

Reply to Fisher

Brian McNiff

In Fisher's insightful analysis of the paradox of emotional responses to fiction (PERF), I am reminded of emotional recalcitrance, a phenomenon in which one feels an emotion that is contrary to a belief that they possess such as fear in response to a knowingly benign object.¹ This can be illustrated with an example relevant to Fisher's project. Take watching a horror film, for instance. In this scenario, a rational person watching the film is not under the impression that what they are viewing is a real threat to them. However, this does not stop the film from eliciting strong emotion in the viewer. A fear response is felt and brings along with it all the associated phenomenal properties that it would in an instance of genuine danger (one's heart rate increases, their pupils dilate, etc.).

There are a number of important similarities between the (PERF) and recalcitrance. Firstly, both seem to indicate a level of disregard for an established belief that would otherwise contradict the emotion felt. Like in the case of (PERF), an instance of recalcitrance is seemingly agnostic to the facts of the matter of what is being reacted to. Just as Bob and Bill empathize with Dobby the house-elf despite not believing in his existence outside a work of fiction, so too does someone experiencing emotional recalcitrance feel the force of their emotions *in spite of* their belief to the contrary.

Secondly, the two have similar relationships with nuclear and extranuclear properties as described. For instances of recalcitrance, it would not be the extranuclear properties of the object that one is reacting to (i.e., that it exists), but rather its discernible nuclear properties that help to induce the emotion (the unnerving qualities of the horror film's antagonist, the shrieking of its soundtrack). Further, the exaggeration of any particular nuclear property could conceivably induce a heightened emotional response (if the film's script was more disturbing or its directing more effective at inducing fear). The same is, importantly, not the case for extranuclear properties as it does not make sense to say that any given object could have exaggerated extranuclear properties. Objects cannot, presumably, be said to "exist" more than they do or be more "possible" than they are.

While it would take more argumentation than could be provided for here, these preliminary similarities between (PERF) and recalcitrance would appear to indicate that the two are closely related if not the same phenomena. In seeming agreement with what Fisher argues for, I would hazard to guess that the (PERF) is itself simply an instance of emotional recalcitrance directed towards a given set of fictional characters, situations, and events and would thus be in need of dissolution if not reframing. In this sense human beings could be thought of as reacting emotionally to works of fiction just as they so often do to the content of the real world: in contrast with what reason would demand.

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¹ Michael S. Brady, "Recalcitrant Emotions and Visual Illusions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2007): 273-84.

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