FILM-ELICITED EMOTION AND MORAL ATTITUDE

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Introduction

The relationship between art and morality appears to have been problematic ever since Plato’s *Republic*. The capacity of art to move its audience at the expense of reason was for Plato the greatest cause for concern in his critique of representational art in the *Republic*. According to Plato, the arts are powerful shapers of character. Thus, to train ideal citizens for an ideal republic, the arts must be strictly controlled. More specifically, the first task of educating ideal citizens is “to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest.” Art and morality are two central aspects of human life. Through art we are able to express and represent ourselves, while morality guides us in our behavior towards other people. The domains of art and morality play a significant role in our lives because they both have the capacity to move and motivate us. Consider the following fictional story:

A kindergarten teacher is falsely accused by his colleague of abusing one of his pupils. Although the court discharges all accusations that were made after the first incrimination, the teacher still receives threats and becomes the victim of physical assault while he attempts to do his groceries in the town’s supermarket. The school where he is employed fires him without providing sufficient reasons and even his best friend no longer believes him. He is innocent, but remains a child molester in the eyes of the angry mob in his town.

This story might affect its readers in different ways. One could feel indignation at the angry mob violating our ideas of justice, or one could be feeling sad for the sorrows the teacher probably experiences. The teacher’s situation is terrible and unjust. If he really is innocent, the town’s people should leave him alone. It is unfair that he still is considered a pedophile even though the court declares him innocent. Feeling angry at the people who still threaten him and feeling sad for the teacher are only two examples of possible emotions elicited by the story. But why do we feel something when reading this story in the first place? There is no real harm done as the victim is only a fictional character. How, then, is it possible that we are able to feel something in fiction? What do we feel and are these feelings even real? These, and many other, questions seem to arise when analyzing the possible emotions elicited by this story. Additionally, it appears to be problematic when the story is real. What if the story sketched above really happened and that the teacher still suffers from panic attacks and depressions? Does it suddenly change the intensity of the elicited emotions and does it become less bearable to feel sad for the teacher? Are the emotions elicited in the reader more real when there is an actual person involved or are they structurally the same?

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Furthermore, the emotions elicited by the story seem to be related with the moral attitude of the reader. When the reader believes it is wrong to harm innocent people, she not only makes a moral judgment when she ascribes wrongness to the angry mob; but, more importantly, experiences emotions that are in line with this judgment, such as anger or contempt. One question that arises here is whether the emotion arises before making the moral judgment or afterwards. When the reader judges the town’s people as acting wrongfully, does he or she feel anger because he or she thinks they are wrong, or is the reader angry at the town’s people and therefore judges them as being wrong? Moreover, considering the relation between morality and emotions in this example, does the moral judgment change when the story is real? Does judging someone negatively in real life situations feel more intense than making judgments about fictional characters? How, then, are we making moral judgments?

The story given above is the main plot of the film *Jagten* (2012), written by Thomas Vinterberg and Tobias Lindholm. It is also the story of Joop Haak, a Dutch teacher falsely accused of sexually abusing his pupils. Fictional movies often draw on real life situations and non-fictional stories. The characters and events in fictional movies do not really exist or occur, but fiction films are able to elicit strong emotional responses in its audience. It is not uncommon that the viewer’s responses to works of fiction can be more emotionally charged than our reactions to actual situations and people. For example, in the film *Jagten* the teacher, Lucas (played by Mads Mikkelsen), is accused of sexually abusing the child of his best friend. The scene in which the child, Klara, is overheard by Lucas’ colleague shows how Klara—unaware of the possible consequences—vilifies Lucas. The viewer already knows the child is lying and might be angry about it. Imagine being in a comparable situation and a little girl tells you something about what a teacher did to her. Even though you know the child is lying, the emotions generated by the actual situation in which you have to decide what to do are probably different from the emotions experienced when watching the scene on screen. With this example I hope to have illustrated that there is a relation between movies and emotions, and that this complex relation is partly based on the mental processes of the viewer, such as imagination and character engagement. These processes also often seem to occur when making moral judgments. The likely emotional responses to the example above can be related to one’s own moral values or standards. When the viewer has strong beliefs about being honest and thinks it is wrong to lie, then she could be infuriated rather than feeling slightly frustrated when Klara tells her story. When the viewer thinks children should not be judged for telling a lie, she would not experience strong emotions about it at all. We feel strongly about our moral values, and our moral judgments are often related to how we feel. An analysis of film-elicited emotions in relation to the viewer’s moral attitude is the starting point of this thesis.

My hypothesis is threefold. First, movies are emotion elicitors. Second, there is an important psychological connection between emotions and morality. Third, there is thus a complex relation between movies, emotions, and morality. In this thesis I aim to get a better understanding of this
complex relation. The research question for this thesis is: how do film-elicited emotions contribute to the spectator’s moral attitude? In order to provide an answer to this question I will first review contemporary scientific literature on these topics. From this I will derive a theoretical framework consisting of a combination of theories from cognitive (film) studies and moral psychology. I attempt to outline a ‘meta-theory’ that could enable film theorists to deal with specific issues concerning the way in which viewers are affected by movies and how their moral attitudes are connected to this process. I hope to develop an approach for understanding the complex relation between the emotions produced by movies and the viewer’s moral attitude. In order to achieve this I will explicate the terminology central to this topic, based on recent relevant literature. The selection of works is informed by their relation to prominent cognitive film-theorists.

One major contribution to cognitive film studies related to spectator’s responses is Carl Plantinga’s *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience*. Plantinga’s varied theoretical perspectives on a large range of important topics within film studies notwithstanding, his philosophical account of emotions as ‘concern-based construals’ stands out in particular. I have traced this back to its origin in the work of Robert C. Roberts. Plantinga develops a “cognitive-perceptual” approach based on Roberts’ theory of emotions. Although Plantinga’s representation of Roberts’ theory seems accurate, I think that a critical view of the implications for the application of this theory to viewer’s affective responses is still missing. Roberts’ account of concern-based construals contains a direct critique of “judgmental theories” of emotions as developed by Martha Nussbaum and Robert C. Solomon. Roberts claims that these theories cannot account for the immediacy of emotional responses. He explicitly criticizes Solomon for using “judgment” to refer to emotions as “evaluative judgments”. However, reading Solomon’s work, I believe that his account of emotions as evaluative judgments allows for a broader understanding of emotions than Roberts’ account of concern-based construals. The issues concerning the debate of how to understand emotions seem to be related to the dualistic approach to understanding emotions as either cognitive or non-cognitive. This will be the topic of the first chapter.

This overview and discussion of theoretical perspectives on the nature of emotion will be followed by a brief conclusion in which I argue that none of the theories are sufficient to encompass the intensity, diversity and complexity of emotions. In the conclusion of the first chapter I propose that understanding emotions as evaluative judgments can be advantageous for several reasons; for one, it allows for a broad perspective on our emotional responses to perceived and imagined events. This is followed by a systematic treatment of several analytically distinct aspects of emotion in the second chapter. Because I am interested in the relation between film-elicited emotions and moral attitude, I will pay more attention to the mental processes involved in our emotional responses than the physical processes. This is not to deny that the spectator’s

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embodied experiences are not important to film studies, but it goes beyond the scope of this thesis. This analysis of the fundamental aspects of emotion will provide much of the background distinctions for the rest the thesis.

Another problematic point in Plantinga’s work is his brief discussion of the paradox of fiction. He uses the notion of the “modularity of the mind” to explain why we care about characters we know to be fictional. As will become more apparent in this thesis, I think Plantinga does not do justice to the complexity of the paradox of fiction, and thereby overlooks important philosophical issues with regard to the elicitation of emotion by film. A discussion of these issues and the theoretical views on the paradox of fiction is the subject matter of the third chapter of this thesis. I believe that an account of the relation between film-elicited emotion and morality cannot ignore the issues related to the paradox of fiction—for one, the question whether our emotional responses to fiction film are fictional emotions. After having analyzed these philosophically puzzling issues, I focus on several specific aspects of emotional responses to fiction film in chapter four. In this chapter I will provide an in-depth analysis of perception and the emotion of awe in relation to the film Gravity (Cuarón, 2013), and also discuss the functioning of the emotional aspect of imagination in being engaged in fiction film. Having provided detailed theoretical discussions and analyses of instances of film-elicited emotion, I will focus on the relation between emotion, movies and moral attitude in the fifth chapter. In this final chapter, I connect important elements from the preceding chapters with insights from the field of moral psychology in the analysis of specific scenes from The Road (Hilcoat, 2009). My method consists of an analysis of theories pertaining to emotional responses to fiction and the viewer’s moral attitude.

Regarding to this method, throughout this thesis I rely on hypothetical spectator responses instead of those of actual spectators. This allows me to examine both the variety of responses to and the emotional variations within responses to fiction film, while simultaneously highlighting specific aspects for analysis. The hypothetical spectator is real in the sense that she possesses certain psychological limitations and qualities that actual spectators also possess. This approach also includes the assumption that the spectator’s attention is focused on the film—and not on her smartphone, for example. Moreover, this means that I do not conceive of the spectator as a construct of the film—in the sense that the film does not ‘produce’ the viewer as subject. Instead, I rely on research in cognitive science and psychology for articulating the qualities possessed by hypothetical spectators. I guard against gratuitous generalizations that would universalize the viewing experience, for viewer experiences are as varied as the viewers themselves. This does not imply that no significant insights can be gained from an inquiry into the general structural features of the process of viewer’s emotional responses to fictional film. Furthermore, my focus is on the emotional responses to narrative fiction film. The general approach offered in this thesis could also

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4 Plantinga, Moving Viewers, 66.
5 David Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 30.
be extended to include the study of non-fiction film and other forms of narrative art. However, this would be the topic for a different study.
Chapter 1: Theorizing Emotions

We are given to thinking of emotions as things as simple and compact as are the words by which we name them.

John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 43

*Doyle: “I thought I was prepared… I knew the theories.”*

*Interstellar*, Christopher Nolan, 2014

Before examining the relation between movies and emotions, and, more specific, in what ways movies are able to elicit emotional responses, something needs to be said about the emotions in general. Emotion can be referred to as a complex, subjective experience which involves feeling, thinking, and activation of the nervous system, physiological changes, action tendencies, and behavioral changes such as facial expression. As varied as the phenomena related to the term are the theoretical frameworks from which to conceptualize emotion. In the current chapter I will first provide a brief overview of different theoretical approaches to the study of emotion. After that I will discuss several specific theories of emotion representing three general theoretical stances towards emotion: cognitive, non-cognitive, and hybrid theory of emotion. The chapter concludes with a short motivation with regard to the preference for a broad conceptualization of emotion.

[1.1] Theorizing Theories

Because emotions are such complex responsive experiences they are interesting for many different fields of research, such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, and neurology, and can be analyzed from many different perspectives. Not surprisingly, different theories exist that attempt to explain not only how and why people experience emotion, but also what emotions are and how they operate. These theories can be distinguished by reference to explanatory context and methodological approach. A general division provides five overlapping categories: physiological, neurological, cognitive, phenomenological and sociological. Each of these categories represents a different perspective on what is the best approach to define and describe emotion. Proponents of physiological theories of emotion propose that emotions are best considered as somatic or bodily responses. Neurological theories of emotion focus on a specific part of the body—the brain—and how activity in this part leads to the experience of emotion. Those who support cognitive theories of emotion argue that thoughts and other mental activity play an essential role in the formation of emotions. A phenomenological approach to emotions offers reflective methods that take into account the emotional experience as it is variously lived, instead of only theorized. It tries to answer the question of how the viewer experiences emotions while watching a movie, and is interested in types of experience and their common structure. Finally, sociological theories of emotion are mainly concerned by the social context in which the topic of emotion is viewed. Similarly, other explanatory contexts also shape the remaining categories of theory. These can be roughly grouped...
into evolutionary or internal contexts. The range of theories with a focus on evolutionary explanation contains analysis of emotions that focuses on the evolutionary benefits that the experience of emotion holds. Internal theories of emotion attempt to describe the emotion process itself – without explicitly focusing on socio-cultural factors. Evidently, the categorization of theories of emotion is not as clear-cut as it might seem and it might be said that there are as many theories of emotions as there are emotions.

A methodological approach important to this thesis, because of the empirical evidence it provides, is experimental research. Studies in experimental psychology could lead to results which might explain how and why emotional responses occur. In one such a set of experiments, Alice Isen found that emotions such as happiness have transferable effects. In one of her most striking experiments, the researchers induced a happy mood in people in a shopping mall by giving them a free gift. Subjects were then asked to fill in an apparently unrelated customer survey. Results showed that people who received a gift said their products performed better than those of control subjects who received no gifts. Other experiments showed that happiness has widespread effects on cognitive organization. Furthermore, Isen’s work provided some of the first empirical evidence on how emotions affect our perception of the social world. The finding that an emotion or mood experienced in one situation can affect behavior, social judgments, and the intensity of emotions in other situations is now one for most firmly established effects in experimental social psychology.

Another method central to this thesis is conceptual analysis. A conceptual analysis has some advantages over other approaches, primarily its emphasis on conceptual refinement and the use of concepts in everyday language. One of the strategies of a conceptual approach to emotions is investigating the relations between comparative phenomena, such as judgments, moods, affects and concerns. Moreover, it also takes into account the analysis of different components of emotions and the analysis of one’s own experiences or imaginative plausible experiences. As will become apparent, the approach taken in this thesis lies primarily within this last category. However, I also refer to and rely on research from different methodological perspectives. In the next section, I will discuss some of the recently prevailing theories of emotion in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. As I also indicated in the introduction of this thesis, the selection of philosophical works is informed by their relation to prominent film-theorists. Furthermore, I do not claim to present a complete overview of existing theories of emotion, but rather a characterization fit for the general aim of this thesis. These theories will be roughly divided into two types: cognitive and non-cognitive.

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[1.2] Cognitive Theory of Emotion

Cognitive theories of emotion hold that the emotion process involves cognitive elements and is more complex than automatic responses. In the current section, I will focus in particular on the theories of Robert C. Solomon and Robert C. Roberts as representatives of a cognitive theoretical slant on emotion. The cognitive elements of the emotion process are, for example, thoughts, evaluations or judgments of the situation, and beliefs. A pure cognitive theory of emotion claims that emotions are structurally identical to thoughts. Other cognitive theories identify emotions with appraisals or evaluations. The defenders of cognitive theories of emotion generally assume that the cognitions involved in our emotions are propositional attitudes. Propositions, here, are statements with truth-value which affirm or deny a state of affairs in the world. Most propositions are statements of fact and can either be true of false. Propositional attitudes are mental states about propositions in the form of beliefs, desires, or suppositions. In general, it refers to the way we feel about or regard something – the attitudes are directed at the content of the proposition. Cognitive theories of emotion thus hold that emotions are about something – emotions have an intentional dimension, they are directed at something.

Different cognitive theories of emotion involve different views about what propositional attitudes are and what their role is in the process of emotion. There are cognitive theorists of emotion who use the term appraisal or evaluative judgments rather than propositional attitudes. The cognitive component of an emotion, then, is the evaluative judgment. Solomon argues that an emotion is a special kind of judgment or a set of judgments. According to Solomon, an emotion is a judgment that concerns matters that are important to oneself: such as one’s interests, goals, and values. Hence, it always involves a personal evaluation of the significance of an event and thus is subjective. According to Solomon, emotions are evaluative judgments. This view holds that, for example, guilt consists of a judgment that I should feel bad about the harm that I have caused when I broke my friend’s favorite coffee mug. In this case, the judgment is evaluative because it implicates that there are good reasons for me to feel bad—breaking my friend’s favorite coffee mug was a bad thing to do. Because emotions are personal evaluative judgments, it also becomes possible to argue about them. Evaluative judgments which are based on wrong assumptions can alter or disappear when someone discovers that the assumptions were wrong. When I guiltily tell my friend that I broke his favorite coffee mug and he begins to laugh and points at a different mug and tells me that that one is his favorite mug, my feelings of guilt would disappear, or at least become less intense, because I had made an evaluative judgment based on a wrong assumption. However, opponents of cognitive theories of emotion argue that a change in appraisal does not always lead to a change in affect. It may happen that we make an evaluative judgment, and then change our judgment without experiencing an emotional change.

It appears that the term “judgment” is in need of an explanatory definition. For Solomon, the evaluative judgments involved in emotions are cognitions. Judgments are, however, not necessarily articulate, reflective, or deliberative. Solomon uses the term “cognitive” to refer to the idea that emotions are something more than mere feelings or sensations, and something more than physiological reactions. In his later work, Solomon understands judgments in a way that seems to have the range and flexibility to apply to direct emotions like fear and more sophisticated emotions such as jealousy and resentment. He further emphasizes that cognition is not to be understood only as conscious and articulate, and points out that there are primitive pre-conceptual forms of cognition. Solomon prefers to use the term “judgments” rather than “perceptions” or “thoughts”, because the language of thought appears to be too intellectual, too sophisticated and too demanding, whereas perceptions are too immediate.

Another prominent theorist that can be regarded to take a cognitivist approach to emotion is Robert C. Roberts. Solomon has reviewed Roberts’ study of the emotions, and responded to the critique leveled against his own theoretical viewpoints. Although Solomon admits to a conceptual overlap between what Roberts calls “construal” and his own concept of “judgment,” he is explicitly hesitant to equate the two. Roberts uses the term “construal” to refer to the more perceptual ways of understanding cognition in emotion, and applies “construal” to a kind of perception that is an impression that results from our ability to perceptually organize the parts of something into a whole. The perceptual organization differs from purely intellectual or calculating organization. That it is possible that one person organizes things differently than someone else would suggest that a construal is subjective. Furthermore, construals are highly dependable on the qualifications and skills of the subject. According to Roberts, we can switch between different construals by changing our perceptual focus, and in this regard it becomes possible to see things differently at the same time. We are able to see things this way or to see things that way. We perceive things in the way that they appear to us, but we can also construe the same perception in different ways, for example, how they could appear for someone else. Roberts refers to this whole process as “seeing-as.” Perceptions are of great multitude and variety, and they are countless, however, only some of these are involved in emotional responses. For Roberts emotions are concern-based construals. To have an emotional experience is not just to construe perceptions in this way or that way, but the construal must be based on a concern of the subject. Concerns include desires, interests, attachments, and aversions. When we construe situations in terms that touch on our concerns, the construals are emotions. I will provide a more extensive analysis of Roberts’ conceptualization of emotion in chapter two, where I will further elaborate on his use of the concept of ‘seeing-as’.

13 Solomon, Not Passion’s Slave, 179.
14 Ibid., 187-189.
15 Ibid., 186.
17 Ibid., 71.
18 Ibid., 79-80.
One objection Roberts and others have raised against Solomon’s theory is that, in contrast to concern-based construals, evaluative judgments can be made without its corresponding emotion. Namely, because judgments can be made without impression and without active concern for what is evaluatively judged.\(^\text{19}\) It can be argued that, on the one hand, we often make evaluative judgments without experiencing the corresponding emotions, and, on the other hand, we can experience emotions without making judgments. For example, when I have a meeting with a good friend and he arrives an hour too late, my anger will be directed at him. When he tells me he got stuck in traffic my anger does not leave immediately. For, even though I judge him free of blame, I am still annoyed by the fact that I had to wait an hour. Also, there are cases of emotions brought on by direct physical means, including drugs, hormones, facial feedback, and electrical stimulations.\(^\text{20}\) The emotional responses induced by these physical means clearly occur without deliberative cognitive judgments. It should be noted that a similar objection could also be raised against Roberts’ theory of concern-based construals. Namely, emotional responses induced by such direct physical means do not involve concerns in the sense put forth by Roberts.

This leads to a second objection to Solomon’s theory of emotion. Namely, that the view that emotions simply are evaluative judgments reduces emotions to mere cognitive processes while neglecting the intense physiological changes and action tendencies that emotions seem to entail.\(^\text{21}\) These objections have led Solomon to develop a revised cognitive theory of emotion in which he emphasizes that he takes judgments to have the same description as construals. Solomon’s use of the term “judgment” does not refer to deliberative judgment. Instead, he tries to develop an account of emotion in which emotions can best be understood as a special kind of judgment. Solomon defends his theory against the objection that we can make judgments without experiencing a corresponding emotion by arguing that while emotions are evaluative judgments, judgments can also be made independently of emotional response. The latter types of judgment are not emotional. In other words, emotion is a special kind of judgment but not all judgments are emotions.

### [1.3] Non-cognitive Theory of Emotion

The question whether our emotional responses can occur independent of related cognitive states is still an on-going debate.\(^\text{22}\) Opponents of cognitive theories of emotion argue that cognitive activities are not necessary components of emotions. From this perspective, emotional response directly follows the perception of a relevant stimulus. This is more akin to reflex processes than evaluation or judgments about the stimulus. Art theorist and philosopher, Jenefer Robinson can be considered as representing a thorough non-cognitive account of emotion. She uses the term

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\(^{19}\) Roberts, *Emotions*, 101.


“affective appraisals” to indicate that emotions require only a non-cognitive appraisal. An appraisal is a judgment of how good or bad an event is. An affective appraisal works rapidly through lower brain centers and serves to pick out and focus attention on those things that matter to the subject in the internal or external environment. Affective appraisals evaluate in a rough and ready way the personal significance of something in a broad way in terms of how they matter. These non-cognitive appraisals produce the physiological changes and action tendencies characteristic of emotional responses. According to Robinson, affective appraisals occur without cognitive activity and are sufficient to generate an emotional response. However, she acknowledges that cognitive activity can occur prior to the affective appraisal, but states that “it is only after there is an affective appraisal that there is an emotional response.” Thus even though it seems that a cognitively complex thought or belief triggers an emotional response, the response itself is the result of an affective appraisal of that thought or belief.

The first objection one could raise against Robinson’s non-cognitive theory of emotion is that it is more focused on the appraisals that trigger an emotional response than on the emotion itself. Robinson’s theory explains what triggers emotional responses, but doesn’t provide a satisfactory account of emotions itself. It seems that, according to Robinson, emotions are ways in which the organism interacts with its environment in terms of how it affects the organism. The emotional response includes a set of physiological changes, gestures, behavior, and action tendencies. Furthermore, Robinson suggests that emotions should be conceptualized as special kinds of information-processing devices, but emphasizes that a non-cognitive or affective appraisal is central to emotion. She also argues that affective appraisals occur without any conscious deliberation or awareness, and that they do not involve complex information processing.

The question whether emotions are cognitive or non-cognitive depends on what is meant by cognition. Robinson uses the term ‘cognition’ to refer to processes localized in the neo-cortex. Although the neo-cortex is assumed to involve only higher cognitive activities, it also involves functions such as sensory perception and motor activities. Following Robinson’s theory, this means that in order to maintain that emotions are non-cognitive, affective appraisals or emotion processes do not require visual information processing or motor activities. It seems to me that even affective appraisals require perception of the situation that triggers an emotion. And, in accordance with Robinson’s use of the term, should therefore be considered to be cognitive. One further objection against the affective appraisal theory is that appraisals seem to require an actual object or situation. In situations, such as in the movie-theatre, where the object of emotion is not immediately present and the organism’s actual environment is irrelevant for the emotional response, it makes little sense to argue that the emotion is essentially triggered by an appraisal which provides the information of

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23 Robinson, *Deeper than Reason*, 55.
24 Ibid., 63.
25 Ibid., 77.
26 Ibid., 36.
27 Ibid., 45.
the organism’s environment. It seems doubtful that Robinson’s theory can provide an answer for emotions that occur without appraisals in terms of organism-environment.

[1.4] Hybrid Theory of Emotion

With the analysis of Robinson’s non-cognitive theory of emotions I hope to have indicated that emotions involve not only non-cognitive processes, but also cognitive activities. Cognitive evaluations can help us to distinguish one complex emotional state from another.28 For example, when my best friend tells me she got the job she really wanted, I feel happy for her. At the same time I feel sad too, because she has to move to a different continent and I won’t see her often anymore. This emotional response is complex, because it is triggered by different affective appraisals. The cognitive activities can steer the emotional response because the affective appraisals are directed at the thoughts or beliefs I hold at that time. This makes it possible to be genuinely happy for her when I talk to her, and to feel sad at those moments when I would like to meet her. When emotions are considered as emotion processes then cognitive activities can play a role in such a process.

The distinction above notwithstanding, I believe that a rigid demarcation between cognitive and non-cognitive theories of emotion tends to overshadow the varied character of emotion itself. It seems to me that much of the complexity of the underlying phenomena is lost because of stark polarization of positions within the debate. However, there are hybrid theories of emotion which suggest that emotions involve cognitive as well as non-cognitive activities. These theories combine the idea that emotions are perceptions of bodily changes with a cognitive evaluation of a situation in terms of appraisals. Such a theory of emotion is offered, among others, by Jesse J. Prinz and it reconciles the debate between those who say emotions are cognitive and those who say they are non-cognitive.29 Prinz defends the somatic feeling theory, first coined by William James. James argues that “our feeling of the bodily changes as they occur is the emotion.”30 This means that the bodily changes are not the effects of our emotion, but that the body changes and an emotion is the feeling of that change.

This thesis has been renewed by Antonio Damasio. Damasio argues that emotions involve feelings of changes in the body, but he expands the range of bodily states underlying our emotions to include states of the “internal milieu”—emotion can register changes in the levels of chemicals in the brain, such as changes in hormone levels caused by the endocrine system.31 Because emotions can bypass the body quite regularly, Damasio emphasizes the possibility that emotional response can occur in the absence of bodily changes when brain centers ordinarily associated with bodily change are active. The brain can enter the kind of state it would be in if various bodily changes had taken place, in the absence of those changes. Somatic brain centers become active when we merely

28 Robinson, Deeper than Reason, 90.
imagine being in an emotional state. This has been found in various empirical studies that focus on
the training effect of imagination. This implies that for an emotion to occur, it does not require an
actual stimulus in terms of a visually perceived object or a bodily change. Visual imagery and mental
representations of movement gives rise to motor imagery which appears to us as perceptions of
bodily movement itself. Thus, imagining emotions or emotional expressions can lead to
experiencing the corresponding emotion. This means that mental representations could be
sufficient to elicit an emotional response.

Prinz’ proposition for a somatic feeling theory includes that emotions can be understood as
bodily perceptions. He proposes the embodied appraisal theory which suggests that emotions are states
that appraise by registering patterned bodily changes. An embodied appraisal can be understood
as a bodily evaluation of the situation and it involves feelings that carry information. Furthermore,
Prinz suggests that emotions are perceptions of our relationship to the world. Perceptual states are
mental systems that have the function of receiving information from the body or the world and can
be defined as states in dedicated input systems, such as perceptual modalities: vision, audition, and
olfaction. Additionally, emotions can be triggered by cognitive states, or, in other words, by
mental representations that are under organismic control. Prinz thus argues that emotion is a form
of perception, and like perceptions, emotions can be inaccurate or even unjustified. Emotions as
perceptual states can thus be understood as embodied appraisals with a thought and a feeling
component. The suggestion that emotions are embodied appraisals has a few advantages over
Robinson’s theory which contains that emotions are triggered by affective appraisals. First, Prinz’
account of emotions as embodied appraisals suggests that emotions involve cognitive and non-
cognitive processes. This means that emotions can involve beliefs and thoughts, and at the same
time represent bodily changes. Second, embodied appraisals can be caused by different elicitors and
facilitate different effects, such as bodily changes, propositional attitudes, action tendencies, and
feelings. Prinz points out that these causes and effects are not essential parts or preconditions for
emotions, but only contingently related to emotions.

Conclusion: A Concept of Emotion

The brief discussion of various theoretical approaches to emotion provides several insights into
how to conceptualize emotion, which incline me towards the use of Solomon’s concept of
evaluative judgment. One of the reasons is that the affective appraisal view proposed by Robinson
does not appear sufficient to explain the intensity, diversity and complexity of emotions. Even

32 For a brief overview of these studies in relation to the topic of this thesis, see: Ian Ravenscroft, “Fiction, Imagination,
and Ethics,” in Emotions, Imagination, and Moral Reasoning, eds. Robyn Langdon & Catriona Mackenzie (New York:
34 Ravenscroft, “Fiction, Imagination, and Ethics,” 79.
35 Prinz, Gut Reactions, 78.
36 Ibid., 222.
37 Ibid., 75.
38 Ibid., 244.
though affective appraisals might be part of the process of emotion, I do not think they can adequately be considered to be the sole cause of emotion. Furthermore, I tend to agree with Prinz in suggesting that bodily changes are standard causes but not essential causes for emotions to occur. Also, I believe that an account of emotion which includes affective appraisals as constituents rather than definite causes might be more appropriate. Notwithstanding, I think that Prinz’ somatic account is lacking because it reduces cognitive activity to mere stimuli. Moreover, I think his approach closes emotion to any form of reflection—placing emotion in the black box of the body. Therefore, I prefer to opt for an account that takes a broader view of emotion and does not leave us phenomenologically blind to what moves us.

Such an account has already been presented by Solomon. Solomon admits that feelings have been left out of the cognitive account of emotions, but argues that a proper construed cognitive theory of emotion is nevertheless able to capture the feelings of the body. Solomon calls the physiological components of emotion “the judgments of the body.” He argues that many of our responses to the world and the ways in which we bring meaning to the world involve processes of “knowing how.” These processes are embodied, which means that the habits and practices we perform involve feelings, or affects, which are judgments of the body. Then, feelings of comfort or discomfort are engaged judgments without being necessarily articulate or conscious. Solomon’s revised cognitive theory of emotion thus holds that emotions are embodied evaluative judgments that may or may not be articulate, conscious, bodily, propositional, or reflective. In the next section, I will analyze the fundamental aspects of emotion accordingly, and examine whether Solomon’s suggestion that emotions are evaluative judgments can provide valuable insights for the further understanding of emotions.

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39 Solomon, Not Passion’s Slave, 191.
40 Ibid., 192.
Chapter 2: Aspects of Emotion

Cobb: “Imagine you’re designing a building. You consciously create each aspect.”
— Inception, Christopher Nolan, 2010

As we have seen, the different theories of emotion range from cognitive to non-cognitive and seem to share several prominent aspects. In this section, I will analyze the structurally related aspects of emotion. In doing so, I aim to bring together elements of the aforementioned theories in an attempt to harness their respective strengths while circumventing their possible weaknesses. Even though the theoretical insights offered are profoundly compelling, it seems to me that none of these theories is capable of providing a full picture of the process of emotion. In order to obtain such a picture I will combine those aspects that have greater explanatory force and also prove to be mutually compatible. I will work under the preliminary assumption that emotion is best understood as a complex process consisting of a cluster of different components. It is complex in the sense that while it is possible to inquire into the structural qualities of the whole, it is impossible to accurately indicate the nature of every particular aspect that constitutes the process. In the approach taken here I will consider emotion as unique combinations of the entire range of relevant components that can be analyzed separately, yet form an integrate whole in the experience of emotions. I think that these components should not to be viewed as separate parts, because it is the combination that constitutes emotion. For these reasons, I will not classify the various aspects with respect to their relative status as ‘causes.’ Instead, I merely contend that those aspects that I focus on should be considered as integral to the whole process of emotion. In order to ground this assumption, I will examine whether the aspects of emotion count as necessary components of emotion. The analysis of the aspects of emotion will be essential to what follows in chapter four of this thesis, in particular with regard to the aspects perception and imagination. Furthermore, in the conclusion of this chapter I will briefly motivate my choice of an operational concept of emotion for this thesis.

[2.1] Perception – Construal and Immediacy

The first aspect of emotion I will examine is perception. That perceptions play an essential role in emotion is suggested by Robert C. Solomon, Robert C. Roberts, and Jesse J. Prinz. According to the last two authors, emotion is in itself a form of perception. Prinz, following a somatic theory of emotions, refers to emotions in the general sense as perceptions of bodily changes. Roberts, on the other hand, provides a more detailed account of emotion regarding perception, in which he argues that emotion should be regarded in terms of concern-based construals incorporating sense-data. In the current section I will primarily focus on Roberts’s model of the role of perception in emotion. The main reason is that his work has been influential for Carl Plantinga’s conceptualization of

41 The structure of emotions consists of more components than I can name, such as conscious preoccupation, expressions, bodily disturbances, etc. For more on this topic, see: Keith Oatley, Best Laid Schemes: The Psychology of Emotions (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
viewers’ experiences. Although I do not focus on Plantinga’s work in this thesis, his use of Roberts’ concept of concern-based construal can be deemed significant to film studies. Hence, my discussion of Roberts’ theory can be considered as contributing to film studies with regard to spectator’s emotional experiences.

According to Roberts, a construal is a kind of perceptual organization of an impression of an object or situation in which the parts have been constructed into a whole. It is seeing a situation as it appears to the subject. In other words, viewed in terms of the determining factor of how something is grasped in the impression. Furthermore, this construal is an emotion when the construed perception is based on our concerns. Emotion can thus be understood as a kind of perception or impression of a situation in certain terms. And these terms are the concerns.

Furthermore, the kind of perception Roberts refers to is a construal which can be understood as an organized impression. This indicates that the construal becomes a ‘seeing-as’: we can see a snake as being dangerous and because I am concerned of my own well-being, I am afraid of the snake.

Roberts’ account of ‘seeing-as’ on which his concept of ‘construal’ is based may become clearer when we trace it back to its source of inspiration, being foremost the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein appears to be addressing the puzzling question of what constitutes our seeing something in one way and seeing it another way. He points to the problem of ordinary language-use of perception in relation to changes in perception. He illustrates this issue with the famous ‘duck-rabbit’-figure:

![Figure 1 – ‘duck-rabbit’](image)

Wittgenstein labels the unusual visual experience of changes in visual impression “noticing an aspect” or “dawning of an aspect”: “I contemplate a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I see that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience ‘noticing an

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44 Roberts, *Emotions*, 69-76.
45 Ibid., 140.
aspect.” The issue he addresses here is that in the case of a changing aspect, our expression of perception and of visual experience is an “expression of a new perception and at the same time of the perception’s being unchanged.” In the case of the duck-rabbit, we see a duck or a rabbit, and when one of these perceived objects changes into the other, we see it differently without the figure being changed. Moreover, we are not even able to point to any material objective changes in the picture.

For the scope of this paper, I will not attempt to provide a full account of Wittgenstein’s concept of the aspect. Rather, I will use it as a model for understanding Roberts’ account of ‘seeing-as’. Wittgenstein argues that ‘seeing-as’ is not part of perception itself. Instead, it denotes a report on perceptual experience. For that reason it is like seeing and again not like. For Wittgenstein, reports of the change of our visual impression are described as: “Now I am seeing this.” The expression of a change of a perception is not one of perception, but it has the form of a report of a new perception. The relation between the different faculties is that the ‘dawning of an aspect’ precedes the ‘visual organization’ of ‘seeing-as’. This only occurs when one’s visual impression of the same perceived object changes. Hence, according to Wittgenstein, it does not make any sense to say “Now I am seeing it as….” when this is a description of one’s perception. Therefore, Wittgenstein applies ‘seeing-as’ to distinguish expressions of changes in our visual impression from reports of our ordinary perception. The description of “seeing something as” is only used to describe what one is seeing differently. Wittgenstein does not provide us with a concept of perception or visual experience. Instead, he argues that we should accept the everyday-language game because there is not one genuine proper case of description of what is seen. Moreover, for Wittgenstein, perception is a broad concept which involves more than sense perceptions of the objective material properties.

Roberts uses the term ‘constitutual’ to refer to experiences of ‘seeing-as’ and, like Wittgenstein, illustrates this concept with the ‘duck-rabbit’ picture. He also takes the term ‘seeing-as’ to denote a perceptual event or state in which one thing is grasped in terms of something else. Thus, construals are impressions; ways things appear to the subject, with the immediacy reminiscent of sense perception. However, in stark contrast to Wittgenstein, Roberts argues that construals – understood as the result of ‘seeing-as’ – need not be states of consciousness. Wittgenstein, ‘seeing-as’ lasts as long as one is occupied with the object in a particular way. This indicates that the kind of perception conceived of as ‘seeing-as’ can only be experienced

48 Ibid., 167e.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 171e.
51 For a similar philosophical stance: “[W]hile the word “perception” may be limited to designate awareness of objects contemporaneously affecting the bodily organs, there is no ground whatever for the assumption which has usually attended this narrowing of the older meaning of the word: namely, that sense-perception has intrinsic properties or qualities marking it off from other forms of consciousness.” – John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* [1929]. (New York: Dover Publications, 1958.), 338.
52 Roberts, *Emotions*, 76.
53 Ibid.
consciously. The advantage of Wittgenstein’s proposal over Roberts’—to denote the act of describing the change of visual impression of one object as ‘seeing-as’—is that it distinguishes the unusual visual experience of ‘noticing an aspect’ from other visual experiences. If we understand perception as the use of our senses to acquire information about the world around us which involves mediation by sense-data, ideas and impressions, then Roberts’ use of the concept of ‘construal’ refers—in contrast to Wittgenstein—to ordinary perceptual experience.

Malcolm Turvey objects to the use of the model of seeing-as to explain perception in toto. He argues that applying this model to perception in general would imply that our ordinary visual experiences “consists of an objective perception of bare, material reality as sensory data, combined with a subjective mental interpretation or organization of these sensory data by the mind of the beholder.” According to this objection, any account of visual experience which takes as its model ‘seeing-as’ needs to demonstrate that all descriptions of standard visual experiences of all objects have the similar form of those reports of the visual experience of seeing-as in relation to more ambiguous images. This would mean that if Roberts’ theory of concern-based construal is considered to apply to all emotional responses, then the experience of emotion would always involve being engaged in the mental activity of indirectly interpreting the sensory data that is objectively and directly perceived. Furthermore, this theoretical perspective indicates that we would always visually experience seeing-as when responding emotionally. Also, Roberts’ model implies that we describe experiences of mentally interpreting ambiguous figures in the same way as describing one’s standard visual experiences. This, however, seem in direct opposition to everyday accounts of perception. In our ordinary perceptual experiences, it does not make sense to say: “Now I see the cat as a cat.” In other words, I do not see it as, I see it. As Ian Christie and Tim J. Smith also point out: “The duck-rabbit is an example of how perception is not just about what is there in front of us. It is as much about formulating hypotheses about what we expect to be there based on prior experience.”

As for Solomon’s account of perception: he argues that perception is that which makes the emotional experience immediate, and that the evaluative judgment defines the perception. He points out that perception captures the heart of one kind of emotional experience, namely, that which he calls ‘immediate’. There is a close link between perception and emotion. This can be illustrated by emotional responses to situations unfolding right in front one’s eyes. For example, as I sit writing at the living room table, my cat, resting on the tabletop, stretches and awkwardly tumbles over the edge to the floor. I promptly laugh and experience a joyous feeling at the ridiculous sight. As in this example, seeing that—prior to any interpretation—constitutes the

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58 Solomon, Not Passion’s Slave, 95.
immediacy of emotional experience. Immediacy conceived in these terms implies that no activity of interpretation necessarily antecedes perception. Various types transcendental categorical ordering of one’s perceptual apparatus is not excluded, but are not considered as forms of interpretation. For Solomon, emotion is not merely a perceptual construct, but an evaluative judgment of the sensory perception. The important difference with Roberts’ account is that Roberts incorporates interpretation—not the organization of sense-data but a more deliberate form—into the construal itself, while Solomon maintains the immediacy of perceptual experience.

The analysis of the first aspect of emotion then leads to the conclusion that most of our emotional responses involve sensory perceptions of an object or situation. The advantage of the idea that emotions are evaluative judgments over concern-based construals, then, is that it is less concerned with perception alone and may include imaginary, distant, or abstract concerns. Evaluative judgments do not need sensory perception as only input. Notwithstanding, perception is an important aspect of emotion, because it is closely tied to other mental processes, for example; judgments, intuitions, beliefs, and imagination. However, it is important to note that not all our emotional responses require perception. As will become clear in the next section, we can also respond emotionally to thoughts and imaginations. Therefore, perception is not a necessary condition of possibility of emotion.

[2.2.1] Imagination – Imagining Emotions, Imagining Minds

The second aspect of emotion that I will examine is imagination. The concept of imagination is heterogeneous and theorists often avoid clarifying its meaning. Although the meaning of the term does not require thorough understanding for everyday use, in relating it to emotions in general—and to emotional responses to fiction in particular—a basic understanding is required. As Turvey argues, an inadequate understanding of the concept of the imagination creates a number of problems for theorists employing it. One of those problems is that it is often used to provide an answer to the question: why do we respond emotionally to something we know does not exist? Attempts to answer this question understand imagination as a surrogate for beliefs, and some argue that we can imaginatively hold different beliefs which explains why we can respond emotionally to something we know does not exist. I will elaborate on this so-called “paradox of fiction” in the third chapter of this thesis.

In the current section, I will review possible definitions of the concept of imagination and attempt to clarify the meaning of it in order to understand its role for emotion. In order for the conception of imagination to be of use for theories of emotion in general, a more comprehensive

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59 Here I must emphasize again that I consider emotion as a process which may consist of different mental and physiological states. Accordingly, emotions involve perceptions as constituent parts, not as separate causes.
60 Solomon, Not Passion’s Slave, 185.
61 Malcolm Turvey, “Imagination, Simulation, and Fiction,” Film Studies 8 (Summer 2006).
view is required first. Presently, I will focus on those accounts that offer a broader view on the concept of imagination. The important insights film scholars offer into the realm of imagination will be more closely examined in the third and fourth chapter. The main reason for this is that the movie-related discussion on the topic of imagination is largely focused on the paradox of fiction. Moreover, this discussion is largely framed in the relation to the question of the role of belief, a topic that tends to overshadow the understanding and conceptualization of the role of emotion. Also, it should be noted that I do not aim at an exhaustive account of imagination. Such an undertaking clearly goes beyond the scope of this thesis. As will become apparent in the third chapter, imagination is one of the key concepts in understanding the relation between fiction and emotions. Theorists such as Noël Carroll, Murray Smith and David Novitz rely heavily on the concept of imagination to explain why we respond emotionally to fiction (see chapter three).

Currently, my focus is primarily on imagination as an aspect of emotion. I will first examine the strong claim that all emotions involve imagination. This claim plays a significant role in explaining why we respond emotionally to fiction; for example, in *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, Carroll argues that emotional responses to fiction are the result of entertaining certain propositions before the mind unassertively. Although he doesn’t state the all our emotional responses are based on imagined contents, imagination is the explanatory factor to explain our emotional responses to fiction film. For this reason I will critically analyze the views of Adam Morton’s strong claim about the relation between imagination and emotion. Additionally, I will review Richard Moran’s more narrow use of the concept of ‘imagination’ that may be more fruitful for understanding imagination as a mental faculty allowing us to change our perspective or attitude (see 2.2.2).

In *Emotion and Imagination*, Adam Morton claims that all emotional responses not only involve but require imagination. He argues that the close link between emotion and imagination allows us to have a wide range of emotions which enables us to direct ourselves towards those emotions that seems most fitting to our situations. Imagination is a mental process of representing something to ourselves: a fact, a thing, or a possibility. Imaginings may also include actions as well as scenes and events. Morton argues that imagining can take many forms, from vivid mental images to simple verbal thoughts to preparedness for perception and action. He emphasizes that imagination is a mental process of searching for representations suitable for a specific purpose. For Morton, pictures and verbal descriptions are all-purpose representations that can be used in many modes of thought. Emotions and imaginations are closely connected because, according to Morton, an emotion is a state which generates a range of representations, usually with respect to a certain object. These include representations of actions towards the object, representations of results that might be produced, and representations of situations that might develop. Emotions will drive imagination of associated facts, possibilities, and actions. In part, imagination is important because

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63 Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 154-156.
65 Ibid., 5.
66 Ibid., 9.
it expresses and responds to our emotions. By making some representations more salient than others, emotions can function as a filter for information and options. This functionality of emotion links representations of real situations to representations of various possibilities that arise from them.\textsuperscript{67}

Additionally, Morton argues that imagination associated with emotion gives a rich mixture of mental representations, including motor images and plans of action. Morton provides plausible examples to illustrate in what ways imagination and emotion are connected. He describes many possible situations to which we are invited to imagine how we might respond. However, the resulting presumable responses towards his imagined scenarios seem for Morton sufficient to draw significant conclusions from. Yet in many of those cases counterexample responses might be thought of. Appealing as Morton’s account might be, its sweeping quality actually obscures our understanding of imagination. His definition of imagination and the role it plays in our lives overextends the concept. Morton’s use of the concept of imagination appears to lack uniformity and is too general to be of explanatory value. Because, following Morton, it seems that every mental activity is an act of imagination. And if this is so, then it cannot be denied that it plays a huge role in our social lives. However, what that role of imagination is and how it can be distinguished from other mental representations is left out of his account. Therefore, I do not think Morton’s account is able to answer the question whether all emotional responses require imagination, precisely because an accurate definition is absent. The wide pallet of conceptual possibilities in mind, I think it is more fruitful to narrow down its scope and distinguish it from other mental processes.

A different kind of account of imagination is provided by Richard Moran. He acknowledges the usage of the term ‘imagination’ to refer to the ability to make connections between various things, to notice and respond to the network of associations that make up the mood or emotional tone of a situation.\textsuperscript{68} In his analysis, however, he restricts the use to a particular kind of imagination. Moran focuses on the question of how it is possible that we get emotionally worked up over something we know to be unreal, or merely fictional. He examines the incongruity between the more general phenomena of experiencing emotion to real events to emotional responses to imagined situations and concludes that responding emotionally to something imagined is an everyday occurrence. In order to clarify the link between emotion and imagination, Moran draws attention to the multifarious description of imagination. The kind of imagination Moran is concerned with is the ability to exercise a kind of “imaginativeness.” He considers this an ability, the possession of which in itself is very much a matter of degree. Furthermore, the concept of imagination Moran employs needs to be differentiated from counterfactual reasoning – in the sense of making simple hypothetical suppositions. Additionally, Moran argues that “different kinds of imagining involve different kinds of effort, draw on different kinds of resources within the person, and may thus require such things as being receptive in the right way, or having had certain

\textsuperscript{67} Morton, \textit{Emotion and Imagination}, 16.

experiences.” Unlike Morton, Moran thinks that emotions do not necessarily involve imagination. Emotions can also be generated by associative memories or perceptions. Moran discusses the role of imagination in emotional responses to fiction and distinguishes between the content of our imagination and the ways in which we imagine something. He argues that imagining something with feeling is not the same as imagining having that feeling. This argument is an objection against theories that hold that we respond emotionally to fiction because we imagine having the same feelings as the characters to which we respond emotionally.

The role imagination plays in coming to understand other people is important for our social existence, because the faculty of imagination enables us to shift perspective and to imagine what it is like for other people. Several of the theoretical and conceptual issues centered on imagination return in my discussion of the paradox of fiction in chapter 3 and my analysis of film-elicited emotion in chapter 4 of this thesis. For now, I hope to have indicated that imagination is considered to be an integral aspect of emotion.

[2.2.2] Imagination - Shifting Perspective, Reading Minds

Imagining what other people think or feel is almost an everyday occurrence. It is a central part of understanding others: their motives, their actions, their feelings. Imagination allows us to change our perspective so that we can predict actions of others. In doing so, we employ a so-called information-organizing framework attributed in imagination to another. Sometimes we fail to understand others by imagining different aspects and attribute the wrong emotion or motives to someone. In this section, I will examine several different ways in which we try to understand others and analyze some views used to explain our so-called capacity of ‘mindreading’. Regrettably, I cannot go into detail through all that has been written about mental capacities that allow us to understand others. The number of competing conceptualizations makes it difficult to keep track of all the concepts being used to refer to different mental processes. Joining in such a debate can be compared with the first time ordering coffee in Starbucks. Therefore, I will merely describe several of the underlying imaginative capacities that allow us to understand other people. By doing so, I hope to point out certain important distinctions signifying the different functions or roles of our imaginative capacities.

First, we can try to understand what someone is feeling by imagining what it must be like for that person to be in a certain kind of situation. This is a simple method that does not require changing to a different perspective. For example, when a friend tells me she just got her driver’s license after the fourth attempt I do not need to take her perspective or to imagine what she believes in order to understand that she probably is very happy. Understanding others in this way can be explained by schemata. Schemata are structures stored in our semantic memory; a mental set or conceptual framework consisting of knowledge abstracted from personal experience. Schemata

enable us to interpret our surroundings and experiences, form expectations, and guide our attention. Schemata may be activated automatically and exert their influence on thought and behavior. Such effects can occur without conscious attention or awareness. Unwittingly primed schemata can influence the dispositional attributions we make regarding other people's behavior. We can try to construct and understand others by means of schemata and revise it on the basis of particular data in a particular context. Peter Goldie labels these forms of mental representation imagining-how-it-is.

Second, we can try to simulate other people's mental states in order to understand what one might be feeling. In simulation one first creates pretend states in her own mind that corresponds to those of the target. These pretend states are the input of cognitive mechanisms which generate a new output that is attributed or assigned to the target. Simulation is a mode of imagination. The kind of simulation employed to understand other people involves the use of imagination, and imaginatively placing oneself in another’s shoes. However, simulation does not require a successful duplication of the target’s mental states, and often simulation processes are inaccurate. Karen Shanton and Alvin Goldman distinguish between inter-personal simulation and intra-personal simulation. Interpersonal simulation is what we do when we imagine being in someone else’s position. Intrapersonal simulation takes place when we imagine ourselves at a different time and/or place. For a more detailed account of the role of imagination, I suggest an additional distinction offered by Alex Neill; that of other-focused imagination and self-focused imagination. Neill argues that our emotional responses — whether to fictional or to actual persons and events — are not all of a kind. He suggests that we should look more closely at the variety of our emotional responses instead of treating them as a homogenous class. Hence, he distinguishes between emotional responses in which the focus of concern is oneself, and those in which the focus of concern is another. These analytic distinctions are important for improving our insight into the role that imagination plays for understanding others.

Inter-personal simulation often involves other-directed simulation. At least, it attempts to. It is to simulate the other person’s mental states: taking one’s perspective as input and attempt to understand what she would do or feel. Goldman uses the term inter-personal imagination to refer to

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70 Smith, Engaging Characters, 21.
72 Smith, Engaging Characters, 21-22.
77 The distinction between other-focused and self-focused imagination can also be of use to differentiate empathic and sympathetic responses. Empathy is other-focused, whereas sympathy is self-focused. This will be elucidated in the fourth and fifth chapter.
empathy and third person mind-reading, and says that it is typically other-directed. However, to clarify some issues concerning perspective-shifting—and what many would consider empathy in advance—I think there are occasions of inter-personal imagination that are self-focused instead of other-focused. This occurs, for example, when I try to take my friend's perspective and fail to run my own believes or wishes “off-line.” In those cases, I imagine what it would be like for me if I were in her shoes. This is a case of inter-personal self-focused simulation. An example of intra-personal other-focused imagination is when I imagine what someone else would do if she were in my shoes. For example, when I feel sad and need some motivation to get things done, I can think of what someone else would do in my situation. I could imagine what a stronger and more persistent person might do. I could ask myself: What would Chuck Norris do? Intra-personal self-directed imagination is, for example, imagining how I would feel when I am enjoying a tequila-sunset at sunset on the beach.

These imaginative capacities do not necessarily produce emotions. It is possible to imagine how someone must be feeling after hearing bad news without experiencing congruous or appropriate emotions. Trying to understand how someone feels, imagining how it is for another and simulating one’s beliefs and desires to predict her decisions do not always generate emotions. Hence, imagination is not sufficient to produce emotions. There must be some additional explanation why imagined events can evoke emotions. Susan L. Feagin proposes a model which describes the psychological processes enabling us to shift perspectives; “mental shifts.” A mental shift indicates a shift in cognitive and emotive orientation; it is a change in attitude of perspective. A mental shift is an imaginative capacity which allows us to change our point of view and, according to Feagin, it can alter our cognitive orientation and dispositional state. Additionally, it can be viewed as a cognitive attitude that differs from propositional attitudes such as belief and desire. This is one of the ideas that form the foundation of what has been called distinct cognitive attitude-theory (DCA). This is an attitude which can be activated by imagination with a functional role that is not belief, but not entirely unlike belief. This theory is a convergence of those defending the view that, in order to explain our emotional responses to imagined content, the sort of imagination that moves us involves mental states that are not beliefs, desires, or perceptions, but are like them in various ways. According to Shaun Nichols, this hypothesis is embraced by many contemporary cognitivist accounts of imagination. Whether simulation theory, the mental-shift model, the DCA-account, or other views on the functioning roles of imagination has the most explanatory value is left out of this analysis. I do not dismiss other accounts of imagination or favor a particular view. With respect to explaining the relation between imagination and emotion in this text, I think it is sufficient to say that there are many cases in which we shift to a different cognitive attitude which

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80 See also: Currie and Ravenscroft, Recreative Minds; Schroeder and Matheson, “Imagination and Emotion.”
enables us to imaginatively change perspective, simulate, pretend or empathize in order to understand other people. Additionally, this attitude allows us to respond emotionally to the contents of what we imagine.

It has become clear from examining these theories that imagination as a mental faculty plays particular roles in various domains of human understanding. The most important roles are providing knowledge of possibility, understanding other people, and planning and counterfactual reasoning. Imaginative faculties enable mental shifts which allow us to understand the situation of other’s and additionally we can respond emotionally to imagined situations and fiction. Further, with respect to emotions, imagination understood as mental representations can function to direct our attention and make some details more salient than others. The account of emotions as evaluative judgments with regard to imagination will be briefly discussed in the fourth chapter. In that chapter I will also examine the role of imagination in responding emotionally to fiction film. As will become clear, imagination serves several significant purposes for our understanding of the fictional world. However, it should not be considered as a necessary component of emotion with regard to responding emotionally to immediate perceptual stimuli.

[2.3] Personal Significance

The third aspect I will consider here is personal significance. The view shared by Prinz and Jenefer Robinson is that the personal significance of the situation is evaluated by affective or embodied appraisals. An appraisal is a state that represents an organism-environment relation that bears on well-being. Hence, the personal significance is the subject’s well-being and emotions appraise the situations in terms of the subject’s well-being. However, there are situations in which we may respond emotionally without appraising the situation in terms of our own well-being, for example bystander-emotions or emotional responses to fictional characters. Against this objection it might be argued that my well-being is dependent of another one’s well-being. I do not reject this option, but in order to understand our emotional world there might be a more suitable approach. Understanding emotions as evaluative judgments justifies a broader interpretation of personal significance. According to Solomon, emotions are self-interested judgments. The judgments that constitute our emotional response may involve desires, wishes, hopes, interests, concerns. Solomon uses the phrase “taking it personally” to refer to the personal significance of emotions. Taking something personally means that it is meaningful to oneself and it may concern matters in which we have personal “investments.” This view of personal significance corresponds to Roberts’ suggestion that a personal significance is related to the concern-base of a construal. According to

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82 For a in-depth discussion of bystander emotions see: Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, 29-93. | For the discussion of emotional responses to fictional characters, see in particular chapter three of this thesis.
83 Solomon, *Not Passion’s Slave*, 94.
84 Ibid., 103.
85 Ibid., 104.
Roberts, a construal is emotional when it touched upon the subject’s concerns, interests and cares. More generally, in order to have an emotional experience the subject has to be concerned about something, because, according to Roberts, without concern it is impossible to be emotionally affected by something. For example, when I open the newspaper on a Saturday morning and read in the obituary page that Jane Doe has passed away it doesn’t affect me at all. However, a few miles away, a friend of Jane Doe reads the same ad and starts to cry. The death of Mrs. Doe is felt as a loss by her friend, whereas it just reminds me of human finitude and does not affect me in the way it does for her friend. This can be explained by the fact that I am not concerned about Jane Doe’s death, because I never cared for her. Her friend, on the other hand, cared for her and thus construes Mrs. Doe’s death as an irrevocable loss. Roberts adds that there is a distinction between basic concerns and consequent concerns. A basic concern enters into the perception in order to characterize the object’s appearance, while a consequent concern is a focused goal orientation which is determined by the type of emotion. Not all emotions have consequent concerns. According to Roberts, basic concerns are dispositions to experience particular emotions. This indicates that, on the one hand, emotions may involve concerns which prepare the subject to act according to the emotion, and, on the other hand, that they are caused by anything that touches upon our concerns.

To understand concerns as dispositions to emotions might explain what possibly triggers our emotional response. However, it can be argued that we can respond emotionally to a situation in which our concern is not very obvious and only becomes apparent in reflecting upon the content of emotion. Moreover, at one moment we can be emotionally affected by something while at other moments we are not affected at all. When I read an article in the newspaper about homeless children in Syria and I construe it as a terrible situation, I might feel angry, sad, or powerless. When I read it without feeling angry, sad, or powerless, then, according to Roberts, my concerns have changed, or I didn’t construe the situation as terrible. This seems to be problematic in Roberts’ theory, because it’s impossible that I’m not emotionally affected if I still think the situation in Syria is terrible and I am still concerned about the homeless children. To consider emotions as concern-based construals doesn’t explain how we can construe the same situation in the same manner and having the same concerns without experiencing the same emotions. I believe that it is more adequate to denote concerns, desires, wishes, interests, and cares in terms of ‘personal significance’. In doing so, it becomes easier to explain why we respond emotionally to imaginations, thoughts, and fiction. Emotional responses necessarily involve personal significance, whether as disposition to emotions, or as constituents or consequences.
[2.4] Intentionality

The fourth aspect of emotion is intentionality. An emotional response only occurs when it is about something; this may be an object, a person, a situation that is real or imagined, a thought, or an idea. An emotion is directed at something or someone. This has been broadly accepted by, among others, Solomon, Roberts, Prinz, and Berys Gaut.\textsuperscript{89} The intentionality of emotion distinguishes it from moods or reflex responses because these affects lack intentionality.\textsuperscript{90} Moods can be understood as mental states that influence our emotional experiences. Being in a certain mood can predispose us to experience certain emotions. Reflex responses also lack intentionality. For example, when I accidently cut myself while I’m preparing a meal, I experience feelings of pain. These feelings are not about or directed at something, but merely caused by something. When the phone rings while I’m preparing a meal and I accidentally cut myself, I may pick up the phone and react angrily at the person who dares to call me at such a bad time. My emotional response might even be more intense when I am already in a bad mood. In this case, my anger is directed at the person who calls me, although it might be caused by something else, namely the sensation of pain. This situation indicates that emotions can be complex because the intentionality (or content) of an emotion can be confused with its cause. Thus, intentionality is a necessary component of emotion.

[2.5] Feelings

The fifth aspect I will mention here is the feeling component. Feelings are important and can be considered as the defining components of emotions. This means that it is the experience of feelings which makes the emotional response meaningful; it is a felt, bodily experience. Although I will not elaborate on this topic in this study, the importance of this phenomenological experience should not be neglected.\textsuperscript{91} However, for the purpose of this text, I will understand feelings as physiological processes, including bodily changes, sensations, and action tendencies. The metaphors used to describe emotions often involve bodily aspects, such as “a broken heart”, “a heavy weight on my chest”, “seeing red”, “the boiling of blood”, and “keeping it cool.” Feelings are necessary components of emotions, but emotions should not be understood as mere feelings. It may be argued that there are types of emotions that lack the feeling component. Yet I would not qualify them as emotions, but rather as mental states. If we were to think of emotions as mere bodily feelings there would not be any kind of reflection, and it would not be possible to explain complex emotions like shame and guilt. Thus, understanding our emotional life requires more than an analysis of physiological changes. Consequently, feelings are a necessary but not sufficient component of emotions.


\textsuperscript{90} Here I understand affect as a broader category defining any state of feeling or sensation: including emotions, moods, feelings, and sensations.

[2.6] Evaluations and Appraisals

The sixth and final aspect I will consider here is the evaluative component of emotion. Every emotion involves a certain evaluation. For example, joy implies a positive evaluation of a situation, shame consists of a negative evaluation of oneself, and guilt involves an evaluation that one has done something wrong. Evaluations involved in emotions may display appraisals, positive or negative attitudes toward its content, and judgments of what is good or bad, or right or wrong. Emotions may be easily identified, even though the evaluations involved are hard to describe. It seems that evaluation in terms of positive and negative is in most situations comprehensible. However, describing a complex emotion in terms of valence cannot help us to understand the entire range of emotions, because complex emotions may contain contrasting beliefs or judgments. For example, a good friend asks me if I would like to go shopping with her, because she has to find new shoes matching her dress. Because she is a good friend and I love her and it seems that shoes are important for her, I promise I will help her even if I dislike shopping. A few days in advance she calls me to cancel our appointment, because she prefers to go with another friend who has a better taste for fashion. Although I feel relieved because I don’t have to do something I don’t like, I also feel a bit jealous because apparently she has friends with better taste for fashion. In terms of valence, the emotional response I experience consists of a negative judgment that I am not good enough, and a positive judgment that I have a day off. Because these opposite judgments are both involved in the emotional process it is not advantageous to understand emotions in terms of valence alone—in this case it is not sufficient to describe the emotional experience as positive or negative. For the scope of this thesis I will consider the evaluations involved in emotions as appraisal processes concerning an embodied self in relation to an event—real or imagined—which are determined by a person’s frames and schemas and involve thought, beliefs, desires, and goals. Further, emotions may contain multiple evaluations; for example, fast, automatic appraisals of a situation, evaluations of oneself as subject or object of the emotion, and evaluations of the emotions experienced.92

Conclusion: Evaluative Judgment as Operational Concept

Breaking down the overarching category of emotion into various aspects marks an important step toward its understanding. With the analysis of several different theories of emotion it appears to be difficult, if not impossible, to construct an all-encompassing theory of emotion. Definitions of emotion are offered by different theorists using various approaches, but none of them seems to be able to account for all the phenomena concerned. I believe that understanding emotions requires an approach that combines the central aspects of emotion, instead of construing a definition of

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92 For metaresponses, see: Feagin, Reading with Feeling, 130-131.
emotion that envelops every type of emotion. Instead of developing a definition via a top-down approach, I advance an account of emotion by means of a bottom-up approach which is able to improve our understanding of the emotions. Hence, the account I propose is less focused on rigid definition, but more pragmatically concerned with offering a way to understand emotions. This account might be able to answer questions concerning what makes us respond emotionally, to what do we respond emotionally, and what happens when we experience emotions. I think the best way to get insights into the domain of emotion is to understand emotions as evaluative judgments or appraisals. Here, I do not imply that all evaluative judgments are emotions. I mainly support Solomon’s view that an emotion is a special kind of judgment, but not every judgment is emotion.

To understand emotions as evaluative judgments has several advantages. First, it allows for a broader understanding of emotions than solely relying on theories that are completely cognitive or non-cognitive—emotions understood as evaluative judgments may involve cognitive as well as non-cognitive processes. Moreover, the approach I have taken does not necessarily require an answer to this question in order to understand emotions. As Solomon also indicates, understanding emotions as evaluative judgments discloses the dimension of mental states, such as beliefs and attitudes, to reflection. Moreover, this perspective also uncovers the ‘reasons’—not just causes—that constitute the emotional response. In other words, considering emotions as evaluative judgments makes emotions more intelligible: the main requirement for operationalization of a concept. These viewpoints notwithstanding, the general mode of theorization and analysis throughout this thesis is marked by a pragmatic eclecticism. Although evaluative judgment serves as the overarching concept of emotions, I employ a broad array of concepts and findings from studies not completely in line with Solomon’s view of emotions. The reason being similar to preference for the concept to evaluative judgment: to proceed otherwise would unnecessarily limit our grasp of the phenomena concerned.

Another advantage of understanding emotions as evaluative judgments is that it can be applied to actual felt emotions and might explain the phenomena involved in a particular emotion. Because emotions are not mere feelings, a description focused more on the evaluative judgments involved in emotional responses—rather than only on the affective states felt during the experience—enables reflection of the conscious experienced processes. This reflection might help us understand the ways in which emotions and their unique quality are experienced. Moreover, combining a more phenomenological oriented approach with the theoretical groundwork offered in

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93 This has been done by Roberts in *Emotions* (2003). Roberts defines emotions as concern-based construals and subsequently forces all the different types of phenomena into his conceptual mold. But for every type of emotion he analyses it appears to be possible to find types of that emotion which do not fit his description.

94 I will not enter the debate around the question what the cognitive or non-cognitive processes in an emotional experience ‘really’ are. Considering the wide disagreement about the meaning of ‘cognitive’ in this context, it would demand a new and different project of inquiry.

95 Solomon, *True to Our Feelings*, 207.

96 Ibid.
this chapter might give us insights into our emotional world—of which our interactions with
fiction, film in particular, can be an integral part.

To consider emotions as evaluative judgments might also improve our understanding of
the role that emotions play in the process of making moral judgments. Emotions can involve
sophisticated and conceptually complicated judgments, such as judgments of responsibility, status,
and value. Different evaluations can lead to different modes of behavior and different emotional
experiences. The role that emotions play in moral responsiveness will be the topic of the fifth
chapter. In the next chapter I will inquire into the relation of fiction and emotional responses
through a discussion of the paradox of fiction.
Chapter 3: Emotions and the Paradox of Fiction

Max: “So you are something of a paradox.”
Ethan: “Well, that depends.”

— Mission Impossible, Brian de Palma, 1996

[Introduction] The Paradox of Fiction

The central aim of this chapter is to enhance our understanding of theories of film-elicited emotions. The account of emotions as evaluative judgments I offered in the second chapter might already provide insight into the emotional process that occurs when watching films. Before this will be elaborated, I will examine several theories of film-elicited emotions offered by prominent contemporary film theorists. To find my way into this labyrinth of theories, I will first focus on those that attempt to solve the paradox of fiction. The paradox of fiction addresses the problematic relation between fiction and the emotional responses it elicits. I will analyze different theories providing possible solutions to the paradox of fiction on their account of, on the one hand, being able to improve our understanding of film-elicited emotions, and on the other hand emotions in general. In order to improve our comprehension of emotional responses to fiction film a theory of film-elicited emotions should also be able to take into account ordinary cases of emotions.

It might be argued that our emotional responses to fiction are unlike our emotional responses to real world situations or events and for that reason its significance for understanding emotion might be dismissed. However, I take a different position and argue that for understanding the world of emotion, our emotional responses to fiction are just as important as ordinary emotional experiences. Hence, a theory of emotional responses to fiction needs to extend beyond the context of fiction alone. Furthermore, it should be noted that it is not my aim here to solve the paradox of fiction. Rather, I intend to point out specific issues from the debate, those of which I think that analyzing them will help further an understanding of how fiction film elicits emotional responses. With this approach I hope shed light on the opaque elements of the relation between fiction and emotion. The theoretical discussions in the current part serve to sharpen the perspective offered in the first part, while preparing, by way of philosophical puzzle, the more film-oriented points expressed in chapter four. Moreover, by addressing the paradox of fiction I attempt to highlight the distinction between questions concerning the conditions of possibility of emotional responses to fiction and questions concerning the specific nature of emotions to fiction. Although in actual experience these issues are inextricably tied, it is important to make this analytic distinction, because it will play in the background of the analysis of moral emotions in chapter five.

The question that lies at the core of the paradox of fiction is: Why do we respond emotionally, care about, or entertain beliefs about characters and situations in narratives that we
know to be fictional?97 This question is addressed by Colin Radford in his article “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?” Radford considers a range of responses to the problem and concludes that our ability to respond emotionally to fictional events and characters is incoherent and inconsistent.98 This idea derives from the incompatibility of three propositions, each of which seem plausible but are mutually contradictory. The first proposition is that we respond emotionally to the characters and situations of some works of fiction. The second is that emotional responses depend on belief: we must believe in the existence of the object of our emotion in order to respond emotionally. The third proposition is that we do not believe that the fictional situations and characters really exist.99 Radford argues that any rational person experiences an emotion only if he or she believes that the object of his or her emotion exists. This means that people who respond emotionally to fiction are behaving irrationally because they know that the object of their emotion does not really exist. Accordingly, they are inconsistent in their beliefs. Radford states that a belief that something can harm us “is a necessary condition of our being unpuzzlingly, rationally, or coherently frightened.”100

This irrationality argument has received many negative responses. A number of philosophers spent considerable time and effort denying that our emotional responses to fiction are inconsistent and incoherent. I think the main reason for denouncing Radford’s view is that the charge of irrationality is deemed to be derogatory, and subsequently unacceptable. Consequently, a variety of different solutions to the paradox of fiction has been developed that support a rationalist account of our emotional responses to fictional works. In the next section, I will review different ways of trying to solve the paradox of fiction and examine whether they are able to improve our understanding of film-elicited emotions and emotions in general.101 I will focus on the question of how we can be moved by something fictional. The issue of whether our emotional responses are irrational might be a topic for another paper, and I will not address it here.102

[3.1] First Proposition: We Respond Emotionally to Fiction

The following question should be raised in relation to the paradox of fiction: What is it we are responding to when we experience emotions for fictional characters or situations? Views that hold that we do not respond emotionally to fictions deny the first proposition of the paradox of fiction.

98 Colin Radford and Michael Weston, “How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?” in Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes 49 (1975), 75.
101 It must be noted that I assume that theories of emotional responses to fiction in general also account for emotional responses to fiction film. I think that medium-specific properties are important to the type and intensity of emotional responses, but the question why we respond emotionally to fiction in general also concerns film.
One class of solutions asserts that we do not experience emotions toward what we take to be fictions, but rather toward certain actualities called to mind by the fictions. One such a possible solution to Radford’s problem is offered by Barrie Paskins. Paskins argues that our emotional responses to fictional characters can be construed as responding emotionally to those real-life people who are in the same bind as the character in the fiction. For example, watching The Lion King we might feel pity for little Simba when he loses his father. Then, according to Paskins’ view, our feelings of pity are for those in the same predicament as Simba: children who have just lost their father.

This approach, of considering the referential object of emotion to lie outside of the fiction, is also taken by Jerrold Levinson. Unlike Paskins however, Levinson suggests that emotions for fictional characters and events are real emotions that we have previously experienced toward real objects in our lives. These emotions are reactivated by those aspects of the story and characters that evoke feelings and beliefs corresponding to recollections of stored life experiences. This process does not require any conscious or deliberate mental activity. Levinson argues that there is a level of beliefs and emotions that normally operates prior to and semi-independently of that of consciously accessible and assessable beliefs and these “protobeliefs” partially override the responses justified by one’s reflective cognitive system. Furthermore, the emotional responses to fictional events and characters are very likely generated by simultaneously awakened responses from some past emotional occasion. In other words, our emotional response to a fictional character is rooted in earlier life context and is subtly projected onto and unwittingly confused with our imaginary emotion towards the fictional character.

Levinson offers another possible account of the fact that we experience emotions when watching movies. Namely, that our make-believe emotion for a character is a real emotion for a kind or sort of thing that exists in reality and is exemplified by the fictional character. According to this view, fiction stimulates our emotional responses toward social phenomena or situation types or categories of persons and these responses are activated by the course of the fiction. This means that we do not respond emotionally to the characters and situations of works of fiction, but that we respond emotionally to actual existing phenomena. On the one hand, our emotional responses to fiction are responses to real-life events or previously experienced emotions reactivated by the fictional content. While on the other hand these responses are evoked mostly without any conscious processing, and are unreachable for mental reflection.

A slightly different approach to the question of whether the object or cause of emotion is itself considered to be fictional is taken by William Charlton. He argues that we won’t respond

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103 Yanal, Paradoxes of Emotion and Fiction.
104 Barrie Paskins, “On Being Moved by Anna Karenina and Anna Karenina,” Philosophy 52, no. 201 (July 1977), 344-347
106 Levinson, The Pleasures of Aesthetics, 304.
107 Ibid., 302.
108 Ibid., 305.
emotionally unless we are somehow prepared to act on or from that emotion.\textsuperscript{109} Hence, that which elicits the emotional response must allow one to do something in relation to it. Herein, Charlton follows a naturalistic account of emotions. In order to explain the relation between emotion and action, he argues that “to be moved emotionally is to be moved to action.”\textsuperscript{110} All emotional responses involve motivations to act. However, action towards fictional characters seems absurd. For example, we cannot comfort fictional characters when they are in distress. Because we cannot act out on our emotional responses to fiction, we need a substitute which enables us to be moved to action. According to Charlton, this substitute might be one of our friends or someone we know who is called to our mind by the fictional character or situation. Thus, fictional characters or situations reflect a state of mind in which we are moved to action towards our friends or someone we know.

The complex relation between emotional responses to fictional characters and the inability to act upon those emotions is what distinguishes fictional emotions from emotional responses to actual events.\textsuperscript{111} It has been argued that our emotional responses to fiction should not considered to be of the same category as those emotions we experience to actual persons or events, because the former lack the action tendencies required for emotions.\textsuperscript{112} However, there are interesting theories claiming that our emotional responses to fiction do involve action tendencies. Levinson explains that action tendencies involved in emotions we experience when watching movies are the result of Darwinian protobeliefs and emotions.\textsuperscript{113} Such Darwinian emotions are induced in us by particularly vivid and lifelike images that are processed very rapidly. Our evolutionarily shaped visual system automatically operates on the basis of visual data without any conscious processing necessarily being involved. If the sensory evidence is of a sort that for evolutionary reasons needs to bypass consciously accessible beliefs our body puts us into a state corresponding to the visual evidence. When we are confronted with an image of a terrible monster we will be in a physical agitated state of a sort that inspires fleeing. This response cannot be neutralized or defused by the conscious belief that such terrible monsters do not exist. However, whether these Darwinian emotions can be viewed as emotions proper is a question that requires to be answered in order to understand our emotional responses to pictures that are less visual stimulating.

Insightful as the above views are, a point of critique remains to be addressed. Namely, spectators themselves might in fact consider the fictional object to be focus of their emotion and not some real-life counterpart or substitute. This raises the issue to what extend the spectators’ perspective is give due consideration during the theoretical inquiry. Are those people who take pity on little Simba when he discovers his father dead mistaken about the object of their emotion? Paskins, Levinson and, to a lesser degree, Charlton all need to assume that they are.

\textsuperscript{109} William Charlton, “Feeling for the Fictitious,”\textit{ British Journal of Aesthetics} 24 (Summer 1984), 212.
\textsuperscript{110} Charlton, “Feeling for the Fictitious,” 206.
\textsuperscript{111} Boruah, \textit{Fiction and Emotion.}
\textsuperscript{112} This issue is put forward by, among others, Boruah, \textit{Fiction and Emotion}, 105-107.
\textsuperscript{113} Levinson, \textit{The Pleasures of Aesthetics}, 302.
[3.2] Second Proposition: Emotions Depend on Belief

Solutions to the paradox that deny the second proposition fall under the heading of thought theory. Theorists subscribing to this position claim that emotional responses do not require a belief in the existence of the objects of our emotion in order to respond emotionally. Consequently, they advance alternate views of the generation of emotions in relation to fictional situations.

A representative version of the thought theory is advanced by Peter Lamarque. In an attempt to provide a solution to the paradox of fiction, Lamarque suggests that the focus of discussion should be shifted away from beliefs to the objects of emotions. He attempts to answer the question of what we are responding to when we respond emotionally to fiction. According to Lamarque, the objects of our emotional responses to fiction are mental presentations or thought contents. He considers thoughts as having mental contents, including imaginings, fantasies, suppositions and ideas. Such thought contents differ from belief. Lamarque defines beliefs as psychological attitudes held in relation to a propositional content that might be viewed as the contents of some of our thoughts. Thoughts directed at representations can be the proper objects of emotional responses to fiction. We can be frightened by the thought of something without believing that anything real corresponds to the content of the thought. Furthermore, mental presentations or thought contents can be the cause of emotions and are quite independent of beliefs we might hold. This means that the contents of thoughts do not presuppose the existence of the object. Moreover, Lamarque argues that we can reflect on and be moved by a thought independently of accepting it as true and that belief and disbelief stay in the background when we are engaged with fiction. Because vivid imaginings are considered to replace belief, Lamarque provides a possible solution to the paradox of fiction. However, whether thoughts alone can be the cause of our emotional responses to fiction is not clear. Lamarque suggests that “fictions are made up of sets of ideas, many having correlates in reality, and these ideas invite an imaginative supplementation and exploration. In connection with fictional characters, this ‘filling in’ process is not unlike that of coming to know another being.” Lamarque explains that our thought contents may differ from the propositional content the fiction offers, because we have an “intellectual and imaginative background,” which makes it more than likely that our thoughts may be “far different from those directly, or logically, related to the propositional content of fictional sentences.”

Noël Carroll addresses the paradox of fiction to explain why spectators respond emotionally to fiction and makes use of Lamarque’s theory. Carroll, like Lamarque, also argues that we can be moved by the contents of our thoughts, and thus denies that emotional response requires

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114 The question whether emotions depend on belief has received considerable attention. However, a further discussion of this interesting issue exceeds the scope of this thesis. See: Bennett W. Helm, “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings,” Emotion Review 1, no. 3 (July 2009); Turvey, “Imagination, Simulation, and Fiction.” / Döring “Why Recalcitrant Emotions Are Not Irrational.”


116 Ibid., 117.

117 Ibid., 124.

118 Peter Lamarque, “How Can We Pity and Fear Fictions?” British Journal of Aesthetics 21, no. 4 (1984), 301.

a belief that the things that move us are real. In Carroll’s view, spectators respond emotionally to the content of the thoughts generated by movies. He states that in entertaining and reflecting upon the contents of fictional representations which provide the contents of our thoughts, we can respond emotionally. Furthermore, Carroll shifts the focus away from spectator’s response to the structural features of film. He argues that movies are able to elicit emotional responses because the spectator’s thoughts generated by the movie are criterially prefocused. This means that movies are structured in such a way that the depicted objects of our attention “satisfy the criteria for the emotional state intended by the creators of the moving picture.” Thus, in order to respond emotionally to a certain scene, the spectator’s thoughts are prefocused to the appropriate properties that count as criteria for an emotional response. Carroll says that when we respond with horror to a creature in the movie, we appraise that creature as being harmful because it has the properties appropriate to elicit horror, such as impurity and fearsomeness. In this regard, Carroll’s theoretical perspective differs strongly from Lamarque’s. Unlike Lamarque, Carroll argues that we ourselves do not bring anything to the fictional content.

Carroll’s theory of film-elicited emotions becomes problematic when it is used to explain why the spectator responds emotionally when watching fiction. Carroll’s view holds that one responds with fear when seeing something fearful. In other words, the fearsome creature has objective properties which elicit fear. I cannot but agree with the truism of this argument. However, it does not explain why one views something fictional as fearful if the object of emotion has no apparent fearsome properties. My objection to Carroll’s account is that it does not distinguish objects of our emotional responses from the emotional responses themselves. Hence, when a creature in a film is intended to be fearsome by the film-makers, then in accordance with Carroll’s theory it will elicit fear in every normal spectator. This entails that spectators should experience the same intended emotions while watching the same movie. The problem with this view might become more obvious with the following example. As a child I watched Martin Rosen’s animation film Watership Down (1978). I watched this movie with fear and horror and for a long time after I wasn’t able to fall asleep before my father had checked every corner of the room for evil rabbits.

Lamarque, Fictional Points of View, 113-134.
Ibid., 88.
Carroll, The Philosophy of Motion Pictures, 159.
Ibid.
Carroll, The Philosophy of Horror, 88. Carroll seems to overlook the possibility that we already add something to a fictional work through our schemata; it seems that schemata do play a significant role for our generalizations and expectations about the ‘flat characters’ in particular horror movies.
Thus, the first time I saw *Watership Down* the animals had the properties appropriate to elicit fear: evil eyes and sinister voices. However, decades later I watched the same movie and did not respond with fear, although the objects in the movie that elicited fear in the first place had not changed.\(^{126}\) Carroll’s theory cannot account for this discrepancy. I think the problem is constituted by the fact that Carroll, in his *Philosophy of Horror*, does not distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic properties of an object. Intrinsic properties are completely independent of other aspects, including the context. Examples of intrinsic properties are as follows: square, round, and six feet tall. Extrinsic properties are relational and always depend on other things outside the object. For example, my length is almost six feet. Being almost six feet is an intrinsic property and doesn’t change whether I’m in China or in the Netherlands. However, in China I would be considered to be a tall woman whereas in the Netherlands I am of average length. In this example, being tall is an extrinsic property because it depends on the relation between my length and the outside world. In horror movies, the monsters have extrinsic response-dependent properties such as being fearsome and impure. Response-dependent properties of an object depend on the capacity of that object to elicit certain psychological responses.\(^{127}\) Inadvertently, in *The Philosophy of Horror*, Carroll must consider the properties of monsters to be intrinsic. However, as I hope to have illustrated with the example of *Watership Down*, such properties are response dependent. Hence, the monstrous properties need to be regarded to be extrinsic. Given these issues, I consider Carroll’s version of the thought theory inadequate with regard to understanding film-elicited emotions.

An objection I would like to raise against the thought theory in general is the following. It fails to improve our understanding of emotional responses to fiction because it cannot provide an

\(^{126}\) Before watching the movie for the second time, I was sure the rabbits had red eyes. Even in the process of writing this thesis I thought that it was the white rabbit with red eyes that was the scariest. However, the evil rabbit (see figure) doesn’t have red eyes.

\(^{127}\) All response dependent properties are extrinsic, but not all extrinsic properties are response dependent.
answer to the question why we respond emotionally to thought contents generated by the fiction, and whether those thought contents are sufficient for emotions. Namely, as Radford points out, “the fact that we respond emotionally to fictional thoughts does not solve the problem, but forms part of it.” Thought theory overlooks this issue, and subsequently only shifts the problem of being moved by fiction to a different level. Another problem arises when analyzing the complex relation between thoughts, imagination and emotions. Consider the following situation: I can entertain the thought—without feeling sad—that someone I care about is ill, and that I should make time to visit him. However, when I am on my way to my ill friend, I might imagine him suffering from the cruel symptoms of his illness and feel pity or sorrow. These feelings can make me reluctant to go and see him, even though I do not even know if he indeed suffers a lot. Because I do not want my friend to see me downtrodden, I attempt a happy face by thinking of positive things—and even try to put up a smile. I could reminiscence about the good times we have had together. And in remembering certain adventures I suddenly want to see him badly in order to have some laughs with him about past times. With this hypothetical situation I aim to illustrate that thoughts are not sufficient for emotions. It also shows that it is possible to entertain or imagine a thought, while not simultaneously holding existential beliefs, yet still respond emotionally. Thought theory must therefore show how thoughts that are not existentially grounded—and that occur along with disbelief—can generate emotions. Even if emotions do not require beliefs, there is no answer why we respond emotionally to thought contents generated by fiction.

Another version of the thought theory has been offered by Robert Yanal. He reviews Lamarque’s theory and agrees with him that emotional responses to fiction are brought on by a focused involvement with vivid and detailed thoughts that may be propositional or non-propositional. Whereas Lamarque insists that neither belief nor disbelief plays any role in being moved by fiction, Yanal suggest a dimension of belief that he calls its “relative activity”:

The activity of a belief lies on a continuum ranging from beliefs I hold that have no effect on my other mental states, which would be nearly inert, to beliefs I hold that occupy my mind to the exclusion of almost everything else, beliefs that would be highly active. 129

Disbelief disturbs emotion only when fairly active. Yanal’s theory holds that spectators render their belief in the reality of a fictional character or situation less active. This does not mean that spectators start believing in the actual existence of the fictional characters or situations. Rather, in accordance with Yanal’s theory, spectators choose to ‘inactivate’ their disbelief in order to be able to respond emotionally. The advantage of Yanal’s version of thought theory over Lamarque’s theory is that the fictionality of the object of emotion is still at issue, and that it answers the

129 Yanal, Paradoxes of Emotion and Fiction, 104.
question why we respond emotionally to fiction. Yanal’s version of the thought theory denies the second proposition of the paradox of fiction. Moreover, it presupposes that spectators are capable of temporarily rendering their disbelief in the fiction inactive. This idea seems to be grounded in theories that hold that spectators do believe, in one way or another, in the existence of the fictional characters or situations. Furthermore, the idea is quite similar to the notion of the suspension of disbelief that is the topic of the next section.

**[3.3] Third Proposition: We Do Not Believe in the Fiction**

Another way to remove the contradiction is to reject the premise that we do not believe in the existence of fictional characters. Theorists doing so argue that our cognitive capacities allow us to believe, one way or another, in the propositions that describe the situations of fictional characters. Thus, they deny that we do not believe in the fictional characters or events. One theory that denies the third proposition is called the *(willing) suspension of disbelief*. This notion is attributed to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. His theory holds that readers allow themselves to temporarily believe in the existence of the fictional characters or events. Carroll explains Coleridge’s idea of willing suspension of disbelief in relation to cinema. When watching a movie, the spectator puts his or her own beliefs temporarily aside and holds a belief concerning the fictional content. Consequently, according to Carroll, the spectator is deceived in believing the illusions created onscreen. Carroll contends that this ‘illusion theory’ undermines the possibility of responding appropriately to fiction. Because it follows that if we would really believe in the fictional characters or events, our emotional responses would not be enjoyable. For example, I enjoyed watching *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (Matt Reeves, 2013) because I knew it was fiction. I did not believe that there was a virus that destroyed a large part of the world population, and that intelligent apes like Caesar actually existed. If, for a moment, I thought that I was living in a world without electricity and with talking, gun-toting, horse-riding apes, I would have been more inclined to make a plan to improve my survivability instead of sitting calmly in the theatres watching a fictional movie—which would have been impossible without electricity. According to Carroll, the suspension of disbelief theory seems implausible considering the fact that during the movie we are still aware that we are watching a movie. However, Carroll’s reading of Coleridge is tendentious. For, Coleridge understands the suspension of disbelief as the temporary withholding of the act of judgment. In other words, we

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130 Although Yanal denies the second proposition of the paradox if fiction, he does not explicitly explain why we respond emotionally to something we do not believe. He explains why we respond emotionally to fiction, and that for those responses belief is not required. However, whether all our emotional responses depend on belief is not something Yanal seems interested in. His theory then seems more similar to the ‘suspension of disbelief’, but his focus on the idea that spectators respond to thoughts generated by the fictional work is more dominant in his work.


133 Ibid., 67.
neither believe nor disbelieve the fiction.134 This is clearly different from the picture of the easily deceived spectator that Carroll presents.

Another important scholar who denies that we do not believe in the fictional characters or situations is Kendall Walton. His make-believe theory rejects the proposition that we do not believe the fictional events or characters, and holds that the emotional responses spectators may experience are the result of participating in a game of make-believe.135 When I watch a horror movie portraying creatures killing innocent civilians, I am participating in a game of make-believe in which I use the movie as a prop to stimulate my imagination. This involves imagining that I am hiding for those rampaging creatures because I might be in danger. Hence, I imagine that the fictional creatures do exist because I make myself believe in the existence of those creatures. Believing in their existence elicits emotional responses, such as fear or horror. Participating in a game of make-believe I may respond with genuine emotions.136 However, Walton emphasizes that the emotions elicited by fictional situations or characters are not to be mistaken with emotional responses to actual events or persons. This does not mean that the emotions elicited by fiction are not actual, felt emotions. But simply that these emotions are ‘quasi-emotions’ in the sense that they differ from our emotional responses to actual events or characters. Thus, quasi-emotions are—like our ordinary emotional responses—felt physical agitations with a cognitive component, and are merely distinguished from our ordinary emotional responses because they are generated by something fictional instead of a real-life situation. This implies that quasi-emotions lack the behavioral components and action tendencies corresponding to emotional responses to actual events. If I would experience fear in exactly the same way as I would when my life really was in danger, I wouldn’t be able to stay in my comfortable chair munching popcorn.137

Opponents of Walton’s theory focus on the claim that emotional responses to fiction are make-believe emotions and not real emotions.138 Carroll, for example, rejects the make-believe theory on these supposed grounds. However, he misconstrues Walton’s argument by not distinguishing between the situations imagined and the emotions imagined. Carroll considers the emotional responses generated by participating in a game of make-believe as make-believe emotions or pretend emotions. Hence, for Carroll, to imagine something emotionally is the same as to imagine experiencing that emotion. Therefore, according to Carroll, the make-believe theory denies that spectators respond with real emotions to fiction. Yet this conclusion does not necessarily follow from the make-believe theory. Although the beliefs are make-believed, they do elicit real emotional responses; not as Carroll would suggest, make-believe emotions. Moreover, Walton’s response to this interpretation is that his theory was designed to help explain our

134 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, 218, 266.
137 Walton, “Fearing Fictions.”
emotional responses to fiction, not to question their very existence. Walton connects his notion of make-believe to the simulation theory in an attempt to defend his theory, and explain the mental processes involved when participating in a game of make-believe.

The simulation theory holds that we can acquire knowledge of the mental lives of other people by mentally simulating to be in their position. The first step in this process is to imagine being ‘in the shoes’ of the fictional character. The spectator pretends to have the same initial desires, beliefs, or other mental states that the spectator thinks the character has. Depending on the cognitive mechanisms employed by the spectator to infer to the mental states of the fictional character, he or she attributes the occurrence of the mental output to this character. In other words, the spectator lets his own psychological mechanisms serve as a ‘model’ to improve his or her understanding of the fictional character by imagining being in the character’s position. This imaginative participation consists in part of mental simulation. The imaginings engage certain of our psychological mechanisms. And, according to Walton, the results reflect aspects of one’s actual personality and character. The difference between simulation theory and thought theory is that the former requires the spectator to engage in imaginative activity, while thought theory emphasizes that holding a thought is in itself sufficient to respond emotionally. To engage in the imaginative activity of simulation require the spectator to make a mental shift or slide which can be understood as switching perspectives. Additionally, as a result of this psychological switch, the spectator might also acquire new ideas, thoughts, or beliefs. The imaginative process of mental simulation allows for a more thorough understanding of character’s minds and fictional situations than thought theory can provide for. This will become clear in the fourth chapter.

Conclusion: A Combinatory Approach

The various attempts that have been made to solve the paradox of fiction to some extend all appeal to a certain feature that need not concern all cases of emotional responses to a work of fiction—they attempt to explain everything in the domain of the paradox of fiction by utilizing only one account. Even if all the theories analyzed above are able to dissolve the paradox of fiction for a given instance of emotion, the question remains whether they are adequate enough to provide a full understanding of our diverse emotional responses when engaged with fiction. Furthermore, the theories seem to share Moreover, I think it is doubtful that a single theory can accommodate the diversity of emotional responses to fiction. For this reason, we should look more closely at the variety of our emotional responses instead of treating them as a homogenous class. The emotions

140 Imaginative processes play an important role in simulation, see chapter 2.2.2 for a more detailed account of perspective shifting, and chapter 4.2 for the role of imagination in emotional responses to fiction film.
144 Ibid., 43.
145 Feagin, Reading with Feeling, 89.
we experience when watching movies are multifarious and too complex to be defined by only one of the theories mentioned above. Therefore, a multi-dimensional approach to emotions generated by fiction is preferred over a one-dimensional conceptualization. Here I will attempt to offer an approach to film-elicited emotions that incorporates the fundamental elements of the aforementioned theories. This means that an instance of emotional response to fiction may include several aspects mentioned in the theories above. Consequently, in order to answer the questions addressed in the paradox of fiction, my approach takes into account the different ways in which we engage with fiction.

When we respond emotionally to fiction, what is it that we are responding to? Paskin, Charlton, and Levinson argue that we do not respond emotionally to fiction, but to something ‘actual’ that has been called to mind by the fiction. This presupposes that we respond to thought contents generated by the fiction. These thought contents can be entertained assertively and non-assertively, and include mental representations, imaginings, fantasies, suppositions, ideas, memories, desires, and expectations. Thus, responding emotionally to fiction is not necessarily bound to the fictional content alone: because thought contents produced by the fiction go along with any inference we may draw. Thought contents do not presuppose a belief in the existence of the object, and can therefore serve as the proper object of our emotional response.146 Because fictional movies are able to induce in viewers thoughts about real-life people, situations, and events, they often correlate with reality. And then we can say that we respond emotionally to something actual called to mind by the fiction. However, we can also respond emotionally to the fictional characters and events—even when we know they are not real. In order for emotions to be generated, existential belief in the object of our emotions is not required. We choose to temporarily render our disbelief inactive and consequently suspend our act of judgment about the existence of the object of our emotional response. Considering the capacity to inactive our disbelief, we might also activate other cognitive processes: such as imagination and simulation.

The emotions we experience when watching movies can be more, or less intense than our emotional responses to ordinary events. This can be explained by the fact that cinema provides us with affect-laden stories that do not ask us to save the world by slaying dangerous creatures. We are not responsible for what happens in the film; it is almost a cost-free opportunity to practice our evaluative judgments. Although it has been argued that we do not act on our emotions to fiction, I think we are as often motivated to act on film-elicited emotions as we are on emotions produced by real-life events. If we feel pity for a fictional character, it does not mean that we are not motivated to act even though we know this to be absurd. The fact that we cannot interact with a fictional character does not imply that we are not inclined to do so. In this sense, the diversity of our emotions becomes more obvious if we consider the possibility to act on our real-life emotions but

146 How thought contents in the form of imagination are able to evoke emotions is discussed in Currie and Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds*.
nevertheless remain inactive. Suppose that we would act correspondingly on every emotional response we experience. Possibly we would have less plates and mugs in the cupboard and even fewer friends than before. Similarly, we can be real angry at one of the characters in a movie and squeeze our fists, but we decide not to throw popcorn at him. For these reasons, movies can contribute to our emotional experiences and additionally we can learn something from them. I think that the emotions we experience when watching movies are genuine emotions, and involve the fundamental aspects described in the first chapter. In the next chapter I will examine two of the fundamental aspects in relation to responses to fiction film.
Chapter 4: Film-elicted Emotions

Tiffany: “You feel that? That’s emotion.”
Pat: “I don’t feel anything.”
— Silver Linings Playbook, David O. Russell, 2012

In this chapter, I relate two of the central aspects of emotion—conceptually distinguished in the first chapter—to emotional responses to narrative fiction film. The first part of this chapter is concerned with the aspect of perception. I think perception is of particular interest precisely because it is mostly disregarded by thought-theoretical accounts of emotion. Through a detailed analysis of scenes from the movie Gravity (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013) and the emotion of awe, I will attempt to illustrate the immediacy and fundamental perceptual aspect of emotion. In the second part of this chapter I focus on imagination in relation to engagement with fiction film. As will become clear, imagination serves several significant purposes for our understanding of the fictional world. However, it should not be considered as a necessary component of emotion with regard to responding emotionally to immediate perceptual stimulus. As I also pointed out in chapter two, and hope to make apparent in the current chapter: either perception or imagination, or both must be considered necessary for emotion—conceptually and phenomenologically. Moreover, imagination also has a strong connection to our moral responsiveness, which will be analyzed in the fifth chapter.

As I argued in the second chapter, all of the six aspects should be considered fundamental and necessary for emotion. Intentionality is necessary, because film-elicted emotions are directed at something. We can be angry at the evil characters or we can have pity for our hero. We can anticipate certain fearful affective outcomes of the scenes we are scared of—fearing for our own fear.147 In the analysis of Gravity in the first part of this chapter, we can respond with awe to the magnificent earth as artifact-emotion or fiction-emotion. The role of personal significance becomes clear when we respond emotionally with empathy or sympathy for the characters. Because we are engaged with the narrative and concerned about the characters, we desire a good outcome and respond emotionally when a good outcome is prevented by evil characters. Hence, our personal significance can also explain why we respond differently to characters (or actors) we don’t like; because we don’t care about them. All our emotional responses to fiction film are accompanied by feelings and physical changes: our blood flows faster when we anticipate a chase scene, we can cry when our favorite character dies, we hold our breath when the main character opens a door to a creepy cellar. Our emotional responses are also evaluations or appraisals of the fictional situation or of the filmic properties. We can be positively moved by heartwarming actions and we can have negative judgments about the fatalistic behavior of characters. In this chapter, while moving

between such levels of theory and detailed analysis, I also hope to make apparent that it is more than worthwhile to understand film-elicited emotions as evaluative judgments.

[4.1] Sensing Gravity
The suggestion that film-elicited emotions necessarily involve perception is opposed to thought theory. According to thought theory, the spectator does not respond emotionally to cinematic representations of fiction. Instead, the spectator is considered to respond to the ‘thought’ that is generated by the cinematic representation of fiction he perceives. By postulating a mental entity as the primal causal factor of the spectator’s emotional response, the spectator’s sensory perception of the concrete cinematic representation is conceived of as secondary. This means that thought theory neglects the medium specific attributes of fiction film, because any other medium can generate thoughts. Malcom Turvey discusses these issues related to thought theory and cinematic representation. He argues that any theory of spectator’s mental activity conceives of the image and soundtrack as merely providing sense-data about the material properties stripped of the diegesis which is the mind’s task to reconstruct. Because mental activity is considered to be the causal factor of the spectator’s emotional response, thought theorists are forced to define cinematic perception as a direct, literal perception of the image and soundtrack as purely material entities. That is, in order to legitimize their postulation, they have to regard film purely as the movement of light, shadow, shape, color, and noise. Considering spectators’ perceptual experiences it seems that the perception of material properties is only one way to conceptualize cinematic perception, and a highly specific one at that. Moreover, it does not seem to correspond with everyday reports of film experiences.

The objections against theories of mental activity provide us with a profound critique of the definition of cinematic perception as merely the sensation of the material properties in the image. It seems more productive to broaden the definition of cinematic perception beyond the mere sensation of the material properties of the image. Applying a definition of cinematic perception that includes seeing the fictional diegesis in the cinematic representation renders a mental entity as causal factor of emotional responses unnecessary. Turvey argues that when the spectator is able to regard the cinematic representation as the fictional diegesis he is also able to respond emotionally and directly to it without the need of a special, mental event or mechanism to explain his ability to do so. “The spectator then can be conceived of as responding with emotion to a fiction film upon the basis of his direct perception of the fictional diegesis in the concrete cinematic representation.” This is not to deny that cognitive processes play a role in responding

149 This definition of cinematic perception is more fitting to abstract avant-garde film than anything out of Hollywood.
150 See also my previous discussion on the aspect of perception in chapter 2.1.
152 Ibid., 455.
emotionally to fiction film, but to conceptualize all cognitive processes involved in the diverse emotional responses to fiction film in terms of thoughts seems incorrect.\footnote{Murray Smith argues that ‘seeing’ is not sufficient to explain emotional responses to fiction, because responding emotionally to what we see involves contextualization and interpretation; cognitive activities which Smith calls ‘thoughts’ (Murray Smith, “Imagining from the Inside,” in Film Theory and Philosophy, eds. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 426-427). However, to understand all cognitive processes as ‘thoughts’ eventually leads us to understand other cognitive processes such as perception, apperception, recognition, comprehension, mental imagery, etc. as thoughts. Clearly, this overly simplifies the matter and is not sufficiently explanatory.}

Furthermore, a broader definition of cinematic perception is also able to include extra-diegetic properties and features outside the fictional world. Viewers are able to respond emotionally to features of the film which exist outside of the fiction. The distinction between emotional responses to the content of the fictional world and emotions that have the film itself as object is not as clear cut as it might seem. Carl Plantinga labels emotions that have as their object the film itself \textit{artifact emotions}. Reactions of this type include forms of enjoyment, admiration and astonishment related to technical qualities of the film. For example, the thrill of a swooping camera motion over the edge of a skyscraper or amazement at the wonderful complexity and texture of a CG alien landscape.\footnote{Ed Tan, \textit{Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film} (New York: Routledge, 2011), 64.} Emotional responses to the fictional world are labeled \textit{fiction emotions}—e.g. feeling for a character’s plight or being dumbfounded by the intricacies of an unfolding murder plot.\footnote{This experience of unfathomable scale and magnitude can be compared with Immanuel Kant’s view on those experiences that exceed the capacities of the imaginative representation: Immanuel Kant, \textit{Critique of the Power of Judgment} [1790], trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 131-132, 141. | I refrain from using the term ‘sublime’ in this context, because it carries a whole set of associated philosophical issues that I cannot address here. Moreover, the term ‘awe’ seems more clearly to denote actual experience than the theory-laden concept of the sublime.} Although analytically distinct, these two categories also merge in the actual viewing experience. The relation between artifact and fiction emotions becomes more apparent in the analysis of film in which these types are both prevalent and closely intertwined. This is a good point to start our focus on the immediacy of fiction film in relation to the experience of awe.

Awe can be regarded as an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that overwhelm current mental structures.\footnote{Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, “Approaching Awe, a Moral, Spiritual, and Aesthetic Emotion,” \textit{Cognition and Emotion} 17, no. 2 (2003): 297-314.} Reviewing literature from different fields of study, Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt conclude that theorists across disciplines agree that awe involves being in the presence of something powerful. Awe involves a difficulty in comprehension and is often accompanied by feelings of confusion, surprise and wonder.\footnote{Keltner and Haidt, “Approaching Awe,” 307-312.} Various components of the experience of awe include passivity, heightened attention, and a diminished self.\footnote{Ibid., 303.} Keltner and Haidt propose that prototypical awe involves two prominent features: vastness and accommodation.\footnote{Plantinga, \textit{Moving Viewers}, 74. | There are emotional responses to the emotions a spectator experiences during film viewing, those are called \textit{meta-emotions}.} Vastness refers to the perceptual experience of being in the presence of something much larger than the self or one’s frame of reference. It is often a matter of physical
size, but may also involve something immense in complexity, ability, or social bearing. Perceptual vastness describes any experience of a certain stimulus that challenges one's accustomed frame of reference in some dimension. The expansion of one's frame of reference requires the experiencer to adjust his or her mental structures and thus stimulating a need for accommodation. Accommodation refers to the need to accommodate the challenge to or negation of mental structures when one fails to make sense of something vast. Hence, awe excites modification of mental structures and to update mental schemas. Vastness and accommodation are the defining features of awe; they distinguish it from other emotions, such as, happiness, admiration, and terror. These descriptions of awe are supported by outcomes of empirical research.

In this section, I attempt to strengthen the argument that a broader use of the concept cinematic perception – involving seeing the fictional diegesis in the filmic representation – contributes to a better understanding of direct emotional responses generated by vivid visual images and aural sensation. The sensatory nature of the film has a direct appeal to spectator's perceptual competences. Spectator's experiences depend in large part on perceptual skills developed outside as well as inside the movie theatre. An example of perceptual skill developed in childhood is the ability to perceive three-dimensional depth. People who are stereoblind are incapable of perceiving stereoscopic depth and often use other methods to provide depth cues, such as motion parallax, perspective and shading. These depth cues are also applied by filmmakers to provide information about depth. Furthermore, the different elements of filmic style – including cinematography, editing, lightning and sound – exert considerably influence over the ways in which the content of the frame is interpreted. Perceptual perspective shifts enable changes in the spatial relationship between the viewer and the viewed image. Stylistic changes have a significant impact on how we perceive and experience the images on the screen. Thus, study of perception plays a significant role for understanding the way spectators appreciate and experience movies. This will be illustrated by an analysis of Alfonso Cuaron's Oscar-winning Gravity (2013); a film characterized by its stunning visual effects and awarded for its cinematographically high quality.

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162 Shiota and Keltner, “The Nature of Awe.” As argued in the former sections, emotions involve multiple components. In this section I mainly focus on perception as aspect of awe, but do not reject the idea that the experience of awe includes imagination as well.
163 Plantinga, Moving Viewers, 113.
166 Jane Stadler “Intersubjective, Embodied, Evaluative Perception: A Phenomenological Approach to the Ethics of Film,” Quarterly Review of Film and Video 19, no. 3 (2002), 239.
Gravity is cinematographically unlike what we had seen on a cinema screen before and it has one of the best uses of 3D in a life-action movie with computer generated imagery. The story is about a medical engineer Ryan Stone (played by Sandra Bullock) and an astronaut Matt Kowalski (played by George Clooney) who work together to survive in space after their shuttle has been destroyed by space debris. The movie features a fictionalized version of the Kessler Syndrome: a collision between objects in low Earth orbit creates space debris that could cause a chain reaction which would increase the chance of more collision and thus more space debris. Eighty of its almost ninety minutes of the film is set in space, at a distance from the earth such that it presents a truly magnificent image. Earth’s constant presence might serve to remind us of where we come from. However, filming in space unavoidably entails many difficulties—consider the logistics—which is why CGI is used to create the setting. For the scenes set in space, only the actors’ faces come from live-action photography. Everything else, about eighty percent of the film, is photo-realistic CGI. The production of this film was challenging. To create the illusion of movement in zero gravity, the camera had to move around the actors. For this, the visual-effects team developed a new technology: a camera attached to a huge robot-arm. This is one of the most important achievements the designers came up with, because its uses are capable of creating amazing effects which can engender powerful perceptual experiences in audience.

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The film begins with a black screen with white text which tells us that life in space is impossible. This is accompanied by aggravating sound climaxing into a vibrating drone. Then we see Earth from outer space and hear voices from a distance, slowly becoming louder. The camera moves and pans very slowly, giving the impression that the earth turns. A white dot is slowly moving towards the camera and into focus (see figure 3).

![Figure 3 – opening scene *Gravity*](image)

The camera, slowly moving, centers on the space shuttle which is upside down and an astronaut is floating around it. Both the air ship in the foreground and the earth in background in sharp focus yield extreme depth of field, because the distance between the space shuttle and Earth appears to be enormous. The movement of the camera makes the objects in the foreground move faster than the earth in the background and so creates the motion perspective effect. The movement of the camera thus allows the viewers to perceive the incredible distance between Earth and the space shuttle. The depth of field is even more enhanced by the 3D technology. For a 3D effect to be really noticeable, distant objects as well as close objects are required. The depth of field and deep focus in *Gravity* is large enough for the 3D effect to be apparent to its viewers. Regrettably, I am unable to demonstrate 3D effects in a 2dimensional text. However, in the following images the depth of field can be demonstrated by the motion perspective effect. The objects in the foreground, the cord and Dr. Stone, seem to move faster than the objects in the distance, Dr. Kuwoski and even further Earth (see figure 4).

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Motion perspective makes other depth cues available to the spectator, such as occlusion and relative size. The moving camera generates occlusions and disocclusions of far objects by near ones. The objects and their textures move at a speed proportional to their physical distance from the camera and their angle from the camera. In the images above, Dr. Stone blocks our view on her colleague and they both partly hide Earth from view. The information of the spatial relations provided here shows that Dr. Stone is closer to the camera than Dr. Kuwoski, and, due to their partial occlusion of the earth, the spectator perceives depth. Motion perspective is pertinent in *Gravity*. It not only enhances depth, but also generates an impression of zero gravity.
When fast moving space debris collides with the space shuttle, Dr. Stone is attached with her cord to a beam that starts rotating with an incredible speed. The camera centers on her and the beam first, showing the movements of both Dr. Stone and the beam with space debris around her. Then the camera moves closer to Dr. Stone and stays directed at her. The camera keeps up with the rotating movement in a fast pace which renders the impression of self-movement, which engages the physicality of the spectator. The technical movement of the camera in combination with the physical movement of the character may affect viewers’ physiology directly. This may even initiate motion sickness, dizziness and nausea. After a few rotations, Dr. Stone detaches herself and the camera stops turning and centers on Dr. Stone orbiting in space; unable to stop herself from drifting away into the dark, increasing the distance between her and Earth. The infinite space around the astronaut makes her appear small and, more appropriately, lost in space.

With an impression of the distances between the characters near the space ship and Earth, the size of our planet appears to be incredible. This might induce in the spectator feelings of diminutiveness and meaninglessness. These feelings may be increased by the affective physical and visceral responses. The uncontrollability of Dr. Stone’s non-stop orbiting body may elicit motor mimicry. Motor mimicry or motor simulation models hold that observation of an action in another person triggers activation of matching neural substrates in the spectator through which the action can be understood. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) experiments demonstrate that the vision of an action directly activates motor programs for executing similar actions due to a connection between vision and action occurring in the somatosensory and premotor areas. Seeing another person perform an action can result in brain activity in the areas associated with those actions, performed by the mirror neuron system. It is not conclusive that there is a causal link between activation in the associated areas and the performance of similar actions. However, many researchers agree that activity of mirror neurons leads to an improved understanding of the action perceived and facilitates motor mimicry and imitation. Thus, seeing Dr. Stone rapidly rotating can activate our premotor and somatosensory areas which might lead to motor mimicry: having a sense of what it is like to flip over and over uncontrollably. This in turn can intensify other responses, such as affective mimicry, motor empathy and alignment with Dr. Stone. These responses are often automatic, immediate and reflexive.

Other features of the film may also affectively contribute to spectators’ responses. On the non-diegetic level, the music score of the scene in which Dr. Stone rotates increases in volume and the bass-rhythm matches the character’s movements. The music itself is a bass-heavy orchestration.
punctuated with jarring noise electronics. It swells, gaining momentum through crescendo waves of pulsing beats and string. A high pitch tone increasing in volume accompanies the diegetic pitch of Dr. Stone’s exclamations. Other diegetic sounds we can hear are the collision of objects: a low, deep, muffled bass, and a fast-paced heartbeat. In space there is no air to transmit vibrations, so the only way sound can travel through space is by touch. There is only Dr. Stone’s voice, her heartbeat and breathing and the sounds transmitted through her body when she touches something. This suggests that spectators share Dr. Stone’s auditory experience, we hear it as if from the inside. This is even more obvious when the spectator shares her point of view. The camera seems to move through her visor and pans so that spectators see what Dr. Stone sees, facilitating affective alignment.\textsuperscript{177} All these filmic features may elicit strong affective responses, such as visceral stimulation through startle and shock-effects, affective and motor mimicry, and auditory entrainment.\textsuperscript{178} These affective responses may serve as intensifiers and enablers of emotion.

After \textit{Gravity’s} first long take—possibly one of the longest tracking shots in Hollywood history—there is ample time to recover. For immersed spectators, the first cut feels like the first moment to take a good breath. The camera slows its movements and there are less objects and action onscreen. Instead, there is only Earth and a small white dot which appears to be Dr. Stone, moving towards the camera’s position (see figure 5). The film provides the spectator with a few seconds to take in the view before music swells again and the camera joins Dr. Stone’s rotating movements again, contributing to the tension through the film. Throughout the film, action scenes are alternated with calm, at times eerily quiet, scenes. However, the emphasis lies on the film’s perceptual spectacle and spectators barely have time to register the sensory information and to process it. It is a rollercoaster ride in 3D.\textsuperscript{179}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{gravity.png}
\caption{Earth Gravity}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{178} For a more complete overview of affective trajectories, see Plantinga, \textit{Moving Viewers}, 140-150.
\textsuperscript{179} Andrea Mandell, “‘Gravity’ is Floating on Advance Praise and Awe”, \textit{USA TODAY} (website), October 3, 2013.
All these filmic features combined are able to elicit emotional responses. The response I am interested in is awe. *Gravity* is awe-inspiring because the perceptual experience can be overwhelming, with moments of almost unbearable emotional intensity. It is beautifully shot, and the view of Earth from outer space is magnificent. Moreover, the scenery is amazingly photorealistic. This realistic depiction of space physics is in itself a cinematic achievement. Seeing those stunning CG images might induce artifact emotions such as wonder and admiration. However, the overall visceral experience and the fast paced thrills might be too strong to form cohesive thoughts about the technical competencies of the film crew. Spectators’ basic visual system is not cognitively penetrable and the sensual experience does not involve processes that make use of explicit background knowledge about the way the film is made or about space physics. *Gravity* thus grants spectators a view of Earth from outer space which reminds them of their individual insignificance enclosed by the infiniteness of the universe. The majestic size Earth and the incredible distance between Earth and the astronauts is almost impossible to grasp. These features can be understood in terms of vastness and accommodation involved in awe. The emotion of awe involved in seeing *Gravity* is a response to perceptually vast stimuli—such as Earth, the expansiveness of the universe, the intense action scenes—that might eventually overwhelm current mental structures. Spectators inspired with awe may feel confused and surprised, but also anxious and afraid for being insignificant in the endless space. The strong visceral feelings distract us from our own self-concepts and make it difficult to make sense of the perceptual information.

Because there are not necessarily any conscious and deliberate mental processes involved in responding with awe to *Gravity*—the emotional experience is mainly sensual and perceptual—there is no need to explain our emotional responses to this film in terms of thoughts. Even if there are high-level cognitive processes involved in responding with awe to *Gravity*, to label these processes ‘thoughts’ seems incorrect. Moreover, thoughts do not appear to be sufficient to explain emotional responses to perceptually vast stimuli. Taking recourse to the concept of evaluative judgment, the emotion of awe can be understood as an appraisal of perceptual vast stimuli which is evaluated as beyond comprehension. Oxymoronically, this implies that the evaluative judgment of the scene escapes valuation in terms of available personal hierarchies and is valuable as such. Employing a broad definition of cinematic perception allows for a better understanding diverse range of emotional responses to fiction film. As I hope to have demonstrated, perception plays an important role for appreciating fiction film and should not be neglected in film studies.

[4.2] Imagination and Engagement with Fiction Film

In this section I will examine in what ways imagination enables spectators to engage with characters in fiction film. As I have already discussed in the chapter 2.2, I do not claim that imagination is

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180 Zenon W. Pylyshyn theorizes about the visual system and develops an interesting information-processing account in *Seeing and Visualization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
necessary for responding emotionally to fiction. My aim in the current section is to clarify what role our imaginative faculty plays for responding emotionally to fiction film. My focus is on the imaginative capacities of spectators to engage with characters, and thus involve cognitive components. In order to engage with characters imaginatively we must have a basic understanding of their situation, goals, beliefs and desires. It is sometimes said that film viewing does not require imagination because the perception of characters and setting in film excludes any inference to imaginative activities. Although film is a sensual medium and viewers do not need to imagine character’s appearances or settings in the same way as literature requires its readers to do, our imaginative faculty does allow us to become involved with film and respond to it. Namely, fiction films induce a wide range of imaginative states including propositional imaginings and empathic states. Because we need a mental representation of what is happening to the characters and what their circumstances are imagination plays a significant role for understanding and appreciating fictional narrative and characters.

It has been argued that imagination is required in order to appropriately respond to fiction film, that it is how we engage with fictional characters. Character engagement can be understood as a pattern of mental activities and responses viewers have in relation to film characters. As I have argued in the first part, imagination comes in different kinds involving different kinds of effort. Therefore, we need to distinguish one particular kind of imagining from the other. In this section, I will not pay attention to the pre-cognitive forms of character engagement, such as motor mimicry, affective mimicry, emotional contagion, and facial feedback. Although I do think they play a significant role in our engagement with characters, imagination is not required for those empathic processes. Ian Ravenscroft distinguishes between expression-first empathy mechanisms and attribution-first empathy mechanisms. The expression-first model refers to the imitation of expressed emotions which consequential facilitates the experience of the expressed emotion in the observer. This does not require imaginative acts. Attribution-first mechanisms are highly cognitive. For they take as input the description of another person’s situation and yield as output an attribution of emotion to that person. It is this second mechanism that is of particular interest.

Ravenscroft argues that by way of mental imitation of the other person’s attributed emotion, the consumer of fiction responds with a corresponding empathic emotional expression. However, he does not think mental imitation of an attributed emotional expression is the most common way in which spectators engage with characters of fiction films, because film viewers can imitate the emotions expressed on character’s faces directly. Ravenscroft admits that expression-first mechanisms are plausible for some forms of fiction, but there are cases in which highly cognitive processes are required for emotional responses to occur. With regard of the imaginative

181 Plantinga, Moving Viewers, 30.
182 Ravenscroft, “Fiction, Imagination, and Ethics,” 75.
184 Ravenscroft, “Fiction, Imagination, and Ethics,” 79.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid., 79-80.
capabilities, those cases are significant. Unlike Ravenscroft, however, I do not think we use our imagination in order to imitate the mental lives of other persons. Imagination described as a capacity to reenact the mental states of others overlooks the distinction between imagining how-it-is and the imaginative activity of perspective-taking. Moreover, it fails to acknowledge cases in which the result of our imaginative reenactment of the mental states of others goes wrong. Like when we misattribute mental states.

Taking into account the above consideration, another distinction needs to be made: imagining having an emotion and imagining how-it-is (see chapter 2.2). Imagining having the same emotional experience attributed to the character is different from imagining how-it-is for a character and accordingly responding emotionally to the imagined content. To distinguish between these kinds of imagining is important. First of all, it allows us to understand cases in which there is incongruence of spectator’s emotions and the assumed emotions characters experience. Furthermore, how we emotionally respond depends mostly on the content of what we imagine. This content is provided by the fictional narrative, supplemented with our own wishes, desires, beliefs, and values. Propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires can be imaginatively recreated to predict characters’ behavior. Nevertheless, sometimes we fail to simulate the characters’ beliefs and desires and hence attribute the wrong mental states to the characters. Emotional engagement with fictional characters should thus be seen as aspects of the manner of one’s imagining, and the emotion is not necessarily part of the content of what is imagined. One version of the simulation theory holds that responding emotionally to fiction involves, first, imagining that the fiction is fact and, additionally, imagining having the same emotions as the character has. I do not reject that it is possible to assess such imaginations, but, as I have argued in the third chapter, we do not need to imagine believing fiction for fact in order to respond emotionally.

I will now return to the question of in what ways the imaginative faculty allows spectators to engage with fiction and fictional characters and consequentially respond emotionally. Rather than rigidly defining the various concepts related to imagination and engaging with fiction, I attempt to illustrate how imaginative processes might enhance our engagement with fiction film. First, spectators adopt a variety of attitudes or stances or change their cognitive attitude. They are invited or challenged to assume or suppose that the fictional depiction occurs. For example, when watching Guardians of the Galaxy (James Gunn, 2014) spectators most likely do not dispraise the movie because there can be no such creatures as talking raccoons, walking human-like trees or green women with pointy ears. What we know to be real outside the fictional world does not regularly apply to fantasy film and is also mostly irrelevant for spectator's engagement with many

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188 Richard Moran discusses the issues concerning imagining emotions and imagining content: pp 89. This issue is also addressed in Currie and Ravenscroft, Recreative Minds, 189-191.
190 Alex Neill, “Fiction and the Emotions”, 10-11; Susan Feagin, Reading with Feeling.
other fiction films. Notwithstanding, fiction films can be criticized for untruthful depiction of situations we may encounter in or know from our own experiences. Films can also fail to involve spectators in the story due to bad actor-performances, ill-matched music, or all-round meager technical quality. Such factors may prevent spectators from engaging with the fictional world. An example of when ‘character disengagement’ might occur is the portrayal of a bad movie accent. In Ron Howard’s *Far and Away* (1992), Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman make their best effort to fake an Irish accent. Unfortunately, the result is less than perfect.\(^\text{191}\) Of course, for spectators who do not judge their accents as false, character engagement might still occur. Once spectators have immersed themselves into the fiction film—by means of adopting a different kind of attitude, enjoying a comfortable position, making sure they won’t be distracted by phones or physical disturbances—they can allow themselves to get caught up into the fictional world.

Second, when immersed in the fictional world, imagination can play different roles. First, imagination enhances character understanding and facilitates character engagement by making it possible to shift to a character’s perspective or to imagine how-it-is for a character. Improving one’s understanding of characters might be helpful to anticipate decisions or actions the characters make. Additionally, these imaginative processes can lead spectators to sympathize or empathize with characters, or they can make spectators identify with characters. I will deal with the concepts of sympathy and empathy in the next chapter. However, these concepts should not be confused with the concept of identification. According to Murray Smith, ‘identification’ is built on three different concepts: recognition, alignment, and allegiance.\(^\text{192}\) These concepts are systematically related and constitute the ‘structure of sympathy’. In order to understand the different types of identification, we have to take into account that our imaginative faculty is flexible enough to switch between different modes of imagination and is not limited to only one process of identification. This allows us to shift through identifications with diverse positions and thus enhances subjective fluidity during the course of the narrative.\(^\text{193}\) The account of identification I advance is broad and does not apply to symmetrical identification alone. Identification is more accurately understood as a result than as a manner of imagination. Imagining *being* the fictional character involves imagining having the same psychological and physical traits and imaginatively standing in her position. Successfully imagining *being the character in the situation* is the strong version of identification.\(^\text{194}\) A weaker version of identification according to Smith is to imagine oneself in the situation.\(^\text{195}\) Unlike Smith, I think the activity of imagining oneself in the situation might lead to identification, yet is not in itself a form of identification. Let me illustrate this with an example. In the end scene of David Fincher’s 1995 film *Se7en*, detectives Mills (played by Brad Pitt) and Somerset (Morgan Freeman) escort the serial killer John Doe (played by Kevin Spacey) to the

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\(^{191}\) Think: leprechauns.

\(^{192}\) Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 74-77.

\(^{193}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{194}\) Ibid., 80.

\(^{195}\) Ibid.
location of the last two murders. Once they reach the desert outskirt of the city, a van approaches and is stopped at a distance by Somerset, which leaves Mills behind to cover Doe. While Somerset opens the delivered box, Doe talks about Mills’ wife and how he had envied him. As Somerset recoils in horror and runs towards Mills to tell him to throw his gun away, Mills realizes what fate has befallen his wife at the hands of Doe. Despite the pleading of Somerset, Mills is too devastated by the news of his wife’s pregnancy and death and empties his gun in Doe, completing the masterpiece of a serial killer. Spectators imagining what it would be like for detective Mills probably end up sympathizing with him and agreeing with his actions. However, imagining what oneself would do in that situation is not a form of identification. Spectators who judge it wrong to kill someone for whatever reason would probably not kill John Doe. They would inwardly scream to Mills and tell him to put his gun down, because he does not have the right to kill Doe. They could think that Mills should listen to Morgan Freeman, because Freeman is always right. Imagination in this example does not necessarily involve identification because the result of imagining oneself in that situation is incongruous with the action occurring onscreen. This can be the result of imaginative resistance, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Of course, by imagining oneself as the fictional character in that situation, spectators might improve their understanding of Mills and identify in some respect with Mills. Further, in thinking about what one would do in that situation, how terrible it would be to lose someone by the hands of a coldblooded murderer, and consequentially wish that Mills pulls the trigger, one’s narrative desire is satisfied and in this case might elicit feelings of delightful retribution. This is not the same as character desire and in many tragic fictional events narrative desire conflicts with character desire. A weaker version of identification holds that spectators (imagine that they) share some traits or situational characteristics or perspective with the character. It seems that this version allows for more diverse imaginative acts. To understand what the role is that imagination plays in identification, the question should be in what respects do spectators identify with characters? Berys Gaut distinguishes between different forms of imaginative identification: perceptual, affective, motivational, and epistemic. Given these distinctions between different forms of identification, its role for film-elicited emotions can only be understood by closer examination of the occurrences of identification. However, for the scope of this thesis I will mainly focus on empathy and sympathy in the fifth chapter.

The second function that our imaginative faculty can serve is to enable spectators to predict, anticipate, and desire possible narrative outcomes. Imagining-what-it-is is one form that imagination can play in engaging with the narrative. This does not necessarily involve character engagement. We can imagine what it is to float in space or to have a talking dog without the

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presence of character. Spectators can also imagine themselves in an onscreen situation in cases when they do not care about the characters or when there are no characters presented at that moment. For example, the opening-scene of Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980) is a long-shot from bird’s-eye perspective of a beautiful landscape: a lake, a pine forest and mountains.

![Figure 6 – opening scene The Shining](image)

A yellow car is driving on the road. Despite the suspenseful music, this scene might elicit strong feelings of *fernweh* (a desire to travel). However, this desire will likely be quickly reversed when spectators become aware of their safety at home.

Lastly, because watching fiction films involves different kinds of imagining with different kinds of effort and resources, emotional responses to fiction film are very diverse. One person may cry when little Simba loses his father in *The Lion King*, while someone else is simply annoyed by the melodrama of Disney-movies and that scene in particular. To understand the role imagination plays in the elicitation of emotions in relation to fiction film, we need to examine the instances and circumstances of film-elicited emotions. An analysis of film-elicited emotions, imagination, sympathy, and evaluative judgments will be offered in the fifth chapter. The account of emotions as evaluative judgments with respect of to the aspects of emotion can serve as a framework for analyzing what the object of spectators’ evaluative judgments are (perceptions or imaginations, intentionality); what kinds of evaluative judgments spectators make (evaluations and appraisals); and what kind of feelings these evaluative judgments involve.

**Conclusion**

It is beyond the scope this thesis to formulate a complete theory of character and fiction engagement. However, I hope to have shown that imagination plays a significant and varied role in our emotional responses to fiction film. Considering spectator’s emotions elicited by fiction film I
conclude that they involve several aspects of emotions mentioned in the first chapter. For this reason, I think we can safely assume that spectator’s responses are full-fledged emotions. We might even conclude that examining emotional responses to fiction provides valuable insights into our emotions in general. In the next part, I will propose to understand emotions as evaluative judgments in order to understand the relation between film-elicited emotions and moral judgments. My main approach remains understanding film-elicited as evaluative judgments, involving the earlier mentioned aspects. However, I do not claim this is the only way to understand film-elicited emotions. I do contend that this perspective highlights otherwise often overlooked features of the relation between emotion and film—phenomena that are primarily studied within the burgeoning field of moral psychology.
Chapter 5: Movies, Emotions, and Morality

In this last chapter I will examine the relation between film-elicited emotions and moral responsiveness. Herein, I take ‘moral responsiveness’ as an umbrella term to refer to responses considered to fall into our moral categories, or related to our moral concerns. This means it pertains to evaluative judgments that are only distinguished from non-moral responses by association to situations and topics associated to the moral domain—the extent of which will be explicated below. I will first provide a brief introduction to current research into the relation emotion and moral judgments, wherein I present three general claims regarding to this relation. In the second section I will further specify how ‘morality’ can be conceptualized, and introduce the notion of ‘paradigm cases’ for relating morality to film-elicited emotion. Thirdly, I will provide a detailed analysis of specific scenes from the film *The Road* (John Hillcoat, 2009). For this analysis I will make use of the concepts of empathy and sympathy. After having presented these illustrations I will return to the three claims about the relation between emotions and moral judgments, where I will discuss them consecutively in light of the analysis of *The Road*-scenes.

I do not claim that my topic is foreign to film studies. Film theorists such as Murray Smith, Noël Carroll and Carl Plantinga have already investigated moral structures in fiction film. However, my approach might be slightly different because I am more interested in spectator's responses than in the moral orientation of fiction films itself. For this reason, assumptions like “guys with white hats are morally good and guys wearing black clothes are morally bad” will not play a significant role in my discussion of moral responsiveness to fiction film. By investigating film-elicited emotions and moral judgments related to those emotions, I hope to provide insights into the ways in which film-elicited emotions can contribute to the moral attitude of the spectator.

[5.1] Brief Introduction to the Research into Emotions and Moral Judgment

The relation of emotion and morality has received increasing attention in the last decade.199 With the arrival of virtue-theoretical approaches the dominance of Kantian and utilitarian ethics, which held no place for the emotions, became less apparent. Well-informed research into how people make moral judgments—what has been incorporated into the ‘cognitive science of morality’—currently still progresses. The question of how people make moral judgments has given rise to new ‘sentimentalist’ approaches. Philosophically, sentimentalism is often contrasted to rationalism. Sentimentalist approaches assume that the human capacity to feel can lead to truth.200 This assumption was most important in morality. Whereas rationalists believed in a morality based upon analytic principles, the sentimentalists thought that a person could access a moral theory derived

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from intrinsic human nature that each person possessed. These views are incorporated in the field of moral psychology. The discipline of moral psychology is a hybrid mode of inquiry, informed by both ethical theory and psychological research. This interdisciplinary approach of moral psychology further enables researchers to freely draw on resources from well beyond the conventional confines of their field.201 The theories and models developed within the discipline are based on empirical data from neuroscience, sociology, and developmental psychology.

Within the field of moral psychology, the question of how we make moral judgments has been approached from different angles. For example, recent evidence from social experiments suggests that moral judgment is more a matter of emotion and affective intuition than deliberate reasoning.202 Furthermore, recent work in cognitive science, psychology and moral philosophy also indicates an important relationship between emotion and moral judgment. Research in those fields has consistently demonstrated the importance of emotion in everyday judgments, including moral judgment.203 Most current views of moral judgment hold that emotion plays an important role. However, the extent of this role is still debated. In the literature concerning emotions and morality there appear to be three general claims about the role of emotion in moral judgment in which the role of emotion is considered more or less important.204 The first and weaker claim is that emotions are related to, or co-occur with, moral judgment. The second claim holds that emotions play an active role in generating and altering moral judgments. The third and stronger claim entails that emotions moralize everyday judgments that were previously assumed to fall outside the moral domain. In the current chapter, these claims serve as a general framework for analyzing the relation between film-elicited emotions and moral judgments, and what role film-elicited emotions play in our moral lives. Before examining an instance of this relation, a basic understanding of the main concepts is required. Therefore, I will first clarify several concepts generally applied in an analysis of morality and emotions.205

[5.2] Morality, Moral Emotions, and Moral Judgments

Before analyzing the role that emotional responses to fiction film play in our moral lives—moral emotions, moral judgments, moral behavior and moral responsiveness—we need to have at least some general notion of what ‘morality’ is. There are different ways to improve our understanding of morality. First, an examination of definitions of morality might help us to get an idea of the domain of morality. However, the breadth and diversity of the term make it difficult to define morality and to distinguish the moral domain from the non-moral. For example, on the one hand, there is a

204 Ibid., 170.
205 The focus of this thesis is on the relation between emotional responses to fiction film and morality. It must be noted that I refrain from developing a normative theory, but I do make use of literature that is grounded in social-psychological research into normative issues.
The descriptive definition of morality which is used to refer to a code of conduct put forward by any actual group, including society as a whole. On the other hand, a normative definition of morality is used to refer to a code of conduct that would be put forward by all rational persons. The descriptive use of “morality” results in a denial that there is a universal morality. In both definitions, morality seems to be concerned with a ‘code of conduct’ or a set of rules. However, what these codes of conduct entail is necessarily explicit, and is different for distinct groups and cultures. Therefore, inquiry into the various codes of conduct, reactions, and judgments customarily deemed to fall within the moral domain would be required to gain further insight into the nature of morality.

Second, we can focus on the judgments about certain actions, people, and events that are deemed to concern morality. Such judgments can be considered as expressions of particular norms. A general account of morality is that it is concerned with norms, where norms are construed as rules about how we should act or what kind of people we should be. Furthermore, moral norms are often distinguished from conventional norms. However, following a descriptive definition of the term, what counts as moral depends on whether one considers it as morally relevant; there is no a priori division between what counts as moral and what is considered mere conventional. People generally distinguish moral from conventional norms based on a strong intuition about what can be considered as a moral or conventional transgression. On what grounds their intuitions are based and how they distinguish the moral from the non-moral domain is still at issue. For these reasons, I favor a relativist view of morality which holds that moral attitude is relative to certain situations, populations, and cultures. The normative question whether something should be considered as moral or conventional is a rich and fascination topic, but it is beyond the scope of this text.

However, rather than stage an attempt to define morality in terms of the articulation of specific rules or norms, it might be easier to find a different way to help us understand morality. Hence, the third and last approach to understand ‘morality’ that I will mention here is the

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211 Although I will not enter any further into the meta-ethical discussion on the status of moral judgments, it must be noted that my position is also in support of the thesis of meta-ethical relativism, which states that: “The truth conditions of a moral judgment depend on the context in which that judgement is formed.” (Prinz, The Emotional Construction of Morals, 174.)
investigation of the emotional responses and the evaluative judgments generally assumed to fall within the moral domain. By analyzing the occurrences of moral judgments and moral emotions it might become easier to understand the domain of morality and distinguish it from the non-moral. A central focus of such an analysis is to characterize the responses and judgments that are appropriate or fitting to the situation on grounds of paradigm cases.\textsuperscript{213} Judgments and emotional responses associated with paradigm cases of moral categories involve judgments concerned with rights and justice, autonomy, dignity, the social, communal or natural order, humanity and welfare.\textsuperscript{214} When an action or event is considered to fall within the domain of one of these categories, it is often judged in terms of “right” or “wrong,” “good” or “bad,” “just” or “unjust.” Such judgments contain strongly felt responses that involve strong attributions of valence. Appreciating and understanding the moral dimensions of emotion offers interesting insights into their depth and meaning for our moral attitudes. The account of emotions as evaluative judgments might serve as a comprehensive starting point from which to congregate emotions and morality. After all, the emotions have moral significance not just because they take place in morally charged situations, but because they are constituted by judgments that are through and through value laden.\textsuperscript{215}

Moral emotions are not distinct from non-moral emotions in general, but can be considered to emerge from them.\textsuperscript{216} Hence, moral emotions can be understood as emotions that detect or promote conduct that violates or conforms to a moral rule, and thus contain, as part of their conceptual structure, evaluative judgments that something is morally wrong or right.\textsuperscript{217} Moral emotions involve a wide variety of very different kinds of evaluative judgments that are often based or grounded upon a moral principle or moral rules. A moral principle is one that tends to generalization and impersonality. Moral principles serve as implicit background assumptions in our deliberations about what to do. They are treated as reasonable grounds for more specific moral rules and judgments.\textsuperscript{218} Moral rules are often considered to derive from moral principles, and are—in contrast to conventional rules—unconditionally obligatory, generalizable, and impersonal insofar as they stem from concepts of welfare, justice, and rights.\textsuperscript{219} Whereas non-moral emotions are ‘just personal,’ moral emotions are often considered to be universal. However, with regard of paradigm cases of morality they depend on the context and object of emotion to be characterized as a moral emotion. As such, moral emotions contain moral judgments, are either constitutive of moral

\textsuperscript{213} Ronald De Sousa has developed an influential analysis of moral socialization of children by means of “paradigm scenarios” (Ronald De Sousa, \textit{The Rationality of Emotion} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 182).

\textsuperscript{214} See: Prinz, \textit{The Emotional Construction of Morals}.

\textsuperscript{215} See Solomon, \textit{True to Our Feelings}, 217.

\textsuperscript{216} Noël Carroll, “Movies, the Moral Emotions, and Sympathy,” \textit{Midwest Studies in Philosophy} 34, no. 1 (September 2010), 7.

\textsuperscript{217} Solomon, \textit{True to Our Feelings}, 213-215; |Prinz \textit{The Emotional Construction of Morals}, 68-76.


judgments, or causally related to moral judgments. For now, it may be easiest to define moral emotions as those that are associated with paradigm cases of moral categories: justice, welfare, and rights. Now we have some basic understanding of morality and its dimensions I will point out the significant role that moral emotions play in responding to fiction.

[5.3] Empathy and Sympathy: The Road

In my analysis of the relation between film-elicited emotions and moral responsiveness I will mainly focus on spectator’s engagement with fictional characters. Emotional responses to fictional characters can influence our moral judgments of the fictional characters and narrative in different ways. I will examine those ways with regard of the aforementioned claims about the relation of emotion and moral judgments. I will employ the concepts of ‘empathy’ and ‘sympathy’ to illustrate the significance of imagination for moral responsiveness to fiction film. Since the terms empathy and sympathy are frequently used interchangeably, it is important to briefly clarify them. Considering the scope of this chapter, I will draw a simplified distinction between empathy and sympathy following Alex Neill. It must be noted that empathy has been defined in two ways; namely, (a) the cognitive awareness of another person’s internal states, and (b) the vicarious affective response to another person. These different types are blended in the emotional response to fiction, strengthening and supporting each other. However, they can be analytically distinguished in order to examine each type in closer detail. It is the first definition of empathy that is central to this chapter: empathic responses that are cognitive, and require an understanding of character’s situation.

According to Neill, empathy is essentially an imaginative activity that involves taking another’s perspective of things. By imaginatively representing the thoughts, beliefs, desires, and so on of a fictional character as though they are one’s own, one can come to share the feelings the characters are feeling. Empathizing with fictional characters thus involves imaginatively taking over the character’s perspective, to imagine the world or the situation the character is in from her point of view. By imagining from the inside, spectators achieve “internal understanding” of a character’s situation and consequently share the feelings the character feels. In empathy, we share congruent emotions with the character. Sympathy can be understood as feeling for the character: in sympathy

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220 “Moral judgment […] is normally multifaceted involving intrinsic motivation, belief, and emotion. A judgment that an action is morally wrong, for example, is normally (1) motivation of non-negligible force, (2) belief that the act is wrong, and (3) emotion that reinforces the motivation and the belief through its cognitive role in unifying these elements.” Richmond Campbell, “What is Moral Judgment?” The Journal of Philosophy 104, no. 7 (July 2007), 348-349.

221 Although sympathetic and empathic responses to fictional characters are important for our engagement with fictional works, these responses are clearly also prevalent in everyday life. Think of the pang of feeling that accompanies observing distress in a loved one, or being moved by of the plight of victims of a disaster, or even the glowing sense of admiration for a talented street musician.

222 Sklar, The Art of Sympathy in Fiction, 24.

223 Hoffman, Empathy and Moral Development, 29.

224 A comprehensive account of the different types of empathic responses in relation to (cinematic) anticipation can be found in Hanich, Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers, 180-195.

225 Neil, “Empathy and (Film) Fiction”, 185-191.
spectator's responses need not reflect what the character is feeling.\textsuperscript{226} Although the terms are somewhat different from each other, they are not exclusive: feeling sympathy for a character doesn't mean we cannot also experience empathy towards him or her.\textsuperscript{227} However, in what ways the notions are interrelated tends to vary in different fields of study.\textsuperscript{228} For example, it has been argued that empathy is a necessary precondition for sympathy, while others view sympathy as a significant component of empathy.\textsuperscript{229} In this thesis, and in relation to our emotional responses to fiction film, I will understand empathy as feeling with and sympathy as feeling for. The similarities and differences between these two forms of character engagement, and what role imagination plays, will become clear in examining their occurrences in responding emotionally to fiction film. I will illustrate that both sympathy and empathy play a significant role for spectator's moral responsiveness to fiction film. Furthermore, I hope to demonstrate the connection between certain types of empathic and sympathetic emotional response to fiction film, and the moral reflection that spectators may experience as a result of these emotional responses.

John Hillcoat’s \textit{The Road} (2009) focuses on two characters, father (played by Viggo Mortenson) and son (played by Kodi Smit-McPhee) who need to survive in a dangerous post-apocalyptic world while on the road towards the coast.\textsuperscript{230} The film opens with a flashback showing the bedroom where the man and his pregnant wife (played by Charlize Theron), are watching the first signs of the apocalypse. The scene then cuts to the present, showing a close-up of the man, implying that it was his flashback. The man wakes up and covers his son, sleeping in his dirty clothes and covered by a tarpaulin. He then walks towards what looks like the opening of their cave and looks outside; from his point of view we see a grey environment: rocky hills and dead trees. When his son wakes up and calls out to his father in distress, he walks quickly to him and comforts him. Then we see the man and his son walking with a shopping cart packed with blankets, crates and bottles. In a voice-over the man is telling of the catastrophes that happened, and that there is not much left in the greying and dying world that grows colder every day. There is scarcely any food left, some people have grouped up and resorted to cannibalism, while others have ended their own lives before falling prey to the cannibals. The music score of the film features both sad elegiac melodies with a soft and lighter touch—alluring, fleeting phrases of piano and violin—and eerie sound loops brimming with suspense and terror. The film is beautifully shot, depicting desolate sceneries of brush-fires on ashen soil, smoke-choked skies, and empty roads and buildings strewn with garbage and rubble.

\textsuperscript{226} Neil, “Empathy and (Film) Fiction”, 179.
\textsuperscript{227} Hanich, \textit{Cinematic Emotion}, 183.
\textsuperscript{228} Sklar, \textit{The Art of Sympathy in Fiction}, 25.
\textsuperscript{229} Empathy as precondition for sympathy, see: Candace Clark, \textit{Misery and Company: Sympathy in Everyday Life}, (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 34; | Sympathy as component for empathy: see Hoffman \textit{Empathy and Moral Development}, 95.
\textsuperscript{230} The names of the two main characters are not given; therefore I variously identify them as the “the man,” “the father,” “the boy,” and “the son.”
When father and son are in a barn looking for food, they see three bodies hanging on a rope. The father explains that they committed suicide. Then he shows his son his gun with two bullets left, one for the man, and one for the boy. The man demonstrates how the boy should hold his gun in his mouth so that he can end his own life when the situation asks for it. Close to a driveway tunnel they have to hide for a group of cannibals. One guy takes a leak in the trees where father and son are hiding. The father threatens to shoot the guy, but he is not impressed and persuades them to come with him instead. The father startles when the engine of the truck starts, which gives the guy a moment to grab the boy. Hastily, the father takes aim and shoots out the guy’s brains, leaving blood and brain splatter on his son’s hair and face. His father gently washes his son’s hair in a river and says matter-of-factly: “I’ll kill anyone who touches you, because that is my job.” Later he tells his son that there are not many “good guys” left and that they have to watch out for the “bad guys.” His son asks if they are still the “good guys” and if they always will be, and his father answers that they will always be. The son repeats this question after the following situation. They encounter cannibals who hold people for food in their basement. Some of those people are half-eaten already, their limbs missing. After entering the basement, those who can move try to hold the man; pleading for help. Instead of aiding them the father pushes them away and hurries out of the basement, locking it again. The son’s desire to be a “good boy” is even more apparent when they have eaten the food they found in a shelter. He asks his father if it is okay for them to take all the food, and if he should thank them.

It is obvious that the man loves his son very much. His face shows expressions of concern and affection. He takes very good care of his son, and it might even be said that he is overprotective. When they encounter an older man on the road, the father rejects his son proposal to give the old man some food. The boy wants to help the old man and his father gives in and asks the old man, who named himself Ely, if he wants to have dinner with them. When they are walking towards their camping site, the boy takes the Ely’s hand. His father tells him bluntly not to hold hands. At the campfire, the father keeps his son close behind him even though Ely is near blind and too old to do any harm. The father is not behaving warmheartedly towards the old man, who seems to be a kind but emotionally broken man. The next morning Ely walks away and the son blames his father that he doesn’t care, that he can’t tell the difference between the good guys and bad guys anymore. When they find shelter that night, the father attempts to comfort his son: he tucks him in, strokes his hair, and holds him tight.

At the coast they get robbed while the son is sleeping. The father is determined to get their belongings back. When they find the thief, the father threatens to kill him if he doesn’t give them all his stuff. The thief however doesn’t appear to be dangerous, and the sons pleads his father not to kill the man. The thief looks scared, and it seems that he regrets taking their belongings. The man orders the thief to take all his clothes off and to put them on the cart too. The thief begs for mercy—telling the man that he doesn’t want any trouble, and that he doesn’t have to do this—while he is undressing himself. Stripped off all his clothes, the thief weeps and says in a broken
voice that he was starving and that the father would have done the same. The next shot is a frontal view of father and son pulling the cart. The father angrily tells his son that he has to learn. The son replies: “But I don’t want to learn!” Then the father explains that because he’s not going to be around forever, he has to learn to take care of himself. The father coughs and struggles to keep to his feet. The boy looks over his shoulder with a sorrowful look in his eyes. The next shot shows the thief, just standing there naked, hopelessly crying over his fate.

Later the boy still sulks, he tells his father that they should have helped the thief and that he looked so scared. Then his father tries desperately to make his son understand that he is scared too, telling the boy that he doesn’t have to worry about everything. The man’s weathered face is in the center of the screen; his facial expression suggests how he must be feeling.

The sad musical tone matches the man’s emotional expression. Then he says: “Okay.” The next shot shows the father and son at the location where they had previously left the thief naked. Then we see a pile of clothes to which the boy adds a can of beans.
The description of these scenes seems sufficient to indicate how the film generates moral evaluative judgments. The film conveys important information about the inner lives of the characters, in particular of the father. His basic motivations and actions are made clear by his voice-over, shots from his point of view, flash-backs, and cues provided by the narrative context. The father’s voice over gives us information about his thoughts, desires, and hopes. He also explains what the context is—the danger of cannibals and starvation—and what their goal is: reaching the coast. The flashbacks showing his wife suggest that he thinks of her and misses her. The contrast between the colorful flashbacks and the grey present makes us aware of the grimness of his situation. Our attention is drawn, but not restricted, to the actions and expressions of the father; we also receive information about the inner life of the boy through dialogue, facial expression, and bodily gestures. Thus, performance, dialogue, voice-over, music, setting, and editing can all contribute to our sense of the characters’ subjectivity. With this information, we are primed to focus our attention on him and his son. This allows us to imagine the world and the situation the father and son are in from their perspective and, in doing so, achieve internal understanding. This makes it possible for us to empathize and sympathize with them.

The differences between these modes of character engagement are difficult to notice. However, one distinction seems to be of explanatory value. Empathic responses are other-focused, whereas sympathy involves self-focused responses. The account of emotions as evaluative judgments might help us understand this distinction. Other-focused responses are evaluations of the situation from the other’s perspective, while self-focused responses are evaluative judgments from one’s own perspective. Empathy involves spectators imagining situations from the father’s point of view: understanding what he feels, and consequently sharing in the feelings ascribed to him. The internal understanding we have of the father may cause us to experience congruent emotions, we feel what he feels. For example, when father and son are hiding from the cannibals, the father’s facial expression shows signs of fear and worry when looking at his son. We may feel fear with him when we imagine the situation from his perspective: apprehending how dangerous the cannibals are is sufficient to empathically experience fear.

However, if we are unable to imagine things from the father’s point of view we cannot respond empathically. For example, when the cannibal grabs the boy we may also respond differently. We can be angry at the cannibal for grabbing the innocent boy, or we can even be annoyed by the fact that the boy is whimpering and making so much noise that the other cannibals might hear them. These responses are not empathic because they are not shared mental states with the characters: they are not other-focused. Nonetheless, these responses can be considered as sympathetic responses. Sympathy does not necessarily have a relation to what the character is feeling, and is self-focused instead. We are making evaluative judgments about the events, situations, and characters from our own perspective. To have sympathy for the father, we need to have an attitude of care or concern toward him. We also have to evaluate him as representing a certain set of traits.
that can be conceived of as valuable.\textsuperscript{231} The man is presented as a loving husband and caring father. The signs of affections he shows for his son enhance our positive evaluation of him, and we may praise the man for taking care of his son. Sympathy involves a benevolent disposition toward the object of our attitude of concern.\textsuperscript{232} Hence, we want things to work out well for the father and son, because we are concerned about them. In other words, our sympathetic attitude toward father and son makes us anticipate their actions and events. Moreover, sympathy involves a heightened awareness of the suffering of father and son.\textsuperscript{233}

Whereas both empathy and sympathy can be viewed as valuable dispositions with regard to morally appropriate responses, my focus will be on sympathetic responses. Regarding moral responsiveness, I believe the investigation of sympathy may provide more interesting insights. Although, empathic responses often involve particular moral motivations, it also presents specific dilemmas concerning moral responsiveness.\textsuperscript{234} First, it requires accurate cognitive assessments of what the character is feeling, also called “empathic accuracy.”\textsuperscript{235} We often fail to adequately imagine the thoughts and feelings of the characters due to the lack of information the film provides us. This leads to inaccurate empathic responses. Failing to accurately infer the character’s thoughts and feelings leads to false views about the mental states of the character. Consequently, this leads to incongruent responses and incoherent judgments about the character’s behavior.\textsuperscript{236} Furthermore, in cases of misattribution or egoistic motives it is also difficult to notice when our responses are really empathic: instead of simulating the character’s beliefs and desires we hold on to our own.\textsuperscript{237} Second, empathic emotional responses to intense suffering can become too painful and intolerable. When we experience “empathic over-arousal” we can be motivated to create a psychological distance between us and the suffering characters, and this in turn moves us out of the empathic mode entirely.\textsuperscript{238} A third reason why I do not focus on empathy is that empathy can lead to biased responses toward the main character. Although this is often the intended result of filmic devices—narrative context, close-ups, character’s physical and psychological traits—empathic bias impacts on the moral orientation of a film, and subsequently poses significant dilemmas for the filmmakers.\textsuperscript{239} Empathic bias can both lead to alteration or affirmation of our evaluative judgments of the characters.

For example, in the scene in which father and son confront the thief we can be biased in favor of the father—who seems angry and

\textsuperscript{230} This is suggested by Smith, \textit{Engaging Characters}, 213-222.
\textsuperscript{231} Carroll, “Movies, the Moral Emotions, and Sympathy,” 16.
\textsuperscript{232} Sklar, \textit{The Art of Sympathy in Fiction}, 28.
\textsuperscript{233} Hoffman, \textit{Empathy and Moral Development}, 87-91.
\textsuperscript{234} William Ickes, \textit{Empathic Accuracy} (New York: Guilford, 1997).
\textsuperscript{237} Hoffman, \textit{Empathy and Moral Development}, 198-199.
\textsuperscript{238} Smith, \textit{Engaging Characters}, 213-222.
scared—can involve feelings of moral outrageousness directed against the thief, as empathic bias can intensify our congruent emotions.\textsuperscript{240} Empathizing with the father activates moral principles, and either directly or through these principles, influences moral judgment. In the case of empathic bias, the moral principle \textit{stealing is wrong} can serve as a justificatory ground for condemning the thief for taking the belongings of father and son. However, this response seems to neglect other conflicting moral principles applicable for the thief’s situation, such as \textit{caring or well-being}. Thus, empathy makes it difficult to take over another’s point of view than that of the ‘empathizee’ and discourages us to take a more objective perspective or switch between different perspectives.\textsuperscript{241}

Although empathy plays a significant role in our moral responsiveness, its complications for understanding emotional responses to fiction film also need to be taken into account—doing so here would exceed the length of this thesis.

As for sympathy, its range allows for an analysis of more diverse emotional responses and thus might enhance the cultivation and practice of our moral responsiveness. Because sympathy is self-focused, the emotional responses constituted by a sympathetic attitude for someone can teach us what is appropriate to feel, because we have to be prepared to detect the existence of a counter-perspective to that of the character.\textsuperscript{242} Sympathy can also involve deliberation and can lead to considerate or reasoned judgments due to a more distanced perspective. The thief in \textit{The Road} will help me illustrate the relation between sympathy, film-elicted emotions, and moral judgments.

\textbf{[5.4] Sympathy for a Thief: Three Claims}

\textit{The Road} presents the essence of a bond between father and son. Their concerns stripped down to bare survival, yet they remain the rare ones showing shreds of humanity. They try to hold on to their better nature amidst plundering cannibals and the ever-present threat of starvation. We have sympathy for the characters, because they can be considered as the ‘good guys’. The boy in particular seems to possess virtues that can be positively evaluated: comforting to the imagination and engaging our affective responses.\textsuperscript{243} In a world without hope, where society is divided into cannibals and those who suffer, his childish benevolence is a bright spot under grey circumstances. However, sympathizing with the characters involves a desire that they will survive. Imagining how it is for the characters in such a dispirited world makes us understand that other moral rules apply. Hence, we can apprehend that in order to survive in a post-apocalyptic world, charitable attitudes are less favorable. However, it is not easy to abandon certain beliefs and values, and becoming aware of being challenged to do so can excite emotions that are counterproductive for our

\textsuperscript{240} Hoffman, \textit{Empathy and Moral Development}, 206-217.

\textsuperscript{241} Note that this is an indirect critique of Carroll’s view that films are \textit{critically prefocused}. Films depicting moral dilemmas or portraying main characters with questionable moral compasses often require spectators to evaluate the narrative from different perspectives. Whereas Carroll is concerned with “normatively appropriate responses” to fiction film, I think taking into account the diverse emotional responses and spectator’s differences seems more fruitful to understand our emotional responses to fiction film (See Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Emotion,” in \textit{Emotion and the Arts}, eds. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 208-209.

\textsuperscript{242} Sklar, \textit{The Art of Sympathy in Fiction}, 32.

\textsuperscript{243} Hume, \textit{Enquiry of Human Understanding}, 6.
character engagement. The concept of ‘imaginative resistance’ can help explain that even when involved in the fictional world, we are constrained by particular beliefs and values. In order for narratives to succeed—to fill in gaps and respond emotionally to them—we often draw on our standard moral norms and convictions. Imaginative resistance also reveals the principled nature of a moral judgment and how hard it might be to change our attitudes in order to respond sympathetically to moral ambiguous characters. Thus, imagination with respect to moral attitudes involves more than adopting a different point of view: it also requires a total perspective of the situation and the consequences it entails.

Because our established ways of thinking may not be entirely accurate, we have to adopt new ways of thinking that are arrived at through our own imaginative capacity. When this succeeds, we can get involved in the fictional world and understand it from a different perspective. This allows us to take on different beliefs, moral standards, and attitudes appropriate—in the case for The Road—for a world doomed to end. Responding sympathetically in accordance with the moral standards of the fictional world can elicit feelings we would not have in real-life situations. However, it is questionable whether the post-apocalyptic fictional world has other moral standards that we have to apply. The question concerning moral standards is a recurring theme in The Road. The boy asks his father multiple times if they are still the ‘good guys’. His father cannot but affirm the question, even though his moral convictions seem to be restricted to their own survival. The divergence of their moral outlooks is the most apparent when they confront the thief. The father is not susceptible for the thief’s pleas for mercy, and appears to be coldhearted when demanding the thief to return their belongings, and every bit of his own. In contrast, the boy whimpers and appears to have pity for the thief. The boy does not seem to understand the importance of retrieving the cart with all their belongings. Even if he does by weighting the pros and cons of his father’s actions, helping the thief instead of making him suffer as a means to their own survival remains for him the proper thing to do. In this situation, shifting between sympathetic attitudes for the different characters can help us to evaluate the situation and its consequences for all three characters.

We can imagine how things must be for the father. His plight to take care of his son—to protect and raise him—can be apprehended as a heavy weight. He has responsibilities toward his son and must uphold them in order to set a good example. He also is the one who carries the burden of choice, and giving up is not an option: he must be strong for both of them. But he is scared too, and he worries how things will turn out for his son when he will be gone. He knows he is dying and the only wish he has is to reach the coast in the idle hope that there is a safe haven. Although his son might be a burden at times, he is also the reason to go on. The love he has for his

244 Murray Smith, Engaging Characters, p 63
boy is heartwarming. Yet we can also imagine how hard it must be for the thief. He is alone in a cruel world and he needs to survive. To survive, he needs to eat and that is why he stole from the father and son. Now imagine yourself to be in his shoes: walking the bleak sandy coastline with nothing but some threadbare clothes. You have been starving, lonely, cold, and scared for a long time. When you see an easy opportunity to get some food, would you just turn around? Note that perspective shifting makes it easier to understand the thief’s situation, but it does not necessarily evoke empathy or sympathy. By changing to a different perspective we can easily imagine what we would do in his shoes, but it does not follow that we also know what he would do or how he would feel. The film provides us with minimal information about the thief, making it difficult for us to simulate his mental states, and empathize with him accordingly. However, sympathy does not require us to imagine the situation from his perspective, but we can imagine ourselves in such a situation and acquire information about ourselves. We can use this information to estimate how it must be for him, evaluate him in light of this new acquired information differently, and consequently respond sympathetically. We can feel sorrow or pity for him. These emotions can change our moral responsiveness in different ways, depending on the intensity of our evaluative judgments of the actions and characters, and to which moral category they are to be applied. Let me now return to the claims about the role of emotion for our moral judgment, outlined in the beginning of this chapter.

First Claim: Emotions follow from moral judgment

Sympathy can help explain what role emotions play for our moral responsiveness to fiction film. I will attempt to illustrate this with the example of having sympathy for the thief. To have sympathy for the thief means that we evaluate him as presenting a set of traits that can be conceived of as morally valuable. Although this might seem problematic because the thief might appears to be lacking such traits, our imaginative capacity can make us place ourselves in his shoes to understand his situation and evaluate him more positively. We understand his hardships and realize why he stole the father and son’s belongings: he wants to survive. Shifting to a different attitude also allows us to evaluate him as a victim rather than as a transgressor. Sympathy for victims can be activated by a ‘general caring principle,’ which is an abstract, fundamental value that holds that we must always consider others. Sympathy can be regarded as a dispositional component for our evaluative judgments: a response-guiding mechanism. Having sympathy for the thief involves being concerned about his welfare. Evaluating the situation in relation to the thief’s welfare can evoke emotional responses: we can feel pity for the thief. These feelings can coincide with feelings of anger directed against the father. When the father demands him to give them all he has—including the clothes he is wearing—we can imagine how awful it must be for the thief. We can evaluate the father’s action as harsh, unfair, and humiliating: he makes the thief suffer even more.

248 Hoffman, Empathy and Moral Development, 224-225.
249 Hakemulder, The Moral Laboratory, 68.
Thus, his action can be considered as a transgression of our moral standards in the category justice or wellbeing and in that case as immoral. This moral judgment can trigger emotional responses corresponding to the evaluation: in this case it triggers anger. The emotional response falls into the moral domain and for that reason can be considered as a moral emotion: moral anger. The intensity of the emotion depends on how strong one’s moral convictions are. Having a strong moral conviction about welfare and human dignity makes one more likely to judge the father’s actions as immoral and could elicit strong feelings of moral anger. The precise role of emotions in this process is not entirely clear: it could also be that our moral judgments are caused by our evaluative judgments of the father’s actions. This is the second claim to examine.

Second Claim: Emotions amplify moral judgments
Let’s reiterate a sympathetic attitude for the thief. Evaluating the situation in terms of his welfare makes us apprehend his misfortune and suffering. Having sympathy for the thief evokes pity or sorrow. These emotions are evaluative judgments of the situation that are made with respect to one’s moral convictions. We are concerned about the thief’s welfare and in this situation his welfare is at stake. Our pity for the thief influences our moral judgments because we can judge that he doesn’t deserve to be treated like that, and that he doesn’t need to suffer. Our emotional responses may help us prioritize preexisting moral concerns for welfare over the moral principle that stealing is wrong. This fictional situation is even more interesting because it illustrates how we can have different moral convictions pitted against each other. On the one side there is the boy’s goal of helping people, and on the other side the principle that it is wrong to take the possessions of another. A sympathetic attitude towards the thief involves concerns for his welfare, which makes us sensitive to acts of benevolence, generosity, and helpfulness.

When the boy wants to help the thief, and they return to the location where they left the thief, we can feel compassion for the boy. We can be genuinely moved by his act of kindheartedness. ‘Being moved’ can be considered as a valuable experience that can help us discover or rediscover what gives our lives significance. In this scene, being moved can influence our moral responsiveness by reevaluating the importance of kindness in a sober world. The feelings evoked in us by perceiving this form of kindness can mitigate our predominant disapproval of the father’s actions and strengthen our positive evaluation of the boy’s moral compass. Our emotional responses to the characters demonstrate that emotions can influence our moral judgments and prioritize certain moral concerns over others.

251 Being moved is referred to as the experience of a positive core value standing out in the circumstances triggering the emotion. The experience of ‘being moved’ can make the experiences reorganize his or her hierarchy of values and priorities. Florian Cova and Julien A. Deonna, “Being Moved,” *Philosophical Studies* 169, no. 3 (July 2014), 169.
Third Claim: Emotions moralize the non-moral

According to the third claim, emotions not only influence or strengthen our judgments about right or wrong, but also moralize actions that were previously seen as falling outside the moral domain. In order to illustrate how this works regarding our responses to *The Road*, it seems that we have to distinguish between the conventional and moral domain. The paradigm cases of moral categories—justice, welfare, rights—can be of use. However, *The Road* is mainly about survival in a post-apocalyptic world which falls entirely into the domain of welfare. In order to discover situations or events falling outside the paradigm moral domain, an inquiry into the narrative is required. Such a situation must then be able to evoke evaluative judgments based on one’s moral dispositions. A scene capable of evoking a moral judgment that doesn’t necessarily fall into one of the paradigm moral domains is when father and son find an underground shelter. There is ample food and water in the shelter and for the first time in a long journey they enjoy a good meal. The boy asks if it is okay to take all of it. His father answers that “they” would want them to. Then the son starts to “thank them” for all the stuff, his hands in clumsy prayer. Then it’s the father’s turn. He takes a moment, brings his hands in a praying gesture, looks up and says: “Thank you, people.”

![Figure 9 – “Thank you, People” The Road](image)

This kind gesture is sweetly stirring. The father and son stumble accidently upon a shelter full food, obviously abandoned. In a world where starvation and violent death are luring around every corner, the boy is still concerned about being the ‘good guys’. The son is worried about the decency to take someone else’s food even though he knows the owner of the shelter is long gone. His moral outlook becomes clear when he asks if they should thank someone for it. But there is no one to be grateful to. In this case, nobody receives the act of benevolence, and the situation seems to fall outside the moral domain. Yet we may be moved by their behavior, and evaluate it as praiseworthy and virtuous. It seems like a right thing to do, and we can admire the father and son for it. Although the situation falls outside the moral domain—the recipient of the benevolent act is
missing—it is possible to moralize the actions of the characters. This illustrates that our emotional response to the situation in its entirety can directly cause moral evaluations of the characters in particular. Evaluating that something is morally right in this case seems to be grounded on our emotional response to it. The attempt to offer an explanation why we evaluate the action as praiseworthy can be considered as an act of deliberate post-hoc reasoning to justify our moral judgment.253

Conclusion

Although there is much more to be said about the relation between film-elicited emotions and moral judgments, I hope to have demonstrated that there is an obvious connection between emotions and morality regarding fiction film. The roles that imagination and empathic and sympathetic responses play with regard to our emotional responses to fiction film are of considerate import for our moral responsiveness. However, it should not be overlooked that the relation between actual viewer responses and moral judgments is likely to be far more complex and varied than what could be conveyed in the current chapter. For one, the current hypothetical scenario disregards the diversity in moral inclinations: deontic, utilitarian, virtue ethical, communitarian. These reservations in mind, I do think ‘thought-experiments’ such as presented in the discussions of the three claims regarding the relation between emotion responses and morality provide general insights into our emotional and moral lives. The operational concept of emotions as evaluative judgments provides us with a theoretical framework for analyzing our emotional responses to, and moral judgments about the fictional narrative and characters.

253 Jonathan Haidt proposes a social intuitionist model of moral judgment. According to Haidt, judgment of moral right and wrong are usually the result of affect-laden intuitions, whereas moral reasoning functions post-hoc to provide justifications for one’s intuitions. Although this model is interesting, I also hope to have illustrated that we can differentiate between moral perspectives through our imaginative capacity to shift from perspective (Jonathan Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment,” Psychological Review. 108, no. 4. (October 2001): 814-834).
Conclusion: Minding Movies

Recalling the dilemmas raised with regard to the Danish film *Jagten* in the introduction of this thesis, we might now have a deeper understanding of the issues at stake. The sense of indignation and outrage that might be felt in consideration of the victimization of the kindergarten teacher and the mobbing behavior of the town community can now be understood as sympathetic responses for the teacher and illustrates how we make moral judgments. In my thesis, I have drawn connections between emotional responses to fiction film and moral responsiveness. I hope to have demonstrated that fiction film provides opportunities to practice a diverse range of different responses by which we can develop our empathic, sympathetic, and moral capacities. Movies provide a context free of immediate concerns of the outside world; it allows the spectator to experience emotions and to entertain desires that we are not allowed to have or act on in the real world. Imagination also plays an important role for understanding the moral orientation of the characters. When we imagine, we draw on our ordinary conceptual repertoire, and evaluations of approval and disapproval. As the result of imagining, we may find ourselves with new insights about, and changed perspectives on, the actual world. Furthermore, shifting between different perspectives provides us with a broader view on the world and increased awareness and understanding of the possible modes to respond to the world. When we succeed in imaginatively taking the character’s perspective, we may represent his beliefs, desires, wishes, and thoughts as though they were our own. Perspective taking allows us to consider what we would have done in the fictional situation. It makes us aware of the possible benefits or disadvantages of behaving or acting in a certain way. We can learn from the consequences of acting or behaving in a particular way in the fiction, without any cost. These lessons might even motivate us to act in the real world; for example, calling your mother when you just saw a movie in which a character reminded you of her. Reflecting upon our responses to fiction film can increase our understanding of ourselves. It can give insight into our moral convictions as well. Sometimes our moral emotional responses to fiction can be unexpected, maybe triggered by a character’s transgression of a moral principle we didn’t know we held.

Some films are able to evoke strong feelings with regard to our moral concerns. We often estimate a character’s moral orientation and uncover what lessons characters can provide. The film supplements our own moral attitudes with moral concerns depicted in the fictional narrative. As a result we can increase our awareness of our moral standards, and we can adjust and refine our moral attitudes. We respond with moral anger or contempt to characters that violate our moral standards. In such cases our disapproval is accompanied by evaluative judgments. Understanding film-elicited emotions as evaluative judgments can give us insight into the meaningfulness of emotional responses to fiction film. Through movies we can explore emotions and uncover their implications for our lives. We can analyze the role they play in attuning us to relevant situations and how they serve as strategies through which we manage to deal with the moral structure of the film.
We can divide the fictional world into good and bad people; morally praise and condemn them accordingly. Film-elicited emotions are an important topic for research because our fundamental attitudes are strongly affected and expressed by our emotional experiences. Because film is particularly able to elicit strong emotional responses it contributes to changes, and affirmation, of our attitudes is well worth considering.

Fiction film can contribute to our moral attitudes by increasing our capacity for compassion. We can acquire new insights through a more practiced emotional engagement—sympathy and empathy in particular—with fictional characters. The extra practice can lead to an improved capacity to sympathize or empathize outside the fictional context, and in turn motivates us to act more charitable or benevolent. Possibly, enhance sensitivity to human suffering. However, it must be noted that it also might work the other way around: to understand certain works of fiction we might need to have sympathy for the devil.

Suggestions for Further Research
The claim that reading fiction can enhance our moral capacities is not uncontroversial. In recent decades, attempts to measure the ethical impact of reading fiction have been made by a number of researchers. Frank Hakemulder addresses a large number of experiments examining the effects of reading fiction on moral self-concepts. However, it has received less attention within film studies, especially in relation to spectators’ responses and mainstream cinema. The claims I made about spectator’s responses and morality are hypothetical insofar as empirical evidence of emotional responses to literature does not directly apply to fiction film. However, empirical evidence concerned with fiction in general might support claims about emotional responses to fiction. I hope to have stressed the importance of examining the effects of film-elicited emotions and morality. By researching the long-term effects of film-elicited emotions on our daily lives we might come to understand how movies can improve our lives. For example, a feel-good movie can motivate us to behave more benevolent and, if we act accordingly, these positive feelings can be prolonged. We might have to make stronger claims about the relation between film-elicited emotions and the moral concepts of the spectator. ‘Ideological’ criticism notwithstanding, I think the implications of Hollywood’s depiction of romantic love and marriage on the affirmation of teenagers’ concepts about love and marriage in real life is in need of serious empirical investigation. By making strong claims which require to be investigated, and in doing so we can discover a field of research comprising theoretical and empirical insights from, among others, moral and social psychology, ethics, film studies, anthropology, and cultural studies.

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254 Ravenscroft, “Fiction, Imagination, and Ethics.”
255 Hakemulder, The Moral Laboratory.
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Summary: ‘Film-Elicited Emotions and Moral Attitude’

The goal of this thesis is to examine the relation is between film-elicited emotions and moral attitude. In the first chapter I argue that emotions involve cognitive as well as non-cognitive processes. Because emotions are not mere feelings, we can reflect on our emotional responses and understand their significant role for engaging with the world. Emotions can be understood as evaluative judgments, or at least, containing evaluative judgments. In the second chapter I analyze several aspects of emotion that can be considered as necessary but not sufficient conditions; for imagination and perception counts that only one of them is necessarily involved in emotions but they are not mutually exclusive. Other aspects of emotions that can be deemed to be a necessary condition are intentionality, feelings, evaluations, and personal significance. Because emotional responses to fiction film, although quite common, raise questions about whether we have to believe in the objects of emotions, the third chapter is concerned with the paradox of fiction. I review several solutions to the paradox of fiction and concluded that a combinatorial account is favorable because it is able to take into account the diversity and complexity of our emotional responses to fiction. In the fourth chapter I focus on the role of imagination and perception with regard to our emotional responses to fiction film, and illustrate this with several examples. In the fifth chapter I bring together the theoretical insights of the preceding chapters with a thorough discussion of the relation between film-elicited emotions and moral responsiveness. The emphasis of this thesis lies on the importance of research on the various ways in which our emotional responses to fiction film can affect our moral attitude.