

Resisting counter-evaluatives

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Abstract

In my talk, I discuss the peculiar behaviour of counterevaluatives, sentences that claim evaluative matters to be different from how they actually are. Counterevaluatives have recently received a lot of attention in discussions of the so-called “puzzle of imaginative resistance” (Gendler 2000). Distinguishing between quasi- and make-believe mental states, I trace the difficulties we experience in imagining counterevaluatives to the way in which counterevaluatives involve quasi-emotions and quasi-feelings. I’ll argue that both the fearfulness of the dangerous and our incapability to imagine it being otherwise are consequences of the way emotive states in general behave under off-line simulation: it is because the relation between quasi-fear and real fear is different from that between supposition (make-believe assertion) and assertion that we cannot imagine not being afraid of the fearful. The constitutive relation between emotive quasi-states and the formal objects of their real counterparts should also shed some light on normative necessity.

Emotions are said to involve formal objects, in the way fear involves the fearful (Kenny 2003: 134). It is with respect to their formal objects that an emotion’s appropriateness may be assessed (cf. Goldie 2000: 34). While they clearly play an explanatory rôle both in our every-day practice with and our theorising about emotions, the ontology, metaphysics and epistemology of emotions’ formal objects remain largely unexplored. In my talk, I would like to make some progress on this score, focussing on their modal behaviour: in what sense can it be said that the fearful could have failed to make fear appropriate? in what sense can we imagine not fearing the fearful? Taking a lead from Tamar Gendler’s “puzzle of imaginative resistance” (Gendler 2000), I’ll argue that both the fearfulness of the fearful and our incapability to imagine it being otherwise are consequences of the way emotive states in general behave under off-line simulation: it is because the relation between make-belief fear and real fear is different from that between supposition and assertion that we cannot imagine not being afraid of the fearful. This does not, however, mean that it is necessary that we fear the fearful.

what it is not - supposition - imagining something to be fictionally true - taking something to be true
authorial authority: there are some limits to what authors can make fictionally true, eg. no-one can make the sentence “This sentence is not fictionally true” fictionally true.

wie verwendest Du ”mbly” in ”x make-believable sees”? Walton verwendet doch ”make-believe” ziemlich wörtlich, dh als ”make s.o. believe”, dh jemanden was glauben machen. Du scheinst es eher wie ”off-line” zu verwenden. Aber was ist off-line sehen, off-line admire usw.? Einige Möglichkeiten: x make-believable sees y = - x tut so, als sähe er y - x macht (z) glauben, dass er y sieht - x stellt sich vor, dass er y sieht - x sieht* y, wobei Sehen* so zu Sehen steht wie Kinoangst zu Angst - x ”indulges in the fiction that” er y sieht Mir scheinen alle 5 verschieden.

We have here a kind of converse of the Frege-Geach problem: expressives take wide scope.

(cf. ? : 401)

Consider the difference between judging that p and performing the act permitted by the first rule of Natural Deduction, to wit that of supposing that p, of make-believable judging that p. The transition from one to the other is an example of act-modification. After the Investigations Husserl (2000, § 3, 13) seems to have come round to Meinong’s view that a similar transition is possible in the affective and conative spheres. The counterpart of serious regret that p or of serious desire that p is make-believable regret-ting or desiring that p.⁸

(cf. ¶: 401–402) In LI V, §§ 39f., Ideas, §§ 109–112, and elsewhere Husserl distinguishes between two types of modification of acts, qualitative modification (the neutrality-modification) and imaginative modification. The second but not the first can be iterated. Husserl thinks Meinong failed to grasp this distinction and that it is of immense importance for Husserl’s later philosophy.

0.1 The puzzle

David Hume writes in *On the Standards of Taste*:

“Where *speculative* errors may be found in the polite writings of any age or country, they detract but little from the value of those compositions. There needs to be but a certain turn of thought or imagination to make us enter into all the opinions which then prevailed and relish the sentiments or conclusions derived from them. But a very violent effort is requisite to change our judgment of manners, and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind from long custom has been familiarized [...] I cannot, nor is it proper that I should, enter into such [vicious] sentiments.”

Though the exact interpretation of this passage is controversial, Hume distinguishes between the reactions we have towards assertions that contradict our descriptive and evaluative beliefs respectively. At least part of the puzzle this raises can also be illustrated by the following:

Try to imagine the following fictional mini-story to be true:

“In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl.”¹

When faced with such an imperative, we face what we may call “imaginative resistance”. If this is accepted as a fact, then the following puzzle arises:

“...the puzzle of explaining our comparative difficulty in imagining fictional worlds that we take to be morally deviant.” (Gendler 2000: 56)

For the sake of exposition let us indulge in the fiction that we imagine worlds, possible or impossible, and let us call the world we are to imagine the Giselda-world. In the following, I am going to assume that we have indeed comparative difficulty in imagining morally deviant fictional worlds and will discuss several explanations philosophers have given of this fact, before offering my own.

Let us first note, however, how vague our starting point really is. Gendler frames it in terms of an asymmetry in make-belief:

“I cannot bring myself to believe that murder is right – but I cannot bring myself to believe that the earth is flat either. When it comes to make-belief, however, we seem more inclined to find ourselves stumped in the one case than in the other.” (Gendler 2000: 58)

In a footnote, she then notes:

“Walton points out (personal correspondence) that my use of ‘make-believing’ seems ambiguous between two readings. If I make-believe that *p*, I may be: (a) accepting that *p* as been successfully made fictional (that is, accepting that the author has succeeded in presenting a story in the context of which a certain proposition is true) or (b) pretending that *p* (that is, entertaining or attending to or considering the content of *p*, in the distinctive way required by imagination).” (Gendler 2000: 58, fn. 6)

¹(Cf. Walton 1994: 37). I follow Gendler (2000: 56) in taking this to be a – somehow contrived – example of an alleged fictional truth evincing imaginative resistance, ignoring its possible literary contexts.

Weatherson (2004) has called (a) the *alethic* and (b) the *imaginative* puzzle of imaginative resistance. In the following, I will concentrate on (b), though I take our answer to the (b)-problem to have implications on (a) as well – at least if works of fiction are invitations to imagine (Walton 1990). I do not claim that we never succeed in accepting morally deviant propositions to be fictionally true – context and rhetoric may help us to do so. I think, however, that there is a comparative – not necessarily an absolute – difficulty in imagining morally deviant worlds and that this explains why context and rhetoric are required for this.

0.2 A range of solutions

In recent philosophical discussions, imaginative resistance has been explained by:

- (i) our refusal to imagine (Gendler);
- (ii) our difficulty of imagining (Hume, Moran, Currie); or
- (iii) our inability to imagine certain propositions (Walton, Weatherson, Yablo).

The argument of Gendler (2000) consisted of two parts: she first argued that our difficulty in imagining the Giselda-world is not due to its being logically or conceptually impossible, because we succeed in imagining (at least some) logically or conceptually impossible worlds and because we face imaginative resistance also with respects to worlds that are clearly logically and conceptually possible. Though I am not very much convinced of her first reason, the second – which I take to be sound – suffices to discard conceptual impossibility as the only source of imaginative resistance. In a second part, Gendler sketched a positive account, turning on the alleged fact that the reader of fictions “feels being asked to export a way of looking at the actual world which she does not wish to add to her conceptual repertoire” (Gendler 2000: 77).

Unfortunately, Gendler’s positive proposal is rather vague – unwillingness to add a certain perspective to one’s ‘conceptual repertoire’ can explain unwillingness to imagine the Giselda-world only if it is properly distinguished both from *believing* that murder is right and from *supposing* that it is. The assumption that the author of the Giselda-story presumably wanted us to convince that murder is right is gratuitous – we are not required to make it in order to experience imaginative resistance. The order of explanation is rather in reverse: it is because we experience imaginative resistance that we are unwilling to accept the author’s invitation to change our moral beliefs if really such an invitation is made. But in the same way, we are unwilling to change our non-moral belief if some author would want to convince us that really, pigs can fly.

The impossibility hypothesis, as Gendler (2000: 64) calls it – i.e. the view that we cannot imagine the Giselda-world because it is conceptually impossible – is just one way of defending an inability-diagnosis of imaginative resistance. A more general diagnosis is that imaginative the Giselda-worlds goes against our belief in certain dependence ties:

“Our reluctance to allow moral principles we disagree with to be fictional is just an instance of a more general point concerning dependence relations of a certain kind.” (Walton 1994: 46)

The dependence relations here are those holding between the subvening base of non-moral properties and the moral properties supervening on them in the sense that no two things could differ in moral properties without also differing in non-moral ones. Weatherson (2004: ??) has argued that we experience imaginative resistance in all and only the cases where the following supervenience principle is violated (he calls it “virtue”):

“If p is the kind of claim that, if true, must be true in virtue of lower-level facts, and if the story is about those lower-level facts, then it must be true in the story that there is some true proposition r which is about those lower-level facts such that p is true in virtue of r .” (Weatherson 2004: 18)

Weatherson (2004) claims that radically divergent epistemic evaluations and attributions of mental states and content also violate this principle and are therefore difficult to imagine.

The problem, however, is that our belief in supervenience does not account for our “inability to understand fully what it would be like for [the moral facts] to be different” (Walton 1994: 46), or, as Gendler (2000: 66) phrases it, of why “we cannot make sense of what it would be for something to be both an instance of murder and an instance of something that is morally right, and for it to be morally right *because* it is an instance of murder”. For our belief that some supervenience relation holds is itself descriptive and therefore readily available for suspension in imagination. But it is not easier to imagine the truth of

“In a world where the total distribution of physical qualities over space-time is importantly different from how it is in the actual world, Giselda did the right thing in killing her baby; after all, it was a girl.”

But supervenience-violation is neither necessary nor sufficient for imaginative resistance.² It is not necessary for we experience imaginative resistance also in cases where no supervenience relations are violated, e.g. where the lower-level facts are imagined to be radically different from what they are.

It is not sufficient because many violations of supervenience-relations are readily imagined. We imagine, for example, that one morning, Gregor Samsa, waking up from anxious dreams, discovered that in bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug – *even if* we think that Gregor Samsa is essentially a person. This is even clearer in the case of entities of other categories: their spatio-temporal location is plausibly essential to events, but we readily imagine my talk having taken place 40 minutes earlier than in fact it actually does.

0.3 The connection with emotions

Stephen (Yablo 2002: 485) argues that we have difficulty in accepting a story where maple-leaves are oval. He generalises this to grokking or response-enabled concepts. A response-enabled concept like “oval” is picked out, but not analysable in terms of our perceptual responses: while we pick out oval things as those that look roughly egg-shaped, it is not necessary that oval things look egg-shaped – even in a world where perceivers have radically different perceptual mechanism than we do, there still would be oval things. The question whether some things in a possible world are oval is not to be decided by how they look to their world-mates, but by how they look to us.

Currie (2002: 205) draws an interesting contrast between belief-like and desire-like imagining. Belief-like imagining is supposing – what we do if we evaluate indicative conditionals by the Ramsey test. In belief-like imagining, the inferential patterns of belief contents are preserved, even though imagined propositions are not required to be consistent with each other and with our beliefs. Desire-like imaginings, according to Currie (2002: 210–211) occur when “we imagine ourselves in [a] situation and then, in imagination, we decide to do something”. The desire of the theatre-goer that Othello not kill Desdemona is of this kind – and it is not the desire that, in this fiction, Desdemona not be murdered. The latter is a real (but odd) desire, the first a desire-in-imagination (Currie 2002: 212). It is in conjunction with desire-like imaginings that belief-like imaginings have emotional consequences. Imaginative resistance, according to Currie, arises when we choose to preserve the normal connection between belief and desire (and between belief-like and desire-like imagining) at the cost of desire-like imagining:

“...if it is difficult [for the reader] to have the desire-like imagining that female infants be killed, she can have the belief-like imagining that female infanticide is right only at the expense of the harmony between belief-like and desire-like imagining which is the natural stance of the intelligent and sensitive reader.” (Currie 2002: 217)

As Currie (2002: 218–219) acknowledges, this diagnosis does not cover all cases: it does not explain our difficulty in imagining the lame joke to be funny or imagine some pain we would experience if tortured by gentle contact with a fluffy chair.

²I am indebted here and in the following to Tyler Dogget’s talk on imaginative resistance at MIT in spring 2005.

“it is harder, much harder, to get people to desire in imagination against the trend of their own real desires than it is to get people to believe in imagination against the trend of what they really believe” (Currie 2002: 214)

Gendler characterises the cases of imaginative resistance Hume had in mind as “cases involving valenced normative evaluations: we are asked to assess something as mannerly or unmannerly, praiseworthy or blameworthy, loveable or hateable, where each of the pairs identifies two points along a normative spectrum where one end is desirable and the other is not”.

0.4 A step back

A GENERAL CONCEPT OF MAKE-BELIEVE

We need, in other words, a logic of “make-believedly” that applies to emotive and not just conative actions.³

An alternative to the voluntarist explanation:

1. Evaluative judgments are tied up with feelings.
2. Feelings either cannot be simulated or they can be simulated only in rather special ways (as some kind of make-believe feelings, as perhaps they are when we go to the movies).

Compare this with the imaginative resistance of a vegetarian to “if you haven’t had a good steak for days, you just feel terribly hungry”.

- (1) Suppose that murder is right.
- (2) Imagine that murder is right.
- (3) Accept as fictionally true that murder is right.
- (4) Pretend that murder is right.
- (5) Make-believedly approve of murder.

(1), even by Gendler’s lights, is easy. (2) is what she takes to be difficult, understanding it as (at least entailing) (3). She takes the difficulty of (4) to explain the difficulty of (3). I think the difficulty (if any) of (2) is explained by the difficulty of (5).

THE RANGE OF THE PHENOMENON How wide is the phenomenon of imaginative resistance? A lot of cases have been mentioned in the literature:

- (i) We have difficulty in imagining, of a really lame joke, that it is funny (Walton 1994: 43–44).
- (ii) We have difficulty in imagining, of sour milk, that it smells good (Gendler 2000: 78 attributes it to Carl Ginet).
- (iii) We have difficulty in imagining, of a monster truck rally, that it is sublimely beautiful (Yablo 2002: 285).

The following are easy:

- (E1) Suppose that this tomato looks green.
- (E2) Suppose that this joke is funny.
- (E3) Suppose that sour milk smells good.
- (E4) Suppose that you are a zombie.
- (E5) Suppose that murder is right.

But the following are difficult:

- (D1) Make-believedly see this tomato as green.
- (D2) Make-believedly laugh about this joke.
- (D3) Make-believedly like this smell.
- (D4) Make-believedly be all dark inside.
- (D5) Make-believedly approve of this murder.

³It should apply to them ‘directly’, not just in a round-about way via a detour through fictional truths that include “such propositions as that one is now experiencing fear and pity for the tragic hero, or that one feels the satisfactions of vengeance when rough justice is meted out to the deserving” (Moran 1994: 77). Imagining that the proposition “I am feeling fear of the lion” is true (or imagining it as true), however, is clearly different from make-believedly fear the lion: feeling fear-at-the-movies is not an activity involving propositions.

0.5 The simulation of emotions

what explains this comparative difficulty?

essential properties of the objects of emotions

restricted counterpart relations – de re

Teroni - 2 notions of 'formal object':

1. what gives the relevant act its conditions of satisfaction
2. what makes the specific act the act it is

cf Frege on the grasping of truth-values – judging is marking out a part within the True – this is ridiculous, but the corresponding claim for practical attitudes seems plausible: to fear a spider, is indeed to mark out part of the dangerous as an object of an attitude

But as a de re claim (accommodating KM's point) Even if the fear of a spider is not the fear of the dangerous, the fear of a spider is a fear of the spider as dangerous

– but of things as so-and-so → FORMAL OBJECTS ALSO FOR FEELINGS, CONTRA MULLIGAN

This is a de re claim: not only is fear fear of something perceived as dangerous but this state of fear is essentially of something perceived as fearful

including Feeling because I include finding funny – I suggest that she may get the point of the joke, feel its funniness and yet not respond emotionally in any way at all.

upshot for normative necessity: pleasure is good, pain is bad, the beautiful is admirable or knowledge is better than error etc - it is not always de dicto - it may be metaphysical necessity after all, holding in virtue of the essences of the objects of emotions

It also accounts for the fact that some readers, e.g. [Gendler \(2000: 74\)](#), react to the Giselda-story by "doubling of the narrator", i.e. concluding not that in the story, murder is right, but that *the narrator thinks* that, in the story, murder is right, and explains why we often consider the morally deviant authorial comments as redundant.

[Radford \(1975\)](#): Paradox of fiction: how can we have feelings towards things we know don't exist? distinguish: (i) identification with fictional character; (ii) relating to the fictional character, understanding their emotions as we understand other people's emotions; (3) Gefühlsansteckung [Lamarque \(1981\)](#): attitudes towards propositions Walton: make-believe / off-line emotions: we imagine that we fear; problem: there's no katharsis then; and: it's still propositional, so why should it move us?

bodily aspect important: [Robinson \(1995\)](#)

contrafactual emotions [Moran \(1994 2001\)](#)

faking: cf. Stanislawski, Die Arbeit des Schauspielers an sich selbst – may become real, cf [Murdoch \(1970\)](#) on the step-mother coming to like the step-daughter

traits of character - dispositions to emotions (not to actions! as in [Brandt \(1970: 30\)](#)) Elster: we can form our character (Ulysses) even if there are problems (Sour Grapes)

my classification of emotions 1st pleasure (Lust), pain 2nd fear (Angst), grief, love (Liebe), hate, homesickness, stress, panic 3rd pleasure (Freude), sadness, fear (Furcht), pride, shame, envy, anger (Wut), pity, anger (Zorn), jealousy, love (Verliebtheit), love-sickness 4th melancholy, euphoria, shock, astonishment

As remarked by [Moran \(1994: 81\)](#), there is nothing problematic at all about surprise directed at fictional characters.

0.6 Morals

normative necessity

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