

Reply by Kathleen Stock

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Responses

Kathleen Stock

I am extremely grateful to all commentators for such patient, generous, and stimulating contributions. What follows are some thoughts, by no means intended to be definitive answers to the worries they have raised, but only to enrich the conversation.

Mitchell Green('Extreme Intentionalism Modesly Modified') argues that, within my 'extreme' intentionalism and my associated position on fiction-making, I should abandon my commitment to a condition that, in order to make a given proposition p fictional, the author must have a 'reflexive' intention that p be imagined by readers. According to me, the relevant intention is 'reflexive' in a Gricean sense. That is, the author of a fiction should intend, not only that her readers imagine that p , but also that her intention that they imagine that p be recognised by them, and that this recognition function as a reason for their so imagining. Instead, Green prefers a condition upon fictional meaning, according to which the author of a fiction *overtly commits* herself to 'certain truths holding in the world she has created for this work' (Green cross-reference). Overt commitment of this kind involves making the fictional truths 'publicly accessible, whilst also making [the] intention to make it publicly accessible, also publicly accessible' (Green cross-reference). Green apparently takes this as an instance of a more general communicative phenomenon: 'overtly manifesting some aspect of one's psychological state' (Green cross-reference).

I don't have a very strong objection to altering or even softening the reflexivity condition within my account; as far as I can tell, I could do that and leave the majority of what I want to say intact. However, I'm not yet sure I need to. For one thing, I'm a bit unclear about what the relevant psychological state, to be overtly made publicly accessible by an author in the act of communicating fictional meaning, is supposed to be. In Green's accompanying story about speaker meaning in ordinary contexts, where the main purpose is the transmission of information, he argues that, roughly, to mean that p is to overtly - in the sense just described - manifest one's *belief* that p . Now, in the case of an author writing

a fictional sentence 'p', clearly she is not ordinarily manifesting her belief that *p*, and even where she is – as with didactic fiction - arguably she isn't just doing this; so what (else) can she be manifesting? I don't think the answer can be: 'she's manifesting her own imagining that *p*' (and nor do I think Green thinks this), since at the time of writing, the author might not be imagining that *p* at all. She might, for instance, be wholly focused mentally on the effect that her sentence will produce on a reader, in a way that excludes imaginative engagement. Perhaps Green would say that she is manifesting her belief that *p is true in the story she is writing*. But then we still need a non-circular account of what is 'true in the story' (according to me: what the reader is reflexively intended to imagine), and this is what is in dispute. A different claim (whether or not Green would make it) would be that the author is manifesting her 'pretence' that *p*. The problem with this is that I don't think pretence is purely a psychological state. It is at least partly connected to relevant forms of behaviour. Moreover, these don't normally include the act of writing a fictional text., I would reject any suggestion that an author writing down a fictional utterance is thereby pretending to write a true statement.

One objection Green offers, in order to motivate his conclusion and the rejection of mine, is that readers of fiction don't always need any special reason to imagine what an author makes fictional. He tells us that sometimes, imagining in response to a recognised fiction (or a known 'story-telling') occurs automatically. I'm not sure this is true; or at least, I think this ignores the way that precisely, recognising that one is being confronted with a piece of fiction, intentionally composed by an author to produce certain imaginings in readers, is itself recognition of a reason to imaginatively engage (as opposed, say, to believe what one is reading, or to count the number of words, or to translate them into French: all possible activities which might occur upon reading). Green goes on to say that 'if pressed' the reader may give as a reason, that the author is authoritative with respect to the fictional truths in her own story. But this resurrects my earlier worry from just now: what are those fictional truths, and what is their basis?

Manuel Garcia-Carpintero ('On the Nature of Fiction-Making: Austin or Grice?') objects in a more wholesale way to the Gricean approach to fiction-making which I endorse. On his account, a fiction is still a speech act; but it's a speech act constituted, not by its relation to a certain set of intentions, but rather by its being subject, via an authorial intention, to one of the following norms:

For one to fiction-make p is correct if and only if one's audience must imagine p, on the assumption that they have the relevant desires and dispositions (2013: 350).

For one to fiction-make p is correct if and only if p is worth imagining for one's audience, on the assumption that they have the relevant desires and dispositions (2013: 351)

Also in his (2013), he discusses the film *Last Year at Marienbad* as follows:

[I]n my view Resnais' film *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) tacitly has a content of the kind explicit in his later film *Providence* (1977): it presents us with different sets of possibilities (some of them inconsistent with each other) that one of the characters (X in *Marienbad*, a professional novelist in *Providence*) is imagining, perhaps for a work of fiction under construction. This interpretation is somehow consistent with some of the cryptic declarations of its authors, the writer Alain Robbe-Grillet who wrote the screenplay and Resnais himself, but for all we know it might be that they did not intend their audience to imagine precisely this on the basis of the recognition of that very intention; even so, the fact that the film contains enough material supporting this interpretation justifies us in sustaining it (2013: 353-354).

I originally responded to these points – perhaps inadequately - in Chapter 5 of my book, where I discuss the nature of fiction. In responding, I considered Garcia-Carpintero's view as a contribution to the debate 'what is a fiction?'; and

not particularly in relation to the question ‘what determines fictional content?’”. This wasn’t unreasonable, I think, given that the former question was the focus of the original 2013 article where the points were made. However, I now think I see more clearly that the same points could equally be made in relation to the question of what determines fictional content; and I take it that this is what Garcia-Carpintero intends in his response to me. That is, I take it that the idea of the *Marienbad* example of fictional content – which I’ll accept for the sake of argument – is that, first, it can’t be accounted for by any Gricean-style reflexive intention that readers imagine that content, precisely; and that second, it *can* be accounted for, as long as we take the authors of the film to intend *de re*, in a relatively ‘unspecific’, coarse-grained way, that it be subject to one or both of the norms above. Garcia-Carpintero asserts that these norms are to be taken as a background, independently existing, content-determining ‘code’. The intention in question is supposed to be *de re* not *de dicto* ([Garcia-Carpintero cross-reference](#)).

Here then, there is seemingly a case where there is fictional content (I’ll assume), of which we can allegedly say that it is accompanied by an authorial intention that it be subject to one or both of the norms described above. However it isn’t accompanied, according to Garcia-Carpintero, by any Gricean intention of the kind I specify. Moreover, it is made clear, Garcia-Carpintero takes this case to be exemplary of a wide class of such cases.

In response, I have three worries. The first is about what content gets in, and what gets excluded, on the norm-based account, assuming that these norms are ‘content-determining’ as Garcia-Carpintero says. Say that a particular audience of a work, for some reason, has a non-standard set of desires and dispositions with respect to a particular work (or genre). Take the phenomenon of ‘head canon’, which is, roughly, an idiosyncratic approach by fans of a work to the ‘back story’ or ‘sub-text’ of a fiction, often influenced by what they would like to see there (so, for instance, since romantic stories involving lesbians are severely under-represented in contemporary literature, ‘lesbian head canon’ attempts to put them there, as it were). Does it follow from Garcia-Carpintero’s view that,

if an author intends *de re* that her work be subject to one or both of the norms articulated above, that such fictional truths are 'in the work' after all? I accept that Garcia-Carpintero, like me, isn't looking to produce an account that fits exactly with every diverse intuition, but still, this seems to me to make the possible contents of a particular work rather too detached from the author's conception of it.

A second worry is about the second norm, and first drafts of stories and novels. To me they look fictional, and to have a determinate fictional content. Yet many authors of fictions fully recognise that their first drafts are not very good, and a sub-set of these might well think that what they write is not 'worth imagining' in any sense.

Finally, I question whether all authors – for instance, young children who write stories, as discussed in my original objection to Garcia-Carpintero - are sufficiently aware of the norms cited, in order even to allow their intentions to latch on to them *de re*. I concede that even children might intend, *de re*, something like 'let what I'm writing be subject to whatever norms there are that govern what I'm doing'. But that seems a little too coarse-grained to do any real explanatory work, either about the nature of fiction, or about its content. Garcia-Carpintero makes an analogy with an intention that one's driving conform to nearby speed limits, without knowing what they are exactly. In this case, though, such drivers are aware of what a speed limit is. I'm still not clear whether anything analogously applies to young children who write stories. In turn, Garcia-Carpintero worries about whether my own account of fiction and fictional content can be satisfied by young authors, and in particular the clause pertaining to the alleged reflexivity of the salient intention. I tend to agree it can't. This means that, as with presumably many activities carried out by children as they learn, we should treat what they produce as proto-communicative rather than full-bloodedly so. This move also looks open to Garcia-Carpintero himself, of course.

Turning now to Ruth Lorand ('Only Imagine? Not Necessarily'): she rejects my claim that fictions characteristically invite imagining from the reader in any illuminating way. She prefers that we say that:

the imaginative part in fiction is already done, for better or worse, by the author, and the fruit of her imaginative project is presented to the reader to follow, understand and appreciate. (Lorand, cross-reference)

In arguing against my view, and motivating hers, she asks a number of questions; for instance

[W]hat does it mean to imagine a proposition as either true or false? In what sense is it different from understanding a proposition? In what sense is grasping propositional content in fiction any different from understanding such content in a non-fictional context? (Lorand, cross-reference)

These are good questions. I think I have answers. On my view, understanding a proposition in the context of a fiction is a matter of understanding the communicative intention that accompanies its utterance: a communicative reflexive intention that the reader should imagine the proposition, and not, say, believe it. This is not yet equivalent to what I call 'F-imagining' (see below), though F-imagining usually fairly seamlessly follows. Analogously, on the Gricean view of conversational utterance, understanding a proposition in this context is a matter of understanding the intention that accompanies the utterance: a communicative reflexive intention that the hearer should believe the proposition in question. This is not equivalent to believing it, though very often believing seamlessly follows.

Lorand goes on to discuss the opening sentence of *Anna Karenina*. She says much that I agree with about it: for instance, that the reader of the novel doesn't know whether this sentence is true or not; that it can't be 'proven' true; that the reader doesn't have to ask herself whether it is true or false, but can assume that it may

be revealed later (or not); that, were the sentence to appear in a sociological journal, we would expect evidence for its truth to be presented in that context; and so on. I'm not sure, however, that these points adversely affect my position. My position on that famous opening sentence of Tolstoy's is that it serves two distinct functions. First, it communicates an intention to get readers to imaginatively engage with a particular proposition, and to conjoin it imaginatively with other propositions in the novel; and second, it communicates an intention (albeit mediated through heavy authorial irony) that readers should believe something about the actual world. (I discuss the relations between fiction and belief at length in Chapter 4). No additional evidence or proof of the sentence's truth need be made available in the work, or otherwise, for the latter to be plausible: arguably, we don't require any such evidence or proof for conversational utterances, offered as testimony. And certainly, no such evidence or proof, or any consideration of the sentence's actual truth at all, is required for the former to be plausible. As for Lorand's implied claim, in the same passage, that 'the very understanding of the propositional content is the same in both cases', though this may be true in one sense, it doesn't follow, on a Gricean view such as mine, that the understanding of the *utterance* is the same in both cases (Lorand Cross-reference). For, as outlined above, understanding an utterance depends on understanding the intentions with which it was uttered, and these differ between the two cases.

Lorand also takes issue with my claim that F-imagining is 'quasi-factual'. She dislikes my description of F-imagining that *p* as, necessarily involving 'thinking that *p* is the case'. Even noting my qualification that this is not in any way equivalent to believing that *p* is the case, she objects that we don't need to do this to understand the story. Again, I agree: on my view, understanding, as just outlined above, is distinct from imaginative engagement, though the two normally co-occur.

A different point raised by Lorand concerns my claim that F-imagining is 'potentially conjunctive'. This is the claim that, in imaginative engagement with a fiction, the reader typically imagines every proposition in the fiction as 'true with

respect to the same scenario'. . In being conjunctive, imagining goes well beyond simply consecutively mentally rehearsing each proposition in turn (27-29). Lorand points out that many non-fictional texts also call for a conjunctive approach to their content, but no imagining. I agree, and briefly discuss the matter in the book, focusing on the different senses in which belief and imagining are respectively conjunctive (190-191). That this is true isn't troublesome for me: for I wasn't intending this one point to do all the argumentative work in explaining what fiction is, or how we engage with it. Each element of my view is intended to be read alongside all the others.

I agree with what I take to be Lorand's final critical point, which is that a good explanation of the phenomenon known as 'imaginative resistance' requires more than simply discussing imagination, broadly speaking; since, arguably, we can imagine having very different values to the ones that we actually have, and in general, as I discuss in Chapter 6, imagining can be very unconstrained. However, that is not my explanation of imaginative resistance. My explanation, outlined in Chapter 4, focuses on the reader's perception of a certain kind of authorial intention, which according to me accompanies 'resisted' fictional sentences: an authorial intention that the reader should engage, not just in imagining *tout court*, but in what I call 'counterfactual imagining'. Counterfactual imagining is imagining with a particular goal: that of arriving at some sort of counterfactual belief about the world. This sort of imagining, as opposed to others, is epistemically constrained by the thinker's current beliefs: one cannot just counterfactually imagine what one likes. Hence, where what one is being asked to counterfactually imagine clashes with existing beliefs in relevant ways, one will experience resistance, according to me.

Like Lorand, Amy Kind ('Imagination Minimalized') focuses on the implications of my view for the nature of imagination. As she rightly describes, in the book I focus on a restricted notion of imagining, which I call 'F-imagining': 'whatever kind of imagining is appropriate, at a minimum, as a response to fictional content' (20). Given fiction's prevalence in human life, and the assumption that fictions invite imagining from the reader, I treat reader responses to fiction as a

good source of empirical information, which should constrain what we say about imagining generally. I then engage with certain contemporary views of the imagination, showing how they don't apply to F-imagining, and to that extent are wanting.

As Kind notes, the account of imagination that follows is at best incomplete: I don't take myself to have done anything like enough to fully distinguish it from all other mental state-types. Still, I'm not sure I agree with Kind's worry that my account 'sounds far too generic for us to feel that we've really honed in on a particular kind of mental exercise at all.' (Kind, cross-reference). Nor do I accept that on my view, F-imagining is *just* 'reading and processing lines of text'. It is – at least - reading those lines, understanding them as the product of a communicative reflexive authorial intention that certain things be imagined, and (normally, though not for instance, in the case of imaginative resistance) seamlessly propositionally imagining them. This is at least to say, where they contain or imply the propositions, p , q , and r , one thinks that p , q and r , in the 'quasi-factual' (22-3) and 'conjunctive' (27-29) senses laid out in the book. Moreover, crucially, F-imagining stands in a distinctive relation to one's own current belief-set: namely: if K F-imagines that p at time t , then:

'i) either K doesn't believe that p at time t ; or ii) K believes that p at time t but occurrently conjoins in thought p and some further proposition q , or is disposed to do so, where q is not the content of any belief of hers at time t . (147)

Moving on: as Kind also notes, my strategy of taking fiction as a primary source of information about the imagination entails that certain other views look ruled out as general accounts of what the imagination is. One of these is Kind's own view that imagining is essentially imagistic: for, I argue, a lot of F-imagining is not. Now, clearly this can be treated as a modus ponens or a modus tollens. Kind prefers the latter: given her premise that imagining is essentially imagistic (Kind 2001), she professes herself more attracted to a view according to which the

mental activity I stipulatively call 'F-imagining', is not a form of imagining at all. I'm not sure what I think of this. On the one hand, I think that both Kind and I accept that there are two interestingly distinct mental activities here, not one; and that we need names for each; and I don't feel any need to get into a fight about terminology for the sake of it. On the other hand, if we cease to call 'F-imagining' any kind of imagining at all, it seems to me that we will only eventually have to point out how closely it resembles whatever-imagining-turns-out-to-be in several important contexts, and then accordingly bring it back into the fold again. There's also the fact that in the meantime, lots of other things will have to be renamed, to the potential detriment of focused investigation: 'imaginative resistance' towards certain fictions will presumably no longer essentially be imaginative, for instance. I don't take these points to be decisive: like Kind, I don't have the space to properly pursue them. The matter is one I hope to address in future work.

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