 224).

It is also often suggested that propositional imaginings have a similar aim to beliefs. Beliefs, it tends to be argued, aim at the truth (Railton 1994, pp. 72-75), and it has been argued that belief-like imaginings likewise aim at what is fictionally true (Walton 1990, p. 41). Thus, the belief/truth relation can be thought of as parallel to the imagining/fictional truth relation.

However, even though propositional imaginings are similar to genuine beliefs in these sorts of ways, there are still important differences between the two mental states. The first key difference between propositional imaginings and beliefs is that imaginings are usually *quarantined* (Gendler 2006, p. 184). That is to say, ordinarily propositional imaginings are kept separate from our beliefs and so do not tend to play a role in motivating our actions.

This notion of quarantining leads us to the second distinctive feature of propositional imaginings as compared to beliefs: they exhibit what Walton (forthcoming, pp. 2-3) calls 'clustering': propositional imaginings typically form clusters based on particular worlds, and imaginings in one cluster won't ordinarily interact with others. For example, in *Midnight's Children*, it is fictionally true that a character can read minds, yet in *War and Peace*, it is fictionally true that reading minds is impossible. Since these two imaginings belong to different clusters, there is no conflict involved in imagining that some

people can read minds and imagining that no one can read minds. This contrasts with belief, since if you believed  $P$  & not- $P$ , this would usually be considered irrational.

A final difference between beliefs and belief-like imaginings is that it is generally agreed that we cannot believe something merely because we choose to, whilst we can imagine something in a belief-like way because we choose to: we can imagine that- $P$  at will but not believe that- $P$  at will. For example, I can choose to propositionally imagine that David Cameron is a lizard, but I cannot choose to believe that David Cameron is a lizard.

In light of these differences, it looks like we need to introduce an imaginative counterpart to belief. There are constraints on genuine beliefs (e.g. not being subject to the will) that are violated in cases involving imaginary things and so it looks like we need to introduce an imaginative counterpart to explain what is going on in these cases.

But we should not be tempted to stop here and think that belief is the only mental state with an imaginative counterpart. Walton (1997, p. 38) notes there is more to imagining than merely imagining *that* things are the case, we can also imagine:

*‘[D]oing things, experiencing things, feeling in certain ways’*

Before considering whether Walton is right to list ‘feeling in certain ways’ (i.e. emotions) in his list of what we can imagine, we will firstly consider another widely accepted imaginative counterpart – namely imagining seeing, or perceptual imaginings – which is an example of imagining experiencing something (and also perhaps of doing something).

This discussion will bring out that imagining seeing sometimes behaves in a similar way to propositionally imagining something (in the sense of being subject to the will). However, there seem to be two ways in which we can imagine seeing something. According to Walton (1973, pp. 285-286), we can also imagine seeing something in the sense that when we see a painting, we

imagine seeing something, and this sort of counterpart does not appear to be subject to the will.

This distinction can be applied to other mental states, such as the emotions, and it is important to emphasise that one can hold that one of the two notions is plausible, and allows for the introduction of an imaginative counterpart, whilst denying that the other notion is plausible. This is the first central claim of this chapter.

#### **1.4 Imagining Seeing and Perceptual Imaginings**

The most obvious sense of imagining seeing is the one involved when we form a mental image of something. When someone forms a mental image of an apple, this seems to have something in common with really seeing an apple, but nevertheless the two activities appear importantly distinct (McGinn 2006,p. 7).

This type of imagining seeing is to some extent under the control of the will, and thus behaves somewhat similarly to propositional imaginings. However, there is also a notion of imagined seeing that is introduced in relation to Walton's make-believe theory that is not so obviously under the control of the will.

Consider someone who, whilst observing a painting, says 'I can see ships docked in the harbour'. As Walton (1973, p. 284) notes, this assertion is odd. In reality, the observer will be looking at splodges of paint on a canvas, not at ships docked in a harbour. One might then move to say that the observer is seeing a *representation* or *depiction* of ships docked in the harbour. However, this in turn will simply raise the question of what it means to see a depiction or representation of a ship, and how this relates to genuinely seeing a ship.

Walton's answer to these sorts of questions is that when looking at a painting, we *imagine seeing* various things. In other words, he thinks that looking at paintings is another example of a game of make-believe, and so when looking at a painting it can be true that \*I see ships docked in the harbour\* (Walton

1973, p. 300). This seems to introduce a further sense in which we might think seeing has an imaginative counterpart.<sup>5</sup>

On Walton's view, when we look at a painting we don't literally see what it depicts, we imagine seeing what it depicts, with this sort of 'imagined seeing' being an automatic response to seeing the painting. This type of imagining seeing differs from the kind related to mental images, since in the painting case what we imagine seeing will depend on our real-world actions and the painting we are looking at. Walton is proposing that it is made the case that someone \*sees ships\* by virtue of them looking at a canvas, with seeing the canvas doubling in some sense as \*seeing ships\* (Walton 1973, p. 304).

Walton's approach here is controversial, and indeed, whether our experience of paintings involves the imagination at all is disputed. For present purposes, we can set aside worries about whether this account of pictorial representation is correct and bring out one salient point.

Walton's account of imagined seeing demonstrates the first central claim of this chapter: that when we talk about imagining-Xing, we could be referring to two distinct sorts of activity. One is where one enters into, at will, an imaginative counterpart state (e.g. when forming a mental image or imagining that such-and-such is the case), the other where one's real-world actions or feelings (e.g. looking at a canvas), constitutes 'fictional' actions or feelings (e.g. \*seeing ships\*).

Accepting that one sense of imagining X-ing involves an imaginative counterpart does not mean you have to accept that the other involves an imaginative counterpart, nor that the other is even a form of imagining X-ing. For example, one could, if they so desired, deny that forming mental images

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<sup>5</sup> However, as Nanay (2004) notes, pinning down the notion of imagining seeing that Walton has in mind is difficult. That being said, it looks like the notion does not boil down to merely forming a mental image of what a painting represents, particularly since no specific mental image is required for one to count as imagining seeing something in Walton's sense.

should be thought of as involving an imaginative counterpart, whilst accepting that one can imagine seeing things in Walton's sense (and, as would be more likely, the reverse of this).

In other words, just because we introduce an imaginative counterpart, this does not necessarily mean we have to introduce one in the sense of a state that is under the control of the will. We will now consider how this point affects the case for introducing a counterpart to the emotions.

### **1.5 Emotion and Imagination**

The emotions have been of great interest to philosophers who have considered our engagement with fictions and the workings of the imagination. This is because the relationship between our emotions and our imaginings is thought to give rise to what is often called the 'paradox of fiction'.

This paradox arises due to the intuitive plausibility of three contradictory claims (Radford 1975, Walton 1978, Gendler & Kovakovich 2006). The first is that we often appear to exhibit emotional responses to works of fiction and describe ourselves as such. We speak of 'pitying' Anna Karenina or 'admiring' Superman, and, when watching horror movies, we often recoil as if we fear the on-screen monster(s).

The second claim is that we do not generally believe fictions to be real. As we saw in our discussions of fictional truth and propositional imaginings, when we engage with fictions, we are best thought of as imagining that there is a person called Anna Karenina, a hero called Superman, and so on.

The third claim is that our emotions are subject to a 'coordination condition' (Gendler & Kovakovich 2006, p. 241). In order to feel an emotion towards something, we ordinarily need to believe that it is real (e.g. it would seem odd if I told someone I felt angry because my sister had stolen my hat, when, as a matter of fact, I don't have a sister). This condition conflicts with the first two claims, since we know that fictional characters aren't real, and yet we appear to have affective responses to their trials and tribulations.

Philosophers have attempted to solve this paradox by rejecting (or modifying) one of the three claims, or by simply accepting the paradox and arguing that our emotional responses to fictions are irrational (Radford 1975, pp. 78-79). For present purposes, I am going to focus on only one solution to the paradox: Walton's suggestion that we feel quasi-emotions towards fictional characters rather than emotions *simpliciter* (1978, 1990: Chs. 5 and 7), which is a solution that seeks to deny the first claim (that we have emotional responses to works of fiction).

Walton's account naturally follows from his make-believe theory of pretence and his motivated by an example which runs as follows (Walton 1978, p. 5): suppose there is a moviegoer called Charles, who is watching a film about a terrible slime that is gobbling up the denizens of London. Having gone on one of its many rampages, the slime turns to the camera, raises a single beady eye from its mucous body, and fixes its gaze directly on Charles. Charles, upon seeing this, yelps, moves back in his seat, clutches his arm rests and shouts 'watch out, it's coming!'. After the film, when prompted, Charles also reports that he was 'terrified' of the slime.

Walton's starting question is whether we should accept this report at face value (Walton 1978, p. 5). On his theory of make-believe, it is clear we have reason to be wary of taking Charles's claim literally. If Charles said after the film, 'I saw a slime', we would interpret him as saying, '\*I saw the slime\*'. Likewise, if he told us about the contents of the story in a propositional way ('That slime attacked London'), we would interpret him as referring to his propositional imaginings, rather than to his actual beliefs. Walton suggests the case is the same for reports about his emotions: we should interpret Charles as saying, '\*I was terrified of the slime\*' – he is expressing what is fictional and not what is true.

One might propose that in this sort of case Charles fears that '\*the slime will attack\*' with this also making it true that '\*Charles fears the slime will attack\*'. As Evans (1980, p. 357) notes, however, it is not clear that we can move from '\*X fears that the slime will attack\*' to 'X fears \*that the slime will attack\*'. The latter suggests that X has a genuine fear of a fictional slime, whereas the former leaves open the possibility that merely an imaginative counterpart to

fear is involved.

Walton (1978, p. 6) proposes that in this case we should indeed introduce such a counterpart and say that Charles *quasi-fears* the slime. However, this is not supposed to be an imaginative counterpart along the lines of forming a mental image or entertaining a proposition at will. The notion of a 'quasi-emotion' is more in line with the notion of imagining seeing ships when one looks at a painting. As we noted in the previous section, allowing that this is possible does not force us to accept that we can have emotion-like imaginings that are under the control of the will.

This distinction is essential to bear in mind, since some philosophers have expressed scepticism about Walton's view precisely because they think it is hard to make sense of 'imagining fearing' something etc., in the sense of imagining this at will (Carroll 1990, p. 74). If we can maintain that there is a sense of imagining fearing that doesn't have to be subject to the will, we can sidestep this sort of worry (Neill 1993, p. 49). Bearing this in mind, we should also note that Walton does not want to make it the case that Charles decides to act as if he were afraid of the slime. As we noted earlier, Walton's talk of 'pretend' should be interpreted as referring to *spontaneous* imaginative responses, rather than *deliberate* ones (Walton 1990, pp. 13-16).

The core of Walton's proposal is that Charles does in fact feel the characteristic bodily changes that accompany an episode of genuine fear, but with these changes only constituting quasi-fear. This is a case of real world feelings making it fictionally true that such-and-such is the case.

But why think these bodily changes merely constitute quasi-fear? For Walton, the reason why these bodily changes fail to constitute genuine fear is because of the connection between emotions, beliefs and motivation. He argues that genuine fear must coincide with a belief that one is in danger, and must also motivate us to perform actions to ameliorate the dangerous situation (Walton 1978, pp. 6-10).

In Walton's example, it is clear Charles does not believe that the slime



threatens his life. If Charles did genuinely fear imminent attack from a rampaging slime, then presumably he would take steps to avoid this – he would hopefully leave the cinema and probably call the police, etc. Walton suggests that ‘fear’ stripped of this sort of motivational role and a belief that one is in danger should not be described as genuine fear, and so he finds it more appropriate to call it quasi-fear.

Again, this does not mean that Charles has decided to pretend to be scared since one cannot simply decide to quasi-fear something. This helps to explain why badly produced films, such as the real film *The Green Slime*, do not manage to produce fear-like responses in their audiences, and why criticisms of Walton’s position along these lines won’t work (see Carroll 1991 for this criticism and Walton 1991 for this sort of response).

This point is also demonstrated by some video games aimed at children.<sup>6</sup> For example, in Nintendo’s *Kirby* series, the player controls the titular pink avatar ‘Kirby’, who sucks up enemies and swallows them to absorb their powers. Now, in many films and games, characters that eat others can cause fear/quasi-fear. However, in these games, no such response is present. It seems intuitive to hold that to engender such a response, the games would have to reflect more on the terrible fate of those devoured by Kirby. In other words, how a fiction presents itself plays an important role in establishing how we respond to it, and this point holds regardless of whether we fear or quasi-fear fictional entities.

That being said, some philosophers remain suspicious of quasi-emotions. For example, one might think that a state being properly described as ‘fear’

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<sup>6</sup> I am assuming here that video games count as fictions. As Meskin and Robson (2012) argue, video games seem to count as fictions in Walton’s sense, though Walton’s definition of fiction in terms of prescriptions to imagine is remarkably broad and does not neatly coincide with our everyday use of the word ‘fiction’. This leads Friend (2008, p. 154) to coin the term ‘Walt-fiction’ for the class that Walton calls ‘fiction’. That being said, I think that our everyday use of the word ‘fiction’ also allows for video games to count as works of fiction – at the very least they tend to be discussed along with films, plays and novels.

depends not on the subject's beliefs, but on the physiological reactions occurring in his body, a position associated with James (1884), and more recently Prinz (2004). If this sort of account of the emotions is correct, then quasi-emotions may well count as genuine emotions by definition.

However, even if one is sceptical about whether we need to introduce quasi-emotions on the basis of constraints on feeling a genuine emotion, there do seem to be many puzzling aspects to our emotional engagement with fiction, and children's emotional responses to their games of pretence (e.g. why do we choose to engage with fictions that we know will 'frighten' us?). A philosopher who sticks with genuine emotions will still need to make sense of these puzzles.

To make a broader point, we should note that when determining whether to introduce an imaginative counterpart, we must consider whether it helps to make sense of puzzles related to the functioning of the imagination, or whether it simply creates new problems and exacerbates existing ones.

This allows us to clarify the first and third main claims of this chapter. In relation to the first claim, we have once again seen that accepting that an imaginative counterpart to a mental state exists doesn't commit us to accepting that we can entertain said counterpart at will: an imaginative counterpart can also be introduced when real world feelings or actions constitute fictional feelings or actions.

In relation to the third claim, we have seen that when considering whether to introduce a counterpart we should bear in mind what puzzling cases the counterpart is meant to make sense of, and we should pay attention to the constraints that ought to be placed on being in a mental state to see if they force us to introduce an imaginative counterpart (e.g. it looks like fear might require a belief that the object of our fear exists, and this is violated in the fiction case).

So far we have seen that several imaginative counterparts can plausibly be introduced, but we should not begin our discussion of desire by presuming that a principle like 'X is a mental state, therefore X has an imaginative counterpart'

holds. In the next two sections, we will consider three mental states that do not appear to have imaginative counterparts: understanding in section 1.6, and thinking and amusement in section 1.7.

In relation to understanding, quasi-understanding is a proposed imaginative counterpart that has proven controversial. Consideration of why this is so will demonstrate how the introduction of a counterpart might be thought to deepen puzzles related to our engagement with fictions. This will allow us to clarify the third claim of this chapter.

Having seen why we should resist the introduction of quasi-understanding, we will then move on to consider thinking and amusement to bring out why in these cases philosophers have not been tempted to introduce an imaginative counterpart. The upshot of this discussion will be that thinking and amusement can both have an imaginary thing as their intentional object. This will allow us to defend the second key claim of this chapter: noting a case where a real-world action or feeling constitutes a fictional action or feeling is not sufficient for justifying the introduction of an imaginative counterpart.

## **1.6 Quasi-Understanding**

Evans (1982, p. 344) appears to introduce quasi-understanding – a counterpart state to genuine understanding that one is in when one reads/hears utterances occurring in works of fiction, or names that appear to ‘refer’ to fictional characters – as a way of avoiding difficulties his approach to names and meaning faces when considering sentences found within works of fiction.

If, as Evans holds, understanding a sentence involves knowing its truth conditions, and understanding a proper name involves knowing the bearer of the name, then genuine understanding will be impossible in the case of fictional names and utterances. Since fictional names do not have bearers, and fictional utterances do not have truth conditions, it seems to follow that we cannot understand such names and utterances. He thus proposes that we ‘quasi-understand’ these names and utterances. As such, the justification for

introducing a counterpart here involves both strategies I noted in my third claim: noting constraints on genuine understanding, and noting a puzzling case where understanding seems to be involved. However, the problem with introducing this sort of counterpart is that it serves to deepen the mysteries related to our engagement with fictions (Sainsbury 1999, pp. 252-257). This is for at least three reasons.

Firstly, we don't ordinarily question whether we can genuinely understand sentences about fictions. This contrasts with the quasi-emotion case – though the introduction of quasi-emotions is controversial, questions about how we can feel pity for someone who doesn't exist, and why our fear of fictional slimes doesn't make us flee the cinema, are questions thoughtful observers of fiction might entertain. That is to say, that even if one rejects quasi-emotions, we still have to make sense of these puzzles.

Sainsbury (1999, p. 254) develops this issue by noting that our 'emotional' responses to fictions differ from paradigm emotional responses. Conversely, the sort of understanding involved with reading/hearing utterances about fictional characters appears to behave in the same way as paradigm cases of understanding. In light of this, it is not so clear that we must introduce quasi-understanding to deal with these sorts of cases, unless one is starting from a position where one is concerned with the truth conditions of sentences about fictions. Thus, the onus is on the one who introduces quasi-understanding to show us we require its introduction by defending the constraints they have placed on genuine understanding.

The second difficulty is that the notion of quasi-understanding introduces an odd disconnect between the state someone is in and their awareness of whether the fiction they are engaging with is real or not. In the case of the emotions, if one thought the slime bearing down on them was real, and then discovered it was merely fictional, it is likely that they would cease to genuinely fear the slime upon coming to this realisation.

On the other hand, in the case of quasi-understanding it appears that if someone mistook a fictive utterance for a genuine utterance, and then came to

learn of its fictional status, they would not move from understanding the utterance to quasi-understanding the utterance: they would learn they only quasi-understood the utterance all along. This is because whether an utterance is understood or quasi-understood appears to depend not on whether the reader knows the sentence is fictional, but on whether the sentence is in fact fictional. On the other hand, whether one feels a real or quasi-emotion will depend on whether they are aware that the fiction they are engaging with is fictional.

Now, one might think this consequence is acceptable if one holds that whether the hearer of an utterance understands it depends on external factors, but we also face a question as to where to draw the line between understanding and quasi-understanding.

For example, many fictions contain statements of fact, or statements that are partly factual and partly fictional, such as sentences about real places, but which make reference to fictional persons who live there. Do we understand the parts about real locations or merely quasi-understand them? Likewise, if a fiction mentions a real street, and a non-existent house on the street, do we only quasi-understand where the house is located? If we propose that we straightforwardly understand fictional sentences, it is easier to make sense of these sorts of cases.

A final issue concerns setting out what it would mean to quasi-understand a sentence. As we noted earlier, Evans is working with the sort of model where to understand what is meant by a sentence such as 'snow is white' is to know that this sentence is true if the thing denoted by 'snow' has the property designated by 'is white' (Davidson 1967).

Sainsbury (1999, p. 256) suggests that to account for how quasi-understanding is similar to genuine understanding we might employ a principle of the form:

*'If F(s has truth conditions) (the fiction has it that s has truth conditions) then s is capable of being quasi-understood.'*

However, Sainsbury notes this approach won't work because we might have a case where a fiction says something like: 'Alice came to the dragon's cave, and said the magic formula the friendly genie had given her, and which no human ear could understand: "erty up asd"'. The dragon heard and realised that he was not to attack Alice.' (Sainsbury 1999, p. 256).

In this case, 'erty up asd' will have truth conditions in the fiction, and indeed, it is part of the pretence that dragons can understand this sentence, but this does not mean that a reader will be able to 'quasi-understand' this sentence (nor can they understand it). Why this is so can be explained if one denies the possibility of quasi-understanding something. If understanding behaves the same way in real life and in fiction, then we will fail to understand gobbledygook when it appears in fiction as we would in real life.

With the introduction of quasi-understanding, this issue is harder to deal with since the defender of quasi-understanding will have to find a way of cashing out the notion that shows it to be similar to genuine understanding but avoids entailing that we should understand any sentence that has truth conditions within the scope of a fiction.

Bearing these issues in mind it seems we should resist the introduction of quasi-understanding. However, this case has helped to clarify our third central claim by giving us an example of a counterpart that serves to only deepen puzzles related to our engagement with fiction, even though one might hold that we can identify constraints on genuine understanding. To deal with this sort of case, it looks like the solution is to develop a more nuanced account of understanding, rather than introducing a counterpart to understanding.

Before applying these considerations to desire, we will discuss thinking and amusement, since these two mental states do not appear to have an imaginative counterpart and philosophers have not been tempted to introduce one. This will help to bring out the reasons we have for denying that a given mental state has an imaginative counterpart, and will allow us to clarify the second main claim of this chapter.

## 1.7 Thinking & Amusement

To begin, we should consider why thinking, in the sense of ‘thinking about *P*’, does not have an imaginative counterpart. A common intuition, recently defended by Crane (2013: Ch. 1), is that a thought can have something that doesn’t exist as its intentional object: we can think about things that exist, like David Cameron, and things that don’t exist, like Pegasus.

One might maintain that it’s odd to suppose that we can think about things that don’t exist, perhaps because thinking about something must involve some sort of real relation between the thought and the object being thought about. That being said, proposing that we can ‘something-like-think’ about non-existent things does not resolve the worry here: we can still question why we can ‘something-like-think’ about things that don’t exist. In other words, the introduction of a counterpart here would not help to solve puzzles about the nature of thinking.

Furthermore, it is also hard to see what the difference between thinking and thinking-like imagining would consist in. If one allowed that we could have thinking-like imaginings about Harry Potter, but denied we could think about Harry Potter, this would be puzzling, since it looks like having thinking-like imaginings about Harry Potter will entail thinking about Harry Potter in some sense. It is made true that someone is thinking about something by their mere act of thinking about something, and thinking-like imaginings, whatever they might be, would also constitute thinking about something.

Or, to put the point in terms of my third claim, there are no constraints on what it takes to count as ‘thinking about something’ that force us to introduce an imaginative counterpart to thinking. So, we have an example here of a mental state where there are no obvious constraints on being in said mental state that drive us towards introducing an imaginative counterpart, nor any puzzles that are solved by introducing a counterpart.

There is at least one other example of a mental state that does not appear to

have an imaginative counterpart: amusement<sup>7</sup>. Currie and Ravenscroft (2002, pp. 189-190) note that we ordinarily take it to be the case that fictional things can be the intentional objects of our amusement (e.g. we can be amused by Bugs Bunny) and that we also allow that we can be amused by things we imagine (e.g. we can be amused by the contents of a daydream).

As such, it looks like we do not need to introduce an imaginative counterpart to amusement. Unlike the case of emotions like fear, we do not feel an obvious pressure to resist the suggestion that we can be genuinely amused by fictional things, since something known to be fictional being the object of your amusement doesn't appear to be problematic, and *prima facie*, there are no constraints on amusement that force the introduction of a counterpart.

Indeed, drawing on Walton (1994, pp. 48-49), we can note that it is unclear what being 'quasi-amused' would involve. For example, we can imagine ourselves being amused by something, but this seems to be forming a belief-like imagining that you are amused, rather than an imagining with amusement-like character. And, since it appears the contents of daydreams can amuse us, imagining something amusing then feeling amused appears to be a case of being amused by something you imagine, not an example of amusement-like imagining.

Of course, it might be fictionally true that one is amused on Walton's account of our engagement with fiction. When watching *Looney Tunes* it will be true that \*I am amused\*, but this will be because I am actually amused by something fictional (it will be true that I am amused by \*P\*), not because I am in a state of quasi-amusement. This contrast with emotions like fear, where it is usually the case that \*I am scared of P\* is true but I am scared that \*P\* is false. This brings out the second central claim of this chapter: noting a case where a

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<sup>7</sup> One might think amusement is another example of an emotion, and that it should have been treated in our discussion of quasi-emotions. However, Walton does not have to be taken as claiming that all emotions have an imaginative counterpart, so even if amusement is an emotion and doesn't have a counterpart this is not problematic for Walton's approach.



real world action or feeling constitutes a fictional action or feeling does not provide sufficient justification for introducing an imaginative counterpart.

However, the case for denying that amusement has an imaginative counterpart may not be as clear as Currie and Ravenscroft suppose. Imagine a situation where a friend is telling you an anecdote about their sister, who is somewhat eccentric and always wears socks on her hands but walks around barefoot. One day, he tells you he jokingly asked his sister why she doesn't put gloves on her feet and she responded with a curt 'because that would just be weird'. You might be amused by this anecdote and proceed to laugh. As such, we can describe this as an example of being amused by your friend's sister.

Now, suppose your friend informs you that in fact he does not have a sister: the anecdote was entirely fictional. This seems to put pressure on the suggestion that his sister amused you. How could his sister have amused you when she doesn't even exist?<sup>8</sup>

An initial response we could offer here would be to suggest that his sister never amused you in the first place; perhaps you were amused by the *story* about her. In other words, we can propose that the object of your amusement wasn't the (non-existent) sister but the anecdote itself. For example, we could note that you might have responded to the anecdote by saying 'that was a funny story!' or words to that effect. However, this simplifies the case – you also might have responded by saying 'your sister sounds hilarious!', making it sound as if she were indeed the object of your amusement.

There are at least two further responses one can give to this case to maintain that we have no reason to introduce an imaginative counterpart to amusement. The first is to note that 'X amuses Y' or 'X is amused by Y' is ambiguous between an intentional and causal reading. We might mean that X's amusement has Y as its intentional object, or we might be suggesting that Y causes X's amusement. The second is to note that it is unclear whether an example like this ought to lead us to introduce 'quasi-amusement' in the way

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<sup>8</sup> I owe this example to Aaron Meskin.

similar examples are thought to motivate quasi-fear etc. This is because there are several discontinuities between this case and the examples that motivate the introduction of quasi-emotions like quasi-fear.

Before we push this second response, we should consider how to construct a response to this case based on the distinction between the causal and intentional sense of being amused by something. As we already noted, the suggestion that a state of amusement can have a non-existent thing as its intentional object doesn't appear to be obviously problematic. We generally take it that our amusement can have Bugs Bunny and other fictional entities as its intentional object, and we do not as of yet have a reason why we ought to reject this intuitive idea.

In the case of fear, we resist this suggestion because it seems being a genuine object of fear requires you to believe the object exists: we think there is something strange about holding that X fears something that is known to be non-existent. On the other hand, in the case of amusement it seems something can be the object of our amusement regardless of whether we believe it is real or not: we do not take it as strange to hold that X is amused by something known to be non-existent.

However, we face a problem when we consider the causal notion of being amused by something, and this notion is perhaps implicit in the example of the made-up sister. To be the cause of a state of amusement, it appears an object must have some sort of link to reality. There is something puzzling about the idea of someone's non-existent sister *causing* you to be amused. This involves a real causal relation, and is ruled out in the same way that someone's non-existent sister cannot tickle you.

However, we can respond to this worry by returning to the distinction between being amused by a story and being amused by a character. In the present case, we could suggest that your amusement was caused by the story itself, even though your amusement had the sister as its intentional object. Indeed, we could make a similar suggestion to explain other cases where one is amused by a story, since these issues around causality will remain when we say our

amusement is caused by a known to be non-existent character like Bugs Bunny.

We can thus propose that in general when a non-existent thing amuses us, this amusement is caused by a fiction, but still has the non-existent thing as its intentional object. To justify the introduction of an imaginative counterpart, we would have to find a reason to deny that a state of amusement can have a non-existent thing as its intentional object. But, as we noted, it is not clear that amusement should be subject to this sort of constraint.

We can back up this worry by returning to the second sort of response we can make, noting the discontinuities between this case and the case of emotions like fear. In the fear case, we noted that it seems odd to describe someone as scared by something they know to be non-existent. This is due to the fact that a non-existent thing being the intentional object of an episode of fear seems puzzling, and because of the constraints on fear related to motivation and belief.

With amusement it's trickier to make this sort of case for a counterpart because there is no clear motivational role associated with amusement, nor any belief-based constraints. Indeed, if, after revealing that his sister was made up, your friend proceeded to tell you further tales about her fictional misadventures you might still be amused, and it is not clear why we should hold that this 'amusement' differs from the amusement you would have if his sister were real.

This point can be reinforced by noting what would happen to your 'fear' as compared to your 'amusement' in a case where you went from believing something was fictional to realising it was real. Suppose you are sitting in a cinema in London and think you are watching a fictional green slime attack the denizens of the street situated just outside the cinema. In this sort of case, you will feel quasi-fear and yelp whilst refraining from calling the police or running (and so on). But suppose you realise that in fact you are not currently being presented with a work of fiction. There really is a green slime attacking the street just outside the cinema (perhaps the cinema screen was linked up to a series of news cameras filming the slime's advances). At this point there will be

a marked change in your actions and you will probably attempt to flee the cinema.

In the amusement case this sort of change will not occur. If you are amused by what you thought was a fictional tale about two clumsy individuals and then realise the individuals are real, it seems you can continue to be amused by them, and it doesn't look like your actions or behaviour will necessarily change. That being said, the case may not be so simple here. For example, suppose Sacha Baron Cohen's character Borat were a real individual rather than a fictional one. If you thought he was a fictional character you might laugh at his comments, but upon realising he genuinely held said views you would probably not be amused by his overt sexism and racism.

However, in this case it is not that you would move from being quasi-amused to amused, as the cinemagoer went from quasi-fear to fear, you would simply cease to be amused. This suggests that an explanation of this sort of case will involve looking into why we find certain things funny, fictional or otherwise, and will not be explained by introducing an imaginative counterpart to amusement.

As such, we can make sense of the sister case by noting the distinction between being the cause of an episode of amusement and being the intentional object of an episode of amusement, and by noting that it is unclear what the difference is supposed to be between being amused by something real and being amused by something fictional.

Thus, we now have two examples of mental states that do not have imaginative counterparts. There are no clear constraints on amusement and thinking that necessitate the introduction of counterparts, and the introduction of counterparts does not appear to be necessary to solve puzzles.

To conclude this chapter, we can now turn our attention to desire and, in line with my third claim, consider whether there are any constraints on desires that necessitate the introduction of an imaginative counterpart I will argue that the constraints on something being a genuine desire are unclear, and so to

determine whether there is a need to introduce an imaginative counterpart to desire we will have to look at cases where said counterpart is said to resolve puzzles.

## 1.8 Imaginary Desires

As my first claim notes, there are at least two notions of imaginative counterparts: one's like propositional imaginings that are under the control of the will, and those like quasi-emotions that are not. With desire, it seems an initial point to make is that it is harder to defend the introduction of imaginary desires that one can entertain at will.

For example, Goldie (2005, pp. 132-133) notes it is difficult to make sense of how one can imagine desiring a mud pie if one does not find mud pies desirable in reality. Perhaps we can imagine something we actually find desirable (like an apple pie) and then imagine having similar feelings about a mud pie, but this doesn't appear to be quite the same imaginative act as imagining desiring a mud pie, i.e. having an imaginary desire directed at the pies muddy contents and dirty crust, and desiring it because it possesses these properties.

Likewise, it is also unclear how to imagine desiring to perform morally deviant actions, like murders. For example, it will not do to simply imagine the sort of actions these desires might lead us to, nor to imagine *that* we have such desires. The former merely involves imagining acting in certain ways, and the latter merely involves imagining in a belief-like way having a certain desire, not imagining desiring something.

However, this only demonstrates that we may not be able to imagine desiring X when we don't actually desire X. This point doesn't count against an ability to imagine desiring X if one does actually desire X. For example, one might hold that we can imagine desiring things we don't *currently* desire but might desire in the future, like imagining desiring a chocolate cake when we don't feel hungry enough to actually eat one. That being said, these sorts of cases may only show that we can desire things we imagine, as opposed to that we can

imagine desiring things, similar to how in the amusement case it looked like we could be amused by what we imagined but it wasn't clear that we could be imaginarily amused.

However, even if an imaginative counterpart to desire entirely subject to the will may be unappealing, there is still the possibility of a form of 'imaginary desires' that behaves more like quasi-emotions, where real world feelings or actions constitute having a fictional desire. Before we consider how such a counterpart might behave and how we might justify its introduction, we should firstly note an initial worry with introducing a desire-like form of imagining, which applies to both desire-like imaginings that resemble quasi-emotions and ones that resemble propositional imaginings.

We can bring out this worry by noting that our desires are often said to have a 'world to mind' fit. Roughly, we want the world to conform to our desires. Beliefs, on the other hand, are usually said to have a 'mind to world' fit. Our beliefs aim at truth, and reflect how the world is in fact. Our desires reflect how we want the world to be.

As we discussed in section 1.3, part of the need for belief-like imaginings is to allow for states like belief that do not fit the world in a strict sense. With desire, the case is trickier, since we will often desire for the world to be a way that it is not at present. It is therefore unclear whether we need to introduce an imaginative counterpart to desire, since we already allow in some sense for desires to relate to things that are not 'real'.

Another way of putting this point is that, as in the case of amusement, it is not clear that we can distinguish between I want<sup>9</sup> \**P*\* and \*I want *P*\*. The first can be read as: 'I want it to be the case that *P* is fictionally true', the second as 'it is fictionally true that I want *P*'. In both cases, it looks like *P* being fictionally true will satisfy the desire. Desires reflect what we want to true of the world and in both cases the desire we have cited appears to call for the same state of affairs

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<sup>9</sup> To streamline discussion, I am going to follow Schroeder (2004, pp. 4-5), and use 'want' and 'desire' interchangeably.

to obtain. Furthermore, it is unclear why we should hold that we can't genuinely desire that \*P\*, since it looks like desires can have something non-existent as their intentional object, since, as we just noted, desires will often relate to states of affairs we want to obtain, not states of affairs that do obtain.

Moving on from this initial worry, we should now consider how imaginary desires, even when not under the control of the will, might behave, and what constraints should be placed on genuine desires. To do this, we should consider how to define desire. Two common approaches to defining desire involve noting the motivational role of desire (Smith 1987) and the relation between pleasure and desire (Strawson 1994).

On the first approach, we might say that to desire something is to be motivated to perform actions that will bring about that something. In other words, to use Schroeder's (2009) formulation of this position, which is associated with Smith (1987):

*'For an organism to desire P is for the organism to be disposed to act so as to bring about P'*

This is sometimes called the 'Humean' view of motivation, which holds that all actions are motivated by desires, and that desires are essentially motivating. However, both these claims have been viewed as problematic. In the first instance, one might hold that things other than desires can motivate us, for example reflexes, or other conative attitudes like hopes.

Moreover, in relation to the second tenet of the Humean picture, it seems that not all desires are essentially motivational. Mele (1995, p. 394) gives the example of a desire that your friend's plane leave on time (with you forming this desire after the time the plane was supposed to leave). That being said, a proponent of the Humean view can respond to this sort of case by proposing that with such desires if you *could* perform an action that led to the event occurring, you would.

Regardless of whether or not desires are essentially motivational, we should

still consider how an imaginative counterpart to desire would behave if we accepted that desires were motivational. If one thinks this is the correct picture of desire, then when asking whether desire has an imaginative counterpart, we can be interpreted as asking one of two things. We might be asking whether there are mental states that are ‘quasi-motivational’ (i.e. that motivate us, just not in quite the same way as our ordinary desires), or we might be asking whether there are mental states that fail to motivate us but still seem to be similar to desires.

Both these approaches are problematic. With the first option, it is unclear what would constitute quasi-motivation. Presumably, being motivated to do something simply entails being disposed to perform actions to bring about that something: it is unclear what sort of example would involve performing an action that is only quasi-motivated.

The second sort of approach is also puzzling, since we are setting out the nature of desire in terms of its motivational role it is unclear why a state stripped of this role could be properly described as desire-like. With belief and its counterpart, we could note the way both states preserve inferences, etc., to set out how the two were similar, but on the present picture of desire we do not have these sorts of features to refer to. This is because we have said nothing about how desires behave beyond the fact that they dispose us to perform actions to bring about their satisfaction.

Since the relation between desire and motivation is unclear, we might instead propose that desire is essentially connected to pleasure. On this view associated with Strawson (1994) (using a formulation from Schroeder (2009)):

*‘For an organism to desire P is for the organism to be disposed to take pleasure in it seeming that P and displeasure in it seeming that not-P’*

Intuitively, this idea is plausible since, as we just noted, some desires do not appear to have an obvious motivational role. For example, one might desire world peace, but not take any active steps towards achieving this goal. On the other hand, if world peace begins to obtain, then it is intuitive to think that the



agent will feel pleasure upon learning of the peaceful world he now resides in. However, this view of the nature of desire is not without its critics. For one thing, it is unclear whether someone experiencing pleasure upon a state of affairs obtaining always means that they desired said state of affairs., Schroeder (2004, pp. 31-32) gives the example of a depressed man who feels no pleasure when his children are successful, but still attests to desiring their success.

If this account of desire is correct, then the present question about whether desire has an imaginative counterpart becomes very different. Now, we need to ask whether there is a state that is 'quasi-pleasurable', or whether there are mental states that are similar to desires but do not cause us to feel pleasure upon their satisfaction.

In the first instance, it strikes me that the idea of something being quasi-pleasurable is puzzling. Pleasure appears similar to amusement in there being no obvious sense in which it could have an imaginative counterpart. For example, if one imagines something they find pleasurable, it is hard to see why this would lead to them feeling quasi-pleasure as opposed to simply pleasure (Moran 1994, pp. 93-94). Indeed, if one has a feeling of pleasure when engaging with a fiction, it is hard to see when this feeling should be properly described as merely quasi-pleasure, since it looks like pleasure can have something fictional as its intentional object, and can be caused by works of fiction.

In the second instance, if one thinks that what distinguishes desire-like states from genuine desires is that desire-like states do not lead us to feel pleasure upon their satisfaction, then it is unclear in what sense such states can be properly described as desire-like.

These difficulties with attempting to define the core feature of desire may be because, as Martin (unpublished, pp. 30-31) suggests, there are numerous mental states that the word 'desire' picks out, or it may be that desires have multiple 'faces', and that our various desires reflect these faces to differing extents (Schroeder 2004).

Bearing this in mind, a final approach to justifying the introduction of an imaginative counterpart to desire would be to give a complex account of desire, which suggests that some (or all) of the elements we have discussed should be part of our account. On this sort of cluster view, we might attempt to give a functional definition of desire by holding that desires are mental states that relate to pleasure, motivation, our preferences, and perhaps have a certain phenomenology etc.

In turn, we can then propose that desire-like imaginings are mental states that lack one or more of these features and are thus similar to desires but still distinct in terms of functional role. In other words, we can take the approach used to introduce an imaginative counterpart to belief to justify the introduction of desire-like imaginings.

However, the way to do this will not be as clear-cut as in the belief case. In the belief case philosophers agree that there are features beliefs and propositional imaginings tend to share (e.g. the way they preserve inferential links) and features they don't tend to share (e.g. propositional imaginings being subject to the will). With desires and desire-like imaginings the case will be more complex.

In mindreading, for example, desire-like imaginings are supposed to be unlike desires in that they don't motivate us, and this is also supposed to be the case for the desire-like imaginings that are involved in our engagement with fictions. However, in the pretend play case, desire-like imaginings are supposed to motivate children to perform various actions.

As such, the story cannot be as simple as saying 'desire-like imaginings share all the features of desire except for X' since the feature (or features) they are meant to lack will differ in each activity that they are supposed to play a role in. This will in turn make it difficult to draw the line between a desire-like imagining and a desire that lacks a certain feature (e.g. a desire with no motivational role and a desire that is really a desire-like imagining because it doesn't motivate us).

The key point to take from this starting discussion, is that attempting to set specific constraints on what a desire is and how they behave cannot neatly force the introduction of an imaginative counterpart to desire independently of considering problem cases, since it is unclear what constraints ought to be placed on our desires. Over the next two chapters, my primary focus will thus be on whether the introduction of desire-like imaginings helps us to make sense of puzzles that arise when we suppose that genuine desires are involved in imagination-based activities like pretend play and our engagement with fictions.

## **1.9 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, we have seen that philosophers have typically accepted that some mental states have imaginative counterparts, but how these counterparts are supposed to behave, and which states have counterparts, are controversial issues. We have also established three claims that allow us to adjudicate whether desire has an imaginative counterpart.

Imaginative counterparts to belief and seeing are typically accepted, and fit what we might think of as the ‘standard’ conception of an imaginative counterpart in that they are both subject to the will. In other cases, such as quasi-emotions, this link to the will is severed and we are said to end up in these counterpart states in a more automatic way, and cannot enter into said states at will. That there are these two sorts of counterparts was the first central claim of this chapter.

By considering understanding, thinking and amusement, we also saw that some mental states do not appear to have imaginative counterparts and that we should not presume a principle like ‘X is a mental state therefore X has an imaginative counterpart’ is valid. And, we saw that it being made fictional that one is in a mental state by a real world behaviour is not sufficient to ground the introduction of an imaginative counterpart, the second central claim of this chapter.

Finally, by considering exactly how an imaginative counterpart to desire would

behave, we have seen that it is unclear what constraints are operative on our ordinary desires. In line with the third central claim of this chapter, this rules out introducing a counterpart to desire based solely on noting constraints on desiring and we will have to focus on puzzling cases where desire and imagination appear to interact to establish whether desire has an imaginative counterpart. As such, we will now consider the first two problem cases – mindreading and pretend play – to see whether introducing an imaginative counterpart to desire in these cases helps to resolve puzzling aspects of these activities.

## Chapter 2: Mindreading and Pretend Play

### 2.1 Introduction

Having seen that attempting to place constraints on desires is unlikely to prove fruitful in settling debates about the existence of desire-like imaginings, we can now turn to consider two specific problem cases that have been suggested by philosophers to necessitate the introduction of an imaginative counterpart to desire: mindreading and pretend play.

In the case of mindreading, simulation theorists like Gordon (1986) and Goldman (1989) have argued that in order to predict and explain the actions of others we must simulate their mental states, specifically their beliefs and desires. As such, a notion of simulated beliefs and simulated desires has been introduced to make sense of mindreading, and philosophers such as Currie (1995, pp. 157-160) have suggested that these simulated beliefs and desires are in fact belief-like imaginings and desire-like imaginings.

I will argue that the introduction of simulated desires is problematic, since these desire-like states appear to be non-motivational and entirely subject to the will, which is puzzling from a phenomenological perspective, and also entails that simulated desires are distinct from the counterpart involved in pretend play and our engagement with fictions. We thus cannot justify their introduction in the mindreading case on the grounds that desire-like imaginings already play a role in fiction and pretend play.

In the case of pretend play, our difficulty stems from the fact that it is hard to specify what sorts of desires motivate children to engage in games of pretence. Desires specified in terms of the game (e.g. the child desires to bark at passers-by) cast the child as having a limited grasp on the distinction between the real and the imaginary, and desires specified in terms of the actions the child is performing appear to leave out why the child is engaging in their game of pretend (e.g. the child desires to point his finger at his sister and say 'bang').

As such, philosophers such as Velleman (2000) and Doggett and Egan (2007) have suggested that an imaginative counterpart to desire is the motivational state that underpins pretend play. Against this, I will argue that the introduction of desire-like imaginings does not manage to resolve the crucial question of how children are able to relate their real world actions to their imaginary world, and that we are better served by supposing that children can have desires to make such-and-such *fictional*.

To begin this chapter, we will firstly consider how desire-like imaginings might relate to our mindreading abilities.

## **2.2 Mindreading and Desire**

We can begin by noting that humans are capable of ‘mindreading’. What this means is that we can predict and explain other persons’ actions, and ascribe mental states to them. For example, if I know that James’s favourite ice cream flavour is chocolate, and I see James head towards an ice cream kiosk, I am capable of predicting that James will choose chocolate ice cream if it is available. Likewise, I am able to ascribe various beliefs and desires to James in this scenario (e.g. a belief that there is chocolate ice cream at the kiosk, a desire for chocolate ice cream etc.) and thus explain why James chose the chocolate ice cream.

What underpins these abilities? Traditionally, there has been a debate between two views. Firstly, there is the theory-theory view, which suggests that humans possess a tacit theory of mind that contains information about how beliefs and desires combine to produce behaviour. For example, this tacit theory might elaborate on truisms like ‘people will perform actions to get what they want *ceteris paribus*’, or ‘people believe what they see *ceteris paribus*’ (Carruthers and Botterill 1999, p. 77-78).

Secondly, there is the simulation approach, which suggests that we are able to mindread because we have an ability to simulate the mental states of others by taking our decision-making systems ‘offline’ (Gordon 1986, Goldman 1989). On this picture, when I predict James’s actions I don’t deploy a theory of how beliefs and desires relate to action, instead I take on in a ‘pretend’ way James’s

beliefs and desires (e.g. a pretend belief that chocolate ice cream is nearby and a pretend desire for chocolate ice cream).

For present purposes, it is unnecessary to adjudicate on this debate. Instead, we need to consider why simulation theorists like Currie and Ravenscroft (2002, Ch.3) think an explanation of mindreading in terms of simulation necessitates the introduction of an imaginative counterpart to desire.

A typical argument for introducing simulated desires might run something like this:

P1: We predict and explain other persons' actions by simulating their mental states.

P2: The mental states that cause people's actions are their beliefs and desires.

P3 (from P1 and P2): We are able to simulate others persons' beliefs and desires.

P4: A simulated mental state is an imaginative counterpart to said mental state.

C: Simulated beliefs and desires are imaginative counterparts to beliefs and desires.

For now, we can avoid attacking P1 directly, since we do not have space to assess the relative benefits of simulation vs. theory-theory. P2 reflects the Humean view that all actions can be explained in terms of belief-desire pairs. This is common ground between participants in the mindreading debate, so I will accept this premise. For present purposes we should thus assess P3 and P4.

We can begin by noting in relation to P3 that we can explain mindreading without needing to introduce simulated desires. As the theory-theorist

Carruthers (2003) notes, it is undoubtedly correct that we must pay attention to peoples' desires in order to predict their behaviour, but dealing with this issue does not necessarily require introducing an imaginative counterpart to desire.

For example, we may be able to predict others' actions by forming belief-like imaginings with contents that mimic the target's beliefs and desires (in the case of James and his ice cream, an imagining *that* I believe chocolate ice cream is nearby and an imagining *that* I desire chocolate ice cream), or by forming beliefs about the target's beliefs and desires.

On the first approach, we may still predict James's actions by simulating his belief that there is ice cream nearby, but we don't need to similarly simulate his desires: we just need to form a belief-like imagining with content related to wanting chocolate ice cream. On the second approach we embrace something like a theory-theory approach and thus end up rejecting P1.

We can defend a move to these sorts of positions with an argument offered by Goldie (2004, pp. 334-335). Goldie notes that if simulation theory is the correct account of our mindreading abilities, then we have to ask how we know which desires to simulate in order to predict and explain the actions of others. Often an individual will have numerous competing desires, and we will need a way of determining which are strongest in order to predict the action they will actually perform. But how one would do this solely by simulating is unclear, and so it looks like an element of theory about desires will need to enter into the picture to enable us to mindread successfully.

However, one might hold that these alternate explanations are not as plausible as one involving simulated desires. As such, we should now question P4 by considering whether 'simulated' desires are best thought of as an imaginative counterpart to desire and whether the notion of a simulated desire is plausible. One way to do this is by returning to the question from section 1.8 of how desire-like imaginings are supposed to behave.

In the present case, simulated desires are said to not be real desires because



they do not reflect our actual preferences about the world, and they don't motivate us to perform any actions. When I 'simulate' James's mental states, I won't necessarily end up wanting chocolate ice cream for myself, nor will I necessarily be motivated to buy some

Furthermore, it looks like we can entertain simulated desires at will: we are able to predict and explain the actions of persons with all kinds of desires we might never have, and to explain this proficiency we will have to allow that we can take on simulated desires that depart radically from our own desires. It is clear then, that genuine desires cannot make sense of mindreading. Even with no specific account of desire in mind it looks like it will be impossible to argue that simulated desires are just a species of desire.

However, even if genuine desires cannot explain mindreading, we still have reason to be sceptical of the idea that 'simulated desires' are desire-like in character and thus best thought of as an imaginative counterpart to desire. This is because, as we noted in section 1.8, there are some cases where it is hard to make sense of what it would be like to imagine desiring something we don't find desirable in reality.

For example, if I wish to predict the actions of someone who loves chocolate ice cream, but I happen to find chocolate ice cream revolting, it is unclear what it would be like for me to form a simulated desire for chocolate ice cream, assuming this simulated desire must be desire-like in character. Similarly one could question how to simulate the desires of someone who is jealous of his wife's lover. We can imagine having desires that lead to jealousy and longing, but it is unclear how to simulate specific desires about the man's wife if we don't also have desires related to her.

Bearing these phenomenological worries in mind, debates about how desire relates to our mindreading abilities are unlikely to settle whether desire has an imaginative counterpart, unless one can give a clear account of how these simulated desires function and why they are best thought of as being an imaginative counterpart to desire.

That being said, one might think that if we can find reasons for introducing desire-like imaginings to explain pretend play or our engagement with fiction, then we can move to propose that desire-like imaginings play a role in mindreading, since they will be an accepted part of our cognitive architecture and deploying them in mindreading will give them a wider explanatory role. However, there are two related difficulties with making this sort of move.

The first can be seen by reminding ourselves that one reason for holding that the ‘desires’ involved in mindreading are simulated desires is that they do not motivate us to perform actions (otherwise, in the case of James and his ice cream, I would end up actually buying chocolate ice cream from the kiosk). But it looks like this sort of desire-like state cannot also play a role in pretence behaviour, since the counterpart involved in pretend play will have to motivate the real-world actions that children perform when engaging in games of pretence.

Likewise, the second difficulty is that the notion of an imaginative counterpart to desire involved in mindreading can’t be identical to the one that is introduced to explain our engagement with fictions. This is because the desire-like states involved in the fiction case are supposed to be automatic responses to narratives, not subject to the will.

For example, as Nichols (2004b, pp. 333-334) brings out, if when watching *Macbeth*<sup>10</sup> one could decide to entertain desire-like imaginings that had content related to Macbeth succeeding in his murderous quest for power, then it would be possible to have a very different experience of the play as compared to when we form desire-like imaginings related to Macbeth failing in his endeavours. However, it is not at all clear that we can vary our desire-like imaginings in order to have these different experiences. If the desire-like attitude we direct towards Macbeth and his goals is best thought of as being an imaginative counterpart to desire, then this counterpart is not subject to the will.

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<sup>10</sup> Nichols uses *Othello* in his example, but the rough structure of his example is the same as the one I lay out for *Macbeth*.

In the case of mindreading, however, we do not seem to face this sort of restriction. We are able to predict and explain how murderous usurpers will act, and this seems to imply that we can simulate desires to murder one's king etc., at will. As such, the notion of an imaginary desire at play in mindreading seems to be different to the one involved in our engagement with fiction.

Now, as we noted in relation to imagined seeing and my first claim in chapter 1, it is possible to propose that a mental state has two different sorts of imaginative counterpart – one subject to the will, and the other a more spontaneous response where real world feelings and actions constitute fictional feelings and actions. But these two types of imaginative counterpart are importantly distinct, and one can accept that one exists whilst denying that the other exists.

Furthermore, even if one accepts something like the cluster theory of desire we introduced in section 1.8, and thus allows for desire-like imaginings to behave in different ways in the various activities they are supposed to play a role in, we will still require a separate justification for their introduction in every case where their introduction is proposed. If we do not give separate arguments to justify the introduction of desire-like imaginings, we risk misclassifying desires that lack certain features as desire-like imaginings. In other words, we cannot solely rely on an argument based on the potentially wide explanatory role of desire-like imaginings to defend the introduction of simulated desires when explaining our mindreading abilities.

The upshot of this is that we will require a positive argument as to why we should introduce an imaginative counterpart to desire to explain our mindreading abilities, and this will involve defending a version of simulation theory that utilises simulated desires against both theory-theory approaches and versions of simulation theory that don't utilise simulated desires. We do not have the space to further assess the prospects of a simulation theory that relies on simulated desires, but we can note that there is still no consensus about whether simulation or theory forms the core of our mindreading abilities, nor about what role, if any, simulated desires should play in our account of mindreading (Nichols 2006, pp. 9-10).

Having seen why considering what underpins our mindreading abilities won't definitively establish the case for introducing an imaginative counterpart to desire, we should now turn to consider whether a stronger case can be made by reflecting on the sorts of mental states that motivate children's pretend play.

### **2.3 Pretend Play**

It has been widely noted that children often engage in what we can call 'pretence behaviour'. They will, for example, pretend that they are having tea parties with their toys and pour out imaginary cups of tea (Leslie 1994, p. 223).

For present purposes, we need concern ourselves only with a motivational question about pretend play. What motivates children to engage in pretence behaviour? By this, I do not mean to ask why children choose to engage in pretend play (a question that appears to demand some of sort of evolutionary answer), but instead to ask what combination of mental states motivates pretence behaviour.

As noted in section 1.8, the Humean view holds that all human actions can be explained in terms of, and are caused by, belief-desire pairs. If, for example, someone can be seen leaving their house with an umbrella, the Humean view will have it that they performed this action because they believe it is likely to rain and that they desire to not get wet (of course, other beliefs and desires may be at play here: one may believe it might rain etc.)

However, pretend play is a problem case for this sort of approach, as it is hard to specify what beliefs and desires underpin pretence behaviour. As such, it has been suggested that propositional imaginings have to play a role in explanations of pretence behaviour, either instead of, or in addition to, beliefs (Nichols and Stich 2000, 2003 Ch.1). On these sorts of views, children's pretend play is motivated either by beliefs and propositional imaginings combining with desires, or by propositional imaginings combining with desires.

However some philosophers, such as Velleman (2000 Ch.11) and Doggett and

Egan (2007) (henceforth D&E), have argued that we need to introduce an imaginative counterpart to desire to explain what motivates pretence behaviour. Thus on their views, we have propositional imaginings combining with 'wishes' (Velleman) or 'i-desires' (D&E).

To see why some philosophers hold that desire-like imaginings are needed to explain pretend play, I will firstly set out in more detail why it is hard to specify the desires and beliefs that underpin pretence behaviour, and why this leads us to a puzzle about the kinds of mental states that motivate pretend play.

## **2.4 Mad and Bad, or Sad?**

A young girl called Sarah is playing cops and robbers with her brother Harry. She is pretending to be the cop, and her brother is pretending to be the robber. During the game, Sarah runs up to her brother, holds out her index fingers, and shouts out: 'Bang you're dead!'. What motivated this action? As we noted, according to the Humean view, all actions can be explained in terms of belief-desire pairs. But what sort of belief-desire pair can explain Sarah's actions?

One option is specify the belief-desire pair in terms of the game, and another is to do so in terms of the actual world. These options are both problematic. The first of these options is what we can call the 'mad' or 'bad' option. This would be to say that Sarah desires to kill her brother and believes that she can satisfy this desire by holding out her index fingers and exclaiming: 'Bang you're dead!'.

This approach renders Sarah as both having a 'bad' desire, and also as mad because of how she seeks to bring about her desire. She is rendered bad because this approach portrays her as having the desire to kill her brother, and it is doubtful that she has this desire. For example, if after having said 'Bang you're dead!' her brother had a sudden heart attack and fell to the ground, this would presumably make Sarah very unhappy: it is unlikely that she genuinely desires her brother's death in this sort of case.

That being said, this problem of 'badness' does not apply to all cases of pretend

play. For example, Sarah may on another occasion pick up one of her dolls, dunk it into an empty basin, and exclaim that ‘Josie needs washing’. In this case, Sarah may well genuinely desire to wash her doll. Perhaps her mother has banned her from cleaning the doll, and if her mother saw her actions and then picked up the doll and washed it, this would satisfy Sarah’s desire.

But, the present explanation also construes Sarah as mad, and this worry applies to both the robber case and the doll case. This is because in addition to a desire to kill her brother, or wash her doll, we also have to ascribe to Sarah beliefs about how these desires are to be satisfied. However, we seem to be construing Sarah as mad and fundamentally confused about the reality/pretence distinction if we propose that she believes she can kill her brother by pointing her fingers and saying ‘Bang you’re dead!’ or that she can wash her doll by dunking it into an empty basin.<sup>11</sup>

To suggest that children are confused in this way is problematic, since there is a wide body of evidence that demonstrates children are relatively competent with the reality/pretence distinction. Indeed, work reported in Harris (2000, pp. 63-65) demonstrates that even children with imaginary friends are still capable of keeping track of the differences between real things and things they merely imagine, and of noting the sorts of things that real friends can do that imaginary friends cannot.

One move to improve the mad explanation is to introduce propositional imaginings. For example, we can propose that Sarah desires to shoot her brother and imagines that she can achieve this result by shooting him (i.e. pointing her fingers and saying ‘bang you’re dead!'). In so doing, we can propose that an imagining-desire pair is what motivates her action.

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<sup>11</sup> This latter case is still somewhat problematic: if Sarah thinks it likely that her mother will wash her doll by virtue of having seen her pretend to wash the doll, then there is scope for thinking that Sarah can rationally believe that dunking her doll in an empty basin will lead to her doll being washed. However, this doesn’t change the fact that Sarah would be mad if she thought that dunking her doll in an empty basin would lead to her doll being washed even if her mother doesn’t intervene.

However this explanation also leaves the motivation behind Sarah's actions puzzling. We will still end up attributing the desire to shoot her brother to her, which is problematic in and of itself, regardless of the connections this desire has to her beliefs or imaginings.

This sort of account may be helpful in cases such as doll washing, however, where we can allow that Sarah can gain some sort of satisfaction by acting out, in a pretend way, activities that are similar to those that would satisfy her genuine desires. But this leaves open the question of why children get satisfaction from acting out desired scenarios in a pretend way.

The second sort of approach we might take is what I will call the 'sad' option. On this picture, we can try to explain Sarah's motivation in terms of the actions she is performing. In other words, we can suppose that she raises her index fingers and says 'Bang you're dead!' because she desires to raise her index fingers and say 'Bang you're dead!' and believes she can achieve this by raising her index fingers and saying 'Bang you're dead!'

The problem with this sort of explanation is twofold. The first problem is that it downplays the extent to which children can get lost in their games of pretence. It is intuitive to think that pretend play involves children acting spontaneously and imaginatively, and does not involve them merely desiring to raise their fingers etc. (Velleman 2000, pp. 256-257).

We can also back up this worry by noting that adults tend to be worse at engaging in pretend play as compared to children. This discrepancy is often chalked up to social inhibitions about engaging in games of pretence, but if the motivation for such activities merely involves having desires to raise one's index fingers etc., then it is unclear why adults should have a harder time acting out such mundane desires as compared to children. The sad explanation doesn't capture the way pretend play seems to be a very childlike phenomenon.

The second problem is that the sad option does a bad job of explaining why children would bother performing pretend actions. Why would Sarah desire to raise her index fingers and say 'Bang you're dead!' if this action has nothing to

do with imagining that she is shooting her brother?

One might attempt to sidestep this issue by supposing that Sarah's desire to raise her fingers combines with an imagining that this is akin to shooting her brother, but this places an odd disconnect between the cognitive (belief-like imagining) and conative (desire) parts of her motivation.

Ordinarily, someone will desire to do X (avoid the rain) and believe that doing Y (staying indoors) will bring about X (avoiding the rain), and so will perform action Y (stay indoors). In this case, however, we appear to be suggesting that Sarah desires to do X (raise her fingers), and imagines that she can achieve Y (killing her brother) by doing X (raising her fingers). This leaves open the questions of why she thinks can achieve Y by doing X and whether she desired to achieve Y (killing her brother). If we say that she did, then we will return to the mad explanation.

Bearing this in mind, explaining Sarah's actions in terms of a belief-desire pair will be problematic if we specify the pair in terms of the action she actually performs, or in terms of the 'pretend' action she is performing. And, we cannot solve this puzzle simply by supposing she is motivated by an imagining-desire pair.

One might propose that we can avoid these issues by noting that they arise due us assuming that Sarah's actions must be motivated by a desire. As we noted in section 1.8, the view that all desires are motivational is controversial, as is the view that all actions are motivated by desires.

However, even if we deny that all desires are motivational, or that all actions are motivated by desires, we are still left with the crucial question of what combination of mental states motivates children to engage in pretend play. It won't do to simply say that one of them isn't a desire, whilst leaving open the question of what alternative mental states might be doing the motivational work. This is why some philosophers have introduced an imaginative counterpart to desire into the picture, but before we consider this view in detail we should firstly consider whether we can defend another sort of desire-based



explanation.

One theory that utilises real desires that is offered to solve this puzzle, endorsed by Stich and Nichols (2000, 2003 Ch.1) (henceforth N&S), is the 'cognitive theory of pretence'. According to this view, the motivation for pretence behaviour cannot be understood merely by looking at pretenders' beliefs and desires, nor their imaginings and desires, but instead requires us to consider how all three mental states interact.

## **2.5 Nichols and Stich's Behavioural Approach**

On N&S's cognitive account of pretence, motivation for pretend play consists in children imagining being, or doing, various things, and forming desires to act similarly to how the thing they are imagining would act, or to how they would act if they were doing what they imagine. For N&S, beliefs enter the picture because pretend play also involves children having beliefs about how the thing they are imagining would act if it were real. In other words, they propose that the following combination of states provides the motivation for pretend play:

1. Propositional imaginings (that I am a dog, that I am a cop, that I am having a tea party, etc.)
2. Beliefs about how things behave (that dogs bark, that cops chase robbers, that tea parties involve serving tea, etc.)
3. Desires about what one wants to behave as-if (I want to behave like a dog, I want to behave like a cop, I want to behave as-if I were having a tea party)

These combinations thus lead to actions such as barking like a dog, chasing a (hopefully) pretend robber and pouring out pretend tea.

That being said, it is not supposed to be the case that children have a 'mentalist' understanding of these three mental states. Instead, N&S propose that children have a 'behavioural' understanding of pretence, and will simply pretend to bark like a dog because of this, without realising that they have desires with content related to wanting to behave as-if they were a dog.

However, there are three difficulties facing this sort of approach. The first two are closely related: firstly the theory is too narrow, and secondly it is too broad, as an account of what motivates children to engage in pretend play. The final difficulty is that N&S's account is subject to an objection Velleman (2000, p. 257) calls the 'depressing' objection.

Firstly then, there is the worry that the theory is too narrow. One way to bring out this issue is by considering N&S's claim that in order for a child to pretend to be a dog, they must have beliefs about how dogs act in reality. D&E (2007, p. 6) suggest that this sort of requirement is unnecessary, and give the example of a child pretending to be something non-existent, like a zombie. Presumably, this involves them following the conventions of how to pretend to act like a zombie, rather than consulting beliefs about how zombies behave.

This criticism is not wholly convincing, however, since one could modify the N&S schema, and say that children require beliefs about how something would behave in reality *or* about the conventions for pretending to be something. Furthermore, this belief constraint seems plausible in some cases. Kind (2011, p. 433) points out that it is unclear how a child could pretend to be a vervet if they have no idea what a vervet is or how a vervet behaves.

However, we can also bring out the overly narrow nature of the N&S approach with another example. Consider a child pushing along a toy car whilst saying 'vroom vroom'. It seems that the child is not making this noise because he desires to act similarly to how a car would act (since he is pretending that the toy car is a real car, not that *he* is a real car). Cases like this involve the generation of pretence behaviour that is not straightforwardly attributable to a prop or to the child, and thus it is hard to account for these activities on N&S's picture (Friedman & Leslie 2007, pp. 115-116). As such, N&S's account seems too narrow.

The second difficulty with the account is that in some cases it is also too broad, particularly when we bear in mind the question of how children recognise pretence behaviour in others. According to the N&S schema, children recognise that someone is pretending when they note that they are behaving similarly to

how something would behave in real life.

The problem with this, however, is that this should lead to children often mistaking pretence actions for genuine actions and vice versa (Friedman and Leslie 2007, pp. 110-111). For example, if a child's mother writes on a board with charcoal, the child ought to sometimes mistake her for pretending that the charcoal is a crayon or chalk. As Leslie and Friedman note, however, children are often very good at keeping track of what is a pretend action and what is a genuine action, and it is hard to explain this general record of success on N&S's account of pretend play.

One might suggest that we can address this issue by tightening up N&S's notion of similarity/behaving as-if. But, the difficulty with attempting to do this is that the cognitive theory of pretence needs a loose notion of similarity to account for the many different forms of pretence behaviour children might engage in.

For example, Sarah probably knows that real policemen don't hold out their fingers and say 'Bang you're dead!', and the notion of behaving as-if that explains this action will have to capture this fact. Thus, the defender of the N&S schema faces something of a dilemma. They must either tighten up the notion of behaving as-if to explain how children keep track of the reality/pretence distinction, or loosen it to capture the various ways in which a pretend action can be similar to a genuine action. Either way, there will be problem cases to deal with.

In addition to these worries about whether the cognitive account is too narrow and too broad, there is also a further objection to the theory, which is called the 'depressing objection'. There are two ideas behind this objection. Firstly, this sort of account of pretend play seems to over-intellectualise what is going on in children's heads when they engage in pretend play, and secondly this account makes children's activities out to be 'depressingly un-childlike' by placing them firmly outside their games of pretence (Velleman 2000, p. 257). According to this objection, the account N&S offer portrays children as behaving like actors who are constantly reflecting on how the thing they are pretending to be would

behave, or how they would act if the situation they are imagining were real, rather than getting 'lost' in their games of pretence.

However, as we have already seen, citing desires phrased in terms of what the child is doing, or in terms of what they imagine to be the case, is also problematic. Thus we are left with a puzzle as to how we should respond to this objection, since it is not clear how to make sense of what is going on here by making reference to the child's desires. As such, one possible response is to suggest that pretend play is motivated by belief-like imaginings and desire-like imaginings, with these two states jointly behaving in a similar way to genuine belief-desire pairs.

On these accounts, it is proposed that Sarah i-desires (or 'wishes', to use Velleman's terminology) to shoot her brother and imagines that pointing her gun (fingers) at him and firing it (saying 'bang') can achieve this. Thus, we can suggest, in line with the third claim of chapter 1, that we can justify the introduction of a counterpart to desire here by noting a puzzle about how desires could explain pretence behaviour, even though it is not clear that any constraints on desire have been violated.

However, in order to justify the introduction of i-desires, we must first consider whether we can defend N&S's account against the depressing objection, and we must also consider whether the move to i-desires/wishes gives us an adequate response to the depressing objection and makes sense of the puzzles about pretence we have noted.

In the next section, I will argue that we might be able to defend N&S against the depressing objection, and that the introduction of i-desires doesn't necessarily deal with the objection. I will also suggest that the introduction of i-desires/wishes serves to deepen the mystery of what motivates children to engage in games of pretend play by leaving out an explanation of how they link their real world actions with what they imagine to be the case.

## 2.6 I-Desires and the Depressing Objection

There are at least two moves that one can make to defend N&S's account against the depressing objection. The first is to simply bite the bullet and accept that the explanation is depressing, and the second is to allow a role for non-conscious desires.

In relation to the first defence, one could argue that an explanation being 'depressing' doesn't have to be taken as a good reason to think the explanation is false. However, this sort of move is fairly easy to counter – as we noted, one reason why N&S's account is said to be depressing is because it over-intellectualises what is going on in the child's mind, since the account appears to attribute complex thoughts to children like 'I want to act like a dog and to act like a dog I need to do X'.

That being said, this response is in turn not wholly convincing since N&S offer a behavioural, rather than a mentalistic, account of pretence, so they can evade this strand of the depressing objection by denying that their theory entails children have an understanding of these complex mental states.

A second response is to argue that N&S's use of desires will only strike us as depressing if we suppose that we are talking about children's *conscious* desires. If we propose that a child's desire to act like a dog is in some sense not conscious, this will give us another way of blunting the force of the depressing objection.

Indeed, Kind (2011, p. 435) presses this point by noting that many seemingly spontaneous actions, such as the amorous embrace of a lover, will strike us as depressing if we explain the actions in terms of beliefs and desires that the persons performing the actions consciously entertain. Currie and Ravenscroft (2002, p. 124) likewise note that people are often drawn to do wonderful and creative things (such as writing poetry) based on desires and beliefs that they are only minimally aware of.

Of course, one might think this sort of move simply begs the question: perhaps

it is true that we are able to make sense of the depressing objection if the mental states involved in pretend play are not conscious states, but why think that the desires involved in pretend play are not conscious? There is no obvious evidence that the desires involved are not conscious, other than the fact that if they were conscious our explanation of what motivates pretence will be depressing.

However, if the defender of an i-desire/wish-based account were to make this sort of complaint, they would face a dilemma. Either they would have to admit that many other actions are depressing when explained in terms of beliefs and desires, or they would have to deny that said actions are depressing. Both horns are problematic.

If one takes the first horn, then the depressing objection is no longer a special problem for children's pretend play, and so using the objection to ground the introduction of i-desires/wishes will be too quick. On the second horn, it is unclear how to make things like the embrace of a lover seem less depressing without relying on something like desires that aren't conscious. This then raises the question of why this solution can't also work in the case of pretend play, and so our motivation for introducing i-desires/wishes is undermined once again.

At this point, we should therefore consider whether i-desire/wish-based accounts of pretend play are any less depressing than a genuine desire based account like N&S's. D&E and Velleman both seem to hold that an explanation in terms of i-desire/wishes is less depressing, but neither of them is clear about precisely why this is so. Why is i-desiring or wishing to be a dog less depressing than desiring to act like a dog?

For one thing, the i-desire account doesn't explain how we avoid the picture of the child thinking about his pretence from outside of his game, as opposed to simply 'getting lost' in his imaginary world. Indeed, as Funkhouser and Spaulding (2009, pp. 12-13) note, i-desire/wish-based accounts appear to presuppose that belief-desire accounts of motivation will leave children outside their games of pretence and it is unclear why we should be forced to accept that

this is so, particularly if, as we suggested earlier, we can allow for desires children are not consciously aware of to be involved.

We can also bring out why the i-desire/wishing account is still subject to the depressing objection by noting that knowing how to bring about one's i-desires or wishes presumably involves having beliefs about what sort of genuine actions (e.g. raising one's index fingers) will count as 'pretend' actions (e.g. raising a gun). This worry is developed by O'Brien (2005, p. 60), who argues that the imaginings involved in pretend play can only play a motivational role when they are 'draped' over the actual world. Bearing this in mind, she suggests that our imaginings can only serve to motivate behaviour in conjunction with beliefs.

For example, if a child starts waving his arms up and down like an elephant's trunk, this action will be motivated by both the child imagining that he is an elephant and by the child's belief that raising his arms in this way will constitute moving his imaginary trunk. Without these beliefs, the child's imaginings would have no direction.

The same is true of the child's supposed i-desires: the child will need some way of matching up his i-desire to raise his trunk with a desire to perform a real world action that will make it fictionally true that he is raising his trunk. In other words, the depressing objection still looms over i-desire/wish-based accounts of pretend play, since these approaches do not avoid the need for beliefs and desires located outside of the pretence to play a role in the generation of pretence behaviour.

We can press this issue by considering how D&E and Velleman conceive of the imaginative counterpart to desire involved in pretend play. The core of Velleman's definition is that what he calls 'wishes' relate to unobtainable things that one wants in a 'faint' way (Velleman 2000, p. 260). In other words, he draws a distinction between desires and wishes on the basis of whether one can obtain what one wants.

However, this seems problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, it seems that

Velleman's distinction must rest on whether or not the agent knows his want is unobtainable. But, it is not clear that children always know the aims of their games of pretence are unobtainable, particularly if they are very young. What is to say that a two-year-old who is jumping up and down flapping his arms doesn't believe that he could somehow fly? Furthermore, in cases like Sarah's doll washing, it seems odd to say that the actual washing of her doll is unobtainable.

Secondly, in some cases this is an odd way of setting out how the child's 'want' behaves. Consider Sarah pointing at her brother and saying 'Bang you're dead!'. It seems strange to suggest she wants to shoot her brother, but that this aim is merely unobtainable or somewhat ephemeral. As such, Velleman's account of wishes brings us back to the difficulties we faced when attempting to specify Sarah's genuine desires.

That being said, D&E are also critical of Velleman's specification of wishes. In turn, they offer a minimal specification of how the imaginative counterpart to desire – which they call *i*-desire – behaves. They suggest that an *i*-desire is a desire-like state that is to be distinguished from desire in terms of its functional role, and that what this role is is a question for neuroscience (D&E 2007, p. 10).

Nonetheless, D&E's minimal definition still proves problematic since they want *i*-desires to explain children's pretend play and the apparent desires we direct towards fictional characters. This immediately raises a problem for them. In the case of pretend play, they need *i*-desires to be functionally analogous to desires in the sense that they play a motivating role of some sort. In the case of fiction, the opposite seems to be true: my '*i*-desire' that Desdemona avoid her tragic fate does not motivate me to leap on the stage to save her. As we noted in 1.8, one could hold that *i*-desires behave differently in different contexts, but this doesn't change the fact that we need an account of how they are supposed to behave in the pretend play case, and of why various states that behave in different ways are all *i*-desires.

Even if we ignore this conflict in their approach, we can also note that in the



case of pretend play D&E appear to be relying on a conception of desire that sees desire as involving dispositions to action. Thus, one way of understanding their introduction of i-desires is that due to the odd nature of children's pretend actions, we should think of pretend actions as being 'quasi-motivated'.

However, it is unclear why we should think of these sorts of actions as merely being quasi-motivated. D&E would presumably draw attention to the fact that, on their account, desires aim to make something true of the world, whereas i-desires aim to make something 'fictionally true'. But this raises the question of why children can't have desires to make something fictionally true.

Perhaps this attributes too much conceptual sophistication to children, but it is unclear why desiring to make something fictional is more sophisticated than i-desiring to make something fictional. For example, as we noted earlier, in order to know what would make it the case that one's i-desire is satisfied, one needs beliefs about how one's pretend actions relate to reality, and a desire to make the real world fit one's pretend aims.

We can also bring out the difficulty here by reminding ourselves of Walton's account of fictional truth. In cases like the one where Sarah holds out her index fingers and says 'Bang you're dead!', it seems that D&E want to say something like \*Sarah desires to shoot her brother\*, whilst also denying that we need to allow that Sarah desires \*to shoot her brother\*.

But why can't we allow for it to be true that Sarah desires to \*shoot her brother\*, with this entailing that \*Sarah desires to shoot her brother\* without necessitating the introduction of a counterpart to desire? In so doing, we could draw a parallel with how we can avoid introducing a counterpart to amusement, whilst still allowing that it can be true that \*I am amused\*. As we noted in my second claim of chapter 1, a real world action or feeling constituting a fictional action or feeling is not enough to justify the introduction of an imaginative counterpart.

Before we consider how this account can be developed, I will firstly offer two reasons philosophers have offered for favouring accounts of pretend play

involving genuine desires, to show that the introduction of i-desires may deepen the puzzles related to pretend play.

## **2.7 Some Points in Favour of Desire**

A first consideration that has been offered in favour of a desire-based account is that children only tend to engage in games of pretence where they are pretending to do something they genuinely want to do, or where they are emulating something that they admire in some sense (Carruthers 2003, 2006). That is to say, usually children pretend to be brave cops or animals they find interesting, etc. One doesn't often hear stories about children pretending to be slugs.

However, this strikes me as potentially oversimplifying the variation in games of pretence. It is not clear that children do usually pretend to be things they admire or wish to be, and indeed one would need a great deal of empirical evidence to prove this claim. N&S (2003, p. 20) note the case of a child who pretends to be dead cat – something the child presumably does not admire or aspire to be.<sup>12</sup>

We should note that the initial context for Carruthers's (2003) point is that he is arguing against the claim that we can form i-desires at will. He takes the fact that children tend to pretend to be things they admire as showing that their genuine desires ground their games of pretence. If i-desires were involved, he is assuming that they would be under the control of the will, and that we would therefore have more cases of children pretending to be things they didn't genuinely desire to emulate.

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<sup>12</sup> Carruthers would respond that children only *usually* pretend to be things they admire. He suggests this child may have pretended to be a dead cat because he desired to do something funny (Carruthers 2006, p. 107). Even still, it strikes me that more needs to be done to ground precisely what this notion of admiration amounts to, and more evidence is needed to establish that children 'usually' pretend to be things they admire.

But whilst the desire-like states involved in mindreading have to be subject to will (if they exist), there is no obvious reason why the same must be true of the desire-like states involved in generating pretence behaviour. D&E, for example, do not explicitly consider whether their notion of an i-desire has a role to play in mindreading, nor do they suggest that i-desires must be subject to the will.

A second reason to favour desire-based accounts, which I find more persuasive, can be found in Kind (2011, pp. 437-438). She notes that if i-desires are implicated in games of pretence, it is unclear what content they have.

She gives the example of her son pretending to fly by flapping his arms. She suggests there are two options: either he i-desires to fly or he i-desires to flap his arms. Since i-desires are supposed to be free of normative constraints, we have good reason to think that if her son is going to i-desire anything, he will i-desire to fly. Why i-desire to flap your arms when you can entertain the far more interesting i-desire to fly?

However, saying her son i-desires to fly doesn't help to explain his arm flapping. Presumably, if he really i-desired to fly, he would jump up and down and try to propel himself into the air, etc. Now, it could be objected that although Kind is right to hold that it is hard to pinpoint her son's i-desire, it will be equally difficult to pinpoint the content of her son's real desire. It seems odd to think that when a child pretends to be flying like a bird he merely desires to flap his arms, and saying he desires to fly will make it difficult to explain his actions and render him 'mad'.

However, we can offer a response to this sort of worry by drawing on Funkhouser and Spaulding (2009, p. 10). They note that explanations of actions in terms of genuine desires have a history of success, and that therefore even though this sort of case is puzzling, there is still reason to think that the correct explanation of pretend play will make use of real desires. At the very least, this sort of consideration allows us to bring out that if i-desires can't neatly explain pretend play, we have no good reason to introduce them. We should direct our energies towards making a desire-based account of pretend

play that works, rather than spending time introducing novel mental states and then seeking to resolve the new puzzles we are left with upon their introduction.

But all this suggests is that we need some sort of desire-based account, and as we already noted, N&S's account has been criticised not only due to the depressing objection, but also on the grounds that their approach is too narrow and too broad, and thus has difficulties explaining the recognition of pretence. I think a better account can be given by supposing that children can desire to make things fictionally true, a proposal I will now sketch in more detail to conclude this chapter.

## **2.8 Desiring to Make Something Fictional**

On this picture, when a child engages in pretence behaviour, such as barking like a dog, what motivates him is (at least sometimes) a desire to make it fictionally true that he is a dog (or more formally to desire that  $*P*$ ).<sup>13</sup> This improves on N&S's approach in several respects, and can also overcome the depressing objection.

For example, this approach makes sense of cases where a child pushes a car along and makes a 'vroom' noise. The child wants to make it fictionally the case that the car is real, or that it is a race car travelling at a fast speed, and they satisfy this desire by making this sound and pushing the car. Thus, their motivation can be explained without having to explain how their behaviour resembles the behaviour of actual cars.

Nevertheless, this approach will still face difficulties when it comes to explaining how children recognise pretence. The issue of recognition, as Liao and Gendler (2011, p. 10) point out, has been largely ignored by philosophers

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<sup>13</sup> We should avoid the strong claim that all pretence behaviour is explicable in this way. We can allow that sometimes children will desire to act like their sibling or copy an adult, and we can allow for there to be pretence behaviour that isn't driven by the imagination, as noted by Currie (2002, pp. 205-206).

working on pretend play, and this issue is one that afflicts all theories of pretend play that don't follow Leslie's (1987) lead in proposing that children possess the concept PRETEND and have a 'conceptual' understanding of pretence.

That being said, the 'desire to make fictional' approach is compatible with Leslie's view, since we can allow that children are able to desire to make something fictionally true partly by virtue of knowing what it would be to make something fictionally true. This might involve children having possession of something like a PRETEND concept, and we could then rely on this conceptual understanding to explain their recognition of pretence.

On the other hand, if Leslie is incorrect to attribute this conceptual understanding to children, and a better account of recognition can be found by referring to behavioural cues, then the approach can accommodate this. Desiring to make something fictionally true does not have to entail a conceptual understanding of desiring to make something fictionally true.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, though this approach does not directly address the issue of recognition, it can piggyback on other accounts that attempt to deal with this issue. Perhaps more crucially, however, one might think this account does no better than N&S's in evading the depressing objection. For example, one might hold that desiring to make something fictionally true will entail children acting partly outside of their pretence, since they will need to reflect on how to make something fictionally true by performing real-world actions.

We can respond to the depressing objection by accepting that someone can desire to make something fictionally true without being aware that this is what they desire. Furthermore, it strikes me that desiring to make something fictionally true is a no more depressing account of pretend play as compared to

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<sup>14</sup> A similar sort of point is also made by Schellenberg (forthcoming, pp. 18-19), who phrases the issue in terms of the distinction between mental states with conceptual, as compared to non-conceptual, content. Bearing in mind this distinction, she also endorses a view of pretence that focuses on desires to make something fictional.

proposing that children i-desire to make X occur. This account still involves children ‘wanting’ to make it fictionally true that X, only without an explanation of how children know what will make X fictionally true.

Another advantage of proposing that children can have desires to make things fictional, is that this helps to make sense of the dilemma noted by Kind about whether her son desires to fly, or flap his arms, etc. On this account, her son will desire to make it fictionally true that he can fly, but the actions that make this fictionally true will be mere arm flapping.

As such, we can now evade this dilemma without also returning to the sad/mad issue that arises when we attempt to specify the desires that motivate pretence. Children are not mad to desire to make it fictionally true that they can fly, nor is this an obviously sad description of the motivational state that leads to them flapping their arms.

One final advantage of this approach relates to the ‘bad’ aspect of some of the apparent desires that lie behind pretence behaviour: we now have two ways to specify the motivational state that lead Sarah to pretend to shoot her brother. Firstly, we can propose that she desired to make it fictional that her brother was dead. However, we might think this still gets her desire wrong, since it is unclear that she desired her brother’s death, even if this death was only fictional.

By linking desires and fictionality, we have a second option available. In the game Sarah and her brother are playing, it may be fictional that there is a cop chasing a robber, but it does not have to be fictional that this cop is Sarah and that the robber is her brother (i.e. it may be false that \*Sarah’s brother is a robber\*). It only needs to be the case that Sarah’s brother is *pretending* to be a robber (that Sarah’s brother \*is a robber\*). On this latter score, Sarah does not have to be construed as desiring to make it fictionally true that she kills her brother: she may only desire to make it fictionally true that she kills the robber.

## 2.9 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we have seen that puzzles related to what underpins our mindreading abilities, and what mental states motivate pretend play, do not give us a compelling reason for introducing an imaginative counterpart to desire.

In the case of mindreading, this is because it is problematic to hold we can enter into a counterpart to desire at will, and because we can make sense of mindreading either by allowing that we can imagine *that* someone desires something or by allowing that we can form beliefs about others' desires.

In the case of pretend play, we faced a puzzle when trying to specify how children's desires behave in relation to pretence. However, it looks like the best way of dealing with this problem is not by introducing an imaginative counterpart to desire, since introducing desire-like imaginings in this case serves to introduce new mysteries and exacerbate existing ones. In particular, we still face questions about how i-desires motivate real-world actions and about what the contents of i-desires are supposed to be.

We can offer a better account of pretend play by proposing that children can desire to make things fictionally true. I have not been able to set out a full defence of this account, but I hope to have demonstrated that it is an initially plausible way of explaining pretend play, which improves in several respects on N&S's approach and approaches that utilise counterparts to desire.

In the next chapter, we will consider a further problem case, which involves what Kind (2011, p. 32) calls *passive* as compared to *active* imaginings: the question of how we account for our desires that appear to be directed towards fictional characters.

## Chapter 3: Desire and Fiction

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we will be concerned with whether the ‘desires’ we apparently direct towards fictional characters are in fact i-desires<sup>15</sup>.

I will begin by setting out some arguments that purport to show why we cannot have genuine desires directed at fictional characters – the so-called ‘simple’ solution. These difficulties are said to get us to the view that desires apparently directed at fictional characters are actually directed at fictions – the ‘change of content’ solution. I will argue that none of these arguments is entirely convincing, and that we may not have to abandon the simple solution as readily as defenders of i-desires suppose.

However, I will then set aside my scepticism about these arguments and consider two problem cases that are said to demonstrate why a change of content solution is unsatisfactory, which are developed by Currie and Ravenscroft (2002: Ch.1) and Doggett and Egan (2007, 2011) (henceforth D&E). These cases are thought to demonstrate that the change of content approach entails that we must problematically attribute conflicting desires to persons engaging with some fictions: for example, a desire that a fiction both has and does not have a tragic conclusion.

Having set out this worry, I will then explain why some philosophers argue that we have to introduce i-desires in order to make sense of what is going on here – the ‘change of attitude’ solution (D&E, 2007, 2011, Currie 2010). I will argue that the path from the change of content solution to the introduction of i-desires is unclear, and that there is no obvious reason to prefer this approach as compared to endorsing the simple solution.

I will then consider a problem case developed by Currie (2010), which focuses

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<sup>15</sup> Writers on this issue all tend to talk in terms of i-desires, so I will use this terminology exclusively in what follows.



on desires directed towards real individuals rather than fictional characters. This case is said to demonstrate a difficulty with the simple solution, which doesn't depend on whether we have to move from the simple solution to a change of content solution. On the basis of this case, Currie (2010, p. 635) also gives a test for judging whether a desire is really an i-desire:

*'A putative desire, A, is an i-desire and not really a desire if A has satisfaction conditions, a canonical statement of which makes reference to a fiction which is not also the object of A.'*

I will argue that Currie's argument need not force us into introducing i-desires. Firstly, I will argue that Currie's proposed test for whether a desire is really an i-desire has odd consequences for what it takes to have an i-desire, in that it appears to make the desire/i-desire distinction depend on external factors.

Secondly, I will argue that his reasons for introducing i-desires would also warrant us introducing i-i-desires etc. when we have fictions embedded within other fictions. To defend his view against this worry, it looks like we need to endorse something like a change of content solution about i-desires or allow that i-desires are differentiated by the fictions they concern. Whichever of the two responses we make, we will be left with a question about why we cannot apply this response to explain Currie's case in terms of genuine desires.

To conclude this chapter I will suggest that the best way to build an account of our conative attitudes towards fictional characters is to focus on what makes it *fictional* that we desire something. I will propose that we can capture what makes it fictional that we desire something without introducing i-desires and I will bring out some general reasons for thinking that an account of our engagement with fiction that relies on genuine desires should be preferred to one that relies on i-desires, even if the exact form of this genuine desire theory is not clear.

To begin, we should first lay out what our options are when it comes to explaining the desires that we appear to direct towards fictional characters.

### 3.2 Three Options

When discussing our engagements with works of fiction, we often use sentences that suggest we have desires directed towards fictional characters. For example, when discussing *Romeo and Juliet* with a friend, one might say something like:

‘I wanted Romeo to realise Juliet was only sleeping.’

This example represents our tendency to talk about wanting fictional characters to perform various actions, or come to certain realisations, etc. In addition, we also sometimes appear to talk about desires related to our own preferences. For example, one might profess:

‘I wanted to tell Romeo that Juliet was only sleeping.’

There are three options for accounting for these apparent desires. The first is what we can call the ‘simple’ solution. According to the simple solution, one just can have genuine desires directed at fictional characters. On this picture, a sentence such as ‘I wanted Romeo to realise Juliet was only sleeping’ will straightforwardly express one of your desires.

However, there are worries with this approach related to whether we can direct our desires towards fictional characters we know do not exist and whose behaviour we cannot interfere with. As such, we might move to the second option and suggest that we need to adopt a ‘change of content’ solution to deal with our desires directed at fictional characters (Nichols 2004b, p. 332).

On this view, we should think of a desire that Romeo should live as actually being a desire that Romeo should live *in the fiction*. This is similar to my suggestion in chapter 2 that children can desire to make things fictionally true, only in this case one simply desires for X to be fictionally true, rather than desiring to *make* X true. On this approach our desires are, strictly speaking, not directed at fictional characters: they are directed at fictions.

The final option is what we can call, following Currie (2010, p. 633), the ‘change of attitude’ solution. According to this response, the simple solution has the content right, but the attitude (desire) wrong. Supporters of this view suggest that when engaging with *Romeo and Juliet*, we i-desire that Romeo should live. In other words, they claim that we have to introduce an imaginative counterpart to desire to make sense of what is going on when we suggest that we want fictional characters to do various things.

Defenders of this approach tend to argue that constraints on desire rule out the simple solution, and that the change of content solution leaves us with a puzzle about our conative attitudes towards fictions that can only be solved by introducing i-desires. Thus they claim that introducing a counterpart is justified in both of the ways I noted in the third claim of chapter 1: desires about fictional characters violate constraints on genuine desires, and introducing i-desires helps to solve puzzles about our engagement with fictions.

The first issue to consider is why constraints on desire are supposed to render the simple solution problematic, and why the change of content solution is sometimes proposed as a better account of what is going on. We can then consider what is wrong with the change of content approach, and why this might lead us to the change of attitude view. That being said, I will resist the charges against the simple solution, and we will return to defend the simple solution in section 3.5.

### **3.3 The Simple Solution**

There are four main arguments we can offer to show why the simple solution might not work. The first three rest on considerations about the constraints that are supposed to be operative on our genuine desires. The first concerns the relation between desire and non-existents, the second desire and possibility, and the third desire and motivation. The fourth argument is one which purports to show that we are rationally required to move from the simple solution to the change of content solution, since having desires about fictional characters will entail having desires about fictions.

In relation to the first worry, one might think it is problematic to suppose we can have desires directed at fictional characters like Romeo and Juliet because they are non-existent. As we noted in section 1.3, this is one of the reasons why we must introduce propositional imaginings. It is problematic to believe that someone who we know to be non-existent is performing certain actions, and so it is usually suggested that when we engage with fictions, we imagine in a belief-like way that fictional characters are performing various actions.

Perhaps the same can be said of desires directed at fictional characters. It is equally problematic, so the argument would go, to say that you want someone that you know does not exist to perform certain actions or avoid a certain fate. So, we have a first way of setting up a problem with the simple solution: noting a difficulty with supposing that people have desires directed towards non-existent things.

However, the difficulty with this first way of attacking the simple solution is that it is not at all clear that desires are ordinarily constrained by whether their objects are known to be existent. Kind (2011, p. 425) gives two possible counter examples: we can desire that our children meet their deceased grandparents, and we can desire that our future children lead happy and fulfilling lives.

That being said, neither of these counter-examples is entirely analogous to the fiction case since we are talking about persons who either have existed, or might exist in the future, not ones who simply do not exist. But as Moran (1994, pp. 76-80) brings out in relation to the emotions and the non-actual, these sorts of cases do not have to be directly analogous to the fiction case. Our counter-examples only need to show that there is not something obviously wrong with saying that X has desires about something they believe to be non-actual.

A second way one might try to bring out what is wrong with the simple solution would be to suggest that the issue concerns not the status of the object of the desire, but the possibility of the desire's satisfaction. We can suggest that we cannot have desires that we know to have impossible satisfaction conditions, and that desires directed at fictional characters would often have impossible

satisfaction conditions.

For example, we can note that when someone says ‘I wanted Romeo to realise Juliet was only sleeping’, they know that it is impossible for this desire to be satisfied. The script for *Romeo and Juliet* was written long before they saw a performance of the play, and the observer is likely to be aware that Romeo will not realise what has happened in the tomb. That being said, this picture will become more complicated when we consider fictions where observers are unaware of what will occur, so this argument may not force us to reject the simple solution in every case, even if one thinks the argument works with fictions like *Romeo and Juliet*.

More importantly, it is unclear whether desiring the impossible is generally seen as problematic. Currie (1990, p. 201) gives a counter-example: as a formalist, he desires to refute Gödel’s theorem even though he knows this is impossible. Again, it is unclear whether such an example is directly analogous to the case of fiction, but it is not obviously wrongheaded to suppose that we can sometimes desire the impossible.

A third way we might attempt to set up the problem with the simple solution is to focus on our lack of motivation to save tragic heroines etc. when engaging with fictions. Though I may say that I wanted to tell Romeo that Juliet was only sleeping, I do not ordinarily find myself shouting this at him from the stalls, nor do I find myself running onto the stage to rip the poison from his hands.

Regardless of whether one thinks that all desires are essentially motivational, this lack of motivation might still seem puzzling since desires at the very least usually have some sort of connection to motivation. That being said, it is also hard to make a case for rejecting the simple solution on the basis of our lack of motivation to interfere with fictions since we can also make sense of this issue by drawing on a rich discussion in Walton (1990: Ch. 5).

Walton points out that when watching a play where a heroine is about to be run over by a train, we could, if we so wished, jump onto the stage and lift her off the train tracks, but we then face the further question of whether this

constitutes saving her. For Walton it does not, and this is a consequence of his approach to fictional truth. As we noted in section 1.2, for Walton something is fictionally true if we are prescribed to imagine it. In the present case, we are not prescribed to imagine, as observers of the play, that we can interfere with the proceedings, and it is also not fictionally true that we are characters in the play.

Thus, even if someone does leap onto the stage, this does not make it fictionally the case that they are a character in the play. And, *a fortiori*, if someone is not a character in the play, then this rules out the possibility of them interfering with the events of the play. If this is right, then the problem with motivation may not be due to our lacking genuine desires directed at fictional characters, but may instead be due to rules about our powers to interfere with fictions.

Bearing in mind my scepticism about these three supposed difficulties, it looks like considerations about the constraints we should place on genuinely desiring something are not enough to make us reject the simple solution. However, there is one final argument we can give as to why we should reject the simple solution that doesn't rely on placing constraints on desire, which is found in D&E (2011, pp. 284-285).

D&E begin their argument by suggesting that desiring that such-and-such will occur – where 'such-and-such' refers to some event in a fiction – will entail that you desire that such-and-such will occur *in the fiction*. This is because it is impossible for your desire to be satisfied unless the event occurs in fiction.

Bearing this in mind, D&E propose that we are in some sense rationally required to move from desires like 'I wanted Romeo to live', to desires about fictions like 'I wanted Romeo to live *in the fiction*', since the latter desire makes reference to the only possible satisfaction condition for the former desire. In other words, they take us as being rationally required to embrace the change of content solution.

However, it is not clear that we are rationally required to make this jump from the simple solution to the change of content solution. The central issue with

this argument is that it at best merely shows that observers of fictions *ought* to note the entailment between desires about fictional characters and desires about fiction, not that they *do* note this entailment. Weinberg and Meskin (2006, p. 234) draw a parallel with one who desires to become a professional philosopher but doesn't wish to become penurious, even though being the former often entails the latter.

As such, it looks like we have no clear reason to abandon the simple solution for the change of content solution. That being said, one might not be convinced by my responses to these four arguments. As such, we should now consider how the change of content solution should be understood and why difficulties with it have led philosophers to introduce i-desires to explain our engagement with fictions.

### **3.4 A Change Of Content**

To recapitulate, the change of content solution has it that when a desire is apparently directed towards a fictional character, the desire should be paraphrased in terms of the fiction the character is in. In other words, we have to go from desires like:

1) I want Romeo to live.

To desires of the form:

2) I want Romeo to live *in the fiction*.

Now, ignoring the questions we raised in the previous section about whether (2) is to be preferred to (1), we should consider why (2) is seen as problematic. The issue with saying people have desires like (2) can be brought out with two related examples discussed by D&E (2007, 2011) (which are based on an example found in Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, pp. 19-23).

The first example is the case of someone watching *The Sopranos*. At one point in the series, Tony Soprano is attempting to flee from the police, and D&E

profess to having felt anxious whilst this event was taking place (D&E 2011, p. 279). Ordinarily, they suggest, a belief-desire pair leads to us having a feeling of anxiety.

Consider an example of my having an anxious response to something. During the 2012 US Open final between Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic, Murray raced into a two set to love lead, and I found myself overcome with a feeling of anxiety. Why?

As we just noted, we can answer this question by drawing attention to a belief-desire pair. My beliefs about Murray – that he often loses Grand Slam finals, that he often loses to Djokovic, that he often slips from a winning position to ultimately losing big matches, etc. – combined with my desire that Murray should win the match, produced in me a feeling of anxiety.<sup>16</sup>

D&E suggest something similar must be true of the *Sopranos* case. They want Tony Soprano to escape from the police, and they realise that this outcome is uncertain and so feel anxious. This seems to entail that they ‘wanted Tony Soprano to escape from the police’, which we are assuming should be paraphrased as wanting Tony Soprano to escape the police *in the fiction*. So we have:

3) I want Tony Soprano to escape from the police *in the fiction*.

However, they suggest that this is simply false since they have faith in the writers of *The Sopranos* to make the best choice about Tony’s fate, regardless of whether this will involve him escaping or being caught. In other words, they think that (3) is too strong, since it commits them to having a preference as to

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<sup>16</sup> We should note here that D&E do not want to make the strong claim that *all* affective response can be explained in terms of beliefs and desires (though this sort of view is hinted at by Currie and Ravenscroft 2002: Ch.9). The idea that anxiety depends on beliefs and desires is relatively uncontroversial, however, and they note that Griffiths (1997), who is critical of belief-desire accounts of the emotions, still allows for anxiety arising in this way.



what the outcome of this fictional scenario should be, when in fact they are ambivalent about the outcome (D&E 2011 pp. 280-281).

Their second example is of *Romeo and Juliet*. In this case, as we already noted, it seems that people sometimes have desires like (2). D&E suggest that once again this seems wrongheaded. Knowing that *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragic masterpiece, it certainly seems as if we don't want Romeo to evade his tragic fate *in the fiction*: if this were to come to pass, we would think that the play would lose much of its aesthetic merit. Yet, we will still report that we wanted him to avoid his tragic fate. Thus it looks like the change of content solution construes us as desiring two mutually exclusive things: that Romeo both lives and dies in the fiction (D&E 2011, pp. 280-282).

But why is this problematic? A first suggestion might be that holding two contradictory desires is irrational in some sense. For example, we could introduce some sort of rationality criterion about desires, which states that it is irrational to hold contradictory desires.

However, the problem with this move is that it is unclear why we should accept that our desires are constrained by some sort of rationality criterion. Kind (2011, p. 429) gives the example of a mother whose son is about to go off to university and leave her alone. Because she doesn't want to be alone, she doesn't want her son to go to university; but at the same time, she knows that going to university will be good for him, and so also desires that he should leave home. Thus, the mother appears to have contradictory desires.

Now, one could argue that this just shows that the mother has irrational desires, which fall short of the rationality constraints that ought to govern her desires. But, at best, this move would only show that she *should not* have such desires, not that she *does not*. Moreover, if we can have contradictory desires related to the real world, it becomes unclear why contradictory desires related to fictions are a special problem.

That being said, there is something problematic about desiring for the world to be *P* and not-*P*, but this does not mean it is problematic to desire *P* and to

desire not-*P*. There is an important difference between desiring '*P* and not-*P*' and desiring '*P*' and desiring 'not-*P*'. Unless we can show consumers of fiction have a desire of the former sort, then an argument based on conflict won't be wholly convincing.

However, though the present worry with the change of content solution is easy to read as one of conflicting desires, D&E (2011, pp. 281-282) suggest that the central issue their examples bring out is not related to holding conflicting desires. Walton (1978, p. 25) notes this point when he says in relation to this sort of puzzle:

*'He [the observer of a play with a tragic ending] may be entirely aware of both 'desires,' and yet feel no particular conflict between them'*

D&E point out that in the *Romeo and Juliet* case, it is plausible to hold that you simply desire for the play to have a tragic ending. If you desired that it had both a happy and tragic ending, they suggest that this should mean that you feel disappointed at the end of the play, since one of your desires will remain unsatisfied (D&E 2011, pp. 281-282).

As Currie (2010, p. 636) puts the issue, the current sketch of the change of content view makes us out as always being ambivalent about the endings of tragic fictions like *Romeo and Juliet*, when in fact we are not at all ambivalent about said endings. And, even in a case where we are ambivalent about the outcome of a fiction – as in *The Sopranos* example – the change of content solution still gets us to the wrong result, since it suggests a conflict between wanting X to occur and being ambivalent as to whether X occurs, when in fact we are only ambivalent.

As such, philosophers like D&E propose the solution here is to introduce i-desires. In the fiction case, i-desires are said to have the same content as the desires attributed to people by the simple solution. So for D&E, and also Currie and Ravenscroft, people can 'i-desire that Romeo lives', etc.

That being said, at present all we have is an argument as to why the change of

content solution is problematic, not one for why we should introduce i-desires rather than return to the simple solution. We will now turn to this issue.

### 3.5 I-Desires and Fiction

The motivation for introducing i-desires at this point then is, in part, to allow that we can have pairs of i-desires about fictional characters and desires about fictions. For example to allow for us to have the following combination of attitudes:

- 1) I i-desire that Tony Soprano escapes from the police.
- 2) I desire that the writers decide Tony Soprano's fate *in the fiction*.

To use Walton's notation, we have something like '\*I desire that Tony Soprano escapes from the police\*' whilst also having 'I desire that the writers will decide \*Tony Soprano's fate\*', with this pair involving two different attitudes. In other words, we have a case where it looks like \*X desires P\* is not entailed by it being true that X desires \*P\*. This contrasts with the case of pretend play, where the worry with this entailment concerned whether a desire that \*P\* was 'depressing'.

However, we must still address how these i-desires behave, and how we can justify their introduction. At present we have reason to think something odd is going on when we engage with fictions, but is unclear precisely why the solution to this puzzle is to introduce i-desires and what explanatory work these i-desires are supposed to be doing.

A first way one might attempt to justify their introduction would be to focus on the negative arguments we considered in section 3.3, in order to bring out that genuine desires directed at fictional characters are impossible, thus restricting us to either the change of content or change of attitude solution. We can then rely on the fact that the change of content solution is problematic, for the reasons just discussed related to conflicting desires and ambivalence, and suggest that this necessitates the introduction of i-desires. Thus, we might think that we don't need to worry about precisely how to set out the nature of i-

desires: we need only note that desire cannot do the trick here. Or, in other words, we can rely on the third claim of chapter 1: that we can justify the introduction of an imaginative counterpart if it helps us to explain puzzles and constraints on a mental state have been violated.

But as we noted in section 3.3, attempting to place constraints on desire in the fiction case will prove controversial. Furthermore, we will still need to address how i-desires evade issues that afflict the simple solution without simply making them avoid these issues by definition (e.g. why don't i-desires motivate us? Why can they be directed at non-existent things?). Merely introducing i-desires does not solve all these puzzles.

A second option for justifying the introduction of i-desires is to focus on our apparently conflicting desires towards fictions, and note as Walton (1978, p. 25) did, that there seems to be something about these cases that marks them out as distinct from ordinary cases of conflicting desires. Having done this, we can then suggest that the only way to deal with this something-like-conflict is by proposing that we can something-like-desire things.

But the issue with this move is that Walton's own theory leaves it unclear as to whether or not we should introduce i-desires (and indeed Walton 2006, p. 144, expresses scepticism about introducing i-desires). For Walton, the something-like-conflicting desires we appear to direct at tragic heroines are explained by noting that it is only *fictional* that we desire the safety of tragic heroines. And, as we noted in our discussion of amusement and the second claim of chapter 1, the fact that it is fictional that X is in a certain mental state does not have to be read as introducing an imaginative counterpart. We will return to the issue of what might make a desire fictional in section 3.7.

Bearing these issues in mind, there is no entirely uncontroversial way of justifying the introduction of i-desires in the fiction case. Thus as it stands we have no clear reason why we should favour an i-desire solution over a simple solution that allows for us to have pairs of desires about fictional characters and desires about fictions.

However, Currie (2010) offers a problem case that is said to demonstrate that the simple solution does not work, regardless of considerations related to whether we can have genuine desires directed at fictional characters, or whether the simple solution entails the change of content solution. Currie thus suggests that we must embrace either the change of attitude or change of content solution to deal with his example, and that bearing in mind the issues noted in 3.4 about ambivalence and conflicting desires, the change of attitude solution is preferable.

### **3.6 Desire and Not-So-Fictional Characters**

The starting point for Currie's argument against the simple solution is to note that some fictions often cause us to exhibit what we might call a 'tragic response' (Currie 2010, p. 632). That is to say, we often experience a certain tension when engaging with tragic fictions like *Romeo and Juliet*.

Currie notes that the defender of the simple solution will have to say that this tension arises because there is some sort of conflict between our desires directed at fictional characters (e.g. that tragic figures live), and our desires directed at fictions (e.g. that tragic figures die to make better works of fiction). He therefore takes defenders of the simple solution to be committed to the idea that we will experience a work of fiction as tragic if we both desire the death of one of its central character (in order for the fiction to be of a tragic sort) whilst also desiring their survival.

To show why this is problematic, he asks us to imagine a fictional documentary called *Death of a PM*, which portrays what might have happened if Margaret Thatcher had been assassinated whilst in power. He notes that out of respect for the steely professionalism of the assassin, or just out of an interest in exploring dramatic possibilities, it is not unreasonable to suppose that when watching the fictional documentary, someone could attest to wanting Thatcher to die.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> When Currie's article was published Thatcher was still alive and in what follows I won't reference her recent death.

The problem with this suggestion is that even though we may want her to die in the fictional documentary, this does not mean that in general we want Thatcher to die. Indeed, it is perfectly reasonable to think that someone could want her to die in the fictional documentary, whilst also not wanting her to die in real life.

Currie argues that a defender of the simple solution cannot make this distinction. When watching *Romeo and Juliet*, one simply desires that Romeo lives: to say that you desire that Romeo lives *in the fiction* is to endorse the change of content solution. On the simple solution, you want Romeo to live, and you want the fiction *Romeo and Juliet* to be one where Romeo dies. Currie suggests that the same is true of the Thatcher case: the defender of the simple solution cannot say that you desire for Thatcher to live *in real life*; they must hold that you want Thatcher to live *simpliciter* and want her to die *in the fiction*.

As such, it seems that an observer of *Death of a PM* will have conflicting desires – they will both desire that Thatcher dies and also that she lives. But, this means that the fictional documentary should engender a tragic response. However, it seems intuitive to think that this response won't occur. One could watch the documentary without feeling any sort of tragic tension as the assassin closes in on Thatcher.

One might think that we can make sense of this issue by making a distinction between the objects of our desires that are apparently directed at Thatcher. We could suggest that our desire that she lives is indeed directed at the real Thatcher, but that our desire that she dies is directed at a *fictionalised* Thatcher. If we make this move, we could then explain the absence of a tragic response by noting that the objects of our desires are different and thus there is no conflict between them.

But this sort of move, as Friend (2003, pp. 46-50) brings out, is problematic because a fictionalised Thatcher is still Thatcher. One way of bringing this point out is to note that when filmmakers make films involving real persons and events, they sometimes intend to alter our perception of said persons and

events. How they would manage this if their films were not actually about these persons and events would prove mysterious.

To make sense of this case, Currie suggests there are two options available to us. Firstly, as we hinted, we can move to the change of content solution, and say that we desire that Thatcher dies *in the fiction* and that Thatcher lives *in real life*, but this will return us to the issues related to conflicting desires and ambivalence when we consider fictions like *Romeo and Juliet*. The other option is to introduce i-desires, and say something like we i-desire that Thatcher dies, desire that she dies in fiction and desire that she lives in real life.

Currie takes this line and suggests that in order to have a tragic response to a fiction we must i-desire that such-and-such will occur whilst also genuinely desiring that it doesn't occur *in the fiction* (Currie 2010, pp. 637-638). In the case of *Death of a PM*, we i-desire that Thatcher dies and we genuinely desire that she dies *in the fiction*. There is no conflict between these two states, and so the fictional documentary will not elicit a tragic response.

However, one might be sceptical of this argument if they think that tragic responses should not be explained in terms of some sort of tension between our conative attitudes (whether genuine desires or i-desires). But, there is another way of making this sort of argument work, which is to note, as Friend (2003, p. 44) does, that sometimes when engaging with fictions involving real people, we want them to do things that we don't (or didn't) want them to do in real life.<sup>18</sup>

In these sorts of cases, the question of how to make sense of these apparently conflicting desires arises once again, since these desires do not obviously cause

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<sup>18</sup> Friend's discussion is concerned with emotional responses to fictions involving real persons, and she takes these sorts of cases to demonstrate why we should introduce quasi-emotions. Her main example is the film *JFK*, where she suggests we find ourselves wanting a rogue prosecutor to succeed in his goals when we know that these goals were misguided in real life.

us to feel conflicted in quite the same way that desiring that  $P$  and also desiring that not- $P$  ordinarily does. Again, we can propose that the ‘desires’ we have related to what the person does in fiction are in fact i-desires.

And so we now seem to have a problem with endorsing a desire-based solution to puzzles related to our engagement with fiction. If we endorse a change of content solution, then we risk mischaracterising our attitudes towards fictions and fictional characters, for example by misconstruing observers of tragedies as being ambivalent about their outcomes. If we deal with this issue by resisting the move to the change of content solution, then we will face Currie/Friend-type cases of fictions where we have desires directed towards real people that are different to those we have directed towards them in real life.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will consider how one might respond to Currie’s argument and defend the simple view, thus resisting the introduction of i-desires. I will also give some general reasons for thinking that a desire-based solution is preferable to an i-desire-based one in section 3.8.

### **3.7 Difficulties with I-Desires**

The first response one could make to Currie’s argument is to consider his proposed test for i-desires, which, as we noted in the introduction, runs as follows (Currie 2010, p. 635):

*A putative desire, A, is an i-desire and not really a desire if A has satisfaction conditions, a canonical statement of which makes reference to a fiction which is not also the object of A.*

In other words, he is proposing that an apparent desire is really an i-desire if its satisfaction conditions refer to a fiction when the desire itself does not. So, for example, the desire that Romeo lives is really an i-desire, since the satisfaction conditions for this desire will make reference to the fiction *Romeo and Juliet*. The desire that Romeo lives *in the fiction* is not an i-desire since it refers to a fiction directly.



The worry I have with this test is similar to the one we raised in section 1.6 about whether the distinction between understanding and quasi-understanding would have to depend on factors external to a person's engagement with a fiction. As I read Currie's test, whether or not someone has an i-desire depends not on their own awareness of their engagement with fiction, but instead on the mere fact that they are engaging with a fiction.

This suggestion strikes me as potentially problematic. As Kind (2011, p. 423) notes, her young son appears to have desires directed at fictional characters, whilst also lacking a sophisticated understanding of what fiction is. On Currie's picture, we seem to have to attribute i-desires to Kind's son, in spite of him not knowing that the satisfaction conditions of his 'desires' make reference to fictions.

Now, one might think this is acceptable on the grounds that being in mental state X doesn't have to entail having a concept of mental state X. However it still strikes me as strange to think that a child could say that they want something (such as the survival of Tinkerbell) but only actually i-desire said something, not because of anything to do with them, but simply because desires directed at fictional characters are i-desires by definition.

In turn, this also raises a worry related to recognition (Kind 2011, pp. 429-30). We are usually capable of recognising what mental state we are in, but on this picture, we will frequently mistake i-desires for genuine desires, namely whenever we mistake something fictional for something real. Perhaps this is an acceptable consequence, but the defender of i-desires will owe us an explanation as to why we also apparently mistake i-desires for desires in our discussions about fictions, since our everyday language doesn't contain a notion of i-desiring something and we must therefore presumably frequently mistake i-desires for desires.

We could also read Currie's test in a subjective way, and suppose that the observer of a fiction must know that the satisfaction conditions of his desire refer to said fiction. So, in the case of Kind's son, he will have a genuine desire because from his perspective the satisfaction conditions of his desire refer not

to a fiction but to a fictional character.

However, if we make this move, the nature of i-desires becomes somewhat odd. They will be the state we are in by definition whenever we realise that one of our desire has satisfaction conditions related to a fiction. This reading of Currie's test concedes that it is possible to have desires directed at fictional characters when we are unaware of their fictional status, so we return to the starting questions of why we need to move beyond accepting that people can have genuine desires directed at fictional characters and what additional explanatory work i-desires are supposed to be doing.

Another response we can make to Currie's argument is to question the motivation for introducing i-desires that his case depends on. As we noted, Currie is suggesting that we need to introduce i-desires in part to explain our apparently conflicting attitudes towards one individual. He then in turn suggests that it would not work to make this distinction at the level of content, and so introduces a change of attitude to deal with the conflict.

A problem with this approach can be shown with an example from the TV series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. In the penultimate episode, the main characters go to a theatre where they watch a play that retells their own adventures. That is to say, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is an example of a fiction that contains a fiction within itself.

As it so happens, when watching the episode, I wanted the characters to do the same things in the play as I did in the series itself (triumph over their enemies, etc.). But it is possible that this could have been otherwise. The play, for example, could have shown the main characters in an unsympathetic light that made you root against them, whilst you continued to support their endeavours in the actual show.

If this were so, then presumably this means you could both want the characters in *Avatar* to overcome their enemies, whilst also wanting them to fall to said enemies. Currie and Friend are both suggesting that a desire about a fictionalised X is still a desire about X, and presumably the same holds for

fictional characters fictionalised within a fiction.

But this would make this a case of having conflicting i-desires: we would i-desire that *P* (that they defeat their enemies) and not-*P* (that they fall to their enemies). It seems that our desire for the characters to succeed is, on Currie's picture, an i-desire, since the satisfaction conditions of this desire will refer to a fiction. In turn, it would seem that my desires about the play within the episode are also i-desires for the reasons Currie cited in relation to the *Death of a PM* case.

However, this means that I could have had a straightforward conflict between my i-desires, which presumably would have been problematic in the way that having conflicting genuine desires is supposed to be, and perhaps should lead me to feel a tension. But it looks like no conflict would have been present here, and I probably would not have experienced any sort of tension.

Two moves are available to deal with this conflict. Firstly, one could bite the bullet and accept that this shows we need to introduce i-i-desires to deal with these desire-like states at the attitude level, but then we risk falling into a regress of desire-like states whenever we have a fiction embedded within a fiction.

Another move would be to say that these i-desires are differentiated at the level of content: one i-desire is about what we want for the main characters in *Avatar*, the other is about what we want for them in the *play contained within Avatar*. We can thus deny that having different i-desires about the same characters is always problematic: if the characters are in multiple fictions I can have different i-desires about them relative to the fictions they appear in.

But, this looks like it just returns us to the problems we noted earlier with endorsing a change of content solution, i.e. issues related to conflicting desires and ambivalence. It is unclear why a change of content solution applied to i-desires would be more palatable than one applied to genuine desires.

Perhaps we can deal with this worry by reminding ourselves that imaginings

exhibit clustering, in the sense of being relative to one fictional world. Bearing this in mind, we can propose that fiction within a fiction cases are not problematic, since i-desires only apply to a single fictional world (Friend 2003, p. 48). In this way, we can allow that i-desires are somehow differentiated by the fictions they concern, but without this entailing that the content of the i-desires relates to a fiction rather than to a fictional character.

However, this move leaves open the question of what marks out the fictional world an i-desire is directed at, so more work would still need to be done to explain why the content of i-desires needn't make reference to the fictional world they relate to. And, perhaps more importantly, we would need an explanation as to why genuine desires cannot be afforded a similar luxury.

This brings us onto the issue we introduced at the end of section 3.5, where we noted that for Walton (1978, p. 25) the central issue here is that our desire that Romeo lives (or that Thatcher dies, etc.) is *fictional*. This point raises the question of what makes it fictional that we desire something. The i-desire response is to suggest that what makes a desire fictional is when the desire is actually an i-desire. But, we noted in my second claim in chapter 2, this is not the only option available for explaining how a desire is rendered fictional.

Another way of explaining what makes some desires fictional is to note that our desires about fictions themselves are not fictional in Walton's sense. It is not *fictional* that you want *Romeo and Juliet* to have a tragic ending, since it is not *fictional* that you have any desires (or beliefs) about the fiction itself.

In light of this point, we could propose that the problems here can be dealt with by setting out which of our genuine desires transfer over into the games of make-believe we play with fictions. If this is right, then what is going on in the cases considered above is that we do indeed have conflicting desires in some sense, but it is only fictional that we have the desire for the tragic heroine to live, or Thatcher to die, etc., and not fictional that we want the tragic heroine to die, or Thatcher to live etc. (since these desires refer to the fiction and the real world respectively), and so it is also not fictional that we have conflicting desires.

Now, one still might think the best way to make sense of this is by introducing i-desires, but as we noted in relation to amusement when bringing out my second claim in chapter 1, just because it is fictional that you find X amusing doesn't mean you aren't also genuinely amused by X. Likewise, if you are genuinely amused by a fiction, this doesn't make it fictional that you are amused *by a fiction*: it makes it fictional that you are amused. We can make a parallel move here to make sense of the relation between desire and fiction.

Both the simple view and the change of content view can fit into this sort of picture. We can either allow that desires can be directed at fictional characters and that it is also sometimes fictional that we have these desires, or we can propose that in some cases our genuine desires that *in fiction* such-and-such will occur make it fictionally the case that we desire that character X will do Y.

I maintain the simple solution is preferable, and that there is no obvious reason to be forced away from it, but one who disagrees on this score can still deal with our problems here by linking Walton's approach to a change of content solution and thus still resist the introduction of i-desires. As such, it looks like we can solve the puzzles about the relation between our desires and our engagement with fictions without introducing i-desires, which takes away our remaining justification for introducing them, since we also could not do so on the basis of constraints on genuine desires.

To conclude this chapter, I am going to make some general points as to why we might think genuine desires are involved in our engagement with fictions, regardless of whether we endorse the simple or change of content solution.

### **3.8 In Defence of Desire**

The first point to make is that when engaging with fictions, contra Walton, we do sometimes feel conflicted about what we want to happen (or at least we behave as if we are conflicted or report ourselves as feeling a certain sort of tension). When watching *Romeo and Juliet*, there does seem to be some sort of sense in which I would like to be able to shout out to Romeo (figuratively speaking) that Juliet is only sleeping. Yet at the same time, I am aware that

their deaths are essential for the tragic narrative and that I cannot interfere with their world. As we noted, according to Currie (2010), a genuine desire account will say this conflict is felt because you have two mutually exclusive desires – what can the defender of i-desires say to explain this tension?

Currie (2010, pp. 637-638) suggests that this feeling of tension arises because we have an i-desire that is at odds with our genuine desires about fictions. But why does holding conflicting desires/i-desires cause us to feel this way?

We can bring the problem here into focus by noting that it is usually agreed that we have no problem entertaining conflicting belief-like imaginings and beliefs, and a consequence of this innocuous point is that we do not *feel* conflicted when our propositional imaginings and beliefs contradict. For example, I can believe that David Cameron is Prime Minister and also imagine what life would be like if Gordon Brown were still Prime Minister, without finding myself feeling conflicted. Why would one think i-desires are different? Why would we feel conflicted about our conflicting i-desires/desires and not about our conflicting imaginings/beliefs (Nichols 2004b, p. 333)?

Currie (2010, pp. 637-638) answers this question by drawing attention to the fact that both desires and i-desires have satisfaction conditions, and that some have identical satisfaction conditions. He argues that it is only natural for us to feel conflicted when these satisfaction conditions are mutually exclusive. But this moves us back to the initial question of what exactly an i-desire is, and why conflicts between the satisfaction conditions of i-desires and genuine desires are felt.

In addition to worries about whether i-desires can make sense of someone feeling conflicted when engaging with fiction, we can also note that the i-desire solution does not necessarily make sense of how we evaluate our responses to fictions unless we develop our account of i-desires further. This point is noted in relation to the emotions by Moran (1994, pp. 93-94) and applied to the case of desire more specifically by Kind (2011, pp. 430-431).

Consider, for example, our conative attitudes towards the main character in the

TV show *Breaking Bad*. The main character is a high school chemistry teacher, Walter White, who has started a new career as a crystal meth producer, and the show charts his descent into the criminal underworld. When watching the show, I found myself rooting for Walt and wanting him to get out of awkward situations. However, when I reflected on the fact that I had these sorts of responses to the show I felt uneasy – I wanted a drug baron to get away with his crimes? I wanted him to kill his rivals? In real life, I certainly don't want people like Walt to be running around – I want them locked away. Indeed, even in other fictions I usually want drug barons to be safely behind bars.

The central point here is that it seems plausible to suppose that the reason I find my conative responses to *Breaking Bad* so troubling is because they are genuine desires about what I want to happen to Walter White. If they were mere i-desires, it is unclear why I ought to feel troubled by them, unless of course, we build into our account of what an i-desire is the idea that having i-desires that conflict with your real desires will make you feel uneasy.

Furthermore, when viewers discuss the series, they often make a big deal about which criminal act performed by Walt was the one that made them stop rooting for him. It strikes me that viewers' answers to this question would not be so interesting if they merely told us about when their i-desires changed, as opposed to their real desires. Why would we be interested in someone's i-desires changing?

One way for a defender of i-desires to respond to this sort of worry is to argue that we just do find it interesting to enquire about what i-desires people have, but to make this defence we will require a thorough account of what i-desires are, and how they behave, and such an account is not forthcoming in Currie (2010) and D&E (2007, 2011).

As such, it seems that introducing i-desires in the present case is potentially puzzling in the same way that introducing a notion of quasi-understanding was puzzling. We do not naturally worry about whether we can have real desires directed at fictional characters, and bringing i-desires into the picture serves to deepen the mysteries surrounding our engagement with fictions by introducing

worries about why we care about our i-desires and why they make us feel conflicted.

In other words, the introduction of i-desires does not appear to solve all the puzzles related to our conative engagement with fictions and also introduces its own problems. Bearing this in mind, I think we would be better served by attempting to develop either the simple or change of content solution to work out precisely how desire behaves in the context of our engagement with fictions. There is not enough space to do this at present, but I hope to have at least shown that some sort of genuine desire approach is preferable to an i-desire-based solution.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, we have seen that some philosophers have argued that we need to introduce i-desires to make sense of the desires that are apparently directed towards fictional characters.

A first way to get to this position is to argue that the 'desires' directed at fictional characters cannot be real desires because they relate to non-existents, or are motivationally inert, etc. But this move is problematic since there is no consensus about what constraints are present on our ordinary desires.

The second way of getting to i-desires works by noting that desires about fictional characters have to be paraphrased as desires about fiction, and then bringing out that this mischaracterises our attitudes towards the outcomes of fictions (by portraying us as ambivalent about the endings of tragedies, etc.). But, it remains unclear whether we should feel forced to adopt this view, and it is unclear how to move from this issue to defending the introduction of i-desires rather than returning to the simple solution.

In addition to these worries, the introduction of i-desires brings with it many of its own mysteries related to our engagement with fictions – for example, the question of why we care about the i-desires we have in response to fictions.



As such, we once again have good reason to refrain from introducing an imaginary counterpart to desire. We will be better served by considering what sort of desire-based account can make sense of our engagement with fictions, rather than introducing a new mental state to do the work.

## Conclusion

We have considered three cases where the introduction of i-desires has been thought necessary: third person mindreading, pretend play and our engagement with fictions. In each case I have argued that the introduction of i-desires is unnecessary since we can explain the puzzles related to these cases without them.

As I noted in my third claim of chapter 1, to justify the introduction of a counterpart we must establish that there are either constraints on the mental state it is a counterpart to, or establish that the counterpart helps to solve puzzles. We cannot justify the introduction of i-desires in either of these ways.

In the case of mindreading, we can explain our ability to predict the actions of others and ascribe mental states to them without introducing a counterpart to desire by adopting a theory-theory view. In the case of pretence, we can make sense of what motivates pretend play by allowing that children can desire to make things fictionally true. And, in the fiction case, although it is hard to pin down the correct account of the desires we apparently direct towards fictional characters there is still reason to be suspicious of thinking that these desires are really i-desires.

In addition, as we saw in section 1.8 and throughout chapters 2 and 3, it is hard to pin down exactly what an i-desire would be, in part because it is hard to pin down what a desire is. For example, attempts such as Velleman's to get clearer on the notion prove problematic because they make strong claims about the limits of our desires. This is likely why Doggett and Egan refrain from offering a detailed account of the difference between desires and i-desires beyond noting that they have different functional roles.

The final point to bring out is that i-desires seem to be thought of as behaving very differently in each of the problem cases we have discussed. In the case of mindreading, i-desires seem to be thought of as similar to belief-like imaginings, in the sense of being largely subject to the will. However, as seen in the fiction case, proposing that i-desires are always subject to the will proves

problematic, since we cannot simply decide to take different conative attitudes towards fictions.

Furthermore, when it comes to explaining our engagement with fictions and our mindreading abilities, i-desires are supposed to lack the motivational force of genuine desires: wanting Romeo's survival will not make you leap onto the stage to save him, and imagining wanting to eat a tuna sandwich (when simulating someone's desire) will not necessarily make you eat a tuna sandwich.

On the other hand, in the pretend play case, i-desires are supposed to play an important role in explaining what motivates children's pretend actions. Bearing this in mind, it appears that the notion of an i-desire introduced to make sense of pretend play behaves differently as compared to the one introduced to make sense of our engagement with fictions and our mindreading abilities.

In light of this, we have no answer to my initial worries about whether i-desires should be thought of as quasi-motivational, or quasi-pleasurable etc. And, if we accept that they will behave in different ways in different cases, this returns us to the problem we noted in relation to a cluster theory of desire about how we should distinguish between genuine desires that lack certain features and full blown i-desires.

This worry is important because it means we cannot rely on a global argument for justifying the introduction of i-desires based on how useful they are for explaining various phenomena. Doggett and Egan (2007), for example, go on from their discussion of pretend play to discuss fiction in order to strengthen the case for introducing i-desires.

Likewise, Currie and Ravenscroft move from noting the need for i-desires to make sense of our ability to mindread to how they are able to explain our engagement with fiction. However, if i-desires have to behave differently in all these cases, we will need to consider each case on its own merits, and as we have seen, it is not clear that any one case offers a compelling reason for

introducing i-desires.

Bearing all this in mind, we should therefore resist the introduction of i-desires into our cognitive architecture. We would be better served in future research attempting to develop how our desires behave in the various activities we have discussed and developing a more thorough account of the nature of desire.

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