

Imagination and Experience

Philosophical Explorations

Edited by Ingrid Vendrell Ferran
and Christiana Werner

First published 2025

ISBN: 978-1-032-43348-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-43349-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-36689-8 (ebk)

6 A normative aspect of imagining

Taking on a (quasi-)doxastic role

Alon Chasid

(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003366898-9

The Open Access version of this chapter is funded by The Israel Science Foundation.



ROUTLEDGE

Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

NEW YORK AND LONDON

6 A normative aspect of imagining

Taking on a (quasi-)doxastic role

Alon Chasid

6.1 Erroneous imaginings

To show that a normative element is inherent to imagining, I will explore cases where imaginings are deemed inherently erroneous. That is, I will show that the norm or commitment by virtue of which imagining can “go wrong” (i.e. when the imaginer *fails* to follow the norm or fulfil the commitment) doesn’t ensue, or doesn’t only ensue, from an intention to imagine, external guidance (e.g. suggestions presented by a work of fiction) or rules (e.g. of a game of make-believe) that mandate certain imaginings, but is an integral part of imaginative activity.

Let me explain. Upon reflection, it becomes apparent that different types of errors can arise in the course of imagining, but not all are inherent to imagining. For instance, mistaking a work of fiction’s invitation to imagine Paris, Texas for an invitation to imagine Paris, France generates an erroneous imagining of the latter. But this error does not seem to have any particular link to imagining: it exemplifies a more general sort of error, namely, misinterpreting a request or invitation.

A different type of such “extrinsic” error can occur when we *intend* to imagine something and fail to do so. Consider John, who intends to imagine dining with the real-world current Russian Prime Minister, and, believing that Vladimir Putin is the current PM of Russia, imagines dining with Putin.¹ John’s imagining seems mistaken, since the current Russian PM is Mikhail Mishustin, not Vladimir Putin. However, since John’s mistake ensues from his false belief, it has no particular connection to imagining. To see this, consider Lucy, who intends to call Darcy, but, mistaking Marcy’s phone number for Darcy’s, calls Marcy. Lucy and John make the same type of mistake: because they hold false beliefs, they fail to act as they intended. John’s imagining, like the conflation of Paris, Texas with Paris, France, seems to lack any specific imagination-related feature that renders it mistaken.

These examples could give the impression that erroneous imaginings are simply instances of broader types of error, and there is no specific sort of error that is unique to imagining, hence imagining has no inherent normativity. This impression might appear to be supported by the widely accepted claim that we are basically free to imagine whatever we want. More specifically, imagining is not truth-committed, and need not be responsive to (real-world) evidence or cohere with what we believe to be true, etc.² And manifestly, if an imaginative project³ *cannot* manifest error, it ipso facto lacks any inherent normativity.

Despite appearances, however, there is indeed, as I will now argue, at least one type of error that is unique to imagining, and hence imagining must have some sort of inherent normativity. Focusing on *spontaneous* imaginings, such as imaginings that arise in daydreaming – that is, imaginings that are unintended, non-deliberate, do not arise in response to external guidance, etc. – I will show that such imaginings can nonetheless “go wrong.” Since error in the context of spontaneous imagining cannot be characterised as misconstrual of an invitation to imagine, failure to carry out an intention, etc., it follows, I contend, that such error must be intrinsic to imagining.

I will start by adducing spontaneous imaginative projects in which imaginings seem to be erroneous. To pin down the error, I will compare each erroneous imagining to an imagining that, despite having the same content as the erroneous imagining, does not seem to be erroneous. This raises the question of what renders the two imaginings – the erroneous imagining and the non-erroneous imagining – different. I will argue that, since both imaginings arise unbidden, and thus the error cannot be attributed to a misconstrued directive, unexecuted intention, etc., the erroneous one must fall short *vis-à-vis* the posited inherent normativity. To demonstrate the various ways in which this sort of error can arise, I will discuss four diverse cases, each with a different structure.

Case 1: John finds himself imagining that he is dining with the current Russian Prime Minister (PM), who, so John imagines, is Vladimir Putin. John’s spontaneous imagining could occur in the context of two different imaginative projects. In the context of one of these projects (J1), John’s imagining that he was dining with Putin, the current Russian PM, was erroneous: had John known who the current PM was, his daydream would have featured Mishustin, not Putin. This point will become clearer if we suppose that, after John tells his spouse about what he imagined, his spouse replies that Mishustin, not Putin, is the current Russian PM. John reacts to his spouse’s comment with embarrassment, admitting that he had mistakenly believed that Putin was the PM, and accordingly, had imagined that he was dining with Putin. In the context of the other project (J2),

John's imagining was not erroneous. When his spouse makes her comment, John, unperturbed, says that he knows, or does not care, that Mishustin is the PM: he simply *imagined* that Putin was the PM.

Given that J1 and J2 unfold spontaneously, what explains the difference between them? Specifically, what is the difference between John's *imaginings* in each project? Note that both imaginings have the same content: "I'm dining with Putin, the current Russian PM." The difference seems to be the extent to which the two imaginings are committed to truth: J1 implies such a commitment, whereas J2 does not, hence only in J1 is John's imagining erroneous. But since imagining, in itself, is not truth-committed, and the imaginative projects in question are non-deliberate and unintentional, and do not arise in response to (external) guidance, etc., what establishes the commitment to truth, and hence the error, in J1 but not J2?

Note further that it isn't just the identities of real-world *objects* (e.g. the real-world Russian PM's identity) that are relevant to the difference between J1 and J2, but more generally, real-world *truths*.⁴ To see this, consider case 2.

Case 2: Diane spontaneously imagines that, on an Arctic expedition, she is approached by a penguin. Again, this imagining may arise in the context of two different projects, both spontaneous. In one project (D1), Diane's imagining is committed to the truth about whether there are penguins in the Arctic. Since Diane falsely believes that there are penguins in the Arctic, her imagining that she is being approached by a penguin is, in *some* sense, erroneous. Indeed, upon being informed that there are no penguins in the Arctic, Diane is embarrassed, recognising the error in her imagining. In another project (D2), Diane may know that there are no penguins in the Arctic. In D2, her imagining is not erroneous. For obviously, she can freely imagine (something she knows to be) a falsehood without any risk of error: imagining isn't truth-committed. Note, again, that Diane's erroneous imagining (in D1) and her non-erroneous imagining (in D2) have precisely the same content. Given that both projects are unintended, what renders Diane's imagining truth-committed in D1, but not in D2, to the effect that in D1 it "goes wrong" due to her false belief?

That imaginings are sometimes, but not always, rendered erroneous by virtue of some "mysterious" commitment to truth is a fairly common phenomenon that occurs in diverse sorts of situations. One such sort involves error with respect to properties (e.g. moral properties) that supervene on other properties. Consider the following pair of (spontaneous) imaginative projects:

Case 3: Mary finds herself imagining that Maggie is acting considerately, though in a decidedly obsequious manner. Continuing her reverie, Mary proceeds to imagine that Maggie *is* extremely considerate. Suppose that Maggie's imagined conduct is not a real-world manifestation of

sincere considerateness. That is, in the real world such conduct typically attests that the agent is likely *inconsiderate*, self-serving, etc. Mary's imagining that Maggie is extremely considerate could arise in the context of two different projects. In one project (M1), Mary's imagining is erroneous: not having a good grasp of (true) manifestations of considerateness, Mary mistakenly takes Maggie's imagined conduct to be a manifestation of extreme considerateness, and hence imagines that Maggie is extremely considerate. In another project (M2), Mary's imagining is not erroneous: Mary has a good grasp of the various real-world manifestations of considerateness; specifically, she knows that, in the real world, Maggie's conduct is *not* a manifestation of considerateness. She simply *imagines* that Maggie's conduct is a manifestation of sincere considerateness.

Again, the idea is that, since imaginings are not truth-committed, they can deviate from the truth, representing manifestations of considerateness that would be deemed phony in the real world as genuine considerateness. Of course, it could be the case that, just as the aforementioned imagined (real-world) falsehoods (i.e. in J1/J2, that Putin is the current PM of Russia, in D1/D2, that there are penguins in the Arctic) entail additional (real-world) falsehoods, the (real-world) falsehoods imagined by Mary entail additional (real-world) falsehoods, for example, that conduct such as Maggie's reflects some social or cultural standard of sincere considerateness. The crucial point is that, despite being identical in content, Mary's imagining in M1 is erroneous, whereas her imagining in M2 is not erroneous. The crucial question, again, is the following: given that M1 and M2 are spontaneous, and the imagined content (namely, that Maggie is very considerate) is the same in both projects, what generates the different normative profiles of M1 and M2?

Case 4: This case pertains to imaginative projects in which the "wrong" mental image is summoned up.⁵ Suppose Lou finds himself imagining that King's College is on fire. The image that Lou summons up in the course of his imagining, however, is that of *Trinity* College.⁶ Of course, the relation between the image and the content of Lou's attitudinal imagining is not random: Lou (attitudinally) imagines, by virtue of the image he summons up, that King's College has a certain appearance, a certain *look*, namely, the way *Trinity* College looks in the real world. Lou's imagining could arise in the course of two different projects. In one project (L1), Lou's imagining follows from his false belief about the (real-world) appearance of King's College. In this case, his imagining is erroneous. Indeed, discovering that he mistook Trinity for King's, Lou is ashamed of his ignorance, admitting that his imagining went wrong. In another project (L2), Lou knows what King's College looks like, or does not care about its real-world appearance: he simply finds himself *imagining* King's College as having a certain appearance, namely, the (real-world) appearance of Trinity College. Nothing in

L2 is ill-founded, given that imagining is generally not truth-committed. Since both L1 and L2 arise spontaneously, we must once again ask what it is that distinguishes L1 from L2, to the effect that only in L1 is Lou's imagining erroneous.

To recapitulate, although the imaginings in cases 1–4 are not intended or externally guided, in each case, the imagining is erroneous in the context of one project, as what it represents is untrue, whereas in the second, the imagining is not erroneous, though it represents the same untrue content. What explains the *contrast* between J1/D1/M1/L1 and J2/D2/M2/L2? Since the difference between the former projects and the latter does not ensue from any disparity in guidance, intention, etc., it can only be due to some normative element that is an integral part of imaginative projects. This element must be such that it can generate a commitment to imagine that which is true, though, as demonstrated by J2/D2/M2/L2, it does not always generate such a commitment.

Suppose it is suggested that much as the *content* of imagining can be determined spontaneously (probably by some sub-personal mechanism, mere associations, etc.; see Van Leeuwen 2013: 224ff), so too, the *normative* element – the element that may generate a commitment to imagine that which is true – can be determined spontaneously. That is, much as one can find oneself imagining, without prompting, seven-legged monsters, having an ice cream in a kayak, or taking a cat to school, so one can also find oneself, without prompting, *committed* to imagining that which is true.

This suggestion has merit. Obviously, if the two imaginings, as well as the overall imaginative project within which each arises, are spontaneous, the normative element in question must also be spontaneous. But this does not explain *how* commitments are generated spontaneously, that is, how we can be rendered committed to imagining something – specifically, truths – without intending to do so, following instructions to do so, etc. Maintaining that such commitments are established by some sort of “hidden” or non-conscious intent, purpose, or sui generis type of directive is problematic, since such directives rule out the possibility of truly spontaneous imaginative projects. On the assumption that there are projects that arise, and unfold, *unintentionally*, the commitment to imagine propositions of a certain sort (specifically, truths), must be taken to be an *integral* aspect of the projects' structure, not a matter of intent or some “added-on” directive. In general, to account for the normative element in question, we must accept that it is *built into* any imaginative project, whether intended or spontaneous.

Pursuing this line of thought, we must look for a normative element that is intrinsic to imagining – an element that characterises *any* imaginative project, intended or spontaneous. I will now examine one such element that has been suggested in the literature.

6.2 Aiming at the fictional truth

In developing his theory of make-believe, Kendall Walton argues that “imagining aims at the fictional [truth] as belief aims at the true. What is true is to be believed; what is fictional is to be imagined” (Walton 1990: 41). Walton’s idea is that just as the norm of belief is truth simpliciter, the norm of imagining is the *fictional* truth. In this thesis, the source of erroneous imaginings is the mismatch between propositions that are *to be* imagined (i.e. the pertinent “fictional truths,” which constitute the “fictional world,” as Walton defines it⁷), and propositions that *are* imagined. Just as beliefs are incorrect (correct) by virtue of the falsity (truth) of their content, imaginings are incorrect (correct) by virtue of the *fictional* falsity (*fictional* truth) of their content. (Hereafter, I will use “f-” for “fictional,” “fictionally,” etc.).

Walton’s thesis can be readily illustrated by adducing imaginative projects in which the positing of f-truths is explicit. For instance, a work of fiction directs us to imagine its content by presenting certain propositions as true, thereby rendering them f-truths, that is, “to be imagined” propositions. In engaging with a work of fiction, we are mandated to imagine the propositions it presents as true. Hence, if we imagine an f-falsehood, this imagining is erroneous. In such cases, our error is more than a misunderstanding about something the work invites us to imagine (e.g. mistaking an invitation to imagine Paris, Texas for an invitation to imagine Paris, France); it is also a failure to imagine the f-truth.

The positing of f-truths in other imaginative contexts is carried out via stipulations, rules, etc. In one of Walton’s best-known examples, players of a game of make-believe stipulate that tree stumps in the forest where they’re hiking are fictional bears (Walton 1990: 37ff.). This stipulation guides the players’ imaginings: if they believe that there is a tree stump at a certain spot, they imagine that there is a bear at that spot. If they *falsely* believe that there is a tree stump at a certain spot, and accordingly, imagine the f-falsehood that there is a bear at that spot, the players err: they err not only in having a false belief (i.e. about a non-existent stump) but also *in imagining an f-falsehood*. Indeed, they violate two commitments: the doxastic commitment to believe that which is true, and a commitment that is inherent in imagining, namely, to imagine that which is f-true.

Walton applies this thesis not only to deliberate imaginings but also to unintended, spontaneous imaginings, that is, those that typically arise in daydreaming and mind-wandering (Walton 1990: 44–45, 2015: 28), though he does not elaborate much on how a proposition is posited to be f-true, and thereby rendered “to be imagined,” in such cases. Clearly, the positing of f-truths, if integral to a spontaneous project, is spontaneous too. This point warrants clarification, but let us first see how Walton’s

thesis explains the type of error we are concerned with here, that is, error of the sort we saw in J1/D1/M1/L1.

Walton certainly accepts that in general, imagination is not truth-committed: we are free to imagine falsehoods, we need not be responsive to (real-world) evidence for or against our imaginings, etc. But imaginings *are* committed to that which is posited to be f-true: in imagining a *fictional* falsehood, the imaginer errs. This thesis seems to explain error of the sort exemplified in J1/D1/M1/L1. The commitment to imagining real-world truths (e.g. Russia's current PM is Mishustin; there aren't penguins in the Arctic; considerateness has such-and-such manifestations; King's College looks like *this*) ensues from positing the relevant f-truths to be identical to these real-world truths. Holding false beliefs about these real-world facts, the imaginers imagine *fictional* falsehoods, hence their imaginings are erroneous. By contrast, in J2/D2/M2/L2, the imaginers do not posit that f-truths are identical to real-world truths, hence their imaginings aren't mistaken. In short, imaginings are erroneous by virtue of representing f-falsehoods. To the extent that f-truths are posited to be real-world truths, and we err regarding what is true in the real world, our imaginings represent f-falsehoods, hence they are erroneous.

On this Waltonian account of erroneous imaginings, in addition to representational states of imagining, imaginative projects involve two elements: a general mandate to imagine that which is f-true, and the positing of specific f-truths. This account is quite unwieldy. However, it seems that a satisfactory account of erroneous imaginings cannot avoid being unwieldy. Recall that the pairs of imaginings in cases 1–4 differed in correctness despite having precisely the same content. This difference can only be explained by invoking *additional* features of imaginative projects, as the Waltonian account indeed does. Moreover, the Waltonian account satisfies the theoretical constraint that the normative aspect must be inherent to imagining: commitment to imagining that which is f-true, and hence, the possibility of error, are integral to both intended and spontaneous imaginative projects.

Despite its merits, the Waltonian account is problematic. In imagining f-falsehoods, do we err, *literally*, just as we err in believing falsehoods? The thesis that, since imagining aims at f-truth just as belief aims at truth, we do indeed err, is, I contend, too strong. There often seems to be nothing amiss about having “f-false imaginings.” For instance, a work of fiction can invite us to imagine, at an early stage of its unfolding, that a protagonist is benevolent, that she's gravely ill, etc., but later reveal that the protagonist is malevolent, her illness was faked, etc. In such cases, engaging with the work not only allows but *mandates* imaginings with f-false content: without following this mandate, we could not engage with the work properly, appreciate it, etc. The claim that engaging with such works, in requiring us to imagine f-falsehoods, requires us to *err*, is far-fetched.

Moreover, suppose that, liking the work, we decide to reread it. In rereading the early chapters, we enthusiastically imagine that which we know to be *f*-false: we imagine that the protagonist is benevolent despite knowing that we are imagining an *f*-falsehood. Were it an error to imagine an *f*-falsehood, our knowledge that we are being invited by the work to err – literally – by imagining an *f*-falsehood would, presumably, prompt us to decline to imagine it. Compare, as per Walton's thesis, *imagining* a proposition we know to be *f*-false to *believing* a proposition we know to be false. Ordinarily, we cannot intentionally believe something we know to be false. Perhaps there are cases (e.g. self-deception and wishful thinking) where we seem to act irrationally, ignoring clear-cut evidence and believing falsehoods. But both structurally and with respect to the circumstances in which they arise, such cases are quite unlike cases of re-engaging with fiction. Generally, our free and uninhibited attitude to imagining propositions we know to be *f*-false is incompatible with the claim that we *err* in imagining *f*-falsehoods. (Readily imagining that which we know to be *f*-false can also occur in other contexts; for example, in attempting to ascertain how we would respond to surprises, discoveries, etc., we might *plan* to first imagine an *f*-falsehood, and then imagine the *f*-truth. But were it the case that to imagine an *f*-falsehood was literally to make a mistake, just as to believe a falsehood is to make a mistake, we would not, and probably could not, engage in imagining *f*-falsehoods in such an easy and carefree manner.)

Furthermore, recall that, as noted earlier, Walton's approach faces a difficulty with respect to spontaneous imaginative projects. It is unclear how *f*-truths are posited in such projects, especially projects that involve a shift from imagining one proposition to imagining its negation. For instance, in spontaneously daydreaming that someone is benevolent, and then, within the same daydream, that she is, in fact, malevolent, what determines which proposition is *f*-true? If the first proposition is *f*-false, was it posited to be *f*-false right at the daydream's outset? If it was, would we not have been aware of its *f*-falsity, and hence not imagined it, given that we are generally disposed to avoid error? And if it was posited to be *f*-false at a later stage of the daydream, what renders our imagining mistaken at the outset? I will not develop this critique here, but such questions reinforce the sense that Walton's thesis is problematic, in particular, *vis-à-vis* spontaneous projects (see Chasid 2021b).

Nevertheless, as I said, the Waltonian account is correct in insisting that imaginative projects have a normative aspect. If imagining lacked this normative aspect, there would be no explanation of the difference between J1/D1/M1/L1 and J2/D2/M2/L2, since the imaginings in each pair of projects represent the same content, which is equally false in both. Given that all these projects arise spontaneously, the main question remains: if not intentions or external guidance, what renders the imaginings that arise in J1/D1/M1/L1 truth-committed, and hence erroneous if they do not represent the pertinent truths?

6.3 Taking on a (quasi-)doxastic role

To account for the type of error under discussion, I will begin by revising Walton's thesis. Instead of arguing that imagining aims at the f-truth as belief aims at truth (as Walton claims), I will argue for a weaker thesis, namely, that with respect to the property of aiming at the f-truth, imagining only *mimics* belief (see Chasid 2021a, 2022). More precisely, in imagining, we are committed to representing that which is *presented* as f-true (sometimes *merely* presented as f-true, but not actually f-true), and hence as to-be-believed, *at each stage* of the imaginative project's unfolding. We are not committed to imagining an f-truth at the stage of the project we are currently in – unless it is also *presented* as f-true at that stage. Indeed, what we *are* committed to imagining at each stage is that which appears to be true from our perspective as imaginers: at each stage, we must grasp the *apparent* f-truths/to-be-believed propositions, and imagine them.

The idea is that, in imagining, we ipso facto take on the role of believers vis-à-vis the f-world, specifically, by taking our imaginings to be doxastic states that aim at the truth in that world. (Hereafter, I will refer to this role as “quasi-doxastic.”) Hence, to the extent that f-falsehoods are presented as f-true, that is, as to-be-believed, at a certain stage, we are not making any (real-world) mistake in imagining them, since we are playing our quasi-doxastic role properly. Moreover, in such a case, the fact that an f-falsehood is *presented* as f-true/to-be-believed *mandates* us to imagine it, in accordance with the quasi-doxastic role we take on qua imaginers.

Two clarifications are in order. First, it can be edifying to formulate the revised thesis in terms of *pretence*, as follows. In imagining that *p*, we ipso facto *pretend to believe* that *p*: we pretend that our states of imaginings aim at truth in the f-world, and by virtue of this pretence, we are committed, in imagining, to representing that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed at each stage of an imaginative project's unfolding. What is crucial to such pretence is, again, not what we know to be f-true, but what we know to be *presented* as f-true/to-be-believed at each stage. Note, however, that analysing imagining in terms of pretending-to-believe, though illuminating, can also be misleading. For one thing, pretence is usually *defined* in terms of imagining, and not vice versa (see Liao and Gendler 2020: Section 6.3.2). Moreover, pretending is usually taken to be an intentional act, whereas imagining can arise spontaneously, as in cases 1–4. Of course, if pretence, or a *certain type* of pretence, can be defined without reference to imagining, and can be conceived of as arising unintentionally, the revised thesis can indeed be formulated in terms of pretending-to-believe. So formulated, the revised thesis argues that, though imagining does not aim at the f-true (as Walton claims), we *pretend* that it aims at the f-truth, as per the role we take on in imagining, namely, the role of pretend-believers

vis-à-vis the f-world. This pretence indeed has a normative aspect: the commitment to imagine that which is presented as true/to-be-believed in the f-world at each stage of the project we are engaged in.

Second, on the revised thesis, taking on this quasi-doxastic role, and hence being committed to imagining the apparent f-truths/to-be-believed propositions, is *inherent* to imagining. In this respect, the notion of “taking on” (“playing,” “carrying out,” etc.) the f-world role of believers – somewhat like “pretending” – could be misleading, since it could be interpreted as connoting an *intentional* act, whereas I am arguing that this role is inherent to imagining, which can be unintended. The idea is not that in imagining, we *intend* to take on the quasi-doxastic role in question; rather, this role is an integral part of the state of imagining, and does not require intention. Compare this inherent belief-like aspect of attitudinal imagining to perception-like aspects of mental images. Much as no intention is needed to render mental images perception-like (in that they represent visual properties from a certain vantage point; they are rich in content, as are perceptual experiences; etc.), intentions are likewise not needed to render attitudinal imaginings belief-like, as they inherently involve a doxastic perspective vis-à-vis the f-world. In short, in this chapter, the notion of “taking on a role” (“playing a role,” etc.) does not connote an intentional act.

The revised thesis applies to both intended or guided imaginings, and spontaneous imaginings. Let me first illustrate this thesis for cases of intended/guided imagining. Suppose that a work of fiction invites us to imagine that the protagonist is benevolent, but later reveals that she is evil. The initial invitation is not issued in isolation, but rather, the work asks us to imagine additional propositions that provide support for the benevolence claim, presenting it as true in the work’s f-world. Hence, even when *rereading* the work’s early chapters, we can easily imagine that which we know to be f-false, namely, that the protagonist is benevolent, since the work convincingly depicts her as benevolent. In such cases, knowing that we are imagining an f-falsehood does not impede our imagining, since the f-falsehood is (initially) presented as f-true, that is, as to-be-believed, rendering it to-be-imagined. Indeed, taking on, qua imaginers, the role of believers vis-à-vis the f-world, we are *committed* to imagining that the protagonist is benevolent, since she is depicted as benevolent.

Similarly, suppose we *plan* to shift from imagining an f-falsehood to imagining an f-truth, for example, from imagining that a certain building is about to explode, to imagining (within the same project) that it was never about to explode. In cases like this, our project is set up, somewhat automatically, to render the f-false proposition to-be-believed at the project’s initial stage: additional imaginings and mental images⁸ are summoned up, for example, that residents are directed to evacuate the building, security

forces search for explosives, etc., thereby presenting the proposition that the explosion is imminent as true/to-be-believed. Despite knowing that we are imagining an f-falsehood (as per our intention), we readily imagine that the building is about to explode. Furthermore, we are *committed* to imagining this “apparent f-truth,” in accordance with the quasi-doxastic role we take on as imaginers.

Likewise, consider Walton’s stumps-are-bears game. Suppose that the players plan to imagine – for fun, to experience a surprise-like feeling, etc. – that there are no bears behind a clump of bushes, though they know that there are tree stumps there, and then to imagine the f-truth, namely, the terrifying fact that there *are* bears crouching behind the bushes. In a case like this, the players do not necessarily err in first imagining that there are no bears behind the bushes, a proposition they know to be f-false: to the extent that they imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed, their imagining is correct. However, since in this example, the f-truths are in part stipulated in terms of real-world objects (tree stumps), the quasi-doxastic role may not be easy to carry out properly. For instance, if, while playing the game, a player is looking directly at a stump and sees it clearly, her imagining that there are no bears there is erroneous, since she does not imagine that which is presented as to-be-believed – unless she *also* imagines that she has a visual impairment, that she has been informed by someone reliable that there are no bears around, or imagines any other proposition that supports the proposition that there are no bears behind the bushes. It might also be the case that, in planning to imagine being surprised by bears, the players “set the stage” for proper execution of their quasi-doxastic role, for example, by camouflaging the stumps, putting up a “No bears spotted here” sign nearby, etc. If they did so, their imagining that there are no bears behind the bushes is *not* erroneous, since in their capacity as imaginers, this proposition presented as true/to-be-believed; moreover, if this f-falsehood is clearly presented as f-true/to-be-believed, it is ipso facto rendered to-be-imagined, hence they are committed to imagining it.

I will soon say more about how the quasi-doxastic perspective’s sensitivity to real-world facts can generate the type of error in question, that is, the error of *not* imagining that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed. Meanwhile, note that the proposed account also applies to spontaneous imaginative projects. In spontaneously imagining a proposition, we find ourselves “automatically” imagining additional propositions, and summoning up mental images that, overall, present the imagined content as true. In this sense, propositions are presented as to-be-believed in spontaneous projects too. Indeed, the proposed account of the normative aspect of imagining presupposes that imaginings do not arise singly. That is, it assumes that a stand-alone state cannot be deemed a full-fledged imagining, and can be no more than a mere supposition (if it arises intentionally⁹),

the entertaining of a passing thought, etc. As this point is widely accepted, I will not develop it here.¹⁰ Of course, an imaginative project can, perhaps must, *start* with a single thought.¹¹ But, to be deemed an imagining, this thought must be accompanied by additional content-laden states that, on the account proposed here, present certain propositions as f-true/to-be-believed.¹²

Let us now return to the type of error this chapter seeks to explain. There are, in fact, two different ways in which propositions can be presented as f-true/to-be-believed in an imaginative project, and, accordingly, two ways in which the commitment to imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed can be established. As we saw in the examples earlier, imagined propositions can be presented as to-be-believed by adducing additional (supportive) imaginative elements, that is, additional imaginings and mental images. Usually, if not always, however, the presentation of some imagined propositions as f-true/to-be-believed, in both spontaneous and intentional imaginative projects, also relies on real-world facts. That is, an imagined proposition is sometimes presented as f-true/to-be-believed *simply by virtue of its truth in the real world*. Accordingly, the commitment to imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed is either the commitment to imagine that which is presented as f-true “internally” (i.e. via additional imaginative elements) or the commitment to imagine that which is true simpliciter, namely, that which is supported by real-world facts. (Of course, the fact that propositions are presented as to-be-believed by virtue of real-world truths does not mean that these truths are also true in the project, that is, f-true. For as I showed in Section 6.2, as the project unfolds, we may discover that some imagined propositions, regardless of whether they are true in the real world, are *f-false*. The point is that propositions can be presented as f-true, that is, to-be-believed, simply by virtue of the alleged real-world facts they represent, whether or not these facts are posited to also be facts of the f-world.)

To demonstrate that the presenting of propositions as f-true/to-be-believed, which enables the imaginer to play her quasi-doxastic role, is often, if not always, carried out by appealing to real-world facts, let us return to cases 1–4. The extent to which real-world facts are relied on comes to the fore when we consider the difference between J1/D1/M1/L1 and J2/D2/M2/L2. Whether a proposition is presented as f-true/to-be-believed “internally” or by virtue of real-world truths is reflected in the extent to which the imaginer invokes her *beliefs* about these truths. We see that the imaginings in projects J1/D1/M1/L1 invoke beliefs about the pertinent real-world facts. As these beliefs happen to be false, the imaginings are erroneous, since the commitment to imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed is violated. The imaginings are erroneous not because they represent f-falsehoods, but because they do not represent that which

is presented as *f*-true/to-be-believed. Since the “presentation-as-*f*-true” in question is established in terms of real-world facts, and we fail to track these facts, we fail to fulfil our commitment, *qua* imaginers, to imagine that which is presented in the project as to-be-believed.

Consider the difference between J1 and J2. John, in imagining that Putin is the current PM of Russia, that he is dining with Putin, etc., can carry out his quasi-doxastic role on the basis of other imaginative elements, specifically, images or imaginings that present these imagined propositions as true (e.g. Putin telling him about his experiences as PM, Putin’s assistants and bodyguards treating Putin like the PM of Russia). That is, the imagined propositions are presented as to-be-believed mainly via “internal” (imaginative) elements, not on the basis of real-world facts. This is what happens in J2. For given that John knows that Putin is not the current PM of Russia, John’s project must appeal to *some* (imagined) grounds that render the proposition that Putin is the current PM *f*-true/to-be-believed. By contrast, in J1, the proposition’s putative *f*-truth is not presented by adducing additional imaginative elements, but by an appeal to real-world facts. Since John falsely believes that Putin is the current PM of Russia, his imagining violates the commitment to imagine that which is presented as *f*-true/to-be-believed, hence it is erroneous. In other words, since John’s quasi-doxastic role in J1 is carried out by his being “open,” to some extent, to the real world, and John fails to track the pertinent real-world truths, he fails to carry out his role properly.

Similarly, consider D1/D2. In D1, Diane carries out her quasi-doxastic role, in part, by appealing to a real-world fact about penguins. Specifically, the proposition that there are penguins in the Arctic is presented as *f*-true by virtue of Diane’s “openness” to the real world. Since her belief is false, Diane fails to fulfil her commitment to imagine that which is presented as *f*-true, hence her imagining is erroneous. By contrast, in D2, the proposition that there are penguins in the Arctic is presented as *f*-true “internally,” by adducing additional imaginative elements. Diane summons up mental images of, for example, penguin tracks in a park in Nunavut, and seeing penguins from the deck of a ship sailing around Greenland; the proposition that there are penguins in the Arctic is thereby presented as *f*-true/to-be-believed in D2, and thus, as to-be-imagined.

It is important to note that the additional imaginative elements that are summoned up in D2 could also arise in D1. The difference between D1 and D2 does not lie in whether these elements are part of the project, but in whether they alone are adduced to present the overall imagined scenario as to-be-believed (D2), or the scenario is in part presented as to-be-believed by appealing to real-world facts, specifically, the real-world fact about penguins in the Arctic (D1).

Granted, in some cases, the additional imaginative elements by means of which imagined propositions can be presented as f-true/to-be-believed without appealing to real-world facts might have to have peculiar or difficult-to-believe content. Consider M1 and M2. In M1, Mary's imagining is erroneous, since she imagines that Maggie is extremely considerate, even though Maggie's imagined conduct is clearly *not* a (real-world) manifestation of extreme considerateness. Mary's error in M1 ensues from the fact that the imagined proposition, that is, that Maggie is very considerate, is in part presented as f-true by virtue of Mary's "openness" to the real world. Since Mary carries out her quasi-doxastic role by invoking false beliefs about real-world manifestations of considerateness, she fails to imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed, namely, the *real-world* import of Maggie's exaggerated gestures: Maggie is *inconsiderate*, self-serving, etc.

By contrast, in M2, Mary's imagining that Maggie is considerate is not erroneous. Given that Mary knows that Maggie's imagined conduct exemplifies (real-world) *inconsiderateness*, the proposition that Maggie is considerate is presented as f-true/to-be-believed *not* by virtue of any "openness" to real-world facts about considerateness, but by additional imaginings, for example, the imagining that Maggie is comporting herself in accordance with some fictional (but non-actual) cultural norms on which obsequiousness is indeed an expression of extreme considerateness. Imagining such additional content provides support for the proposition that, in light of Maggie's (imagined) behaviour, Maggie is extremely considerate, rendering it f-true/to-be-believed. Hence Mary does not err: she fulfils the commitment to imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed. Note that if Mary could not imagine such departures from real-world cultural norms,¹³ she would be unable to imagine that Maggie is extremely considerate. Indeed, Mary can imagine that Maggie is considerate by virtue of her (imagined) behaviour *either* by imagining additional content (e.g. imagining cultural norms of considerateness that differ from the real-world norms) *or* by falsely believing that Maggie's conduct is a real-world manifestation of extreme considerateness.

Lastly, the difference between L1 and L2 exemplifies another aspect of the imaginer's quasi-doxastic role, and how it can be improperly executed. The difference between L1 and L2 lies in how the mental image associated with Trinity College enables Lou to carry out his quasi-doxastic role. In L1, to present the proposition that King's College is on fire as f-true/to-be-believed, the project is partly "open" to the real world, specifically, vis-à-vis the appearance of King's College. To fulfil the commitment to imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed, Lou must *recall* what King's College looks like, but since his recollection of the college's appearance

is flawed, and he mistakenly summons up an image of Trinity College, he does not fulfil this commitment. Hence his imagining is erroneous.

In short, in L1, summoning up the college's image is part of the recollection process, which fails, rendering Lou's imagining erroneous. By contrast, in L2, the proposition that King's College is on fire is presented as f-true/to-be-believed, not by appealing to real-world facts about the appearance of King's College, but "internally," by adducing additional imaginative elements. Granted, Lou *imagines* that King's College has the appearance that Trinity College has in the real world (as he does in L1), but his imagining is not erroneous. Since the imagined proposition is presented as f-true by purely imaginative elements – specifically, by summoning up an image of the college – and not by recollection, that is, not by being "open" to the real world, Lou's quasi-doxastic role is carried out properly.

6.4 Concluding remarks

This chapter has argued that imaginings are committed to representing certain content, and hence can be rendered erroneous by failing to represent that content. Introducing cases 1–4, I first showed that imaginings can be erroneous not only when they are intended but also when they arise spontaneously. It follows that the commitment to represent the content in question is not a matter of intentions or compliance with external guidance but is inherently related to imagining. After considering an account of erroneous imagining based on Walton's thesis that the norm of imagining is the fictional truth, and finding it insightful but not fully satisfactory, I suggested a revision. The revised account asserts that imagining f-falsehoods does not entail that our imaginings are erroneous. Rather, imaginings are erroneous when we do not imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed in a given imaginative project. The commitment to imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed follows from a feature that is inherent to imagining, namely, that in imagining, we take on the role of believers vis-à-vis the f-world, and as such, take our content-laden states (i.e. our imaginings) to aim at the f-truth. Erroneous imaginings arise from a failure to fulfil this commitment, a failure to carry out our quasi-doxastic role properly.

I then argued that propositions can be presented as true/to-be-believed in an imaginative project's f-world in two different ways: by adducing additional imaginative elements or by appealing to real-world facts. When propositions are presented as f-true/to-be-believed by "openness" to real-world facts, there is a possibility of erroneous imaginings. In such cases, our beliefs about these facts are crucial: if they are false, we fail to imagine that which is presented as f-true/to-be-believed, rendering our imaginings erroneous.

Imagining is committed neither to representing (real-world) truths nor to representing fictional truths. But this does not entail that imaginings are totally unconstrained. Imagining involves taking on a quasi-doxastic role vis-à-vis f-truth – a role we can fail to execute, in our capacity as imaginers, when we do not imagine the presented-as-true propositions at each stage of an imaginative project’s unfolding. The commitment to imagine the presented-as-true propositions differs markedly from the commitment that ordinarily applies to beliefs, judgements, and other representational states with a “mind-to-world” direction of fit. The commitment applicable to such states involves a specific relation between the states’ correctness conditions and the truth value of their content: these states are correct/erroneous by virtue of having true/false content. This relation probably motivates Walton’s argument that imagining aims at the f-truth, that is, that an imagining is correct/erroneous by virtue of its content’s *fictional* truth/*fictional* falsity.

The commitment inherent to imagining is not of this type. It is not associated primarily with representational states and the truthfulness of their content, but rather, it is a commitment that ensues from following a different norm. Since imagining inherently involves taking on a quasi-doxastic role, in imagining, we are ipso facto committed to mentally representing that which is presented as f-true (sometimes merely *presented as* f-true, but not f-true), and hence – given our role – as to-be-believed, at each stage of an imaginative project. It might seem as if this task should be easy to perform, especially in light of our freedom to imagine (almost) anything we want. But since the presentation of propositions as f-true/to-be-believed often “reaches out” to the real world, it can generate the commitment to ground our imaginings in facts about, say, the current PM of Russia, penguins in the Arctic, true considerateness, or what King’s College looks like. In such cases, our real-world doxastic failures can adversely affect the execution of our quasi-doxastic role, rendering our imaginings erroneous.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to those who helped sharpen my argument. In particular, I’d like to thank Dan Baras, Roberto Casati, Greg Currie, Anna Ichino, Julia Langkau, Nethanel Lipshitz, Bence Nanay, Alik Pelman, Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, Assaf Weksler and Christiana Werner for their input. This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grant No. 2349/23).

Notes

- 1 The structure of this example was suggested in Williams (1973: 29–30), though Williams adduced it in a different context.
- 2 This is the prevailing view; see Kind (2016: §4).

- 3 The term “imaginative project” refers to the overall mental activity associated with imaginings, which encompasses, in addition to explicit and implicit attitudinal imaginings, patterns of inference that apply to imaginings, stipulations regarding fictional truths (see Section 6.2), and various kinds of mental states that are functionally related to imaginings (i.e., mental imagery, emotional responses)
- 4 Friend (2000) and Davies (2015) contend that imaginings can, in some sense, be *about* real-world objects. I do not deny this; my point is that the difference that demonstrates the error in question is much broader than identity mix-ups. See also Chasid (2020), especially 44–45.
- 5 In this chapter, I remain neutral on the question of whether imaginative projects necessarily involve mental images; see Walton (1990: 13), Kind (2016: 7), Van Leeuwen (2013: 222). For argument’s sake, I make the assumption that imagining *can* be accompanied by mental imagery.
- 6 This Wittgensteinian example is discussed in the literature in other contexts; see, for example, Walton (1990: 29–30).
- 7 Walton defines fictional worlds as “sets of *propositions-as-indicated-by-a-given-work*” (1990: 67). Since Walton takes fictional worlds to be constituted, not just by the content of works of fiction but also by that of daydreams and spontaneous imaginings (44–45), this definition applies to the latter as well.
- 8 In this chapter, I assume that mental images contribute to rendering an imagined scenario to-be-believed, but don’t uphold any specific theory about how they do so. That is, I assume that mental images support (attitudinal) imagining either by virtue of their similarity to perceptual experiences (i.e. they support imaginings in a manner akin to that in which perceptual experiences support beliefs) or because they are akin to the mental images that arise in the course of remembering, they have rich content, etc.
- 9 See Arcangeli (2019: 77).
- 10 See, for example, Arcangeli’s account of the differences between supposing and imagining: imaginings, but not suppositions, “show a holistic dynamics . . . [imagining] does not come in isolation, but as a piece of an *imaginative project*” (2019: 42ff). See also Nichols and Stich (2003: §2.3), Langland-Hassan (2020: 6), Liao and Gendler (2020: §2.5), Chasid (2020, 2021b).
- 11 See, for example, Nichols and Stich (2003: §2.3.1).
- 12 This claim is consistent with, but different from, the widely accepted claim that imagining mirrors the inferential patterns of belief; see, for example, Walton (1990: Ch. 4), Currie and Ravenscroft (2002: 12ff), Nichols and Stich (2003: §2.4), Weinberg and Meskin (2006: 180–181). My point is that in imagining a proposition, we also imagine and summon up images that render the proposition credible, not just propositions that *follow* from it by way of belief-like patterns of inference.
- 13 The difficulty, or impossibility, of imagining such deviations might be an instance of the phenomenon of imaginative resistance (see Tuna 2020), which is beyond the scope of this chapter.

References

- Arcangeli, M. 2019. *Supposition and the Imaginative Realm*. New York: Routledge.
- Chasid, A. 2020. Imagining in Response to Fiction: Unpacking the Infrastructure. *Philosophical Explorations* 23 (1):31–48.

- Chasid, A. 2021a. Belief-like Imagining and Correctness. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 58 (2):147–160.
- Chasid, A. 2021b. Not by Imaginings Alone: On How Imaginary Worlds are Established. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 7 (2):195–212.
- Chasid, A. 2022. A Puzzle About Imagining Believing. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 13:529–547.
- Currie, G. and Ravenscroft, I. 2002. *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, D. 2015. Fictive Utterance and the Fictionality of Narratives and Works. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55:39–55.
- Friend, S. 2000. Real People in Unreal Contexts, or Is There a Spy Among Us? In *Empty Names, Fiction and the Puzzles of Non-Existence*, ed. A. Everett and T. Hofweber, 183–203. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Kind, A. 2016. Introduction: Exploring Imagination. In *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, ed. A. Kind, 1–11. New York: Routledge, 1–11.
- Langland-Hassan, P. 2020. *Explaining Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liao, S. and Gendler, T. 2020. Imagination. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/imagination/>
- Nichols, S. and Stich, S. 2003. *Mindreading: An Integrated Account of Pretence, Self-Awareness, and Understanding of Other Minds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tuna, E. H. 2020. Imaginative Resistance. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/imaginative-resistance/>
- Van Leeuwen, N. 2013. The Meanings of ‘Imagine’ Part I: Constructive Imagination. *Philosophy Compass* 8 (3):220–230.
- Walton, K. L. 1990. *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walton, K. L. 2015. In *Other Shoes: Music, Metaphor, Empathy, Existence*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weinberg, J. and Meskin, A. 2006. Puzzling Over the Imagination: Philosophical Problems, Architectural Solutions. In *The Architecture of the Imagination*, ed. S. Nichols, 175–202. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, B. 1973. Imagination and the Self. In *Problems of the Self*, ed. B. Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.