

Editorial Manager(tm) for Philosophical Studies
Manuscript Draft

Manuscript Number: PHIL3421R3

Title: Imaginative Resistance Without Conflict

Article Type: Original Research

Keywords: Imaginative Resistance, Walton, Fiction, Imagination, Moral, Gendler, Stock, Weisberg, Meskin

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IMAGINATIVE RESISTANCE WITHOUT CONFLICT

(Word Count: 8124)

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Section 1: Introduction

Suppose that you are reading a work of fiction and come across the line:

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

Your reaction to this line will depend on what else is happening in the story. For example, if in the fictional town where Giselda lives, girls who survive face lives worse than death, then you may accept statement GK (Stock 2005: 619). But suppose instead that the author makes it clear that girls in the fictional world are treated much the same as girls in the actual world. It is just the *moral* facts that are different: in the fictional world, it is morally right to kill babies simply because they are girls, whereas in the actual world it isn't. This seems hard – if not impossible – to accept. But why?

After all, writers of fiction can say all sorts of false things, which we accept as true in the fictional world just on the author's say-so. For example, an author can write:

W By the year 2010, packs of wolves were roaming the towns of England.

We would accept statement W as true in the fictional world, even though we do not accept it as *actually* true. Why don't we similarly accept as true in the fictional world whatever *moral* statements an author makes? ¹ What accounts for this asymmetry? This is what is sometimes called the puzzle of imaginative resistance.²

In this paper, I outline a range of popular solutions to the puzzle, all of which depend on a common assumption: that imaginative resistance is caused by a certain sort of conflict. I show that this assumption is false, and thus that each of the popular solutions fail. I then suggest a new solution to the puzzle.

Section 2: A range of popular solutions to the puzzle

Nearly all philosophers working in this area link the puzzle described above – which (following Walton 2006) we can call the 'fictionality puzzle' – with another puzzle – the 'imaginative puzzle'. We can easily imagine all sorts of false things – for example we can imagine that dogs can talk, and that people can fly. But it is not nearly so easy to imagine that the world is much as it actually is, except that it is morally right to kill baby girls. In general, it seems that we have difficulty imagining certain moral claims obtaining that we take to be false – whereas we do not have a similar problem

¹ The puzzle seems to arise not just for moral claims: Brian Weatherson shows how imaginative resistance can also arise for aesthetic claims, epistemic evaluations, attributions of mental states, attributions of content, shape predicates, and claims about constitution (Weatherson 2004: 3-6). For simplicity however, in this paper I focus on moral cases.

² Walton and others have argued that there are several distinct puzzles that go under the name of 'the puzzle of imaginative resistance' (Walton 2006, Weatherson 2004). In this introduction I focus on what Walton calls the 'fictionality puzzle' – 'the most perplexing of the bunch' (Walton 2006: 140)

imagining non-moral claims obtaining that we take to be false.³ This imaginative puzzle seems to mirror the fictionality puzzle, and it is generally agreed that there is some sort of link between the two. Without wanting to claim quite generally that what cannot be imagined cannot be fictional, many of the philosophers working in this area agree that it is our inability to imagine false moral claims such as GK that accounts for the difficulty in making them fictionally true.

The popular solutions described below all attempt to explain the fictionality puzzle (e.g. why an author cannot easily make claim GK fictionally true) by accounting for the imaginative puzzle (e.g. why we have difficulty imagining claim GK). I run briefly through each of the solutions below.

The ‘dependence relation’ solution (Walton)

Walton’s response to the puzzle involves what he calls ‘dependence’ relations between moral and non-moral facts. To understand what Walton means by these dependence relations, suppose that you knew all the relevant physical or natural facts about a person called Mr Smith. Suppose, for example, that you knew everything that he had done and would do during his lifetime, and that you knew exactly what had happened to him during his lifetime, and that you knew every relevant fact about his physical make-up. From these physical or natural facts, you would be able to gather certain moral facts. For example, if you knew that Mr Smith gave a lot of money to charity, then (given certain other pieces of background information) you could conclude that Mr Smith did something good in his lifetime. How do we manage to get a moral claim out of a collection of non-moral claims? We must be assuming that certain relations – what Walton calls ‘dependence relations’ – hold between the two types of claim. Stating what these relations are (or even what we typically believe them to be) is clearly a tricky business, but here is a rough and ready example of such a relation: when a person gives lots of money to charity, other things being equal, (s)he is doing something good.

³ This isn’t quite accurate, for it is not simply moral claims that cause imaginative resistance (see footnote 1), but I am putting this point to one side for simplicity.

Walton claims that in cases of imaginative resistance we are being asked to imagine a combination of moral and non-moral claims which are incompatible with the dependence relations that we believe to hold. So for example, we might be asked to imagine that someone voluntarily gave lots of money to charity – that they helped many people and harmed no-one, and remained humble throughout their lives, and that there were no other special circumstances to diminish their actions (i.e., that all else is equal) – and yet we are also asked to imagine that what they did was morally bad rather than morally good. This is incompatible with the dependence relations that we believe to hold between moral and non-moral claims. Walton claims that imaginative resistance ‘has something to do with an inability to imagine [certain kinds of dependence relations] being different from how we think they are, perhaps an inability to understand fully what it would be like for them to be different’ (Walton 1994: 46). Walton admits that this solution is sketchy, but it is certainly a tempting line of thought, and Weatherston (2004) and Yablo (2003) have developed related views (Walton 2006: 146).

The ‘impossibility’ solution (Stock)

On this solution, the thought is that we cannot imagine what we judge to be impossible. Or, more accurately, we cannot imagine what we judge to be *conceptually* impossible – for it could be claimed that recognising that something is metaphysically impossible does not prevent us from imagining it (e.g. perhaps we can imagine that water is a unitary element, even though this is metaphysically impossible (Weinburg and Meskin 2006: 187)). The proponents of this view argue that a claim such as GK (combined with further claims about the context) is judged by the reader to be conceptually impossible, and is therefore unimaginable.

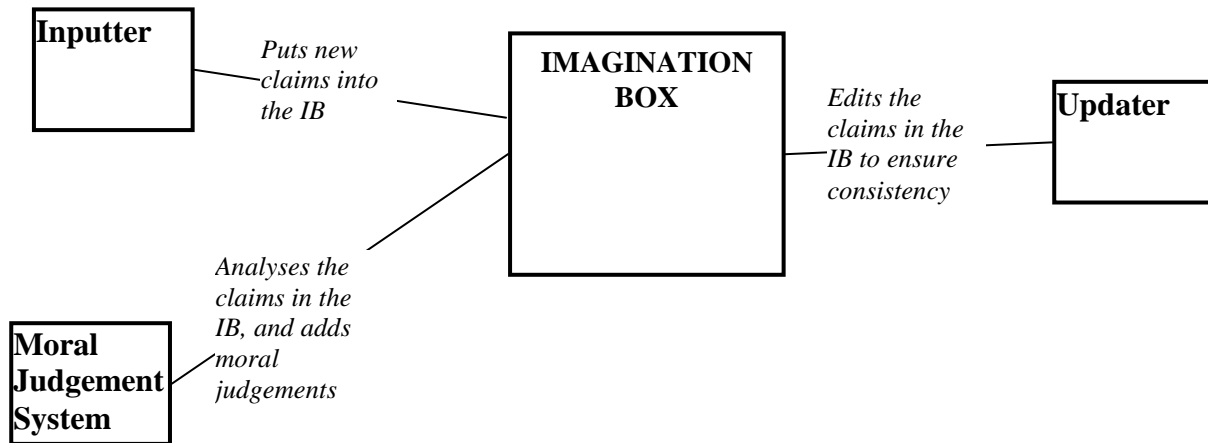
This solution has faced several criticisms. Some have questioned whether it is plausible to claim that whenever we judge a moral claim to be false, we also judge it to be conceptually impossible. For example, Richard Moran argues that ordinary moral disagreement could not take place as it does if we considered any moral view that conflicts with our own to be conceptually impossible (Moran 1994: 101-102). Others have questioned whether recognising something as a conceptual impossibility prevents us from being able to imagine it – and so prevents it from being fictionally true. Tamar Szabó

Gendler, for example, has written a story in which – apparently – 12 both is and is not the sum of 5 and 7 (Gendler 2000: 67-68). If Gendler has succeeded in getting us to imagine something conceptually impossible – i.e. that 12 both is and is not the sum of 5 and 7 – then this would provide a counterexample to the central claim of the impossibility solution.

Despite these objections, this solution is referred to by several authors as the most natural solution (e.g. Gendler 2003: 64-66, Weatherson 2004: 7), and is defended by Kathleen Stock (2003, 2005).

The ‘empirically-oriented’ solution (Weinberg and Meskin)

Jonathan Weinberg and Aaron Meskin have what they call a ‘more empirically-oriented’ approach to the problem than many other philosophers (Weinburg and Meskin 2006: 177). Weinberg and Meskin account for the phenomenon of imaginative resistance using a model that is designed to describe – at some high level – how our minds work. The model contains a belief box: for every claim that a person currently believes, we say that that claim is ‘in their belief box’. Weinberg and Meskin argue that the model should also contain an ‘imagination box’ (IB), which is functionally distinct from the belief box. For every claim that a person is currently imagining, that claim can be said to be ‘in their imagination box’. The model also includes an ‘inputter’ (the ‘mechanism or set of mechanisms [which] allow us to insert contents, just about any content whatsoever, into the IB, on the basis of a decision to do so.’ (Weiberg and Meskin 2006: 182); an ‘updater’ (which edits the content of the imagination box to keep it consistent); and various ‘domain specific processes’, including a ‘moral judgement system’ which will place appropriate moral judgements into the imagination box.



The design of this model and the presence of each component is justified by appeal to various features of the imagination. Crucially, the model has not been engineered specifically to account for imaginative resistance. Thus the fact that the phenomenon of imaginative resistance would inevitably arise on the model can reasonably be said to explain the puzzle of imaginative resistance, rather than simply depict it.

Here is how the phenomenon of imaginative resistance will inevitably arise on the model. As you read a work of fiction, the claims stated in the fiction are put into your imagination box by the inputter. Your moral judgement system will add moral claims as appropriate. In cases of imaginative resistance, the fiction will state some moral claim which conflicts with the claim added by your moral judgement system. The inputter will try to place the moral claim stated in the fiction into the imagination box, but as soon as it does so, the updater will recognise the conflict and remove the newly added moral claim. As the moral claim stated in the fiction cannot be held in the imagination box, it cannot be imagined.

Section 3: The problem with the ‘conflict’ solutions

The solutions outlined in the previous section are some of the most popular solutions in the literature, and there is lively debate amongst the proponents of these solutions about which one is best. I aim to show at a single stroke that none of them will work. My key idea is that we do not just experience imaginative resistance when we are asked to imagine moral principles holding that we believe to be false. We can also experience imaginative resistance when we are asked to imagine moral principles holding whose truth-values we are uncertain of. Here is an example:

The Story of Lucy

Lucy was good friends with a couple called Paddy and Patricia. Paddy and Patricia enjoyed their lives very much, seemed happy with their marriage, and had two healthy happy children. One day, Lucy saw Paddy holding hands with another woman. Lucy agonised over what to do, but eventually she decided to tell Patricia what she had seen. Patricia confronted Paddy; Paddy claimed (truly) that he was just comforting a friend; Patricia didn't believe him, and forced him to leave; Paddy killed himself, and Patricia died of depression soon afterwards; The children were taken into care. Lucy was very sad, and wondered whether she had done the right thing. She had: being honest with Patricia was the morally right thing to have done, even though it had such sad consequences.

Now, when I reach the last line of this story, I experience imaginative resistance. I'm quite sure that, in this fictional world, Lucy saw Paddy holding hands with another woman – just because the author says so. But I am unsure whether Lucy did the right thing in telling Paddy – and the author claiming that she did does not automatically settle the issue. Perhaps what Lucy did was right, and perhaps it wasn't, but the author can't make it the case that Lucy did the right thing – even in the fiction – just by saying so. This seems to be a case of imaginative resistance, but here I am not being asked to imagine

something that I believe to be false – but rather to imagine something whose truth-value I am unsure about.⁴

None of the popular solutions above can account for my imaginative resistance in this case. Let's briefly review why this is.

The 'dependence relation' solution (Walton)

According to this solution, cases of imaginative resistance occur when what we are asked to imagine conflicts with the dependence relations that we believe to hold between moral and non-moral claims. In the story of Lucy, I am unsure what the dependence relations actually are: given the relevant non-moral facts, I am unsure what moral judgement to draw. I do not believe that the dependence relations are just as the author presents them, but neither do I believe them to be different from how the author presents them. Thus Walton's diagnosis does not apply here.

The 'impossibility' solution (Stock)

According to this solution, cases of imaginative resistance occur when we are asked to imagine what we believe to be conceptually impossible. But I do not believe the moral claim made in the Story of Lucy to be conceptually impossible. I do not believe it to be true, but neither do I believe it to be false. And if I don't believe the moral claim in the story to be false, then I certainly don't believe it to be conceptually impossible.

The 'empirically-oriented' solution (Weinburg and Meskin)

On Weinburg and Meskin's picture, imaginative resistance occurs when the moral judgement system places a moral claim in the imagination box, which contradicts the moral claim made in the story that the reader is trying to imagine. But as I read the Story of Lucy, my moral judgement system will not

⁴ You may not share my uncertainty here: you may believe that Lucy did do the right thing, or that she didn't. If so, then you may prefer to think of another example that has the relevant feature for you – i.e. a story containing a moral claim that you do not believe to be either true or false. This should be easy to do, provided that you sometimes feel uncertain about which action in a given situation is morally right.

place a moral claim in my imagination box that contradicts the moral judgement made in the story, because I do not make any moral judgement that conflicts with that made in the story. There will thus be no contradiction for the updater to resolve. Weinburg and Meskin's solution to the puzzle does not work for the Story of Lucy case.

An assumption common to each of the three popular solutions above is that imaginative resistance is caused by some sort of *conflict* – between what we believe and what the author asks us to imagine. Of course, no-one would claim that we experience imaginative resistance *whenever* we are asked to imagine something that we believe does not hold – but on each of the three solutions above this is assumed to be a necessary (though of course not sufficient) ingredient in cases of imaginative resistance. What the Story of Lucy shows is that this ingredient is not even necessary: we can experience imaginative resistance without conflict of this sort. In the next section, I consider two ways in which the proponents of the conflict solutions might try to answer my objection: neither of these attempts prove successful.

Section 4: Two replies to my objection

1st Reply

I have claimed that in the Story of Lucy the moral claim that I am asked to imagine (i.e. that Lucy did the right thing) does not conflict with anything that I believe. But this claim could be questioned: after all, people are sometimes mistaken about what beliefs they hold. Even though it seems to me that I am simply uncertain whether Lucy did the right thing, I might nevertheless believe – subconsciously, perhaps – that Lucy didn't do the right thing. Maybe my imaginative resistance to the Story of Lucy could even be taken as evidence of this subconscious belief. If so, then the Story of Lucy would not be a counterexample to the Conflict Solutions.

I do not think that this attempt to rescue the Conflict Solutions is successful however. To see this, consider the Story of Lucy II, which is much the same as the original Story of Lucy, but with a different ending. In the Story of Lucy II, the last line is replaced with ‘Lucy’s regret was appropriate, for Lucy’s action was not morally right’. I feel imaginative resistance to the last line of the Story of Lucy II, just as I did to the last line of the original story. To explain my imaginative resistance to the Story of Lucy II, the proponents of the Conflict Solutions would need to claim that I have a (subconscious) belief that what Lucy did was morally right. Thus to account for my imaginative resistance to both the original Story of Lucy and the Story of Lucy II, the proponents of the Conflict Solutions would need to claim that I believe both that Lucy did the right thing, and that Lucy didn’t do the right thing. Thus they would need to claim that I have beliefs with contradictory contents. Whilst I do not want to claim quite generally that all my beliefs are consistent, the Conflict Solutions start to look very unattractive when saddled with the claim that I must have subconscious beliefs – beliefs that I do not recognise as mine – that contradict each other.

2nd Reply

The Story of Lucy states that Lucy did the right thing – and it is not as though I believe that Lucy didn’t do the right thing: we cannot get a conflict quite that easily. But perhaps there is a more subtle way in which the statements in the story conflict with what I believe. For example, perhaps I believe that it is *uncertain* whether Lucy did the right thing. Does this belief conflict with what I am asked to imagine?

To make things clear, let’s use Weinburg and Meskin’s account to illustrate this idea. As I read the Story of Lucy, the inputter places some non-moral claims in my imagination box – i.e. that Paddy and Patricia have two children, that Lucy saw Paddy holding hands with another woman, etc. My moral judgement system will then add a moral claim to the imagination box, which might be something like – ‘it’s uncertain whether Lucy did the right thing’. The next line in the fiction states that Lucy did the right thing, so this will then be added to the imagination box too. Is there a contradiction between

these two statements – ‘it’s uncertain whether Lucy did the right thing’ and ‘Lucy did the right thing’ – that will prompt the updater to remove one of these statements?

To untangle this question, we need to separate out two different ways of understanding the term ‘uncertain’. Under the first reading, which I’ll call the epistemic reading, ‘it is uncertain whether Lucy did the right thing’ just means something like ‘I don’t know whether Lucy did the right thing’, or perhaps ‘I don’t believe that Lucy did the right thing, and I don’t believe that Lucy didn’t do the right thing’. Under this reading, the two claims (‘Lucy did the right thing’ and ‘it is uncertain whether Lucy did the right thing’) are not contradictory. It is obviously possible for something to hold without my having any beliefs about whether it holds.

It is tempting, however, to think that here we are faced with a version of Moore’s Paradox. Here is an example to illustrate Moore’s paradox: it seems that I can’t believe simultaneously both that it is raining, and that I don’t believe that it is raining, even though these two claims do not contradict each other. Perhaps there is something similarly problematic about having the claims ‘Lucy did the right thing’ and ‘I don’t believe that Lucy did the right thing’ in my imagination box simultaneously, even though they are not contradictory. But there is a crucial difference here. Moore’s paradox is about our inability to *believe* two claims simultaneously, and it is not at all clear that there would be a parallel problem with *imagining* them both simultaneously. It seems that I *can* imagine simultaneously that it is raining and that I don’t believe that it is raining: I can imagine myself being tricked by clever lighting into thinking that it is a sunny day, while it is actually raining outside. Moore’s paradox is thus not relevant here.

In short, if we take ‘uncertain’ in an epistemic sense, then there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with having the two claims ‘Lucy did the right thing’ and ‘it is uncertain whether Lucy did the right thing’ in my imagination box simultaneously: they do not seem to be in conflict.

Let us then try an alternative interpretation of ‘uncertain’, under which it means something like ‘indeterminate’. Plausibly, ‘doing the right thing’ is a vague expression, which admits of borderline cases. And on some accounts of vagueness, there is genuine – non-epistemic – indeterminacy about whether vague terms apply in borderline cases. Thus my moral judgement system might add ‘it is indeterminate whether Lucy did the right thing’ to my imagination box – and this really would contradict the claim made in the fiction (‘Lucy did the right thing’). For ‘Lucy did the right thing’ entails ‘it is true that Lucy did the right thing’, which contradicts the claim ‘it is indeterminate whether Lucy did the right thing’.

My response here is to point out that – even though I experience imaginative resistance to the last line of the story of Lucy – I don’t believe that it is indeterminate whether Lucy did the right thing. I think that there might well be a fact of the matter as to whether Lucy did the right thing: it’s just that at present I do not know it. It follows that my moral judgement system would not add ‘it is indeterminate whether Lucy did the right thing’ to my imagination box – and so there would be nothing to contradict the moral claim made in the fiction. A defender of the conflict solutions might claim that I am wrong about my own beliefs: the fact that I experience imaginative resistance is evidence that I believe – subconsciously – that it is indeterminate whether Lucy did the right thing. My response here can parallel my response in the previous section to a similar point. Consider the Story of Lucy III, which is much the same as the original Story of Lucy, but with a different ending. In the Story of Lucy III, the last line is replaced with ‘Lucy discussed her actions later with her friends. Some thought she had done the right thing, and some thought that she hadn’t. In fact, all of Lucy’s friends were mistaken, for it was simply indeterminate whether Lucy had done the right thing’. I feel imaginative resistance to the last line of the Story of Lucy III, just as I did to the last line of the original story. To explain my imaginative resistance to the Story of Lucy III, the proponents of the Conflict Solutions would need to claim that I have a (subconscious) belief that it was not indeterminate whether Lucy did the right thing. And this sits very badly with the proponent’s need to claim that I also have a subconscious belief that it was indeterminate whether Lucy did the right thing.

In the previous section, I used the Story of Lucy to raise an objection to the Conflict Solutions. In this section, I have considered two possible replies that the proponents of the Conflict Solutions could give to my objection: neither reply has been successful. In the next section, I consider how the Conflict Solutions might be modified in the light of my objection.

Section 5: Modifying the Conflict Solutions

The Story of Lucy shows that the conflict solutions described above will not work as they stand – for they all assume, incorrectly, that it is only when we are asked to imagine a moral claim that we believe to be *false* that we experience imaginative resistance. But perhaps we can modify the Conflict Solutions so that instead they rely on the correct claim that we experience imaginative resistance when we are asked to imagine a moral claim that we do not believe to be true. Below I consider how each of the solutions would work with this modification.

Modifying Walton's Dependence Relation Solution

With this modification, Walton's Dependence Relation solution would become something like this: we experience imaginative resistance when we are asked to imagine certain kinds of dependence relations being a certain way, and we lack a belief that they are that way. On this modified account, our imaginative ability is limited in a stronger way than on the original account. It is not merely that you cannot imagine certain claims if they conflict with what you believe: it is that you cannot imagine certain claims unless you already have a matching belief.

There is nothing obviously contradictory in this modified version of Walton's theory, but it is unattractively ad hoc. Part of the appeal of the original account was the implicit assumption that, in cases of imaginative resistance, what we are being asked to imagine conflicts with certain deeply held beliefs. Imaginative resistance was supposed to derive from an 'inability to imagine [the dependence

relations] being different from how we think they are, perhaps an inability to understand what it would be like for them to be different' (Walton 1994: 46). The implication is that our beliefs about these dependence relations are so central to our way of thinking that we cannot even make sense of the idea of their being otherwise – and it seems natural to suppose that we can't imagine some claim holding unless we can at least make sense of it. But the modified version of Walton's theory, designed to deal with the Story of Lucy, cannot rely on this implicit assumption. We can experience imaginative resistance without what we are being asked to imagine conflicting with any of our beliefs - deeply held or otherwise. The modified version of Walton's account thus raises a pressing question: *why* is it that where certain moral claims are concerned, we cannot even imagine them holding unless we already believe that they do hold?

Modifying the impossibility solution

On the original version of the impossibility solution, we experience imaginative resistance when we are asked to imagine something that we recognise as conceptually impossible. This could be modified to become: we experience imaginative resistance when we are asked to imagine something that we do not recognise as conceptually possible.⁵ And the idea that we can imagine only what we recognise as conceptually possible does seem to have some independent appeal. It echoes what Stephen Yablo claims – in a different context – for conceivability: 'conceiving involves the appearance of possibility' (Yablo 1993: 5). We might think that imagining is harder than conceiving – that any limits on what can be conceived will also limit what can be imagined – and so conclude that if Yablo's account of

⁵ This modification does not seem to be open to Stock, because of the way that she characterizes conceptual impossibility. Stock suggests that for something to count as conceptually impossible, it must be 'manifestly incoherent' (Stock 2005: 617). I do not believe the moral judgment made in the Story of Lucy to be incoherent – for I have not ruled out the possibility of its being true. Though the moral judgment might (arguably) turn out on reflection to be incoherent, it certainly is not *manifestly* incoherent, and I know that. Thus, if I accept Stock's use of the expression 'conceptually impossible', I recognize the moral claim made in the Story of Lucy as not conceptually impossible – and so presumably conceptually possible. Thus on the modified version of the Impossibility Solution – according to which we can imagine only what we recognize as conceptually possible – my imaginative resistance to the Story of Lucy remains unexplained. The modified version of the Impossibility Solution that I discuss looks more promising given a different view of conceptual impossibility, according to which a claim can be conceptually impossible without being obviously untrue.

conceiving is right, then we cannot imagine what we do not recognize as conceptually possible.⁶ The modified version of the impossibility solution thus has some independent appeal.

However, this modified version would certainly be weaker than the original solution. One way of attacking the original solution was to produce an imaginable claim that we recognize as conceptually impossible. To attack the modified version of the solution we need only produce an imaginable claim that we do not recognize as conceptually possible. Thus to defeat the impossibility solution there is no need to show, as Gendler tried to do in her story 'The Tower of Goldbach' (2000: 66-68), that we can imagine that 12 both is and is not the sum of 5 and 7 (a claim that we recognize as conceptually impossible). Instead the impossibility solution (in its modified form) would be defeated if we could just show that we can imagine that Goldbach's conjecture is true (a claim we do not recognize as conceptually possible). And there is reason to think that this second task will be easier than the first. It would be easy enough to create a story in which mathematicians joyfully discover a proof for Goldbach's conjecture, and natural to say that you can read this story and imagine its content – including the claim that Goldbach's conjecture is true. Of course, it is open to objectors to claim that when we read this story, we are not *really* imagining that Goldbach's conjecture is true, but without some good motivation, this move is not appealing. Stock makes a parallel move in response to Gendler's 'Tower of Goldbach' story, claiming that when we read this story we are not *really* imagining that 12 both is and is not the sum of 5 and 7, but Stock has a principled reason for this move. She notes that you can only imagine the claims in the 'Tower of Goldbach' by refusing to draw certain inferences. But (Stock claims) to count as using a particular concept, there are certain inferences that you must be prepared to draw: if you are not prepared draw certain 'core' inferences about the number 7 (e.g. that when it is added to 5 there is a total of 12), then the number 7 is not part of the content of your imagining. But it is not at all obvious how this objection could be applied to my

⁶ In fact, Yablo himself might well reject the claim that the limits he has placed on conceiving would also apply to imagining. For Yablo makes it clear that he is using 'conceiving' in a special sense. He writes: 'far from trying to give the notion's one true meaning, my aim right now is only to distinguish conceiving in the sense that matters from various *other* cognitive operations doing business under the same name' (Yablo 1993: 5). Whilst we might normally assume that whatever can be imagined can also be conceived, this does not seem nearly so obvious when conceiving is understood in Yablo's sense.

Goldbach's Conjecture case. When I imagine that Goldbach's conjecture is true, what relevant inferences am I refusing to draw?

To sum up, then, we can modify the impossibility solution to deal with my Story of Lucy case, but in doing so we weaken it, exposing it to a new range of counterexamples which are harder to fight off.

Modifying the empirically based account

Let us finally consider how Weinburg and Meskin's empirically based account would need to be modified to deal with the Story of Lucy. It would no longer be enough for the updater to weed contradictions out of the imagination box: the updater would also need to find and remove any moral claim inserted by the inputter that had no matching moral claim generated by the moral judgement system.

The major disadvantage of this modification is that it would be an ad-hoc response to the puzzle of imaginative resistance. On Weinburg and Meskin's original account, the solution to the puzzle of imaginative resistance emerged naturally from the authors' model of the imagination, which was designed to meet independent requirements. For example, the 'updater' was introduced to explain our ability to draw inferences both from what we believe and from what we imagine: empirical evidence suggests that the same mechanism operates in both contexts (Weinburg and Meskin 2006: 178-9). And the moral judgement system - and its interaction with the imagination box - can also be justified without reference to imaginative resistance: 'it is crucial to our engagement with ordinary narrative fiction that *some* moral mechanisms be engaged by the imagination. We would not be able to make sense of the punishments and rewards that befall the characters in fictions - or the moral emotions of those characters - were we not able to make moral judgements about the fictional (and hence imagined) events which befall them' (Weinburg and Meskin 2006: 181). Thus on the original account, Weinburg and Meskin could reasonably claim that their empirically informed model could 'shed light' on the puzzle of imaginative resistance (Weinburg and Meskin 2006: 177): for we could see how imaginative

resistance would inevitably arise, given the way that the model *had* to be for independent reasons. On the new modified account, however, the model has been adapted specifically to solve difficult cases of imaginative resistance (such as the Story of Lucy case). Rather than the model shedding light on the puzzle of imaginative resistance, the puzzle of imaginative resistance has laid down new requirements on the model. Thus it can no longer be said that the empirically-oriented account has *explained* the puzzle of imaginative resistance.

We have seen then that though we could adapt each of the Conflict Solutions to deal with the problem I have raised, in every case the required adaptation would seriously weaken the account. The Conflict Solutions look like inadequate responses to the puzzle of imaginative resistance. The question then arises: what should we put in their place? In the next section I outline an alternative solution to the puzzle of imaginative resistance - the 'Import Solution' - which avoids the problem faced by the Conflict Solutions.

Section 6: The Import Solution

According to the Import Solution, moral principles do not get to be true in fictional worlds by being imagined. Rather, general moral principles hold in fictional worlds because they are automatically imported into them, along with a host of other background claims that are not explicitly stated by the author. As Walton writes: 'We are usually entitled to assume that characters have blood in their veins, just because they are people, even if their blood is never mentioned or described or shown or portrayed. It is fictional in *La Grande Jatte* that the couple strolling in the park eat and sleep and work and play; that they have friends and rivals, ambitions, satisfactions, and disappointments; that they live on a planet that spins on its axis and circles the sun, one with weather and agriculture, poverty and plenty; and so on and on and on.' (Walton 1990: 142). Now there is no agreed formula for working out exactly which background claims are imported into a work of fiction in this way, but this much seems

clear: lots of claims that the reader takes to be true in the actual world are automatically imported into many fictional worlds. So for example it is true in the fictional world of *Pride and Prejudice* that adult humans generally get about by walking rather than crawling. This is never explicitly stated, but we automatically import this claim into the fictional world. If we did not do so, we might have much more sympathy with Mrs Hurst and Miss Bingley's surprise that Elizabeth should have *walked* three miles to see her sister. Similarly, it is never explicitly stated in *Pride and Prejudice* that (all else being equal) it is wrong to persuade a 15 year old to leave a loving family, rape her, and then abandon her expecting that she might starve. We import this claim automatically into the fictional world, and we rely on this claim (or something like it) to interpret Elizabeth's reaction to Wickham's behavior. Thus many claims that we generally take to be actually true – including general moral principles – are automatically imported into fictional worlds.

A claim does not need to be imagined – or even imaginable – to be true in a fictional world. Claims that we take to be true – but that we cannot directly imagine⁷ – can be made true in a fictional world by being automatically imported into it. Consider for example the claim that -1 has three cubed roots, or the claim that there are more than 4 dimensions. Despite the fact that these claims seem unimaginable, we believe that they are true, and they are automatically imported into many fictional worlds. For example, given that Ian McEwan does not touch on the number of cubed roots of -1 in his novel *Saturday*, -1 has three cubed roots in that fictional world. Thus claims can be true in fictional

⁷ I say 'directly imagine' rather than just 'imagine', because it could be argued that we imagine these claims whenever these claims hold in a world that we imagine. For example, if you imagine a world in which rabbits can talk, then presumably -1 has 3 cubed roots in that world. Effectively, the claim that -1 has 3 cubed roots has been automatically imported into the imagined world. If this counts as imagining that -1 has 3 cubed roots, then of course we can imagine this claim.

In the same way, if we imagine a world in which rabbits can talk, then in the imagined world it is true that murdering innocent children is wrong. It could be argued that this counts as imagining that murdering innocent children is wrong.

I think there is a clear case for a more robust notion of 'imagining'. For if we are stuck with a notion of 'imagining' such that a claim can be imagined simply by imagining a world in which that claim is true, then we would be forced to say that there is no such thing as a claim that we believe to be true but cannot imagine. For a claim that we believe to be true will be automatically imported into many worlds that we can imagine. In this paper I am assuming a more robust notion of 'imagining': under this more robust notion, we cannot imagine that -1 has 3 cubed roots, and (I claim) neither can we imagine that a particular general moral principle (whether we believe it to be true or not) holds.

worlds without being imagined, for even unimaginable claims can be made true in a fictional world by being automatically imported.

According to the Import Solution, general moral principles – whether we believe them to be true or not – can *only* get to be true in a fictional world by being automatically imported. And the only general moral principles that we will import into a work of fiction will be the principles that we take to be true. This explains nicely why the moral principles that can hold in a work of fiction are limited in the way that they are, for to be imported into a fiction, it is not enough for a moral principle to *fail to conflict* with what we believe: a general moral principle will be imported into a work fiction only if the reader believes that it is true.

The Import Solution thus avoids the problem faced by the Conflict Solutions, and deals well with the issue raised by the Story of Lucy. The contentious claim, of course, is that general moral principles can *only* get to be true in a fictional world by being imported into it: why can't they also get to be true by being (directly) imagined? I do not attempt a full defense of this claim here, but my thought is that general moral principles are simply not the sorts of things that we can imagine. To see the appeal of this claim, we need to consider carefully what exactly it is claimed that we cannot imagine. We can of course imagine that some particular type of action causes a lot of unhappiness or happiness: for example, we can imagine a world where hitting people makes them happy and smiling at them makes them cry. And we can of course imagine that some particular type of action is generally disapproved of: for example, we can imagine a world where everybody approves of hitting, and nobody approves of smiling. Indeed we can also imagine a world in which some omnipotent, God-like creator approves of hitting, and rewards it in the afterlife. Thus we can imagine worlds in which people have a variety of attitudes and reactions towards certain types of actions – and authors can create corresponding fictional worlds. What authors cannot do is create fictional worlds in which the *bare* moral principles are different – e.g. a world in which, even though people cry when they are hit, and feel distressed by the idea of hitting, it is nevertheless the right thing to do. And a change in the

bare moral principles would be undetectable: there is no perspective whatsoever – not even a perspective that we can occupy only in imagination⁸ – from which the bare moral principles can be experienced. My suspicion is that at least part of what it is to imagine something – rather than simply suppose it – is to imagine experiencing it. I do not mean to imply that the content of an imagining is fixed by the experience undergone in imagination⁹: the claim is rather that when we can think of no experience whatsoever that would count as experiencing a given claim, then that claim cannot be imagined.¹⁰

The Import Solution – while obviously sketchy – is an example of a solution that succeeds where the Conflict Solutions fail. To solve the puzzle of imaginative resistance, we need to explain why a certain range of moral principles cannot be made true in a fiction, and as the Story of Lucy shows, that range includes moral principles that we feel uncertain about. The Conflict Solutions are aiming at the wrong range: having missed an important part of the data, the proponents of the Conflict Solutions offer inadequate solutions to the puzzle. The Import Solution, in contrast, explains nicely why the line

⁸ The perspectives that we can adopt in imagination allow us to imagine many things that (given who, where and when we are) we could not really experience. For example, we can imagine Henry VIII having honey on toast for breakfast, perhaps by visualizing him biting into the toast from a nearby vantage point – a vantage point that we can't actually occupy. We can even imagine an invisible ghost moving through the room – leaving no trace on human perception – by occupying (in imagination) the perspective of the ghost.

⁹ Christopher Peacocke (1985) has argued that the experience a person imagines having can fail to individuate the content of her imagining. Peacocke illustrates this with an example: 'Imagine a suitcase. If you succeeded, now imagine a suitcase with a cat wholly obscured behind it. It seems that the same, subjective image will serve to meet both requests, even though in one sense what is imagined in each case can be different: in the second case, in the imagined world there is a cat behind a suitcase, whereas that may be left open in the imagined world of the first case.' (Peacocke 1985: 19).

around the moral principles that can be made true in a fiction falls where it does: moral principles only get to be true in a fiction by being imported, and we will not import a principle into a fiction unless we believe it to be true.

Section 7: Conclusion

The Conflict Solutions do not work as they stand. They share the assumption that imaginative resistance occurs only when the reader is asked to imagine something that conflicts with what she believes – and the Story of Lucy shows that this is not the case. Attempts to modify the Conflict Solutions to deal with this objection have been unsuccessful. A new approach is called for: I have outlined a new account – the Import Solution – which is free from the Conflict Solutions’ defect.

¹⁰ As mentioned in footnote 1, the puzzle of imaginative resistance seems to arise not just for moral claims, but also for aesthetic claims, and various other sorts of claims. In this paper I have focussed on moral claims, but there is no obvious reason why the Import Solution could not be extended to cover imaginative resistance to other sorts of claims. To explain imaginative resistance relating to aesthetic claims, for example, we would need to claim that general aesthetic principles are unimaginable, and so can only be made true in a fiction by being automatically imported into it. This would explain why an author cannot make it true in her fictional world that something has a particular aesthetic value simply by stating that it has that value. For example, if a character in a fiction recites a terrible poem – or indeed a poem of dubious aesthetic value – and then the author simply states that the poem is beautiful, we experience imaginative resistance.

Again, to see the appeal of this position, we need to consider carefully what it is claimed we cannot imagine. We might well be able to imagine some context in which such a poem would be beautiful – much as we can perhaps imagine a context in which killing baby girls is the right thing to do. And of course we can imagine worlds where people react to the poem in all sorts of different ways. What I claim we cannot imagine is everything being much the same as it actually is, except that the aesthetic principles are different: e.g. the ugly poem being beautiful, with no change in context or in peoples’ reactions. Again, the thought is that bare aesthetic principles are not the sorts of things that we can imagine because there is no perspective from which they can be experienced.

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