Pennywise Parsimony: Langland-Hassan on Imagination
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What is imagination?

This is one of the most interesting questions in philosophical psychology. We should welcome Peter Langland-Hassan's ambitious attempt to answer it in *Explaining Imagination*.

Well, how *does* he answer it?

As I divide things, Langland-Hassan's answer has *three* main components.

1. Conceptually separating *attitude imagining* from *imagistic imagining*.
2. Validating imagistic imagining as an independent construct by demonstrating its theoretical coherence and versatility.
3. Offering a theory of "attitude imagining" that avoids positing what he calls a "*sui generis* cognitive attitude." This theory attempts to *explain* things like pretend play, hypothetical reasoning, and cognition of fiction; to explain them using only more "basic" mental states like beliefs and desires; and thus to explain them without positing a *distinct* cognitive attitude of imagining, as many theorists do (including me). In other words, "attitude imagining," for Langland-Hassan, is whatever explains those things (except for a distinct cognitive attitude of imagining itself).

Correspondingly, the present essay has three parts. In the first two parts, I highlight (briefly) how Langland-Hassan's first two components are a helpful corrective to much philosophical thought about imagination. But in the third, I argue that Langland-Hassan's third component is misguided. It is ontologically pennywise and pound foolish: for a slight savings in ontological complexity it dramatically reduces explanatory power. So his denial of distinct imaginative attitudes should be rejected.

Component 1: The Separation: Attitude Versus Imagistic Imagining

The question "What is imagination?" should be divided into different questions, *if* the focal term "imagination" can refer to more than one thing.

Langland-Hassan's position is that "imagination" can indeed refer to (at least) two things that often go together but also come apart. I agree and have argued for essentially the same position myself.[1]

First, "imagination" can refer to *imagistic imagining*. Example: if I were to suggest that you "imagine" a tennis ball going over a net, you would probably go on to have visual mental imagery—and hence would engage in imagistic imagining. Langland-Hassan characterizes this notion as follows: "Imagistic imaginings (or 'I-imaginings') are cases of thought that involve mental imagery as a proper part."[2] He then characterizes mental imagery as mental states that *seem to the person who has them* to be "image-like" or "sensory," without having come from an

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[1] Van Leeuwen (2013). In that essay, I also argue that "imagining" can have a third, orthogonal sense in addition to *attitude imagining* and *imagistic imagining*, namely, *constructive imagining*.

[2] P. 54.

external source (this last part separates mental imagery from perception).[3] One might quibble with this characterization, but Langland-Hassan is right to distinguish imagistic imagining from a different notion of "imagination."

Second, "imagination" can refer to *attitude imagining*. This, roughly, involves relating to some content in a way that doesn't amount to *believing* it. Example: if I were to suggest that you "imagine" *that the present year is 2004*, you would likely represent that content in your mind somehow. But you wouldn't believe it. You would have an *imaginative attitude* toward it. Langland-Hassan writes: "Attitude imaginings (or A-imaginings) are, again, cases of rich, elaborated, epistemically safe thought about the possible, pretended, unreal, and so on. A-imaginings enable us to consider what could have been or may yet be—to contemplate the fictive and fantastical."[4]

Let's take it as given that "imagination" and "imagining" can refer either to imagistic imagining or to attitude imagining. Of course, the two things often go together: when I daydream about being an astronaut going to the moon, I have mental imagery of events I regard as fictive; I have an imaginative *attitude* toward what I i*magistically* imagine. But the two senses of "imagination" can come apart, and not seeing that will muddle our answer to "What is imagination?" To his credit, Langland-Hassan's development of the present distinction corrects (at least) two confusions.

First, one often hears about *imagination versus belief*. That is fine, as long as one is clear that one is contrasting an imaginative <u>attitude</u> and a believing <u>attitude</u>.[5] But that phrasing easily leads to the following false assumption, which arises from conflating the two different senses of "imagination":

> False assumption 1: if a mental state incorporates mental imagery, then it is not a belief.

This assumption is typically not stated overtly, but it lurks in the shadows, making theorists miss the possibility of beliefs that include imagery among their constituents. For example, it is implied by the framework of Currie & Ravenscroft (2002). Currie & Ravenscroft characterize imaginative states ("re-creative imagining") as being "offline" counterparts to "online" mental states, where "offline" means something like *divorced from the typical forms of action output for the respective mental states*. On Currie & Ravenscroft's framework, "belief-like imaginings" are offline counterparts to beliefs (i.e., *attitude imaginings* under a different name), and mental imagery is the offline counterpart to percepts. That may be right in some sense. But on this way of construing things, as Langland-Hassan points out in section 3.7, there is no obvious place for beliefs that *incorporate* mental imagery. The reason is that, on the Currie & Ravenscroft framework, belief-like imaginings *and* mental imagery both fall on the "offline" side of the divide, while belief and perception are "online." Implicitly, mental imagery is *separated from*

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[3] See p. 57.
[4] P. 58.
[5] Of course, one can both and imagine and believe the same thing at the same time (Leslie, 1987). But in so doing, one is still having two *different* attitudes.

belief by being "off-line." Langland-Hassan makes plain that such a separation needn't hold: beliefs can incorporate imagistic imagining.

Second, many theorists contrast "propositional imagining" with mental imagery in a way that suggests that "propositional imagining" *can't* have imagery among its constituents. In other words:

> False assumption 2: a mental state's being "propositional imagining" entails that it does *not* incorporate mental imagery.

The error lies in thinking that any representation with propositional content *must* be formatted in a (non-imagistic) *sentential* way (this tendency is also part of what drives False assumption 1).[6] Kathleen Stock (2008: 378), for example, appears to commit this error when she writes that "propositional imagining . . . does not have the right phenomenology to be sufficient for seeing-in" (an example of "seeing-in" would be seeing a horse in a painting of a horse). Stock's claim here tacitly assumes that "propositional imagining" inherently lacks imagery among its constituents, since it is at least arguable (and should not be lightly dismissed) that imagistic imagining *does* have the right phenomenology for seeing-in. It is thus a useful corrective that Langland-Hassan shows *how* images can be constituents of mental states that have propositional contents, such as "propositional imagining." Stock, in any case, is far from being the only guilty party: *dichotomizing* "propositional imagining" and "mental imagery" is a widespread bad habit among philosophers of imagination. Langland-Hassan is right to correct it.

Component 2: Putting Imagery to Work

Having established the independence of attitude and imagistic imagining in Chapter 3, Langland-Hassan dedicates Chapter 4 to the theoretical work imagistic imagining can do.

More specifically, Langland-Hassan details a picture of the "hybrid structure" of many beliefs, judgments, desires, decisions, etc., according to which the *same* mental image (or image type) can figure in the constituent structure of *different* attitudes.

For example, a judgement I-imagining (or "JIG") might have the following structure:

JIG (The Arc de Triomphe painted silver would be: **a big silver arch** . . .)[7]

Here, the "J" refers to the attitude of judging. The bold portion (**a big silver arch**) indicates the imagistic component of the hybrid representational vehicle, and the non-bolded portion indicates the rest of the representational vehicle that is non-imagistic (perhaps discursive). A person who has this mental state is deploying a visualization, one that depicts a big silver arch, to determine a portion of the representational content of a propositional judgment. This hybrid structure can be true or false, depending on whether the Arc painted silver would really be how the JIG represents it.

Importantly, such hybrid structures can figure in *any* propositional attitude, as Langland-Hassan explains. There can be desires that incorporate imagery, intentions that incorporate

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[6] See Crimmins (1992) for a representational system that uses blocks and pegs to express propositions.
[7] P. 83.

imagery, and even decisions that incorporate imagery (e.g., a decision to make a vase that is **this oblong shape . . .**).

In addition to being useful for cognitive theorizing, such hybrid mental states ring true phenomenologically. One might desire *that one eat* **a toasty grilled cheese with cheese stretching as the halves separate . . .** , where imagistic imagining is part of the vehicle of the contents of the desire. Or one intends to something **this way . . .** , where an image is part of the vehicle of the contents of one's intention.

In short, because Langland-Hassan recognizes that attitude type can vary independently of representation and content, he can describe important aspects of human cognitive flexibility.

In light of that, one might reasonably hope that Langland-Hassan would also recognize that humans have cognitive flexibility in terms of what *attitudes* they can take in relation to any given idea.

Such a hope would be in vain.

Component 3: Denying Distinct Cognitive Attitudes

A prevailing view in philosophy of mind and epistemology is that there are many different ways human minds relate to ideas—and <u>imagining</u> is one of them. The different ways of processing ideas are distinct *attitudes*.

To focus on cognitive attitudes, one can <u>think</u> that *p*, <u>suppose</u> that *p*, <u>wonder whether</u> *p*, <u>hypothesize</u> that *p*, <u>assume</u> that *p* <u>just to be safe</u>, <u>assume</u> that *p* <u>for the sake of argument</u>, and so on. These underlined terms designate distinct cognitive attitudes: ways of processing ideas that treat their contents as describing how the world is or might be.[8] Furthermore, the underlined terms aside from "<u>think</u>"[9] designate members of a broad, nuanced, and interesting family of imaginative attitudes: ways of relating to ideas that are distinct from strictly believing them. In other work, I call these *secondary cognitive attitudes* since it's important to have a term for the whole family that doesn't collapse it into a single notion of imagining that (through historical twists) has a strong association with fiction.

Let me highlight what I think is at the heart of imagining and secondary cognitive attitudes generally. Doing so will clarify what Langland-Hassan is denying, when he rejects a "*sui generis*" cognitive attitude of imagining. Langland-Hassan will find my way of characterizing things here to be tendentious; that's fine since my subsequent arguments do not depend on the next three paragraphs. What follows, in any case, puts in sharp relief what is at issue.

Humans—and perhaps some other animals to some extent[10]—can hold an idea in mind and *play* with it. This capacity is crucial. By "play," I mean we can represent *p* without having committed in any more serious way to the idea in question. For any given *p*, we can (in principle and usually in fact) mentally represent *p*

- without committing to its truth or falsity

- without committing to its possibility or impossibility
- without committing to act as though the world is as *p* portrays
- without having any notion of how *probable* it is
- without wanting *p* or ~*p*
- without being clear right away what follows from *p* or what implies it
- without committing to doing anything serious with that idea *p* at all . . .

Of course, one reason to mentally represent *p* without making these commitments might be to *figure out* whether to make them. But that entails that one *hasn't* made them for a time. And that might also *not* be the point: one might just find the idea interesting. Importantly, the cognitive play I am discussing *extends over time*. During this temporal extension, one is imagining that *p*. That is, one has a distinct cognitive attitude from belief toward *p*, an imaginative attitude that one can take in relation to arbitrary contents—largely voluntarily. I give a theory of this and related attitudes in other works[11], but this description suffices for now.

Langland-Hassan denies that there are such distinct (commitment-free) imaginative attitudes. What other theorists explain by appeal to a distinct attitude of imagining (or supposing, etc.) that *p*, Langland-Hassan attempts to explain in the following terms: *there are real phenomena (daydreaming, pretending, conditional reasoning, cognizing fiction, etc.) that other theorists appeal to a distinct attitude of imagining to explain, but those phenomena are better explained by a theory that posits no such distinct attitudes; rather, they should be explained by positing such mental states as the following*:

- a <u>belief</u> that *p* is possible
- a <u>belief</u> that *p* is true in some fictional story
- a <u>belief</u> that if *q* then *p*
- a <u>desire</u> that *p* (possibly with imagistic contents)
- a <u>judgment</u> that something follows from *p* . . .

Essentially, for Langland-Hassan, the kind of commitment-free cognitive play I described does not exist: if one represents *p*, one is either believing it, believing it's possible, judging it, desiring it, intending it, believing *p* → *q*, etc. Langland-Hassan goes on in the remaining chapters of the book (Chapters 5-12) to attempt to *explain* various "imaginative" phenomena of interest using only resources of the sort just mentioned: he explains daydreams as desires with imagistic contents (Chapter 4); he explains conditional reasoning in terms of beliefs with conditional and other contents (Chapters 5 and 6)[12]; he explains pretend play in terms of beliefs that describe certain entities and desires to act like or pretend to be those entities (Chapters 7 and 8); he explains cognition of fiction by appeal to beliefs about what happens in a story (Chapters 9 and 10); and so on. His contention is this: if he explains *all* these things without positing a distinct cognitive attitude of imagining, he has explained "attitude imagining" in a reductive way that leaves us with no need to posit distinct attitudes; since we have no need, parsimony implies we

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[11] Van Leeuwen (2009, 2013, 2014, 2023).
[12] *Contra* Williamson, he thinks no attitude of supposing is needed to arrive at conditionals in the first place; cf. Williamson (2016, 2020).

shouldn't. To put the point starkly, *every* case (not just some cases) that someone like me would describe as <u>supposing</u> that *p* (as a distinct attitude) will be analyzed, in Langland-Hassan's framework, as <u>believing</u> possibly *p*, <u>believing</u> *p* implies *q*, or something of that sort.

From my perspective, *Langland-Hassan's strategy is to examine the phenomena that emerge from the cognitive play I described above and then to redescribe them as if the internal cognitive play had never occurred*. Less tendentiously: there is a class of phenomena that stem from "imagination" in some sense, and Langland-Hassan aims to explain these phenomena without positing distinct attitudes; if he can do this, according to him, he has *explained* imagination.[13]

Critique 1: Pennywise

Suppose you have to dig a hole and someone offers to sell you a shovel. Should you buy it? If the shovel were a million pounds sterling, you'd be better off digging with your hands. But if the price were pennies, not buying it to save money would be pennywise and pound foolish: for little savings you incur a huge cost in energy and time. This sort of trade-off transfers over to ontological arguments that invoke parsimony. One could posit a maximally simple Parmenidean ontology (all being is simple and unified), but one will explain almost nothing of what we can observe. From there, the game is to maximize explanatory power with the fewest ontological additions. One should thus get clear on how much ontological complexity one saves by not positing something *before* striking it. One can then weigh the ontological savings against the explanatory power lost. If the savings are slight but the loss of explanatory power great, striking the entity is ontologically pennywise and pound foolish.

Here I argue that positing distinct imaginative cognitive attitudes is modest in terms of added complexity, *if* we assume that the psychological systems we are discussing (in this case, humans) are capable of the attitude of <u>belief</u> in the first place. Otherwise put, the ontological complexity of a cognitive system whose only cognitive attitude is human-like belief is not that much lower than one that is capable of both belief and a distinct attitude of imagining.

So, what must a cognitive system be capable of to have beliefs? This is a contentious question, but I'll help myself to a standard sort of answer in naturalistic philosophy of mind; other accounts of belief would facilitate the same point.

A cognitive system capable of believing (in a mundane, factual sense, e.g., believing it is after 7 PM) must be capable of the following:

- **representing** things: some representations are the vehicles of the **contents** of the beliefs.
- **reality tracking**: some continual, reality-oriented updating of beliefs is necessary for them to guide actions in the world effectively.
- **desire-conjoined action guidance**: beliefs give the agent a picture of what things are like in a way that allows her to select actions that cause her desires to be satisfied.
- **inferential governance**: beliefs supply the informational background that facilitates inferential updating of other beliefs (and other cognitive attitudes), as new information arrives.

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[13] See Langland-Hassan's p. 144 for a description of the intended method.

As I see it, the capacities just listed are *largely the same as* those needed to have distinct cognitive attitudes like <u>imagining</u>. More specifically, for a cognitive system to be capable of imagining, it must be capable of the following:

- **representing** things: some representations are the vehicles of the **contents** of the imaginings.
- **voluntary adding**: rather than being tethered to the real world through reality-oriented updating, some imaginings involve representations that were developed through a voluntary process.[14]
- **compartmentalized action guidance**: imaginings (and other secondary cognitive attitudes) guide actions in ways that resemble how beliefs do, but their role in doing so is *limited* to limited to certain practical settings, like make-believe or thought-experimental reasoning (etc.).
- **quarantined inferential governance**: imaginings and other secondary cognitive attitudes enrich the informational background that facilitates updating of other secondary cognitive attitudes *of their same type*, i.e., largely without affecting the background body of beliefs.

There are many details to be explored. But this picture is far from idiosyncratic, and it is enough to see that positing distinct cognitive attitudes is *not* like adding a new substance to one's ontology. Rather, it is positing an ability to deploy the capacities implicated in <u>belief</u> in a restricted, tailored way. No doubt *some* cognitive machinery needs to be added, ontologically speaking, beyond what is needed for a cognitive architecture whose only cognitive attitude is <u>belief</u>. But this is one thing simulation theorists got mostly right: imagining does not occur in a wholly separate cognitive system; it is the deployment of existing cognitive systems in ways that limit the scope and consequences of those systems. Nature has a penchant for using existing structures for new purposes with little modification, when there is an advantage in doing so: the capacity to imagine is one such case, so the parsimony advantages of not positing distinct cognitive attitudes, like <u>imagining</u>, is pennywise indeed.

Critique 2: Pound Foolish

What then is the loss of explanatory power that comes from rejecting distinct imaginative cognitive attitudes?

I focus here on three losses.

First, Langland-Hassan's theory fails to explain *epistemic safety*. Recall that "epistemic safety" figures in how Langland-Hassan characterizes "attitude imagining" ("Attitude imaginings . . . are, again, cases of rich, elaborated, epistemically safe thought . . . "). So far, that's common ground. But the psychological entities he posits in his reductive account are, in fact, *not* epistemically safe, so epistemic safety is not explained.

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[14] Crucially, Langland-Hassan needs something like voluntary adding for the processes he envisions (e.g., pp. 20-21), so my appeal to it cannot be an ontological/parsimony disadvantage relative to his account.

An attitude is epistemically safe in the relevant sense if, and only if, one's holding it in relation to false contents does not *ipso facto* entail one's being epistemically in the wrong.[15] Attitude imagining, understood as a distinct cognitive attitude, is epistemically safe in this sense. I can imagine outlandishly false things without risk of being epistemically in the wrong just for their falsity. I can <u>imagine</u> that there are gnomes, that four is prime, that Julius Cesar returned from the dead, etc., without having to worry that someone can justly say, "You're wrong!" And that's because I'm just <u>imagining</u> the falsities. For any given *p*, one can imagine that *p*, and, even if *p* turns out false, one is not thereby epistemically in the wrong for imagining it. One might be a pervert for imagining that *p*. One might be in the grip of OCD. One might be making oneself sad. And so on. But the falsity of *p* does not *in and of itself* constitute an epistemic failing for one (merely) imagining it.

Belief, by way of contrast, is *not* epistemically safe. Whenever we believe something, we risk getting things wrong, if the belief turns out false. Even beliefs that have evidence in their favor are wrong if false. So now we must ask: When Langland-Hassan theorizes imagining that *p* as <u>belief</u> that possibly *p*, or <u>belief</u> that in the story *p*, etc., has he really captured epistemic safety?

I am imagining right now, for example, that there is a unicorn running around my backyard. On Langland-Hassan's view, this would likely be analyzed as a <u>belief</u> that it is possible that there is a unicorn running around my backyard (or something like that). But depending on how the metaphysics of unicorns works out, that might *not* be possible. In that case, I would be (if my imagining were what Langland-Hassan says it is), epistemically in the wrong: my imagining is just another false belief (with false modal contents). That shows that Langland-Hassan fails to explain the *actual* epistemic safety of my imagining. And this point generalizes. Belief *generally* carries a level of epistemic risk that doesn't obtain for imagining, so positing beliefs with ever more complex modal or conditional contents can't capture real epistemic safety of imagining.[16]

Second, Langland-Hassan's theory does not capture the *temporal extension* of hypothetical reasoning and playing with ideas generally. As suggested above, one often works on (or plays with) a cluster of ideas in one's mind for some time *before* one has decided what to do with them. In a 1916 letter to Gabriele Münter, for example, Wassily Kandisky writes: "I am working again on my painting Moscow. It is *slowly* taking shape in my imagination."[17] This illustrates the fact that there is often a *time interval* between (i) when one begins working with some ideas and (ii) when the ideas have fully taken shape. The question then is this: *what psychological relation does an agent have to that idea or cluster of ideas <u>during that time interval</u> in which the ideas are still taking shape?*

Langland-Hassan is compelled to say that, during that time interval, one has one of the following attitudes to modalized or conditionalized versions of the contents of those ideas: belief/judgment, desire, decision, or intention. But if the imagined scenario is *still in the process of being fleshed out*, it would make little sense for one to take one of these normatively loaded attitudes.

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[15] Note that this is a different notion of "safety" from that developed by Sosa (1999) and subsequent literature in Sosa's tradition.

[16] Cf. Munro (2023).

[17] Kandinsky (1916/2024); my italics.

Suppose, for example, we ran into each other at a conference, and I said, "There was a unicorn in my backyard last week." You might suspect that I am starting off a joke or other fiction, or that I am deluded and telling what I take to be the truth, or that I am about to run a philosophical thought experiment, etc. It would make sense to imagine what I am describing in some detail *first* to see how it hangs together *before* coming to a judgment about it. Langland-Hassan's theory effectively collapses, in many cases, the start (imagining) and the finish (judgment) of such processes, so he fails to make sense of the temporal extension that is typical of (epistemically safe) imaginative attitudes.

We can break this down into two components, which I'll call *loading* and *searching*.

Loading occurs when one imagines something, knows that there is more to come, is open to adding elements to what one has imagined, and is in the *process*—either endogenously or through external prompting—of adding further imagined elements to the imagined situation. Sensibly, imaginers often finish loading before coming to any judgments (etc.) about what one has imagined. But if an imagining *just is* a judgment/belief with complex contents of some sort, then there *can't* be a time interval during which such judgment-free loading occurs.

Searching, in the present sense, is when one imagines a situation with the aim of figuring out what information is relevant to determining what follows from it. The idea is that imagining or supposing it helps the search process along.

Timothy Williamson (2016) describes the case of a shepherd who arrives at a conditional with the following content: *if the sheep are out of their pen, they are down by the river*. Williamson's gloss on this is that in order to arrive at this conditional the shepherd first <u>supposes</u> (a distinct cognitive attitude from believing) the proposition *that the sheep are out of their pen*. Then, on the basis of that supposition plus background beliefs he accesses as part of this "imaginative exercise," he comes to further imagine *that they are down by the river*. Since the imaginative exercise comports with other background beliefs, the shepherd comes to believe the indicative conditional.

Langland-Hassan's task is to explain how the shepherd arrives at the conditional without appealing to supposition. Here's how Langland-Hassan reanalyzes the process:

1. The shepherd registers the question, "Where are the sheep likely to be if they have broken out of their pen and disappeared?" and begins relevant processing.
2. Beliefs about the sheep's preferences and tendencies are accessed from the Belief Box, such as "The sheep like to drink water and frolic in the river" and "The sheep have, in the past, gone down to the river when their pen was left open."
3. From these beliefs, the following conditional is inferred and takes up residence in one's Belief Box: "If the sheep are out of their pen and disappeared, then they have gone down to the river." (p. 135)

One might be puzzled as to how one "registers the question" without <u>supposing</u> its contents, but let us a assume for the sake of argument that that notion is coherent. What is missing is the fact that temporally continuing with an "imaginative exercise"—holding the antecedent content in mind and playing with it—aids the searching that's implied in Langland-Hassan's step 2. Relevant background beliefs, which are needed to go from the antecedent *to* the consequent of the conditional, do not always spring out of one's subconscious like Athena from the head of Zeus. Rather, <u>supposing</u> the antecedent for an extended time aids in the ongoing search for relevant background beliefs: *find beliefs that are relevant to the thing being supposed*.

The important question is this: What is one doing cognitively in relation to the antecedent *p* in the time interval *during which* one is still searching for beliefs that are relevant to determining what follows from it? Williamson, with whom I agree, has an answer: one is supposing *p*. I do not see that Langland-Hassan has an answer.

In sum, one often imaginatively represents *p* for an extended time so that one can load or search for other contents that are relevant to determining what *else* to do with it (whether to form further beliefs, judgments, etc.). Langland-Hassan can't explain the agent's attitude toward *p* during the extended time interval *prior to* the arrival of further beliefs, judgments, etc., because his theory says attitude imagining *just is* those beliefs, judgments, etc. Thus, the judgment-free imagining of *p* that occurs during that open time interval cannot, on his theory, even exist.

Third, an important element of cognition of fiction cannot be explained on Langland-Hassan's theory. When cognizing fiction, one often has <u>beliefs</u> about what officially happens in the story: e.g., I <u>believe</u> *that in the LOTR story Gandalf is smoking a pipe when he arrives in the Shire*. Such beliefs are a central part of Langland-Hassan's theory, so he has no difficulty with them. Yet one also often has florid imaginings that go beyond what one believes is officially true in the story. I might <u>imagine</u> *that Gandalf plucks a flower from the side of the road as he arrives in town* and do this without believing that is part of the official story content. In other work (2021), I say that such imaginings are what explain the playful, personal side of engagement with story content, which includes everything from daydreams about story characters to generation of fan fiction. Crucially, this playful side is epistemically safe: I needn't worry about getting the story wrong when I imagine up some fan fiction; after all, I'm *just* imagining![18]

Even the best theories don't explain everything. But adopting a theory of "imagination" that fails to explain epistemic safety, the temporal extension of hypothetical reasoning, and the playful side of cognition of fiction is pound foolish indeed.

Conclusion: Cognitive Flexibility Revisited

Human cognitive architecture allows us flexibility in terms of how we relate to ideas. The attitude words that exist in natural language (thinking, supposing, assuming, suspecting, imagining, etc.) give us just a small window into this flexibility. Note how easy it is to modify those words with adverbs and still produce intelligible ascriptions:

Sam <u>cautiously assumes</u> his transmission will make it another 1,000 miles.
Sarah <u>reluctantly supposes</u> her opponent might have a point.
Jeff <u>unflinchingly accepts</u> the contents of the report.
Greta <u>boisterously imagines</u> the things she'll buy with her lottery winnings.

The adverbs here do not indicate differences in *content*. They indicate variations in *how people relate to* content: variations in attitude.

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[18] Langland-Hassan (pp. 197-198) tries to analyze such imaginings as "decisions" to experience fictions in a certain imagistic way. There are two problems with this. (1) Often the images just occur without a decision to have them. (2) The attempt leaves unanswered how one relates to the particular (not-believed-to-be-fictional) contents of the images once one has started deploying them in ongoing story cognition.

In outwardly behavior, humans have the flexibility to do a great many things. In inwardly cognition, humans have the flexibility to do a great many things with *ideas*. We have, marvelously, the cognitive flexibility to shape for ourselves many and various attitudes—including imagining as a form of cognitive play.

Over and over throughout the book, *Explaining Imagination* comes face to face with that beautiful cognitive flexibility without quite seeing it. It finds itself in this position through its constant insistence that attitude imagining should be explained—but explained using certain particular deliberately restricted resources. So the theory that emerges is too ontologically stingy to capture the real phenomenon. We do well to accept Langland-Hassan's framing of the question, "What is imagination?" Yet for pennies more than he's willing to pay, our answer could be pounds richer.

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