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Version: Accepted Version

Article:
Williams, JRG and Woodward, R (2021) The cognitive role of fictionality. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 102 (2). pp. 423-438. ISSN: 0031-8205

https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12660

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The Cognitive Role of Fictionality

J. Robert G. Williams and Richard Woodward

Fictions leave many things open. What colour are the heroine's eyes? How many hairs are on her head? Did the villain get shot in the final scene, or did the jailor complete his journey to redemption and empty the magazine into the air? Are the ghosts that appear to the Governess real, or a delusion?

In such cases, it is not merely that details about the fictional goings-on are left unsaid. We may not be told that Holmes has a liver, but it is nonetheless fictional that he does. But the heroine's eyes are neither fictionally blue nor fictionally some other colour, and the number of hairs on her head is neither fictionally odd nor fictionally even. All we heard was the shot ring out as the screen faded to black, and no answer was given to the question of whether the jailor was redeemed. These are not cases in which the fictional goings-on are settled implicitly, but rather cases in which the fiction is genuinely *incomplete*. There are, so to speak, no fictional facts of the matter.

The phenomenon of fictional incompleteness is crucial to our understanding of the *cognitive role* of fictionality. We will clarify more precisely what we have in mind here in due course, but it is clear that fictional incompleteness plays a central role in our appreciation of fiction — oftentimes the fact that a work fails to deliver an answer to some question of what is fictional lies at the very heart of why we find that work aesthetically interesting — and so the question of how incompleteness should impact on our engagement with a work is a compulsory question for theorists. Our first and main goal is to provide a general framework for understanding how cases of fictional incompleteness should impact on our imaginative engagement with a work. A second goal is to show that not all cases of fictional incompleteness are born equal, so correcting an overly simple picture of fictional incompleteness often presupposed in extant discussions. Our third and final goal is to shed light on some subtle interpretative questions that arise with respect to the dominant account of fictionality found in the contemporary literature, due to Kendall Walton (1990). Indeed, Walton's general account of fictionality is premised on a view about the cognitive role of fictionality, since its central element is the idea that, when a

proposition is fictional, one ought to imagine that proposition. But how should this proposal be extended to cover cases in which neither *p* nor its negation are fictional? We argue that, within a Waltonian setting, there is no general answer to be given: in some cases, appreciators are permitted to resolve the incompleteness by either imagining that *p* or imagining that not-*p*, but in other cases, appreciators are prohibited from imagining one way or the other. But though pluralism is the natural approach given Walton's account of fictionality, a better and more general picture of the cognitive role of fictionality can be formulated if we posit an imaginative analogue to credence. This account is *evidentialist* in nature and states that one's degree of imaginative confidence in *p* should match the conditional probability of *p* given the fictive evidence. And whereas the Waltonian approach is built around the idea that fictionality stands to imagining as truth stands to belief, evidentialism is built around a competing analogy: that fictionality stands to imagining as evidence stands to credence.

1. The Cognitive Role of Fictionality.

In the basic case, the question of the cognitive role of fictionality is this: what is the correct cognitive attitude to have to *p* when it is fictional that *p*? It is fictional that hobbits eat six meals a day, but what impact should this fact have on our mental lives? In calling it a *cognitive* role, we make a first move: that the correct attitude to have is, broadly, cognitive: something belief-like or acceptance-like in character. (This is not to deny that a full story will have something to say about the mesh between fictionality and mental states of all kinds).

Though it has never to our knowledge been explicitly posed in the extant literature, an answer to the question of the cognitive role of fictionality is implicit in the pioneering work of Kendall Walton (1990). For Walton's account of fictionality is informed from the beginning by the idea that fictionality has a distinctive connection to imagining that is analogous to the connection between truth and belief:

> Imagining is easily thought of as a free, unregulated activity, subject to no constraints save whim, happenstance, and the obscure demands of the unconscious. In this respect, imagination appears to contrast sharply with belief. Beliefs, unlike imaginings, are correct or incorrect. Belief aims at truth. What is true and only what is true is to be believed. We are not free to believe as we please. We are free to imagine as we please. So it may seem, but it isn't quite so. Imaginings are constrained also; some are proper, appropriate in certain contexts, and others not. (1990, p.39)

That imagining has *something* to do with fictionality is relatively uncontroversial: Walton himself describes the idea as akin to "pulling a rabbit out of a hutch" (1990, p.5). But here Walton suggests that fictionality has a normative connection to the imagination, a connection that is conceived in terms of and informed by the analogy with the normative connection between truth and belief. On this approach, the cognitive role of fictionality is identified as follows: when it is fictional that *p*, the correct cognitive response is to imagine that *p*.[1]

This proposal needs to be handled carefully. For one thing, the connection between belief and truth is complex, and highlights that questions about the cognitive role of a given phenomenon are multifaceted. For instance, whilst many would agree that whether a belief is *correct* rather than *incorrect* depends on whether that belief is *true* rather than *false*, one might balk at the idea that truth has a normative connection to belief that is captured by a slogan like "if *p* is true, then one ought to believe that *p*". After all, even if the truth of *p* means that believing that *p* is correct, is one really under an obligation to believe that *p* even if one has no information pertaining the question of whether or not *p* is true? That is not to say that there is no normative connection between belief and truth, but that the connection is more controversial than the identification of correct belief with true belief. Going one way, one might think that truth is normatively connected with belief

[1] Walton avoids using the deontic modal 'ought' to express his view, preferring to talk about what we are 'prescribed' to imagine. His reason parallels a familiar worry about the idea that one ought to believe the truth: if 'ought' implies 'can', it follows that every true/fictional proposition is believable/imaginable. Although everything we will have to say could be just as well expressed in other terms, we will express things using deontic modals for ease of exposition.

insofar as if one *learns* that *p* is true, then one ought to believe that *p*. Going another way, one might think that truth is normatively connected with belief insofar as one ought to believe the truth in a highly external sense of "ought" even though, in a more subjective sense of "ought", one ought not to believe that *p* if one has no evidence with respect to *p*. Maintaining the analogy, the same range of options arise for construing the link between fictionality and imagining. This complicates not only the proper interpretation of Walton but also our subsequent discussion. In what follows, we write as if the question of cognitive role of fictionality is normative in character (what attitude ought I take to *p*, when *p* is fictional?), but this is a placeholder, which the reader is free to construe via their own favoured take on the relation between belief and truth.

Another way in which theses about the cognitive role of fictionality require careful handling is highlighted by Walton's qualification that imaginings are proper "in certain contexts". What one ought to imagine what is fictional is purpose-relative. Walton is not suggesting that you presently ought to imagine that there are little creatures called 'Hobbits' who eat six meals a day, though that proposition is indeed true according to *The Lord of the Rings*. Rather, the idea is that when a proposition is fictional, you are prescribed to imagine that proposition when engaging with the relevant work: imagining that there are hobbits is thus the thing to do when reading *The Lord of the Rings* but not when reading *The Lord of the Flies*. Moreover, if one engages with *The Lord of the Rings* merely with the goal of examining Tolkien's use of personal pronouns, there seems to be no requirement to imagine that there are hobbits since one is not engaging with the work in a way that is connected to appreciating it as a work of fiction. Hence, the idea is that, when *p* is true according to a given work, one ought to imagine that *p* when one is trying to fully appreciate that work *qua* work of fiction (compare García-Carpintero (2013, p.346) and Friend (2017, p.30)).

A final nuance is that Walton not only appeals to the idea that fictions prescribe imaginings to delineate the cognitive role of fictionality, but also to give an account of its nature. For Walton, *what it is* for a proposition to be fictional *just is* for there to be a prescription to imagine that proposition (1990, p.39). This definition of fictionality is independent of Walton's account of its cognitive role. Even if we reject his analysis of

fictionality, we can still accept that the thing to do with a fictional proposition is to imagine it, subject to the qualifications made above. By analogy, the thought that belief aims at the truth may but need not involve the anti-realist idea that truth is definable in terms of what we should believe. Certainly, the more natural view is that the existence of any obligation to believe that *p* is explanatorily downstream of *p*'s being true: *p* is the thing to believe *because* it is true that *p*. Our discussion is independent of the explanatory order. For all that we say, the order of explanation appropriate in the case of fictionality might be the opposite of what Walton himself thinks.

The idea that fictionality is normatively linked to imagining provides a natural and fruitful starting point for thinking about its cognitive role. However, it bears emphasis that Walton's proposal is limited to the 'good' case, i.e. to what attitude we should have to *p* when it is fictional that *p*. What remains to be seen is what happens in the 'bad' case: what is the correct attitude to have to *p* when it is *not* fictional that *p*? Addressing this question, we think, requires thinking hard about the phenomenon of fictional incompleteness.

2. Fictional Incompleteness.

A work of fiction is incomplete with respect to the proposition that *p* just in case *p* is neither fictionally true nor fictionally false, i.e. just in case it is neither fictionally the case that *p* nor fictionally the case that not-*p* (see Woodward (2017)). We have:

Fictional Incompleteness

It is not fictional that *p* & It is not fictional that not-*p*

Sometimes incompleteness is tied to *indeterminacy* what is fictional (see, e.g., Stock 2017, p. 1). This terminology is unfortunate since it is premised on a controversial understanding

of indeterminacy and obscures differences between cases.[2] Questions of fictionality might be indeterminate because it is fictional that it is indeterminate whether *p*. But the sense in which *Othello* is incomplete with respect to the colour of Iago's eyes need not entail that it is fictionally indeterminate what colour his eyes are. Fictional indeterminacies raise subtle questions about the cognitive roles of both fictionality and indeterminacy, and we set them aside here since our topic is incompleteness, not indeterminacy. Again, our question concerns its cognitive role: what attitude should we have to *p* when it is neither fictional that *p* nor fictional that not-*p?* It is neither fictionally true nor fictionally false that the number of hobbits is even, but what impact should this have on our engagement with *The Lord of the Rings*?

Two answers to this question can be distinguished in terms of whether the following normative principle is accepted:

> **From Incompleteness to Prohibition**
> If it is not fictional that *p* & It is not fictional that not-*p*, then one ought not imagine that *p* and one ought not imagine that not-*p*

Prohibitionists accept this rule: in a case where neither *p* nor not-*p* is fictional, one ought to suspend imaginative judgement about *p*, meaning that one is not permitted to imagine that *p* and not permitted to imagine that not-*p*. In contrast, *permissivists* reject it: in a case where neither *p* nor not-*p* is fictional, it is not the case that one ought not imagine that *p*

[2] The temptation to think of cases of incompleteness in terms of indeterminacy likely comes from the idea that cases of fictional incompleteness involve gaps in what is fictional that are structurally analogous to cases of indeterminacy that (allegedly) involve truth-value gaps. But setting aside the controversial link between indeterminacy and truth-value gaps such thinking presupposes, the point remains that all hands should distinguish (i) cases where neither *p* nor its negation are fictional from (ii) cases where it is indeterminate whether *p* is fictional and (iii) cases where it is fictional that *p* is indeterminate. Compare the more detailed discussion of indeterminacy and incompleteness in Woodward (2017).

and not the case that one ought not imagine that not-*p*, meaning that one is both permitted to imagine that *p* and permitted to imagine that not-*p*.[3]

Both prohibitionism and permissivism are *monistic* accounts*:* each offers an account of the cognitive role of fictionality that applies in all cases of fictional incompleteness. In contrast, we will later argue that the Waltonian should embrace *pluralism* and hold that there is no single normative rule that is applicable in all cases of fictional incompleteness. Put otherwise, the Waltonian should accept that there are cases of *permissive incompleteness*, which fit the permissivist model, and cases of *prohibitive incompleteness*, which fit the prohibitionist model.

In the remainder of this section we look at range of circumstances in which fictional incompleteness can arise. Pluralism, we suggest, is naturally suggested by this data.

Unspecified Details. Consider first cases of fictional incompleteness which concern some minor detail about the fictional goings-on that is left unspecified. Standard examples of incompleteness are of this sort: Moriarty's eyes are neither fictionally blue nor fictionally some other colour, the number of hairs on Holmes's head is neither fictionally odd nor fictionally even, and Watson's first word was neither fictionally "mama" nor fictionally some other word. Such details are of little importance to the overall plot, so it is no surprise that Arthur Conan Doyle did not settle them. But in the course of reading his stories, we may well resolve the incompleteness: we might, for instance, picture Moriarty as having blue eyes. Such cases seem to naturally fit the permissivist model: it would be odd to say that a reader who imagines Moriarty to have blue eyes has thereby done something wrong.[4] Or consider the case of Hermione Granger's skin colour. According to J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is incomplete with respect to the

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[3] We assume that permission is the dual of obligation: X-ing is permitted iff it is not the case that X-ing is prohibited iff it is not the case that it is obligatory to refrain from X-ing. Note also the connection with our earlier discussion of how the question of the cognitive role of fictionality should be formulated. The alternative way of framing the issue would be to say that whilst the prohibitionist and permissivist agree that imagining that *p* is incorrect when a fiction is incomplete with respect to *p*, they disagree about whether one is permitted to imagine *p* upon learning that neither *p* nor its negation are fictional.

[4] To be clear, the relevant idea here is to imagine Moriarty as having blue eyes is to do something consistent with proper engagement with the relevant work of fiction rather than to do something inconsistent with such engagement but excusably so. Thanks to an anonymous referee for forcing us to be clear about this.

colour of Hermione's skin: it is neither fictionally white nor fictionally some other colour. Even so, we're confident that in the course of reading Rowling's story, many readers imagined, perhaps implicitly, that Hermione had white skin. And we're confident that you will share our intuition that they were permitted to do so.

Deliberate Withholding. Consider next cases of fictional incompleteness which concern some major detail about the fictional goings-on. Is it is true in *Bladerunner* that Rick Deckard is a replicant rather than a human being? The proclamations of various commentators notwithstanding, we think it is plausible that *Bladerunner* does not provide a settled answer to this question and the evidence is finely and deliberately posed between the two options.[5] Unlike a 'don't care' question like whether he has an even number of freckles, the question of whether Deckard is a replicant lies at the very heart of the film, so much so that fully appreciating *Bladerunner* may well be thought to require being in a state of imaginative uncertainty about his true nature: jumping to the conclusion that Deckard is a replicant would be to miss the point entirely. Similarly, suppose that *Twin Peaks* had ended at the end of its first season and left the question of who killed Laura Palmer unresolved, resulting in an incompleteness over the identity of her killer. Again, the question of who killed Laura lies at the very heart of the story, and though we are plausibly required to *speculate* and *wonder* about the identity of the killer, it seems to us that it would have been inappropriate to simply jump to the conclusion and flat-out imagine that the killer was her father, Leland, even if that would have been consistent with all the fictional truths. On the face of things, these cases fit the prohibitive model: rather than just imagining whatever one pleases, we should suspend imaginative judgement and *not* resolve the incompleteness one way or the other.[6] (While prohibitionism seems correct

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[5] Ridley Scott, the director of *Bladerunner*, has said that Deckard is a replicant, and Philip K. Dick, the author the story upon which it is based, has said that Deckard is human (and this is how Harrison Ford said he played Deckard in *Bladerunner*). And there is also a tricky question of how the interpretation of *Bladerunner* is effected by its sequel. But we do not think that the beliefs of fiction makers settle questions of fictionality: considerations of aesthetic charity also play an important role in determining what is fictional, and we think *Bladerunner* is *better* when interpreted along the lines we have suggested (see Wildman and Woodward (2018)).

[6] The present point anticipates a theme to which we shall return in more detail in section 6: claims about what one is and what one is not permitted to imagine need to be handled carefully given that imagining is a heterogeneous affair.

in this case, notice that the appropriate reaction to this kind of fictional incompleteness is also positively characterized in terms of imaginative uncertainty, allowing for speculation and wonder. We will come back to this later.)

Genre Incompleteness. Consider next cases of fictional incompleteness that emerge due to issues of genre classification. Is it true according to *The Turn of the Screw* that there are ghosts? James's story can famously be read in at least two ways: as a naturalistic tale of a governess who hallucinates ghostly spirits, and as a supernatural story of a woman who is genuinely being haunted by spirits from beyond the grave. Our conception of what is and is not fictional is shaped by how we classify the story: taken as a ghost story, it is fictional that there are ghosts that the Governess sees, whereas taken as naturalist tale, it is fictional that there are no ghosts. Both classifications seem permitted, but since neither is enforced, it looks as though *The Turn of the Screw* will be incomplete with respect to the proposition that there are ghosts, with there being no obligation to imagine that there are ghosts, and no obligation to imagine that there are no ghosts. How exactly to understand this case of fictional incompleteness is controversial: those who emphasise the legitimacy of each classification may see it as a case of permissive incompleteness, whereas those who emphasise the essentially ambiguous nature of the work may see it as a case of prohibitive incompleteness. Be that as it may, incompleteness that arises due to questions of genre classification seems to be different in kind to incompleteness arising in other cases.

Silly Questions. As Walton (1990, p.174) observes, some questions about the fictional goings-on seem silly. What is happening to Tintin at a molecular level that explains why he never grows old? How come Othello manages to speak in such fine verse off the cuff? Why is Kenny not worshipped as a god given how often he rises from the dead? Why hasn't the detective noticed that the frequency of murders in his quaint English county is astronomically high? Where did Babe learn English? Exactly how to understand such silliness is controversial. One tempting thought is that the questions rest on presupposition failures: perhaps it isn't fictionally true that Tintin doesn't grow old, and perhaps it isn't fictionally true that Babe speaks English, meaning that the questions of what accounts for Tintin's eternal youth and Babe's linguistic abilities will be rendered infelicitous (cf. Sainsbury (2014) who suggests that these claims are true 'in' but not 'according to' the

relevant fictions). We suspect this move merely pushes the silly bump around the carpet. Even if isn't fictionally true that Babe speaks English, it is hard to deny that it is fictionally true that Babe communicates with the other animals on Hoggett Farm, meaning that there will still be a silly question of how such communication happens. Similarly, it seems to us that it is true according to *South Park* that Kenny is regularly resurrected — he dies in one episode and is back in the next — and so the silly question of why no-one has noticed his return from the grave cannot easily be dismissed. And on the face of things, we thus have a case of incompleteness since *South Park* offers no explanation of why Kenny's return to the land of the living has passed unnoticed. And we think this is more naturally classified as a case of prohibitive incompleteness. As Walton suggests, silly questions ask questions about the fictional goings-on that simply *shouldn't arise* and the corresponding imaginings thus seem to be prohibited rather than permitted. (Note here the contrast with the *Bladerunner* case: whereas speculation and wonder seemed permitted (and perhaps obligatory) in that case, they seem prohibited when we encounter silly questions.)

Whatever one makes of the specific examples, we hope that the range of cases of fictional incompleteness considered above makes it premature to conclude that there is a single rule governing the imaginative response that is appropriate in all cases of fictional incompleteness, and indeed suggests that the normative profile of fictional incompleteness varies from case to case. And as we shall now argue, Walton's account of fictionality has the resources to naturally accommodate a pluralistic conception of the cognitive role of fictionality as it arises in cases of fictional incompleteness.

3. Waltonian Pluralism.

Recall that Walton appeals to the link between fictionality and imagining to give an account of the nature of fictionality: *what it is* for a proposition to be fictional *just is* for there to be a prescription to imagine that proposition.[7] Cases of fictional incompleteness thus emerge when there is no prescription to imagine one way or the other:

[7] Walton (2015) has recanted and now holds that prescriptions to imagine are merely necessary for fictionality. For a defence of the original proposal, see Woodward (2014, 2016).

No Prescriptions to Imagine

There is no prescription to imagine that *p* & no prescription to imagine that not-*p*

However, when there is no prescription to imagine *p*, one of two further claims will be the case: either there will be a prescription *not* to imagine that *p* or there will be *no* prescription *not* to imagine that *p*. In turn, even though the *genus* of fictional incompleteness can be identified with cases where there are no prescriptions to imagine, two[8] *species* of fictional incompleteness can be delineated depending on which of the following claims holds:

Prescriptions not to Imagine

There is a prescription *not* to imagine *p* & a prescription *not* to imagine not-*p*

No Prescriptions not to Imagine

There is *no* prescription *not* to imagine *p* & *no* prescription *not* to imagine not-*p*

Cases where there are not only no prescriptions to imagine but also prescriptions not to imagine will be cases of *prohibitive incompleteness* in the sense introduced earlier: to say that there is a prescription not to imagine *p* is to say that imagining *p* is prohibited. In contrast, cases of the latter kind, where there are not only no prescriptions to imagine but also no prescriptions not to imagine, will be cases of *permissive incompleteness:* to say that there is no prescription not to imagine *p* is to say that imagining *p* is permitted. Walton's view thus naturally accommodates pluralism about the cognitive role of fictional incompleteness:

[8] In addition to the cases delineated below, there are mixed cases where either a) imagining that *p* is prohibited but imagining that not-*p* is permitted or b) imagining that *p* is permitted but imagining that not-*p* is prohibited. We suspect such cases of incompleteness are rarities and set them aside. A further case is discussed in Wildman and Woodward (2018) in the context of interactive fictions where there is an obligation to either imagine that *p* or imagine that not-*p*, though neither imagining is itself prescribed.

imagining that *p* is an appropriate response in some but only some cases of fictional incompleteness.[9]

Walton's wider account of fictionality helps to flesh out these observations. It bears emphasis both that the concept of fictionality that we have focused on so far is operative at the level of what is true according to a *work of fiction* and that there is another concept of fictionality that is of central importance in Walton's account, one operative at the level of what is true according to a *game of make-believe*. Walton holds that when we engage with representational artworks — 'fictions' in his sense — we engage in sophisticated games of make-believe, much like those played during childhood. However, in the case of fiction, there is a distinction between what is true in the *work* and what is true in the *game* we play with that work, and there is no simple one-to-one correlation between works and their games. For instance, two people could read *The Lord of the Rings* but play different games of make-believe: Delia could play a game in which Frodo is secretly in league with Sauron and Clara could play a game in which Frodo and Sauron are enemies. Even though their games of make-believe are tied to the same work, they have different contents that are generated on the basis of different principles of generation, i.e. different rules linking the objective features of the work and what is to be imagined. And they are not born equal: Clara's game is *authorised* for *The Lord of the Rings*, whereas Delia's is not.[10]

The relation between what is true according to a work (i.e. what is *w*-fictional) and what is true according to a game of make-believe (i.e. what is *g*-fictional) now emerges as follows: it is *w*-fictional that *p* just in case *p* is *g*-fictional with respect to every game of make-believe that is authorised for *w*. Accordingly, a work will be incomplete with respect to *p* just in case it is not *w*-fictional that *p* and not *w*-fictional that not-*p*, i.e. just in case it is not true according to every authorised game that *p* and not true according to every authorised game that not-*p*. Transposed into this setting, the crucial point that we bring forward from our previous discussion is that there are two reasons *why* a work might be

[9] Note that though it accommodates pluralism, it could be maintained, e.g., that every case of fictional incompleteness is a case of permissive incompleteness and so Walton's account doesn't strictly speaking entail pluralism. The question would then be how plausible this combination of views is, given the data cited in the previous section.

[10] For a more detailed overview of the various elements of Walton's account (games of make-believe, principles of generation, etc.) and their interrelations, see Woodward (2014).

incomplete. On the one hand, the work might be incomplete either because a) *p* is true in some but only some authorised games and not-*p* is true in some but only some authorised games or because b) there is no authorised game in which *p* is true and no authorised game in which not-*p* is true. In the first case, the work-level incompleteness emerges due to the existence of multiple authorised games which say different things about *p*. In the second case, the work-level incompleteness emerges due to an incompleteness in the authorised games themselves. Moreover, if the work-level incompleteness arises due to the existence of multiple authorised games that say different things about *p*, we will have a case of permissive incompleteness since there will authorised games in which *p* is true and authorised games in which not-*p* is true. But if the work-level incompleteness instead arises due to the authorised games being themselves incomplete, we will have a case of prohibitive incompleteness since there will be no authorised games in which *p* is true and no authorised games in which not-*p* is true.

The Waltonian, then, can offer a rationale for the differences between cases of fictional incompleteness surveyed in the last section. Consider the seemingly permissive fictional incompleteness concerning whether Moriaty's eyes are blue or not. The Waltonian can account for this by positing a pair of games of make-believe authorized by the *Holmes* stories, one in which it's fictional that his eyes are blue, and another in which his eyes are some other colour. By contrast, consider the seemingly prohibitive fictional incompleteness concerning whether Deckard is a replicant. The Waltonian can account of this by holding that in every game of make believe that is authorised for *Blade Runner*, it is neither fictional that Deckard is a replicant nor fictional that he is human. Of course, there will be interesting questions to explore about what facts about our practices of creating and engaging in works of fiction lead to these patterns of authorization, but such questions are the Waltonian's stock-in-trade.

4. Fictionality is not analogous to truth.

In the basic case where a proposition is fictional, the cognitive role of fictionality can be identified: subject to various qualifications, one ought to imagine that *p*. In extending this approach to cover cases of fictional incompleteness, we suggested that Waltonians

should embrace pluralism, according to which the normative profile of fictional incompleteness varies from case to case. In cases of *prohibitive* incompleteness, we should neither imagine *p* nor imagine not-*p*. But in cases of *permissive* incompleteness, we are permitted to imagine *p* and permitted to imagine not-*p*.[11] We argued that this pluralistic conception of the cognitive role of fictional incompleteness is both suggested by the data and naturally accommodated by Walton's treatment of fictionality.

We like this conclusion. But in this section we argue that it is hard to square with the original analogy with which we started: that fictionality stands to imagining as truth stands to belief. In the next section we will construct an analogy that works better.

If we take the analogy to truth seriously, fictional incompleteness would be the fictive analogue of a truth-value gap: its being neither fictional that *p*, nor fictional that not-*p*, would be the analogue of a case where it is neither true that *p*, nor true that not-*p*. But what are the permissible/correct attitudes to take to *p*, when *p* is neither true nor false? We submit that believing *p* is *impermissible/incorrect* in this case. After all, if you believed that *p*, and then learned that *p* was a truth value gap, then unless you dropped your belief in *p*, you'd end up believing the repugnant conjunction: *p* and it is not true that *p*. The repugnancy of this conjunction needs explanation, and the obvious explanations is that beliefs are only correct when their contents are true. If the analogy between fictionality and truth were good, imagining that *p* would only be correct if *p* was fictional, and so imagining that *p* (or imagining that not-*p*) would be incorrect whenever *p* was a locus of fictional incompleteness. That is incompatible with pluralism: the fictionality-truth analogy supports a monistic, prohibitionist, model of the cognitive role of fictional incompleteness.

The Waltonian can deploy their theoretical machinery to defend the analogy between truth and fictionality to a certain extent. The best defence is to restrict the analogy and say that it is only *game*-fictionality that stands to imagination as truth stands to belief. They can then embrace the consequences: just as one is prohibited from believing *p* when *p*

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[11] To stress: even if imagining *p* and imagining its negation are each permissible, it is a further question whether imagining their conjunction is permissible. We suppose that it is not permissible to imagine the conjunction, though strictly speaking we don't need to take a stance on that issue here.

is a truth value gap, one is prohibited from imagining that p when p is a locus of incompleteness in the imaginative game in which one is engaged. The overall cognitive role of fictional incompleteness is still pluralist, however, since the restricted version of the fictionality-truth analogy doesn't predict prohibitionism for work-incompleteness arising from multiple authorized games.

But this defence is insufficient. Look again at some of the paradigmatic cases of prohibitive incompleteness in *withheld details*. The data is that (when engaging properly) we should be imaginatively uncertain over whether Deckard is a replicant — a state that allows for further imaginative speculation and wondering. This doesn't play nicely with the analogy between (game-)fictional incompleteness and truth value gaps. If you're uncertain whether p, and learn that p is neither true nor false, then unless you change your attitude to p itself, you'd end up being uncertain of the repugnant conjunction: p and it is not true that p. But uncertainty here is just as mistaken as belief: the conjunction should be utterly rejected. Truth value gaps prohibit uncertainty as much as they do belief. Looking at particular examples of truth value gaps supports this. France not being a monarchy, perhaps "The King of France is bald" is neither true nor false — but while it is true that one ought not believe that the King of France is bald, uncertainty on the matter is equally a mistake. Likewise, "This very sentence is false" may be neither true nor false. But if so, it is to be rejected, not assigned some middling level of confidence (see Field (2003), though compare Maudlin (2004)).[12]

We believe that pluralism about the cognitive role of fictional incompleteness is correct. We have no quarrel with the way that some of this variety is systematized in Walton's framework of game-worlds and work-worlds. But one thing that fictional incompleteness teaches us is that the underlying analogy of fictionality with truth needs to be given up. In the next section, we offer a replacement: fictionality stands to imagination

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[12] Objection: this data is one-sided, since there are cases of truth value gaps (e.g. Jimmy is bald, where Jimmy is in fact a borderline case of baldness) where some sort of uncertainty is intuitively the correct attitude. Reply: it's contentious whether such borderline cases of vague predicates are truth value gaps. And some (cf. Field (2003)) defend the thesis that rejection, rather than uncertainty, is the appropriate attitude to them. But the point is well taken that one way to defend the fictionality-truth analogy is to defend a controversial and surprising view on the cognitive role of truth value gaps. For systematic issues of the principles and theories in play here, see Williams (2016).

as *evidence* stands to belief. On the new analogy, fictional incompleteness is analogous not to truth value gaps, but evidential gaps.

5. Evidentialism.

Aoife and Angus disagree about which city is the capital of Germany. Aoife has a gut feeling that it is Berlin whereas Angus remembers his teacher telling him that it is Bonn. But though they are each supremely confident in their respective judgements, we should be critical of both. Angus's belief is *mistaken* and Aoife *lacks evidence* for hers.

Following Timothy Williamson (2001), say that a proposition's *degree of evidential support* for a person x is the probability of that proposition given the evidence that x has. Given the identification of evidence with knowledge, the evidential probability of p for x can be identified with the probability of p given what x knows. This proposal is naturally extended to associate a certain cognitive role with evidential probability: x's degree of confidence in p — x's *credence* in p — ought to match the evidential probability of p for x. And so our complaint about Aoife's belief targets a perfectly objective fact: the mismatch between her sky-high confidence and the much lower probability assigned to that proposition given what Aoife knows.[13]

How might these ideas transpose to the fictional case? The immediate difficulty here is that the state relevant to the above picture of evidential probability — credence — comes in degrees whereas the one relevant to fictionality — imagining — is normally thought to be an 'on-off' affair. But though it is controversial how the connection should be forged, credence is inherently tied to belief: on standard models, to believe that p is to have some suitably high credence in p (see Foley (1993)). And though there is a heterogeneous range of states that get called 'imaginings' in the literature (see Ryle (1949), Kind (2013)), the imaginative response appropriate in the case of fiction is typically thought of as being an 'off-line' or 'simulated' analogue to belief which we can label *make-belief* and which differs in crucial ways from other candidate imaginative states like conception and supposition (see Nichols (2004), Meskin and Weinberg (2006)). Putting these two

[13] Since what one knows changes over time, the proper formulation of these ideas will require temporal indexing that we will leave implicit.

observations together, we suggest that there is good reason to think that there is an imaginative analogue to credence: indeed, this is precisely the picture that emerges when we combine the credence-theoretic conception of belief with the conception of make-belief as an imaginative analogue to belief. Put otherwise, if we hold that to believe that *p* is to have some suitably high degree of confidence in *p*, why *not* think that to make-believe that *p* is to have some suitably high degree of imaginative confidence in *p*?

Moreover, we think that positing such degrees of imaginative confidence provides an elegant explanation of certain facets of our engagement with fiction, facts that are very hard to explain unless degrees of imaginative confidence are posited. Explaining the phenomenology of our imaginative engagement with *Bladerunner*, we contend, requires accommodating the way in which our imaginative engagement with that work is hedged on the central question of whether Deckard is a replicant. But our metafictional beliefs are not hedged: we are fully confident that it is neither fictional that Deckard is human nor fictional that he is a replicant. Moreover, the fictional chance of Deckard being human is extremal: fictionally, the objective chance of Deckard being human is either One or Zero. Similarly, at the end of the first season of *Twin Peaks*, one does not know who fictionally killed Laura but one's imaginings seem weighted: one is much more tempted to think the killer is Leland Palmer than Audrey Horne. Rather than explaining these differences at the level of the contents imagined (imagining that it is more likely that Leland rather than Audrey killed Laura), or the level of credences about what is fictional (having a higher credence in the proposition that it is fictional that Leland killed Laura than in the proposition that Audrey killed Laura), we instead propose to explain them at the level of the imaginative states themselves (being more imaginatively confident in the proposition that Leland killed Laura than in the proposition that Audrey killed her). Indeed, as the example of *Bladerunner* has just illustrated, the rival proposals seem unable to explain the full range of data. By taking imagining to be itself degreed, we submit, we put ourselves in the position to offer an account of the structure of the imagination that not only coheres

with the idea that belief is a degreed state, but also is ideally suited to accommodate the apparently degreed structure of our engagement with fiction.[14]

Having posited degrees of imaginative confidence, or *i-credences* for short, we can formulate a rule linking them to probabilities conditionalized on the fictive evidence:

Evidentialism

One's *i*-credence in *p* should be *n* iff the probability of *p* given the fictive evidence = *n*

Accordingly, a proposition's *degree of fictive support* (its *fictive probability*) is its probability given the fictive evidence. But how should fictive evidence be understood?

On the one hand, we might identify the fictive evidence with what is fictional. As a result, when *p* is fictional, the degree of fictional support for *p* will be sky high since *p* is part of the fictive evidence. So one's *i*-credence in *p* should be sky high too. Similarly, when not-*p* is fictional, the degree of fictional support for *p* will be rock bottom since the fictive evidence is inconsistent with *p*. So one's *i*-credence in *p* should also be rock-bottom. Finally, when the fiction is incomplete with respect to *p*, both *p* and not-*p* will be consistent with the fictive evidence, meaning that both propositions will receive intermediate probabilities given what is fictional. So one should not be imaginatively certain in either proposition; each should receive an intermediate degree of imaginative confidence.[15]

On the other hand, we might identify the fictive evidence with what is *known* to be fictional. To see the difference, consider Charlotte and Lukas who are watching *Inception*. When the credits roll, the protagonist, Dom Cobb, spins a spinning top and both Charlotte

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[14] Compare the idea, defended by Currie and Ravenscroft (2002) and Doggett and Egan (2012), that there is an imaginative analogue to desire. Rather than explaining conative imaginings at the level of content (imagining that one desires chocolate), they instead explain it at the level of the imaginative attitude itself (imaginatively desiring chocolate). The central argument for such states, which parallels but is independent of our argument for *i*-credences (and on which we need take no stand for present purposes), is that our conative engagement with fiction cannot fully be explained unless we posit *i*-desires.

[15] The appeal to *probabilities* that lies at the heart of evidentialism might be thought troublesome: classical probability theory does not allow for an inconsistent propositionto to receive positive probability, and so there is a question of how the evidentialist will deal with inconsistent fictions where some contradiction is fictionally true. The natural response would be to appeal to some non-classical probability theory of the kind considered in Williams (2012, 2014).

and Lukas know the score: if the spinning top topples over, Dom is awake in the real world, but if it keeps spinning, Dom is asleep in a dream world. The screen fades to black, and Charlotte immediately leaves the cinema and misses the sound of the spinning top toppling over, indicating that Dom is awake.[16] Lukas, by contrast, stays for the credits and hears the sound. So whereas Lukas knows that it is fictional that Dom is awake, Charlotte does not. Now, if the fictive evidence is identified with what is fictional, both Lukas and Charlotte should be imaginatively certain that he is, since it is fictional that Dom is awake. But if the fictive evidence is identified with what is *known* to be fictional, Charlotte's position changes: she will now be required to have an intermediate degree of imaginative confidence that Dom is awake since she doesn't know the fictional facts.

The evidentialist faces a choice. Going one way, she identifies the fictive evidence with what is fictional and we get one analogy that is close to Walton's original proposal: fictionality stands to imagining as evidence stands to credence. Going another way, she identifies the fictive evidence with what is known to be fictional and the analogy changes and departs from Walton's original proposal in a more radical manner: *known* fictionality now stands to imagining as evidence stands to credence. The differences between these versions of evidentialism won't really matter here, and we will assume the former for ease of exposition.[17]

6. Evidentialist Incompleteness.

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[16] The example is controversial since the director of *Inception*, Christopher Nolan, has said that the 'sound' is just part of the score and isn't meant to indicate that Dom's spinning top has toppled. But the general idea should be uncontroversial even if one does not like the specific case: just compare two readers of a novel, one of whom gives up half way through and one of whom makes it to the end.

[17] For the record, we find it more natural to identify the fictive evidence with what is known to be fictional. The alternative has awkward results: Charlotte is required to have a hedged credence in the proposition that it is fictional that Dom Cobb is awake (because she doesn't know that this is fictional) but a sky high *i*-credence in that proposition (because it is fictional). Why, then, consider the alternative proposal at all? First, because it most directly parallels Walton's original proposal. Second, because one way we mentioned earlier of reading the intended force of the belief-truth connection (one ought to believe that p *upon learning that* p is true) will, when applied here, already deliver an analogous constraint (one ought have imaginary credence k in p only if k is the probability of p conditional on what *one has learned* to be fictional). Whether the epistemic relativization should be part of the content of the principle or come in as part of the intended force of the deontic modal is something on which we remain neutral here.

Consider two fictitious films, *Fair* and *Bias*. Both end with Villain rolling a dice. If it's a six, Hero will die. In *Fair*, the dice is fair. But in *Bias*, the dice is weighted to land on a six every other roll. Each film ends with Villain rolling his dice, the screen fading to black before the result becomes clear. So in both *Fair* and *Bias* it is neither fictional that Hero lives nor fictional that he dies. And Villain wore a mask in both films, so it is also neither fictional that Villain has blue eyes nor fictional that his eyes are some other colour.

With respect to fictional propositions, the evidentialist and the Waltonian offer similar accounts: for instance, the Waltonian holds that one ought to imagine that Villain rolled a dice and the evidentialist holds that one ought to be fully imaginatively confident in that proposition. Indeed, if imagining that p is identified with having a suitably high degree of imaginative confidence in p, the evidentialist account and the Waltonian account fully agree whenever p is fictional. The crucial differences between the accounts emerge in cases of incompleteness, as occurs in both fictions with a) the proposition that Hero lives and b) the proposition that Villain has blue eyes.

The cases intuitively differ in normative profile. The eye colour case is a paradigmatic case in which it seems permissible to imagine either way, whereas the question of whether Hero lives or dies is naturally understood to require the imaginative analogue of uncertainty: we are supposed to *worry* for Hero, which seems to preclude us from jumping the gun and simply imagining what we please. This contrast is elegantly explained by the Waltonian. Given that there is a prescription not to imagine that Hero lives but no prescription not to imagine that Villain has blue eyes, the responses that are appropriate in the two case differ: imagining that Hero lives will be prohibited, but imagining that Villain has blue eyes will be permitted.

This explanation seems off-limits for the evidentialist, however, since she in effect treats *all* fictional incompleteness as prohibitive: when a fiction is incomplete with respect to p, one is always required to have some intermediate degree of imaginative confidence in p. For instance, evidentialism predicts that one ought to have a relatively low *i*-credence in the proposition that Villain has blue eyes, which seems to preclude the possibility of resolving the incompleteness by imagining that his eyes are blue. Whilst her account explains one difference between *Fair* and *Bias* —- our *i*-credence in the proposition that

Hero lives should be differently weighted in the two stories —- she seems unable to accommodate cases of fictional incompleteness in which our imaginative responses are naturally understood as being permissive in character. This is the *permission problem*, and we distinguish two responses: *enrichment* and *relocation*.

Enrichment is the idea that it is permissible to enrich the fictive evidence. Recall in this regard Walton's distinction between works and games. In permissive cases of incompleteness like the eye colour case, the idea was that whilst it is not *w*-fictional that Villain has blue eyes, the content generated by the work can be supplemented to determine a game in which Villain has blue eyes. Thus whilst every *w*-fictional proposition will be true in every game of make-believe that is authorised for *w*, what is *g*-fictional can outstrip what is true according to the work upon which that game is based.[18]

It's a nice question *how* enrichment happens, but here is one idea. What is true in a game depends on the principles of generation the player accepts and, in most cases, these relate features of the work to what is to be imagined. But there are exceptions. On the one hand, principles of generation can be categorical: *it is to be imagined that Villain has blue eyes!* On the other hand, principles of generation can use the player's own imaginative responses as props: *if Villain is visualised as blue-eyed, it is to be imagined that Villain has blue eyes* (compare here Walton's (1978) take on the paradox of fiction where the player uses her own physiological and imaginative responses as props to make it true in her game that she fears the slime). In a similar vein, the evidentialist could hold that the relevant fictional truths upon which we should conditionalize are those that are true in our respective games of make-believe rather than those that are true in the work of fiction itself. Given that it is permissible to enrich the fictive evidence with the proposition that Villain has blue eyes — given that there is an authorised game in which Villain has blue eyes — the permission problem will be solved. Our *i*-credences should match the fictive evidence, but there is a degree of freedom in what our fictive evidence is.

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[18] As an anonymous referee very helpfully pointed out to us, this phenomenon is ubiquitous since playing a game of make-belief almost inevitably makes certain indexical things true— e.g. that the imaginer is seeing or hearing the events unfold — which almost always go beyond what is fictional according to the work.

Relocation is the idea that the sense in which we are permitted to resolve the incompleteness is consistent with there being an obligation to hedge one's imaginative credences. Recall here that the notion of imagining relevant to our discussion is that of *make-believing* that a proposition is the case. And though the relocater thinks that it is impermissible to *make-believe* that Villain has blue-eyes, she allows that it is permissible to imagine that he does, so long as the relevant sense of 'imagine' is distinct from make-belief. In particular, it is permissible to *suppose* that he does.

Consider the contrast between belief and supposition. It is impermissible for Arsène to believe that Arsenal will win the Premier League: all the evidence suggests they won't. But Arsène may obviously *suppose* that Arsenal will win the league, and perhaps come to conclude that if Arsenal will win the league, then Tottenham won't. And perhaps in the course of reasoning under this supposition, Arsène pictures the players lifting the trophy.[19] Given the structural similarities between belief and make-belief, it would be strange if this situation wasn't replicated in our imaginative engagement with fiction. And it seems to be. Think again of *Twin Peaks*: given the fictive evidence available to her at the end of the first season, it is wrong for Isabel to make-believe that Leland killed Laura. But there is nothing wrong with her *supposing* that Leland killed Laura within the context of her imaginative engagement with the story, and perhaps coming to make-believe on that basis that if Leland killed Laura, then he must have drugged his wife. And perhaps in the course of reasoning under this supposition, Isabel pictures Leland doing terrible things. Indeed, insofar as she is prescribed to *wonder* and *speculate* about the identity of Laura's killer, it would seem that fully appreciating the story *requires* Isabel to make suppositions within the context of her engagement with *Twin Peaks*. So we've good reason to think that these *fictive suppositions* are an important aspect of our engagement with fiction.

Insofar as it is permissible to imagine that Villain has blue eyes, the relocater might think of this as something we're permitted to fictively suppose rather than make-believe. The difference between the functional roles of make-belief and supposition seem to support this conjecture. It is often observed that there is a difference between make-belief

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[19] We stress that we are not claiming that supposition is imagistic, just that sometimes one enjoys visual imaginings in the course of supposing something. It's quite hard to suppose that your hair is blue without visualizing yourself with blue hair, for instance.

and supposition in terms of their connection to our affective systems: horrifying make-beliefs tend to produce horror whereas horrifying suppositions do not (see Kind (2013), Arcangeli (2017)). Hence, if we were make-believing that Villain had blue eyes, we should be disposed to have certain emotional responses upon learning that (fictionally) all blue-eyed people were to be killed: perhaps we would be inclined to *fear for Villain*. But we are not so inclined. The idea that we're supposing his blue eyes explains this nicely.[20]

The appeal to fictive supposition, we submit, goes a long way towards explaining away the appearance that there are cases of permissive incompleteness. And even if the specific proposal proves flawed, relocation seems a promising resource for the evidentialist to deploy when faced with the permission problem. On this approach, we are permitted to imagine that Villain has blue eyes, but the sense in which we are so-permitted isn't cashed out in terms of it being permitted to *make-believe* that he has blue eyes. At the very least, we submit that the evidentialist has two resources for accommodating cases of permissive incompleteness, and thereby plausible strategies for solving the permission problem.

7. Conclusions.

In the basic case, the question of the cognitive role of fictionality is this: what is the correct cognitive attitude to take to p, when it is fictional that p? We began by considering one answer to this question, implicit in the work of Kendall Walton, that the correct response to a fictional proposition is to imagine that proposition. But as we saw, this approach is silent in cases of fictional incompleteness. We argued that that Waltonians should embrace a pluralistic account of the cognitive role of fictional incompleteness: in some cases of fictional incompleteness, we are permitted to resolve the incompleteness during our engagement with the target fiction, and in other cases, we are obliged not to resolve the incompleteness. But though we argued that pluralism is predicted by Walton's wider account of fictionality, it puts tension on the original idea fictionality stands to the imagination as truth stands to belief. And so we developed a rival conception of the

[20] Another difference between make-belief and supposition is that only the former is subject to the phenomenon of imaginative resistance (see Gendler (2000, 80-1)). It's a nice question whether this difference might help the evidentialist.

cognitive role of fictionality that is built around a different analogy: on this evidentialist approach, (known) fictionality stands to the imagination as evidence stands to credence. Though it raises many questions, we submit that evidentialism provides an elegant account of the cognitive role of fictionality, and deserves to be considered as a genuine rival to the account which we have extracted from Walton.[21]

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[21] We thank Stacie Friend, Manolo Garcia-Carpintero, Andy McGonigal, Aaron Meskin, Kathleen Stock, Kendall Walton, Nathan Wildman, and our anonymous referees at *PPR* for helpful feedback on earlier versions of this material. JRGW's work on this paper was supported through a British Academy Research Development Award (BARDA53286). RW's work was conducted within the context of the DFG Emmy Noether Research Group *Ontology After Quine* (WO-1896-1/1). Thanks to the *British Academy* and the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* for supporting these projects.

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