

# Can fictionalists have a genuine emotional response to religious discourse?

Dr Jessica Eastwood

To cite this article: Dr Jessica Eastwood (2022) Can fictionalists have a genuine emotional response to religious discourse?, International Journal of Philosophy and Theology, 83:5, 339-350, DOI: [10.1080/21692327.2022.2137561](https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2022.2137561)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2022.2137561>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 12 Mar 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 81



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# Can fictionalists have a genuine emotional response to religious discourse?

Dr Jessica Eastwood 

Teaching Fellow & Schools Liaison Administrative Officer for the Theology and Religion Department, Durham University, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham DH1 3RS, UK

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to suggest that the fictionalist's emotions toward religious discourse could be better supported than the current literature allows. By 'fictionalist' I mean those of whom interpret religious discourse as useful fiction. The threefold structure of the article will argue that: (1) the concept of aliefs has been falsely equated with the concept of imagining, (2) the fictionalist ought to adopt a hybrid theory of emotions rather than a cognitive appraisal and, (3) if (1) and (2) are accepted, then key issues concerning the genuineness and appropriateness of emotions toward fictional entities can be overcome. I will conclude that something significant is at stake here, and that is whether or not the fictionalist's emotions are deemed 'real' or not. Thus, to provide the best defence of the fictionalist's emotions is to: (A) separate that which has been lumped together, that is: quasi emotions and alief-evoked emotions (B) argue for the hybrid account of emotions and, (C) defend the genuine and appropriate nature of fictional emotions.

## ARTICLE HISTORY


Received 25 June 2019  
Accepted 14 October 2022

## KEYWORDS

Religious fictionalism;  
Paradox-of-Fiction; belief;  
alief; emotions; philosophy  
of mind

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to suggest that the fictionalist's emotions toward religious discourse could be better supported than the current literature allows. By 'fictionalist' I mean those whom interpret religious discourse as useful fiction. The threefold structure of the article will argue that: (1) the concept of 'aliefs' has been falsely equated with the concept of imagining, (2) the fictionalist ought to adopt a hybrid theory of emotions rather than a cognitive appraisal and, (3) if (1) and (2) are accepted, then key issues concerning the genuineness and appropriateness of emotions toward fictional entities can be overcome. I will conclude that something significant is at stake here, and that is whether or not the fictionalist's emotions are deemed 'real' or not. Thus, to provide the best defence of the fictionalist's emotions is to: (A) separate that which has been lumped together, that is: quasi emotions and alief-evoked emotions (B) argue for the hybrid account of emotions and, (C) defend the genuine and appropriate nature of fictional emotions.

**CONTACT** Jessica Eastwood  [jessica.g.eastwood@durham.ac.uk](mailto:jessica.g.eastwood@durham.ac.uk)  Teaching Fellow & Schools Liaison Administrative Officer for the Theology and Religion Department, Durham University, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham DH1 3RS, UK

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

### ***Alieving Is Not Imagining***

When it comes to asking the question: *just how is it that we respond emotionally to fictional discourse even when we believe it to be non-actual(?)*<sup>1</sup> one popular response is that we *do not have real* emotions toward fictional entities precisely because we do not believe fictional entities to exist. This idea is represented by Kendall Walton and his theory of make-believe and adjoining quasi emotions<sup>2</sup>. In an appeal to common sense and the familiar, Walton suggests that our emotions toward fiction are ‘quasi emotions’. By this he means that, the emotions we feel whilst engaging in fiction are not the same as the emotions we feel toward that which we know or believe to be true. Fictional emotions<sup>3</sup> are not brought about by ‘*believing-that*’, instead they are brought about ‘*make-believing-that*’, and this involves using one’s *imagination*<sup>4</sup>.

In a theological context, make-believing and the concept of quasi emotions has been adopted by Robin Le Poidevin to explain the religious fictionalist’s emotional response to religious discourse<sup>5</sup>. This means that when the fictionalist is engaging in religious discourse, they will take themselves to be engaging in a (rather complex) game of make-believe. That is to say, the fictionalist will ‘enter into what she takes to be the religious imagination to the extent that she becomes affectively engaged’<sup>6</sup>. Ergo, the fictionalist’s emotions toward religious discourse are quasi emotions; those affective states generated by fictions<sup>7</sup>. If this is true, says Le poidevin, then ‘the existence of quasi-emotions has to be explained’, and to do this Le Poidevin gestures at Tamar Gendler’s concept of aliefs<sup>8</sup>. Coined by Gendler, the term ‘alief’ refers to a unique, habitual-like mental state with a propensity to respond to ambient stimuli. ‘To alieve’, then, could be contrasted with the concept ‘to believe’ because whilst the latter might express an ongoing belief-that (*x* exists, for instance), the former describes a short-term instinctual-like reaction-that (*x* might exist). The existence of aliefs can be used to explain otherwise perplexing phenomenon or ‘belief-discordant behaviour’, including fictional emotions. For instance, when walking across a glass skywalk 4,000 feet above ground, it is possible to *believe* that you are safe whilst simultaneously *alieving* that you are in danger. With the alief having roughly the following content: ‘Really high up, long long way down. Not a safe place to be! Get off!’<sup>9</sup>.

Why, then, can quasi emotions not be assimilated with alief-evoked emotions? I’ll begin with the most obvious reason, because Gendler specifically tells us that alieving is not imagining. The cognitive state of alief cannot be assimilated with other cognitive states such as imagining (and believing) because they exist along different crucial dimensions<sup>10</sup>, ‘it lies in another plane altogether’<sup>11</sup>. In other words, to imagine might be understood as this: ‘If I imagine *P*, I imagine that it is true that *P*, but the actual truth or falsity of *P* is explicitly irrelevant to my successfully imagining it to be’<sup>12</sup>. To imagine, then, is to *accept* a proposition: to imagine that *P* is to regard *P* as true (in some way). Ergo, to imagine is a propositional attitude. But, to alieve is not to have a propositional attitude. On the contrary, to alieve that *P* is not to accept that *P*, for alief does not involve acceptance<sup>13</sup>. Instead, upon alieving *P* the subject will simultaneously believe *P* and believe not-*P* – i.e., in the case of the skywalk, it is possible to *believe* that you are perfectly safe whilst also *alieving* that you are in danger.

The concept of alieving has been introduced by Gendler as a *different* type of mental state to that of imagining, which suggests that Le Poidevin’s utilization of aliefs to

describe quasi emotions is incorrect. Why? Because quasi emotions are uniquely attached to the theory of make-believe, and to make-believe is to imagine, and to imagine is not the same as to believe. Ergo, it appears wrong to assimilate quasi-evoked emotions and belief-evoked emotions because the former relies on the subject engaging in make-believing, whilst the subject experiencing belief-evoked emotions is in no such state of imagination. Moreover, I wish to suggest that beliefs have been falsely equated with the concept of imagining.

### ***Pure-Cognitive and Hybrid Theories of Emotion***

Within any given attempt to make proper sense of perplexing phenomena such as fictional emotions, lies an assumption about the *nature* of emotions. Namely, a prior conviction about what causes an emotional response and how this said response can come to be recognised as a ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ emotion. *Cognitive theories of emotion* assume that emotions are constituted by some form of cognition, typically a belief. In that, emotions involve a belief or a judgment and this can cause a bodily response, however this physiological change is not a necessary component of what constitutes an emotion. Moreover, since we do not believe fictional entities to be actual, our emotional response to fiction are that of quasi emotions<sup>14</sup>, and quasi emotions are not genuine emotions, Walton argues<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, if the religious fictionalist is to adopt this theory, as Le Poidevin does, then the best the fictionalist can hope for is a quasi emotion toward religious discourse. But a hybrid theory of emotions might be able to help here.

Before explaining a hybrid account, I must first present the *non-cognitivist* position. If the pure-cognitive theory is on one end of an ‘emotion theory spectrum’, on the other would be a non-cognitive theory, the most notable of which is the James-Lange theory, and the idea that emotions occur as a result of physiological reactions to events or stimuli. Thus, it is a *non-cognitive* theory because it stipulates that emotions do not rely on type of cognition (belief or judgment) in order to occur. Rather, the idea is this: that ‘*bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*’<sup>16</sup>.

Typically, pure-cognitivist theories are thought to provide a better account for complex fictional emotions such as jealousy and pity. A pure-cognitive theory is held most notably by Martha Nussbaum and Walton. It is the view that it is the relevant belief or judgment that constitutes the emotion, not the affective responses, although they might accompany the belief. Moreover, only a certain type of belief or judgment is necessary for an emotion to obtain<sup>17</sup>. Whereas, the non-cognitivists are thought to provide an adequate account for basic emotions such as anger and fear, for which we have typical physiological responses. A hybrid account, then, states that the basis for an emotion is some form of cognition *and* bodily responses. One hybrid theory in particular I want to present here is Katherine Tullman’s theory. Tullman’s account is based on three theories, I shall briefly explain each to give a complete picture of her hybrid account<sup>18</sup>.

### ***Rosenthal’s HOT theory***

On the topic of consciousness within philosophy of mind, David Rosenthal’s *higher-order thought* theory, otherwise known as a HOT theory, postulates that we can be conscious of a (first-order) mental state – i.e., a sensation, belief, another thought, an emotional state,

and so on, by having a higher-order thought about said mental state<sup>19</sup>. Essentially, a higher-order thought is a thought about a (first-order) mental state. Rosenthal describes this as follows:

Sensing is not ... the only way we are conscious of things. We are also conscious of something when we have a thought about that thing as being present. I need not see somebody in the audience to be conscious of that person; it's enough just to have a thought that the person is here. There is, moreover, no other way we know about of being conscious of things. So, if we are not conscious of our conscious states by sensing them, the only alternative is that we have thoughts about them—what I have called elsewhere *higher-order thoughts*<sup>20</sup>.

In the naturalistic tradition, HOT theorist John Locke insisted that when we are talking about consciousness we are talking about whether or not a mental state is conscious. Locke concluded that mental states are conscious when we *perceive* those states, that is when we are aware of ourselves as being in those states (known as the *higher-order perception theory*)<sup>21</sup>.

Rosenthal has since developed Locke's theory, and insists that *perceiving is not the only way* in which one becomes aware of a mental state. Rather, the appropriate awareness takes the form of an assertoric, non-inferential *thought*, to the effect that we are in such a state (hence, *higher-order thought theory*). Essentially then, a HOT is a thought about a mental state; if I cannot *see* somebody in the audience, it is enough, says Rosenthal to have a *thought* about them in virtue of being conscious of that person<sup>22</sup>.

Tullman draws on two specific points here. The first is to do with *the object of one's mental state*, and the idea that the object need not be physically present 'and that we don't *believe* are physically present'<sup>23</sup>. That is to say that we can have HOTs about 'our family member across the country, about people long-gone, about hypothetical or counterfactual cases, and even fictional characters'<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, Tullman uses this aspect of the HOT theory to counter the pure-cognitivist argument that some form of cognition (i.e., belief) necessarily constitutes an emotion.

The second has to do with our *awareness*. A HOT theory states that we need not be conscious of the HOT itself because the HOT itself is not the emotion. Rather, HOTs can cause an emotion by 'acting as the intentional object of the emotion'<sup>25</sup>. Tullman uses this idea to help explain how it is that we can have not only basic emotional responses to fiction but also complex emotions. The former can occur, on the basis that we will always be in some mental state whilst watching a film – in the sheer sense that we are awake – physiological responses such as 'blood pressure, muscular tension, and so on, can take place without one's being aware of them'<sup>26</sup>. With complex emotions, HOTs represent the object of our emotions and in this instance, one need not be aware of those factors in the environment, instead a *thought* about Anne's plight, for instance, can evoke an emotion of pity.

### ***LeDoux's two pathways***

Joseph LeDoux's research on the brain systems involved in emotional processing draws the following hypothesis: there is a non-cognitive appraisal in emotions that takes place below the level of awareness and produces physiological changes in the subject<sup>27</sup>. LeDoux found that there are two pathways in which information about an emotional stimulus in

one's environment reaches the amygdala (the part of the limbic system associated with emotions). There is the 'high' cortical road and the 'lower' thalamic road<sup>28</sup>. The cortical road is the slower of the two and gives a more accurate representation of the stimuli, and is associated with rationality<sup>29</sup>. The thalamo-amygdala pathway is quicker because it bypasses the cortex altogether, as a result, the thalamus is 'unfiltered and biased toward evoking responses'<sup>30</sup>. This means that it cannot 'make fine distinctions' and tell the amygdala exactly what is there, but it is nonetheless 'intriguing, for it suggests that emotional responses can occur without the involvement of the higher processing systems of the brain' – i.e., the sensory cortex (the high road)<sup>31</sup>.

So, how does Tullman use this neuroscientific research to propel her hybrid theory? Based on LeDoux's finding that many of our emotions happen too quickly for cognitive evaluation, Tullman says that – if LeDoux's theory is correct – the pure-cognitivist claim that *only* beliefs (or some other form of cognition) can constitute a genuine emotion 'is undermined; emotions can occur without one first having a belief about one's environment'<sup>32</sup>. However, it is possible for the pure-cognitivist to respond and say, well yes there is an emotional response but it is *not genuine*, and Tullman indicates that LeDoux's argument also addresses this. All our emotions, he says, are based on this sort of subcortical processing, which necessarily results in felt bodily responses '[c]ontrary to the primary supposition of cognitive appraisal theories, the core of an emotion is not an introspectively accessible conscious representation'<sup>33</sup> (as Rosenthal argues). Furthermore, '[f]eelings do involve conscious content [watching a film, reading a book], but we don't necessarily have conscious access to the processes that produce the content'<sup>34</sup> (what Rosenthal would refer to as a HOT).

### ***Carroll's thought-theory***

In a bid to solve the puzzle of how it is that we can respond emotionally to that which we believe to be non-actual, Carroll defends the genuine nature of fictional emotions and says that we can have real emotional responses to fictional characters and situations<sup>35</sup>. Our emotions do not have to correspond to external reality, in order for the emotions themselves to be real. So, we can feel just as strongly for the loves and losses of our favourite characters as we can for the plight of our friends and family. Thus, Carroll denies the precedent that we are only genuinely moved by what we believe is actual (one of the three *prima facie* premises of the paradox of fiction). Similarly to Walton, then, Carroll agrees that it is not the fictional world *itself* towards which we have an emotional response, rather – in opposition to Walton – it is our *thought content about the fiction*. Carroll maintains that 'we can be moved by the content of thoughts entertained; that emotional responses do not require the belief that the things that move us be actual'<sup>36</sup>. Tullman does proceed to modify Carroll's account in light of Rosenthal's HOT theory and research by LeDoux<sup>37</sup>, but for our purposes it is important to know that Tullman utilizes Carroll's thought-theory to defend a hybrid theory of emotions that does not solely rely on the belief to constitute a genuine emotion.

### ***Why, then, ought the fictionalist adopt a hybrid theory?***

If Tullman's hybrid account is plausible – and it is possible to have a *thought* about a fictional entity and for this to potentially evoke an emotional response that is genuine, then it is my conviction that the fictionalist will do better to adopt a hybrid theory over

a pure-cognitivist account. When ‘make believing’, the best the fictionalist can argue for is a quasi emotional response. That is a non-genuine emotion toward that which the fictionalist takes seriously, namely engaging in religious discourse. To this extent, a fictionalist can not immediately or even easily be pointed out from among realists. We understand this point when Le Poidevin introduced us to Fiona (the fictionalist) and Reginald (the realist):

Reginald and Fiona are regular church-goers. They sing hymns, join in prayers, discuss the sermon afterwards and often meet to read passages of the Bible together and explore the meanings and implications of those passages. They seem to the neutral onlooker to be equally engaged in these activities, equally inspired by them, and equally inclined to relate them to their everyday lives. Behaviourally, then, there is nothing to distinguish the religious attitudes of these two individuals. However, on questioning, each gives a very different philosophical account of the basis of that behaviour: Reginald is a realist . . . He takes God-talk -subject to an important qualification- at face-value, and as true by virtue of the way the world is independently of human belief . . . Fiona is a fictionalist. When engaging in religious language and practice, she takes herself to be engaging in a (rather complex) game of make-believe<sup>38</sup>.

What the ‘tale of two church goers’ demonstrates is that the fictionalist is not out to fool anyone, she truly believes in the moral, social, emotional and intellectual benefits of engaging with religious discourse in a way that is as wholly immersive as possible. And, so, if it is at all possible that once adopting an alternative hybrid account, it will contribute to a defence of fictionalist positions, and any broader positions that do not rely on the conception of belief-that (in a traditional conception of God perhaps), then, surely, the fictionalist ought to adopt a hybrid theory. I will now continue this argument specifically in response to two concerns that Le Poidevin has which stem from his cognitivist position.

### ***Overcoming the Issue of Genuineness and Appropriateness***

If, thus far, I have been able to successfully illustrate that (1) aliefs have been falsely equated with the concept of imagining, and (2) that a hybrid theory of emotion is a greater fit for the fictionalist given their non-belief-that position, then I will now present some solutions to two specific concerns that le Poidevin expresses. Namely, I: the issue of genuineness and, II: the issue of appropriateness, that come with a pure-cognitive appraisal.

#### ***I: The issue of genuineness***

Le Poidevin fears that the fictionalist’s emotional response to religious discourse will be deemed ‘qualitatively different’ from the realist’s because the realist’s response is triggered by belief-that whilst the fictionalist’s: *alief-that*<sup>39</sup>. This demonstrates Le Poidevin’s commitment to a pure-cognitivist theory because his fear stems from the idea that what constitutes a genuine emotion is belief-that, and fictionalist’s do not have belief-that – i.e., the fictionalist does not *believe-that* religious language is (intended to be) objectively fact-stating. Therefore, the fictionalist cannot have a genuine response to religious discourse. Whereas, the realist (who does believe that sentences in religious discourse are objectively fact-stating) will. Moreover, the fictionalist’s emotions will be quasi emotions and qualitatively lesser than the realist’s *real* emotions.

**I: Response**

According to Gendler, on the larger topic of emotion and fiction, there is the broader issue at hand, and it is this: the existence of an inconsistent triad of premises. They are:

- 1) *The Response Condition*: We have genuine emotional responses towards *F*;
- 2) *The Belief Condition*: We believe that *F* is purely fictional;

At the same time, it is also true that:

- 3) *The Coordination Condition*: In order for us to have genuine emotional responses towards a character (or situation), we must not believe that the character (or situation) is purely fictional<sup>40</sup>.

Walton and other pure-cognitivists reject *the response condition*, as does Le Poidevin. But, since we are trying to defend the genuineness of fictional emotions (in terms of qualitiveness), I will draw on Gendler and her promotion of both *the response condition* and *the belief condition*, her argument for denying *the coordination condition* and, overall, her claim that ‘it is *not* a condition on our having genuine ... emotional responses towards a character (or situation) that we believe the character (or situation) to be non-fictional’<sup>41</sup>. To explain how this is possible, Gendler states that there are two dimensions along which fictional emotions differ from actual emotions (Table 1):

*Read from right to left:*

I will now explore how each dimension can defend the notion that fictional emotions are just as genuine as actual emotions or, at least, that Walton’s argument for the contrary is not superior. In regards to the object of emotion, as with Rosenthal and Tullman’s HOT theory, it is possible to have an emotional affinity with members of family living abroad, about the now-deceased, about babies that have not yet been born, and even fictional characters – i.e., that which does not exist *here and now*. As Gendler puts it, we have ‘no inclination to withhold attributes of genuineness from cases involving past or future or merely possible persons or events’, thus it ‘seems that we do not require that the target of genuine emotion exist in the here and now’<sup>43</sup>.

In terms of the latter – ‘resulting behaviour’ – Gendler calls on the investigative work of Antonio Damasio (and his team) on consciousness, behaviour and practical reasoning. His (1994) investigation<sup>44</sup> revealed that automatic responses play a central role in practical reasoning, and this is based on the following sort of process: when playing a card game for instance, ‘[w]e imaginatively engage with the potential consequences of various courses of action’, ‘thereby, activating our emotional response mechanisms’<sup>45</sup>. Then, ‘we encode the results of these simulations somatically’ (a bodily response) and ‘the presence of these “somatic markers” then helps to guide our future behavior’<sup>46</sup>. These emotions are known as ‘simulated emotions’, and Gendler believes that there is a ‘striking resemblance between *simulated* emotions and *fictional* emotions’<sup>47</sup>.

**Table 1.** A table based on Gendler's distinction between actual and fictional emotions

Dimensions <sup>42</sup>	Actual Emotions	Fictional Emotions
Object of emotion	Actual individual and/or events	Ostensibly non-actual individual and/or events
Resulting Behaviour	Certainly predictable ways	Not directly tied to fashion in this way



She continues this line of thinking to suggest that – if Damasio’s team is correct – both simulated and fictional emotions ‘produce bodily changes to those produced by actual emotions’<sup>48</sup>. And, that actual emotions ‘feed directly into action whereas the former feed only indirectly into action’<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, Gendler suggests that this is ‘a difference in processing, not in motivation’<sup>50</sup>. Furthermore, if we can agree that there is a striking similarity here, then Gendler wishes to say that ‘while Walton is surely correct to note that fictional emotions do not feed into behaviour in the ways that actual emotions do, it does not follow that they do not have similar motivational structure’<sup>51</sup>.

In the theological sphere, this means that the religious fictionalist’s emotional response can be genuine (*the response condition*) without believing fictional entities to exist (*the belief condition*). Therein, it would make sense for the fictionalist to adopt Gendler’s theory to defend against *the coordination position*; that in order for us to have a genuine emotional response towards a character (or situation) then we must believe the character (or situation) to be nonfictional.

## ***II: The issue of appropriateness***

Le Poidevin holds that the fictionalist’s emotional response to religious discourse is potentially ‘religiously inappropriate’ because of the fictional frame in which fictionalists capture the discourse<sup>52</sup>. Based on Hume’s paradox of tragedy (which investigates how is it possible that we can gain pleasure from tragic artworks)<sup>53</sup>, Le Poidevin suggests that the ‘aesthetic features’ of fiction (‘which cannot but evoke pleasurable emotions’) could inhibit the fictionalist’s ability to ‘appropriately’ respond to religious discourse because their emotions will be coloured by their *alief*-that and not a *belief*-that<sup>54</sup>. Therefore, the fictionalist might feel some type of emotion toward a religious tragedy that is not pure in its horror, but ‘a frisson of horrified delight’, and thus religiously inappropriate<sup>55</sup>.

## ***I: Response***

This issue for Le Poidevin stems from his conviction that *both* the fictionalist and the realist might not be able to have appropriate emotional responses to religious discourse because of the ‘aesthetic features’ of fiction (Hume’s paradox of tragedy). I will now present three potential ways to get around this issue.

### ***General observation***

In a bid to defend the fictionalist’s emotional response from fiction’s ‘aesthetic features’, Le Poidevin argues that if such an issue exists ‘realists are not immune to it’<sup>56</sup>. Insofar as, realists do interpret religious discourse as ‘unvarnished truth’, but religious narratives, ‘even when viewed realistically, are often presented in a dramatic, artistic or musical medium which exploits aesthetic features’ (which, as we know, cannot but evoke pleasurable emotions)<sup>57</sup>. His conclusion, then, is that if Hume’s paradox presents an issue for the fictionalist, then it, too, presents an issue for the realist. However, surely this is an issue with religious narrative *itself* and not an issue, immediately, for the fictionalist. By this I mean, is this not a problem with religious discourse, the narrative context in which it sits, and whether it is *at all* possible to ‘appropriately’ interpret it, without *anyone* falling victim to the ‘aesthetic features’?

### ***Alieving is not strictly pleasurable***

If we assume, as Le Poidevin does, that the issue is with the fictionalist and their alieving (rather than believing), and if we assume that this is a parallel issue for the realist, it is still important, I think, to point out that aliefs *themselves* are not pleasure seeking, as it were. In other words, I have suggested that perhaps ‘alief’ is problematically insincere because of its aesthetic features, Le Poidevin has pointed out that ‘realist-belief’ religious narrative has aesthetic features also, so if the problem is with the ‘aesthetics’ it is a problem shared. First of all, then, I wish to say that the problem of aesthetic features is shared (by alief and belief), and secondly even if it is not, alief is not problematic in the way that is being presented. Insofar as, if alief uniquely has aesthetic features, these aesthetics features are not problematically ‘pleasure-seeking’, that is, aiming at false gratification or consolation.

Moreover, if the former were the case – that the issue is with the fictionalist and their alieving – then the fact that the fictionalist might be alieving does not add to or further the idea that the religious discourse in which they are emotionally responding to is in anyway ‘enjoyed inappropriately’ because of their interpretive lens (alieving). For the instances of alieving that we are given by Gendler do not demonstrate such ‘pleasurable and sought after’<sup>58</sup> emotions. Gendler gives examples of: walking across a skywalk and fearing falling through the glass; searching for one’s wallet whilst believing that it was sitting at home; averse to eating fudge that has been formed into the shape of dog faeces; reluctance to put a piece of vomit-shaped rubber in your mouth; and hesitation to wear your adversary’s shirt<sup>59</sup>. Furthermore, with Le Poidevin’s suggestion that there might be a difficulty here, it is worth noting that this issue is not catalysed and would not be perpetuated by the existence and the fictionalist’s utilization of aliefs.

#### Victims of Hume’s Paradox

Hume’s paradox of tragedy refers to the ‘beauty’ or ‘force of imagination’ swirling together ‘the painful, as well as agreeable passion’<sup>60</sup>. This means that only when the subject is ‘imagining’ or ‘pretending’ does the paradox apply. And, as I have previously pointed out, the subject that is experiencing alief-evoked emotions is in no such state of imagination. Therefore, if I am correct in interpreting the concept of aliefs as incompatible with make-believing, then applying Hume’s paradox to question here of the appropriateness of the fictionalists alieving, is a little more complicated. By this I mean, the fictionalist that adopts a pure-cognitivist theory might fall victim to the paradox because they are *imagining* whilst engaging in their theological game of make-believe. Whereas, the fictionalist that adopts a hybrid theory might not fall victim in the same way (at least, theoretically) because their emotions toward the discourse are *not evoked by imagining* but by alieving.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper has been threefold, to: (1) separate out the concept of alieving from the concept of imagining, to (2) argue that the fictionalist ought to adopt a hybrid theory of emotions rather than assume a pure-cognitivist theory, and finally (3) to propose that if the fictionalist accepts (1) and (2) then they are in a position to defend the genuineness and appropriateness of their emotional response to religious discourse. As religious fictionalism continues to gain notoriety within academia and popularity in the lived-practice and engagement with religious discourse, the way in which we interpret

and present the nature of the fictionalist's emotions is important and requires continued research, particularly in emotion theory. I suggest further investigation into hybrid accounts and research into the possibility of having genuine, rational and appropriate responses to that which we believe and/or know to be non-actual<sup>61</sup>.

## Notes

1. Otherwise known as the paradox of fiction, it was most notoriously presented in C. Radford's 'How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?' and K. Walton's 'Fearing Fictions.' For an up-to-date and extensive and list of references on the paradox see, E. Konrad et al 'The Paradox of Fiction'.
2. Walton, 'Fearing Fiction'; and Walton, *Mimesis as Make-believe*.
3. When I use the phrase 'fictional emotion' I simply mean the subject's emotional response to fiction.
4. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 39–42.
5. Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*, 118; and Le Poidevin, *Religious Fictionalism*, 32, 60.
6. Le Poidevin, *Religious Fictionalism*, 35.
7. Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*, 117–118.
8. See above 6., 42.
9. Gendler, 'Alief and Belief', 634.
10. *Ibid.*, 647.
11. This also includes belief, alief exists on a different plane to both 'imagination' and 'belief' (*ibid.*, 647–648).
12. In the original quote Gendler also uses the conceptions of 'pretending' and 'supposing' (*ibid.*, 267).
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 268.
14. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-believe*, 246.
15. *Ibid.*, 202.
16. James, 'What is an emotion?', 189–190.
17. Walton argues 'that fear necessarily involves a belief or judgment that the feared object poses a threat is a natural supposition which many standard theories of emotions endorse' (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 197). Nussbaum rejects the claim that all emotions have a felt bodily response, arguing that '[t]here usually will be bodily sensations involved in grieving, but if we discovered that my blood pressure was quite low . . . or that my pulse rate never went above sixty, there would not, I think, be the slightest reason to conclude that I am not grieving . . . We do not withdraw emotion-ascriptions otherwise grounded if we discover that the subject is not in a certain brain-state' (Nussbaum, 'Emotions as Judgements of Value and Importance', 195).
18. Tullman, 'HOT Emotions'.
19. See David Rosenthal, *Consciousness and Mind* for a complete description of this theory.
20. Rosenthal, 'The Timing of Conscious States', 658.
21. J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.
22. Rosenthal, 'How many kinds of consciousness?', 658.
23. See above 18.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 164.
29. *Ibid.*, 161.
30. *Ibid.*, 165.
31. *Ibid.*, 163, 163, 161.

32. See above 18.
33. See above 28., 299.
34. Ibid., pp. 299.
35. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*; Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*; Carroll, 'Film, Emotion, and Genre,'; Carroll, 'Review: Mimesis of make-believe'.
36. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 88. Note, however, that the following lines reads, '[w]e can be moved by prospects that we imagined', which means that we cannot insert the theory of aliefs here.
37. Tullman reverses Carroll's stipulation that the appraisal *causes* the bodily change because, as we now know from LeDoux's research, bodily changes are not caused necessarily by cognitive appraisals; rather, the perceived bodily change can take place before the appraisal.
38. Le Poidevin, 'Playing the God Game', 178.
39. See above 6., 43.
40. Gendler and Kovakovich, 'Genuine Rational Fictional Emotions', 241.
41. Ibid., 242
42. Table 1 is based on Gendler's assessment given (ibid, 248).
43. Ibid., 249.
44. Domasio et., 'Insensitivity to future consequences'.
45. Gendler and Kovakovich, 'Genuine Rational Fictional Emotions', 247–248.
46. Ibid., 248.
47. Ibid., 248.
48. Ibid., 250.
49. Ibid., 250.
50. Ibid., 250.
51. Ibid., 250.
52. See above 6., 43.
53. Hume, 'Of Tragedy'.
54. See above 6., 44.
55. Ibid., 44.
56. Ibid., 44.
57. Ibid., 44.
58. Ibid., 43.
59. Granted that alief is a different state from imagination, there is the possibility that imagining something (during a game of make believe) could trigger an alief. For example, the "subject who shows reluctance to put a piece of vomit-shaped rubber in her mouth. When the visual experience as of vomit awakens in the subject the entertainment of vomit-related trains of thought, the affective experience of disgust, and the activation of motor routines associated with behaviors like retreat and avoidance [the] subjects come to *alieve occurrently* the representational-affective-behavioral content: 'Vomit! Disgusting! Stay away!'. In fact, 'it is likely that you right now – prompted by the associations set into play through imagining such a case – occurrently alieve something with similar (though decidedly milder) content' (Gendler, 'Alief and Belief', 645).
60. Hume, 'Of Tragedy', 261, 263, 262.
61. For more a detailed exploration of this discussion see Chapter Four of my doctoral thesis, *Transcending Fictionalism: God, Minimalism and Realism*.

## Notes on contributor

*Jessica Eastwood* is a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University. Within the area of philosophy of religion, Jessica's research topics include: God, nature, fiction, emotion and anti/realism.

**ORCID**Dr Jessica Eastwood  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6030-7619>**Bibliography**

- Carroll, N. *The Philosophy of Horror*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc, 1990.
- Carroll, N. "Film, Emotion, and Genre." In *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*, edited by Noël Carroll and J. Choi, 217–233. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006.
- Carroll, N. *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008.
- Carroll, N. C., and K. L. Walton. "Review: Mimesis of make-believe." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45, no. 178 (1995): 93. doi:10.2307/2219853.
- Damasio, A. R., A. Bechara, H. Damasio, W. Steven, Anderson, and Anderson. "Insensitively to Future Consequences following Damage of Human Prefrontal Cortex." *Cognition* 50, no. 1–3 (1994): 7–15. doi:10.1016/0010-0277(94)90018-3.
- Eastwood, J., *Transcending Fictionalism: God, Minimalism and Realism*. Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: Accessed October 20, 2022. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/14014/>
- Gendler, T. S. "Alief and Belief." *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 10 (2008): 634–663. doi:10.5840/jphil20081051025.
- Gendler, T., and K. Kovakovich. "Genuine Rational Fictional Emotions." In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, edited by By Matthew Kieran, 241–253. Blackwell: Blackwell-Wiley, 2006.
- Hume, D. "Of Tragedy." In *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, edited by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, 1874–1875. Vol. 3. London: Longman, Green, 1757.
- James, W. "What Is an Emotion." *Mind* 34, no. 9 (1884): 188–205. doi:10.1093/mind/os-IX.34.188.
- Kendall, W. *Mimesis as Make-believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990.
- Konrad, E., T. Petraschka, and C. Werner. "The Paradox of Fiction – A Brief Introduction into Recent Developments, Open Questions, and Current Areas of Research, Including A Comprehensive Bibliography from 1975 to 2018." *Journal of Literary Theory* 2, no. 12 (2018). doi:10.1515/jlt-2018-0011.
- LeDoux, J. *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998.
- Locke, J., *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1960 (Many editions now available.)
- Nussbaum, M. "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance." In *Thinking About Feeling*, edited by C. Robert and Solomon, 183–199. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Poidevin, L. "Playing the God Game: The Perils of Religious Fictionalism." In *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, edited by Nagasawa, Yujin and Andrei A. Buckareff, 178–191. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Poidevin, L., and Robin. *Arguing for Atheism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Poidevin, L., and Robin. *Religious Fictionalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Radford, C., and M. Weston. "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes. 49 67–93, (1975). Accessed October 20, 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4106870>
- Rosenthal, D. "The Timing of Conscious States." *Consciousness and Cognition* 11, no. 2 (2002a): 215–220. doi:10.1006/ccog.2002.0558.
- Rosenthal, D. "How Many Kinds of Consciousness?" *Consciousness and Cognition* 11, no. 4 (2002b): 653–665. doi:10.1016/S1053-8100(02)00017-X.
- Rosenthal, D. *Consciousness and Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Tullman, K. "HOT Emotions: Dissolving the Paradox of Fiction." *Contemporary Aesthetics* 10 (2012).
- Walton, K. L. "Fearing Fictions." *The Journal of Philosophy* 75, no. 1 (1978): 5–27. doi:10.2307/2025831.