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Imaginative Resistance. An Emotion-Based Account

For about fifteen years now there has been an increasingly vivid discussion of the so-called »puzzle of imaginative resistance«: we feel resistance to imagining worlds that are morally different from our world. In morally deviating worlds people do not just *think* differently about morality, but different things *are* morally good in these worlds. I will start with some introductory thoughts about the different dimensions of the problem. Then the general functioning of imagination has to be scrutinized. As I see it, imagining consists in the entertaining of a mental content without asserting it. However, this can be done in different ways: just by supposing the truth of a proposition, or in an experiential mode that involves also sensory and affective qualities. This brings us to a distinction made by Richard Moran (1994). He distinguishes two modes of imagining: a *hypothetical* and a *dramatic* one. Dramatic imagining is a form of imaginatively adopting a total perspective including thoughts, sensory qualities and emotions. From Moran's point of view, imaginative resistance depends mainly on the *feelings* involved in dramatic imagining. Therefore, I call it an affective account of imaginative resistance. Yet, it has been argued that imagined emotional responses are only »make-believe« or pretend. We, therefore, have to find out whether this objection is threatening the force of Moran's account. His answer to the challenge is based mostly on the affective aspect of dramatic imagining. Although he is right in emphasizing the role of feeling in emotional imagining, it does not suffice to explain the arousal of imaginative resistance. Therefore, we have to proceed from an affective to a full-fledged emotion-based account. Emotions in the full sense of the term cannot be reduced to mere feelings, they have a representational content. I suggest understanding the representational content of emotions following Kenny (1963) in terms of their *formal objects* which individuate emotions, make them intelligible and give their correctness conditions. If an imagined content is not presented as a viable instance of the formal object of an emotion, the imagining will fail. As a consequence, I will develop a multi-layered model of failures to imagine something emotionally due to the specific ways in which the representational content and the affective dimension interact in emotional imagining. We also have to get a firmer grip on the nature of the feelings involved in emotions in order to understand their impact on imaginative resistance. From my point of view this has to do with their nature as *bodily* feelings, which makes emotional imagining in a way intrusive that distinguishes it from other kinds of imagining. We will then have to reconsider how the bodily feelings involved in emotional imagining relate to their representational content. Finally, I

will discuss why it is specific to imaginative resistance that the imagining does not just fail, but a feeling of repulsion is evoked.

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