How One Cannot Imagine What One Could Imagine

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The puzzle of imaginative resistance, i.e., the puzzle of explaining why people *resist imagining* that some actions are right or wrong *for the reasons outlined* in the fiction, is admittedly intriguing. For on the one hand, it seems that there is no problem in understanding all sentences of a certain piece of fiction, in particular the problematic ones emphasized by the puzzle, for people are quite able to represent what they (fictionally) mean. Yet on the other hand, it seems that the puzzling sentences are so problematic that people want to mentally distance themselves from what they seemingly describe. In this paper, first, after having critically discussed the extent of relevant solutions to the puzzle, we will present our account. For us, the puzzle of imaginative resistance is a pragmatic issue concerning the failure of participative or empathic imagination, as located at a pre-semantic level. The linguistic meaning of the relevant sentences involved violates some of our moral beliefs. Thus, at the level of a wide context (i.e., the overall situation of discourse), we pre-semantically refrain from pairing such sentences with a fictional truth-conditional content in a narrow fictional context (i.e., the set-theoretical kind of context constituted by a series of fixed parameters) based on such a meaning, although we could theoretically make that pairing. Yet second, we want to stress that our solution is flexible enough to explain why sometimes people can regain participative imagination concerning the relevant sentences. For, still at the very same pre-semantic level, people can adopt some repair strategy allowing them to take on again the perspective the narrator prescribes to imagine.

The structure of the paper is the following. In Section 1, we describe the puzzle and critically discuss the extent of relevant solutions to it. In Section 2, we present our account of the puzzle. In Section 3, we hopefully show some of its possible advantages.

1. What the Puzzle Amounts to

It is admittedly hard to grasp why the puzzle of imaginative resistance (Szabó-Gendler, 2000) – i.e., the puzzle of explaining why readers *resist imagining* that some actions are right or wrong *for the reasons outlined* in the fiction – is puzzling: "what

explains the impediments we face when asked to imagine certain sorts of situations, for example, ones in which morally horrendous acts like torturing an innocent person are considered morally right?" (Kroon and Voltolini, 2019)

People have tried to solve the problem by resorting to different strategies. On the one hand, Hardians (Doggett and Egan, 2007) have merely appealed to *difficulties* in imagining while Cantians (Walton 1994, 2006) have more specifically maintained that what is in question is an *inability* to imagine. On the other hand, Wontians (Gendler, 2000) have replied that it is instead an issue of *unwillingness* to imagine. Even more radically, eliminativists (Stock, 2005) have said that there is no problem at all, insofar as there really is no imaginative resistance.

All the above positions have their pros and their cons. Yet for us, they cannot properly be assessed until one clarifies what sort of imagination is involved in the puzzle. To us, it seems patent that, as regards *cognitive* imagination, there indeed is no problem in so imagining any kind of situation. Cognitive imagination is to us nothing but *propositional supposition*; as Priest (2016) stresses, one can suppose whatever one likes. So *pace* Stock (2003), for us there is no problem even in cognitively imagining a contradictory situation. For *qua* propositional supposition, cognitive imagination is neither acceptance – or anything similar to acceptance involving a certain positive, or even agential, attitude towards the situation imagined (Walton, 1990, p. 20) – nor mental imagery, whose imaginative power is constrained by our sensory capacity, as we all know since Descartes' example about the impossibility of mentally imagining a chiliagon as different from a circle. Priest's (2016) contradictory story, *Sylvan's Box* – the story of a box left by Richard Routley/ Sylvan in his farm at Bungendore that is full and empty at the same time – vividly stresses the point. It is precisely because one understands that the story is contradictory that one may legitimately find it weird. Here it is (in italics the contradictory sentence):

As I was putting the last batch of papers back, I noticed a small box located between that pile and the one on Meinong. It was too small to have papers in, I thought; maybe it contained some more letters. I picked it up and examined it. It was of brown cardboard of poor quality, made in a developing country, perhaps. The lid was taped down, and on it, there was a label. In Richard's own handwriting—under which dozens of typists had suffered over the years—was written 'Impossible Object'. [...] Carefully, I broke the tape and removed the lid. The sunlight streamed through the window into the box, illuminating its contents, or lack of them. For some moments I could do nothing but gaze, mouth agape. At first, I thought that it must be a trick of the light, but more careful inspection certified that it was no illusion. *The box was absolutely empty, but also had something in it*. Fixed to its base

was a small figurine, carved of wood, Chinese influence, south-east Asian maybe. (Priest, 2016, p.128)

So for us, cognitive imagination is never impaired, even when it involves contradictions. Therefore, appealing to cognitive imagination does not help with getting rid of the problem. One must distinguish cognitive imagination from another type of imagination; namely, *participative* imagination, which one may also take to be a form of empathic understanding. Indeed, the problem affects *this* second form of imagination. For it involves factors that have to do with *how* we deploy imaginative resources, especially in fiction. As Camp (2017) underlines, when one engages with a work of fiction, one takes on the perspective prescribed by the narrator (a point already emphasized by Putnam 1976); hence, when experiencing imaginative resistance, one would resist taking on that perspective (which might happen for prudential, moral, or aesthetic reasons).

Appealing to a problem not in cognitive, but in participative imagination as blocking one's imaginative commitment, is a good move. One may then easily explain Brock's (2012) saying that the puzzle is not the puzzle of explaining why readers cannot imagine morally bad things happening as they are described in fiction (more specifically, he says that it is not the puzzle of explaining why readers are either unable to imagine characters and narrators believing and espousing moral ideas unacceptable for them or, more in general, fail to engage imaginatively with false moral evaluations made within fiction). As Gendler (2000) has stressed, as we saw before, the puzzle of imaginative resistance is not a puzzle of inability, but a puzzle of unwillingness. Nonetheless, what Brock says is correct at a certain level but not at another. Readers well manage to cognitively imagine, contrary to what they believe, that certain actions are right or wrong *tout court*, yet they refrain from so participatively imagining.

When focusing on participative imagination, we see how relevant is what Nanay (2010) emphasizes by saying that the problem of imaginative resistance is *pragmatic*, because we contextually refrain from imagining what the author *conversationally implicates* with what is fictionally said in a sentence's fictional use, i.e., the use of a sentence that people perform while engaging in a certain make-believe game (Walton 1990). In such a case the kind of imagination that is blocked is not cognitive, but participative: the one activated when we put ourselves in the protagonists' shoes.

Now, we think that Nanay is overall on the right track: imaginative resistance is a matter of pragmatics, involving participative imagination in particular. Yet resorting, as Nanay does, to what is implicated instead of what is (fictionally) said by a story simply moves the problem one step forward. Why should it be the case that, once we manage to imagine what a sentence fictionally says, we cannot manage to

imagine what its utterance implicates? It is precisely because also in the problematic cases we grasp the implicature that we may take a certain evaluative stance on it. For example, one may well say that certain utterances of Pauline Réage's *Story of O* imply that women like to be brutalized by men (to say nothing of Gabriel Matzneff's *Les moins de seize ans*, which the author intends as a hymn to pedophilia).

Suppose that *Story of O* contained the following sentence: (1) O is happy to be a man's slave.

Granted, one may legitimately take that the implicature that women like to be brutalized by men one can draw from uttering (1) is false: as one may say, Réage has no particular psychological insight. Yet, it is precisely because one manages to imagine what the above implicature conveys that one may claim that it is false.

2. Our Solution to the Puzzle

So, we agree with Nanay that the right solution to the puzzle must be a pragmatic one. The trouble with Nanay's account is that it fails to single out the relevant level at which the pragmatic problem of imaginative resistance must be located. Indeed, although the problem involves an issue in a *wide* context, the overall situation of discourse that any pragmatic phenomenon mobilizes (Predelli, 2005), we claim that such a problem must be located in that context at a *pre-* rather than at a *post-*semantic level (to resort to Perry's 1997 distinction), as Nanay, by contrast, does in his appeal to implicatures.

A typical case of a pre-semantic pragmatic issue is the choice of the relevant parameters that constitute the semantically relevant *narrow* context of interpretation for a sentence. In Kaplan's (1989) sense, a narrow context is a set of fixed parameters (typically, the agent, the space, the time, and the world of the context) that, *qua* context of interpretation (Predelli, 2005), enables a sentence to be truth-conditionally interpreted. This can clearly be seen with indexical sentences, i.e., sentences that depend on the context of interpretation to get truth-conditions.

Take the indexical sentence: (2) I am American.

(2) has certain truth-conditions when it is paired with a narrow context whose agent is Obama, which enables the indexical pronoun "I", a certain directly referential device (namely, an expression that exhausts its truth-conditional contribution in its reference) to pick up Obama as its referent in that context: so paired, the sentence is true if and only if Obama is American. Yet it has utterly different truth-conditions when it is paired with a narrow context whose agent is Trump, which enables the

indexical pronoun "I" to pick up Trump as its referent in that context: so paired, the sentence is true if and only if Trump is American.

Now, consider the phenomenon of *referential transfer* (Recanati, 2004 ; Predelli, 2005). In this phenomenon, a term is contextually given an extended *meaning* (in the case of a directly referential device, an extended referent) (Nunberg, 1979). Such a meaning differs from the meaning that the term standardly has, yet it is linked to that meaning via a certain pragmatic relation, such as e.g. a metonymical relation: say, the *author-work* relation, the *customer-thing ordered* relation, the *possessor-thing possessed* relation. Now, this phenomenon can be seen as a case in which pragmatically, there is a pre-semantic shift of one parameter of the narrow context that must be paired with a sentence for that sentence to get truth-conditions, For example, the agent parameter of that context is *pre-semantically* shifted to an item having a certain pragmatical relation (e.g., one of the three aforementioned kinds of relation) with the item constituting the standard meaning of the relevant expression involved, the indexical "I" in this case.

In this respect, consider the sentence: (3) I'm parked out back,

once uttered by Obama and once uttered by Trump. Here, the metonymical relation from the sentence's utterer to the car she possesses makes it the case a certain pragmatic shift is settled *before* that the semantic value of the relevant token of "I" is computed. Under the metonymical relation linking utterers to their cars, the narrow-contextual referents of "I" in the above different utterances of (3) are neither Obama nor Trump, but the items that are metonymically related to them; namely, their respective cars. So, one gets that when paired, after the pre-semantic shift, with a narrow context of interpretation that has Obama's car as its agent, (3) is true if and only if (iff) Obama's car is so parked, and when paired, after the pre-semantic shift, with a narrow context of interpretation that has Trump's car as its agent, (3) is true iff Trump's car is so parked.

Now, one may see resistance in participative imagination as another pre-semantic pragmatic phenomenon. For it has to do with the wide contextual pre-semantic fact that the fictional truth-conditional contents of certain sentences are not activated as regards narrow contexts that have *fictional worlds* as the world parameters of such contexts, *fictional* narrow contexts to give them a name. This failure of activation has to do with one's realizing that in a wide context, given the linguistic meaning of the sentences on which that content would be based, those contents would contravene some actual moral principles one endorses.

Theoretically speaking, the situation with imaginative resistance towards fiction-involving sentences bears a certain similarity with the situation affecting a sentence like: (4) It's five o'clock [on the Sun]. (Searle, 1979; Wittgenstein, 2009)

Since in the wide context for (4) involving the Sun the time parameters have not been settled, no suitable narrow context involving any such parameter can be appealed to for assigning (4) a truth-conditional content, as instead it would have been the case if (4) has been uttered in a wide context involving the Earth.

Yet in the case of imaginative resistance, it is not the case that a certain fictional truth-conditional content for a fiction-involving sentence in fictional narrow is altogether missing, as in the case of (4); instead, that content is blocked, or bracketed. For if one could merely appeal to cognitive imagination, the relevant fiction-involving sentence could certainly be paired with a fictional narrow context assigning that sentence a certain truth-conditional content. Yet since, as we have said, in the case of imaginative resistance wide context includes certain principles making the linguistic meaning of that sentence morally disputable, one pre-semantically refrains from participatively imagining what one could cognitively imagine. Hence, in the relevant fictional narrow context, such a sentence is prevented from having the truth-conditions it would have if the wide context were different, notably from a moral point of view.

In a sense, therefore, we part company with Walton when he claims that the puzzle of imaginative resistance differs from what he calls the puzzle of fictionality, for unwillingness to imagine something does not involve refraining from judging something to be fictional (2006, p. 140-141,145). Granted, one can ascribe a sentence a fictional truth-conditional content since one can cognitively imagine it. Yet one can refrain from doing that ascription, precisely because of one's failure with participative imagination.

Let us consider plausible examples of this overall situation. Respect towards corpses or infants, or concern for discriminated genders, social and ethnic groups, and human 'races', may prevent one from making believe that things unfold in a certain way if that way goes against that respect and that concern. Although one cognitively imagines what one would then say in a fictional narrow context, one then refrains from participatively imagining what one can cognitively imagine. As such, the fictional truth-conditional contents of the relevant fiction-involving sentences are prevented from being imagined in that context.

So, consider again the fiction-involving sentence allegedly from *Story of O*: (1) O is happy to be a man's slave.

Granted, given (1)'s linguistic meaning, one could certainly cognitively imagine at what conditions (1) would be true in the world of Réage's story; if it were merely a matter of cognitive imagination, (1) would certainly be true in that world. Yet, since one's participative imagination is impaired by the morally disputable character of that meaning – as one rejects the morally intolerable idea that being a man's slave

could make a woman happy – one refrains from representing its truth-conditions in a fictional narrow context, i.e., from representing its fictional truth-conditional content.

On this concern, reference to *fictional* narrow contexts is not so determinant. A similar situation of failing to be participatively imaginative may occur also when other sorts of narrow contexts were involved. To put it in Matravers' (2003) terms, one withholds one's *fictionally* asserting (1) since one morally disagrees with (1)'s linguistic meaning, even if one can cognitively imagine its fictional truth-conditional content.

Likewise, one may distance from *someone else's* asserting, in an actual narrow context yet having a different subject as its agent: (5) My raping others is a nice thing.

For one morally disagrees with (5)'s linguistic meaning, even if one can cognitively imagine its contextual truth-conditional content.

According to us, that things stand this way is proved by the fact that, in the relevant cases, we cannot properly enjoy the piece of fiction that is involved, from the great masterpieces of human literature down to the humble mini-stories that one can find in jokes and puns. For, insofar as we grasp the morally intolerable linguistic meaning of the sentences characterizing the story, we refrain from *even fictionally* representing what the story would fictionally say. In other words, we are imaginatively prevented from contextually modulating that meaning, by contextually giving those sentences fictional truth-conditions, as we would instead do if the story were morally allowed to fictionally say something.

Consider for example the following passage from the hypothetical story made up by Haidt:

> Julie and Mark are sister and brother. They are traveling together in France on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At the very least, it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie is already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom, too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love but decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other. (Haidt, 2001, p. 814)

Certainly, there is no problem in understanding what would make the passage fictionally true, viz. true in the world of Haidt's story. Hence, we can certainly cognitively imagine what that passage would say. But the fact that for that passage to be fictionally true, we should fictionally describe incest as happening between two siblings and incest is for us morally intolerable, we are prevented from

fictionally representing things this way. Ditto for the following (public) joke, in which what is morally intolerable is the necrophiliac attitude of the two male protagonists of the joke in its being addressed toward the unfortunate female protagonist:

> A pilot, a steward, and a hostess survive a plane crash and drift for days in the ocean until they reach a small remote island, in the middle of nowhere. After some days, they get the idea that no one is coming to rescue them. It's a sad moment but life goes on, and the survivors set up camp, eat fish, drink coconut milk, and fall asleep under the beautiful sky. Some weeks pass. One day, the hostess says: 'Okay guys, we know we're here for a long time, possibly forever. I know you have needs, and I have needs too. We are good friends, we know each other well … I think we can do something: I could have sex every day, one day with one of you, and the next with the other one, etc. And if anything goes wrong, if one of us wants to stop for any reason, we just stop without asking any questions. What do you think?' The two guys look at each other shyly and finally approve. It's the beginning of a new life. They make love every other day, everyone is satisfied, and they all live happily together. Sadly, one day, the hostess gets depressed. And after a few weeks of melancholy, she hangs herself from a tree and dies. The pilot and the steward are strongly affected. But they decide to be strong and try to keep on living as well as they can. One day, one of them tells the other: 'You know … we've known each other for a long time, and after all, we've been through, I think we could try'. The other guy answers. 'Hey, I was thinking the same thing. Let's try, and if one of us wants to stop, no questions, we just stop'. And then, they have sex again, and everything is fine again. Until one day, one of them tells the other 'Hey … I'm sorry but, you know, I feel bad about it, it's not as good as it was, it's *against nature*. We said that we could stop at any time, so, yeah, I think I want to stop'. 'Oh dear, I totally agree, it's not the same, we can stop, no problem.' 'So … should we bury her?'

At this point, one may say that our position regarding imaginative resistance very much resembles that of the Wontians in their appeal to an issue of *unwillingness* to imagine. Yet if what we have said above is the case, just as for Matravers (2003), for us the problem of imaginative resistance has not to do with the fact that we are unwilling to *export* certain truths from fiction to reality, as Szabó-Gendler (2000) claims; as if one were learning from fiction certain moral upshots that turn out to be intolerable in actual life. For this claim entails that we *can* imagine those moral upshots, insofar as we incorporate them in what the relevant fiction-involving sentences, e.g., (1), contextually say fictionally. Rather, for us it is the other way round; namely, given that intolerability traces back to the linguistic meaning they involve, we are unwilling to *import* such truths from reality to fiction, by refraining from giving such sentences what we could cognitively do; namely, certain truth-conditional contents in given fictional narrow contexts.

3. Some implications

By distinguishing, on the one hand, between cognitive and participative imagination and by linking, on the other hand, the latter to moral acceptance, our position entails that if one endorsed different moral claims, what is now for one participatively unimaginable could turn out to be such, thereby allowing one to cognitively imagine what one presently is prevented from doing. For example, since we take both breaking one's words and racistly ascribing such an attitude to discriminated people such as pygmies to be morally intolerable, we find the following joke participatively unimaginable, although cognitively speaking we might certainly represent it. The joke's unacceptable racist story involves not that an inclusive alternative is misunderstood by the story's deuteragonists as an exclusive alternative, but, more radically, that what was originally presented by its protagonist, the pygmy king, as a respectable exclusive alternative is all of sudden reverted by him into an intolerable inclusive alternative. But what if there were, as Nietzsche would put, a transmutation of all values, so that we turned out to be a community of word-breakers?

> Three men are imprisoned by pygmies. They are tied up in the center of a coliseum with thousands of pygmies onlooking. The king calls out to the first guy, "Death or huba-buba!?" The guy says, "Well, I don't know what huba-buba is but I don't want to die. So, huba-buba." The King turns to the crowd and yells, "HUBA-BUBA!" The crowd goes crazy, jumping up and down and cheering "HUBA-BUBA HUBA-BUBA HUBA-BUBA!" A group of pygmies rush out and sodomize the first guy. The guy is released and limps away from the coliseum.
> The king turns to the second guy and says, "Death or huba-buba!?" The guy doesn't want to be sodomized but figures it would be better than dying. So he says weakly, "Huba-buba." The King turns to the crowd and yells "HUBA-BUBA!" The crowd goes crazy and cheers frantically, "HUBA-BUBA HUBA-BUBA HUBA-BUBA!" A group of pygmies rush out and sodomize the guy. The guy is released and limps away from the coliseum.
> The king turns to the last guy yelling, "Death or huba-buba!?" The guy replied, "I'm not getting fucked in the ass. I'll take death." The King turns to the crowd and yells "Death! ....by HUBA-BUBA!"

Moreover, our position has another explicatory advantage. For it entails that, if certain amendment practices concerning what it would be said are adopted, we can regain that enjoyment. As Stock (2005, 617-8) puts it, imaginative resistance takes place when one cannot think of a general context, a wide context in our framework, which would then enable the proposition we are prompted to imagine in a corresponding narrow context to be true, i.e., true in the (fictional) world of that context. But when such a wide context is provided, resistance reaction disappears.

For us, as we said, providing such a context is precisely a matter of pre-semantic issues. We have to find an overall situation of discourse, a wide context as it were, that makes the suspension of our moral habits and rules acceptable, given some other moral principles.

Consider for example the fact that we are reallowed to take pleasure in reading John Cleland's (1985) *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, in which Fanny partakes in acts that may no longer be considered to be morally deplorable, for sexual deviance can be regarded as an acceptable practice as long as the people involved are consenting and interested in carrying it out (as is Fanny's case: "All my foundation in virtue was no other than a total ignorance of vice": Cleland, 1985, p. 40), rather than something shameful and embarrassing, as is standardly the case.

In this concern, various repair mechanisms can be pre-semantically adopted. For example, reappropriation. Consider e.g. an immoral story, or even a joke, about Jews told by a Jew, say a joke mocking Jews yet told by Woody Allen: "I'm very proud of this gold pocket watch. My grandfather, on his deathbed, sold me this watch."

Or take awareness of distance, up to disinterestedness. Consider this example of awareness of distance (as underlined in italics) taken from a passage of the novel by Irvine Welsh (1993) *Trainspotting*:

> Society invents a spurious convoluted logic tae absorb and change people whae's behaviour is outside its mainstream. Suppose that ah ken aw the pros and cons, know that ah'm gaunnae huv a short life, am ay sound mind etcetera, etcetera, but still want tae use smack? They won't let ye dae it. They won't let ye dae it, because its seen as a sign ay thir ain failure. The fact that ye jist simply choose tae reject whit they huv to offer. *Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a fuckin couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth; choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life.* Well, ah choose no tae choose life. If the cunts cannae handle that, it's thair fuckin problem. As Harry Lauder sais, ah jist intend tae keep right on to the end of the road. (Welsh, 1993, p. 76)

In this respect, one may also appeal to hyperboles in telling a story:

> A young ventriloquist is touring the clubs, and one night he's doing a show in a club in a small town in Arkansas. With his dummy on his knee, he's going through his usual dumb blonde jokes when a blonde woman in the fourth row stands on her chair and starts shouting: "I've heard enough of your stupid blonde jokes. What makes you think you can stereotype women that way? What does the color of a person's hair have to do with her worth as a human being? It's guys like you who keep women like me from being respected at work and in the community and from reaching our full potential as a person, because you and your kind continue

to perpetuate discrimination against, not only blondes, but women in general… and all in the name of humor!" The young ventriloquist is embarrassed and begins to apologize, when the blonde yells, "You stay out of this, mister! I'm talking to that little jerk on your knee!" (Hurley, Dennett, Adams, 2011 p. 234)

Or one may even abstract from the protagonists involved by being considered as symbols rather than as particular persons. Consider e.g. a joke about Hitler understood not as cowardly regarding him taken as a dead individual that, *qua* dead, cannot (obviously) reciprocate the joke, but as regarding the Führer taken as a symbol for human wickedness: "Why was Hitler bad at math?" "He could only count to nein."

In this respect, one may even appeal to a change of linguistic *cotext*, which is another factor of wide context, for example when the relevant story is told with a change of words that removes reference to a morally unacceptable situation (e.g., suppose that the protagonists of a sexual intercourse are no longer described as brother and sister – as in the aforementioned hypothetical story tested in Haidt (2001) – or as mother and son – as in the following little tale by Gottschall by omitting, for example, the final sentences saying that the protagonists of the story are mother and son:

> Theirs was a May-December affair. Tom was only twenty-two […]. Sarah was buxom and quick to laugh. She looked much younger than her forty-five years. […] When Tom graduated college, Sarah decided to take him to Paris as a reward. "Let me be your sugar momma", she said laughing.
> They spent ten days in the city […]. As they strolled hand in hand down Parisian boulevards, they felt the strangers' eyes appraising them, judging them, tsk-tsking behind their backs. […] The lovers had paid dearly for their bliss. […] Why were people so nosy and jealous? […] They walked back to their hotel along the Seine, drunk on wine and rebellion. Entering their room, Tom hung the NE PAS DÉRANGER sign on the doorknob. Then, bouncing and rolling across the room's surfaces, Tom and Sarah made love […]. (2012, p.125-127)

Analogously, as far as a joke is concerned, suppose that the funny but morally perverse situation that it involves is alternatively described by inverting the gender that is appealed to (passing from a discriminated to a non-discriminated gender). One may guess that what the very same people are prevented from taking as funny, for it involves a character from a discriminated gender, would be taken as such if a character from a non-discriminated gender were involved instead (clearly enough, that guess should be tested somehow, maybe by appropriate psychological experiments).

Reconsider e.g. one of the previous jokes so renarrated (changes in italics):

> Two *stewardesses* and one *pilot* survive a plane crash and drift for days in the ocean until they reach a small remote island, in the middle of nowhere. After some days, they get the idea that no one is coming to rescue them. It's a sad moment but life goes on, and the survivors set up camp, eat fish, drink coconut milk, and fall asleep under the beautiful sky. Some weeks pass. One day, the *pilot* says: 'Okay *girls*, we know we're here for a long time, possibly forever. I know you have needs, and I have needs too. We are good friends, we know each other well … I think we can do something: I could have sex every day, one day with one of you, and the next with the other one, etc. And if anything goes wrong, if one of us wants to stop for any reason, we just stop without asking any questions. What do you think?' The two *stewardesses* look at each other shyly and finally approve. It's the beginning of a new life. They make love every other day, everyone is satisfied, and they all live happily together. Sadly, one day, the *pilot* gets depressed. And after a few weeks of melancholy, he hangs himself from a tree and dies. The two *stewardesses* are strongly affected. But they decide to be strong and try to keep on living as well as they can. One day, one of them tells the other: 'You know … we've known each other for a long time, and after all, we've been through, I think we could try'. The other *stewardess* answers. 'Hey, I was thinking the same thing. Let's try, and if one of us wants to stop, no questions, we just stop'. And then, they have sex again, and everything is fine again. Until one day, one of them tells the other 'Hey … I'm sorry but, you know, I feel bad about it, it's not as good as it was, it's *against nature*. We said that we could stop at any time, so, yeah, I think I want to stop'. 'Oh dear, I totally agree, it's not the same, we can stop, no problem.' 'So … should we bury *him*?'

Or suppose that, while still sticking to the same audience having the same moral principles, one changes the relevant ethnic/racial/social group that is mentioned (e.g., passing from blondies to policemen), as in the following modification (changes in bold again) of the Dennett et al.'s (2011) aforementioned joke:

> A young ventriloquist is touring the clubs, and one night he's doing a show in a club in a small town in Arkansas. With his dummy on his knee, he's going through his usual dumb *policemen* jokes when a *policeman* in the fourth row stands on his chair and starts shouting: "I've heard enough of your stupid *policemen* jokes. What makes you think you can stereotype *policemen* that way? What does a *person's job* have to do with her worth as a human being? It's guys like you who keep *policemen* like me from being respected at work and in the community and from reaching our full potential as a person because you and your kind continue to perpetuate discrimination against, not only *policemen* but *men* in general. __ and all in the name of humor!" The young ventriloquist is embarrassed and begins to apologize, when the *policeman* yells, "You stay out of this, mister! I'm talking to that little jerk on your knee!"

In all such cases, the relevant sentences are for us allowed again to regain a fictional truth-conditional content in a corresponding narrow fictional context.

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So conceived, our position falls under what, dealing with humor issues, Carroll (2014) labels *moderate moralism*. We may understand the story as such, but we cannot even fictionally assert what it would fictionally say if it were allowed to fictionally say something unless certain practices are adopted to morally amend that fictional truth-conditional content in a way that allows us to enjoy it again. Granted, if we were immoralists about humor, we would get rid of scruples about violations of moral principles in a wide context. Therefore, we would be forced to say that in humorous cases there is no problem with participative imagination, hence with imaginative resistance, to match participative with cognitive imagination. Yet since we believe that imaginative resistance is a real phenomenon, better for us not to be immoralists.

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