

## **Comments on Doggett and Egan, “Wanting Things You Don’t Want”**

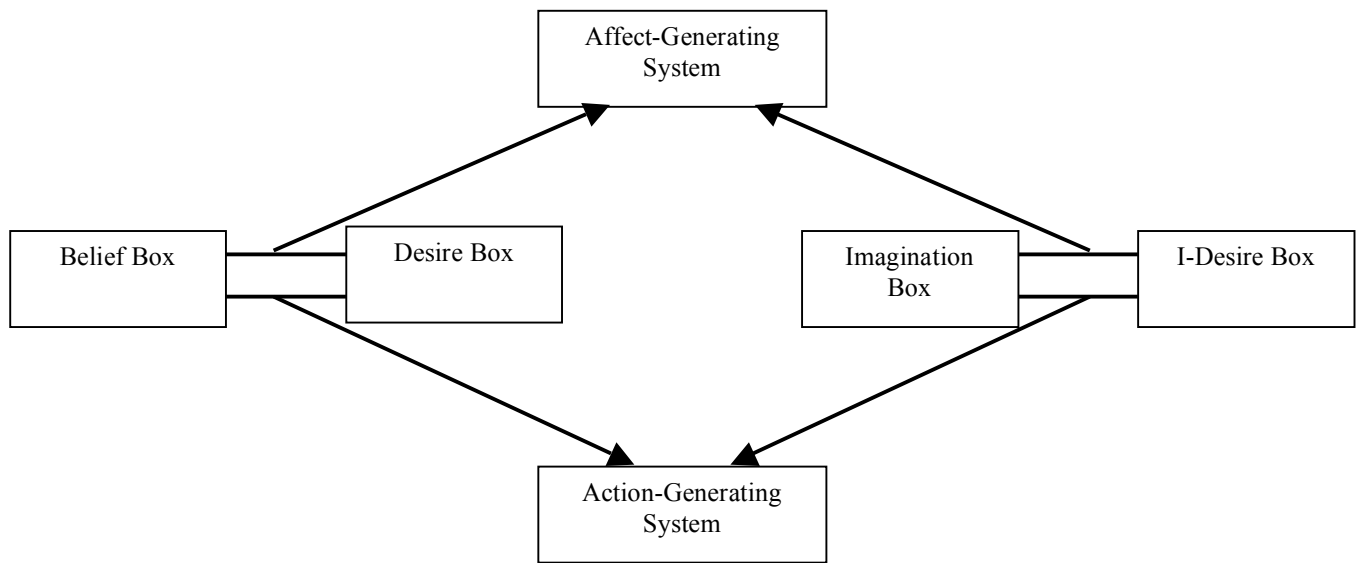
Thanks to Andy and Tyler for their excellent paper. Their model of imagination has many advantages over Nichols and Stich’s theory of imagination, which they set out to improve on. I’m very sympathetic to their approach. So rather than find things to criticize, I’ll focus my comments on two issues that might require adding quite a bit of complexity to their model of imagination. At the end, I’ll toss in a critical question about *i*-desires.

### ***1. Connection between beliefs and imaginations***

Subjects that are imagining *p* have mental representations that play a distinctive role in their cognitive economies. Andy and Tyler treat these states of imagining *p* as analogous to believing *p*. Both beliefs and imaginations are linked with desires or *i*-desires to yield actions and affective responses in the subject. More specifically, they argue that imaginings combine with *i*-desires to motivate pretense-directed behavior.

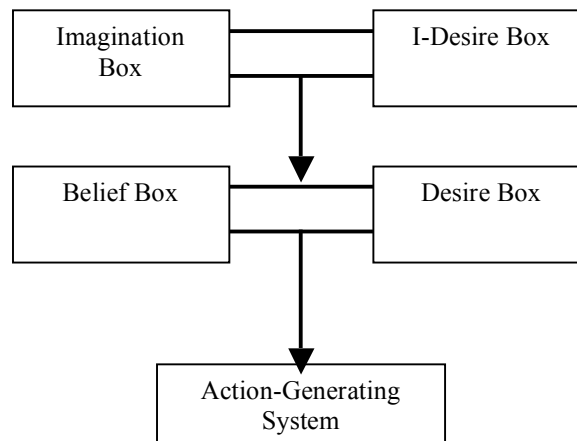
So far so good. But imaginings don’t just combine with *i*-desires to motivate behavior. For a subject to be able to act out her imaginations, she needs to relate the contents of her imaginations to the contents of relevant beliefs. Say I’m imagining that I’m a crocodile. I need something to go proxy for the crocodile’s jaws. I believe that my arms put in a certain position would serve this purpose well. In order to act out my imagination, I need certain beliefs about my arms and I need to assign to my arms the function of being crocodile jaws. More generally, a subject who acts out her imaginations does not just need imaginations and *i*-desires. Two further elements are required. The subject needs (1) beliefs about the environment and (2) needs to connect her imaginations to these beliefs. If this is right, then Andy and Tyler’s model

**Model A**



needs to be replaced with such a model:

**Model B**



The point is not simply that in games of make-belief some behavior is governed by beliefs and some behavior is governed by imagination. On Model B, imagination/i-desire pairs do not *replace* belief/desire pairs, nor are they added to belief/desire pairs. They are rather *draped* over beliefs about the world. Less metaphorically, imagination/i-desire pairs are connected to beliefs about the world in the production of behavior and affect.

There are a lot of possible ways to understand the connection between imaginations and beliefs. One important point is that it requires that a subject operate with an awareness of the distinction between what is real and what is imagined. Awareness of this distinction is what differentiates cases of imagination from cases of delusion. When I'm imagining that I'm a crocodile, I don't *stop* believing that these (flapping my arms) are my arms. I *gain* a new belief. In addition to believing that these (flapping my arms) are my arms I believe that these (flapping my arms) could go proxy as crocodile jaws. My belief that these are my arms serves an important role in my ability to act out my imagination. It's because I believe that my arms can be used to perform certain crocodile-like movements that I decide to use them to go proxy as jaws. If I'm in a state of delusion, my belief that these are my arms may be replaced by a belief that these are dangerous jaws. This leads me to my second point.

## ***2. Imaginative Immersion***

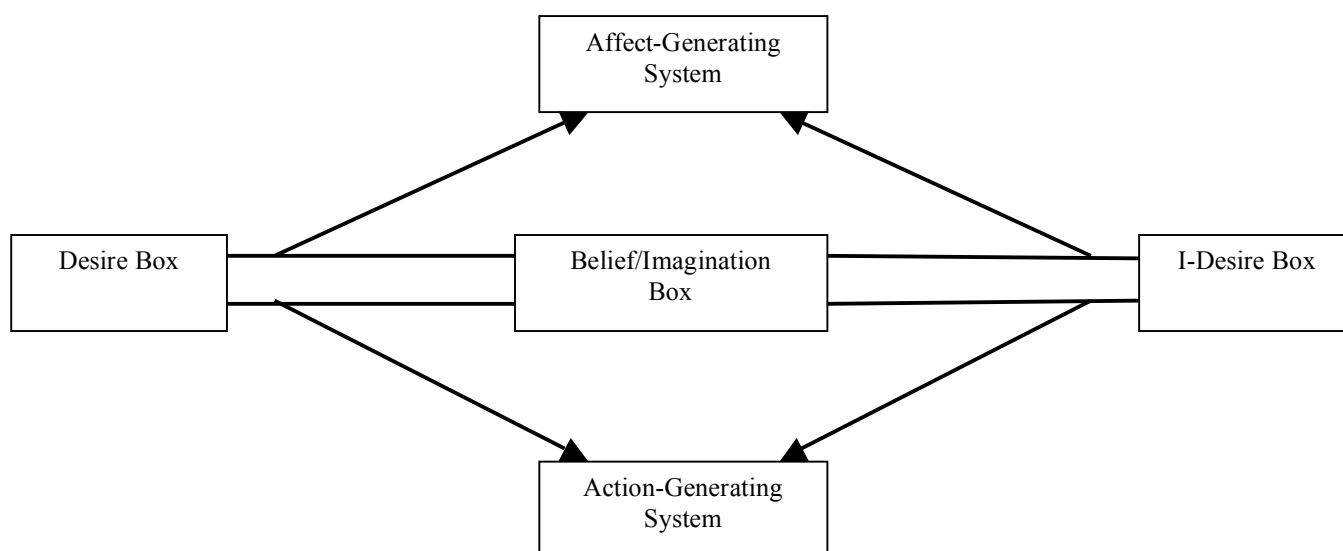
Although Andy and Tyler's model deals with many issues substantially better than Nichols and Stich's model, it's not obvious that it deals with imaginative immersion any better. As Andy and Tyler point out "many good actors' technique is to lose themselves in the characters they're playing – by which we mean their thought processes do not detour through their beliefs about the character and their desires to act as that character would or desire to make things fictional. They simply slip into character (by imagining that they are this character) and then act" (p. 18). With some caution about the bit in brackets, this seems right. But if one takes this line seriously, the model of imagination has to again be more complicated than on Model A.

It's generally recognized that imagination is governed by a norm of quarantining. If I imagine that I'm a crocodile, I'm not inclined to believe that I'm a crocodile. Nor am I inclined to believe many of the things that would be entailed were it true that I were a crocodile. I don't, say, start to believe that I'm a reptile. In cases of imaginative immersion, however, quarantining arguably can break down to some extent. I don't suddenly start believing that I'm a crocodile, but my mental state may start having similarities to beliefs. In this respect, the mental state of

imaginative immersion resembles the mental state of a delusion. The distinctive cognitive role of the relevant representation is to some extent belief-like and to some extent-like an imagination.<sup>1</sup>

If this is right, then we have to add a further complication to Model A. On Model A, beliefs and imaginations are in two distinct boxes. If imaginations can gradually turn into beliefs, then imaginations and beliefs should not be in separate boxes as on Model A. Imaginations and beliefs should rather be on a continuum.

### Model C



The typical starting point of a game of make-belief may be a pure imagination. But as I immerse myself in the game, I slide down the continuum towards a representation whose cognitive role is closer to that of a belief. What marks a good actor may be the ability to swiftly move up down the continuum between pure beliefs and pure imaginations – to swiftly slip in and out of characters. When a good actor plays a villain, she doesn't simply imagine that she's a villain. She immerses herself in this imagination. In doing so, she adopts mental representations that are to some extent belief-like and to some extent imagination-like. It's precisely because these new representations are in the same box as her genuine beliefs that they can stand in conflict with the subject's genuine beliefs. Say, I imagine I'm a bird. I loose myself in the game of make-belief. I

<sup>1</sup> Andy Egan makes a similar point about delusions in his "Imagination, Delusion, and Self-Deception".

climb up a tree and am about to jump off the tree. But in the last moment I decide not to jump. What motivates me to abstain from jumping are my beliefs that I'm a human and that I can't fly. There is a conflict between my belief that I'm a human and my imagination that I'm a bird. The conflict is much the same as a conflict between two beliefs. This can be accounted for if imaginations and beliefs are understood as in the same box.

### ***I-Desires***

In light of these considerations about the relation between beliefs and imaginations, I'd like to question the need for i-desires. According to Andy and Tyler, "pretend action is motivated by i-desires and imaginations with the aim of making the i-desired things fictional rather than true." They consider several examples of desires in the context of imagination that lead them to reject the Stich/Nichols model of explaining what goes on in imagination. A lot of the examples have to do with conventions of what one does when one pretends to be something, for instance yelling "bang-bang, you're dead", when one pretends to be a robber. Obviously, robbers don't typically yell "bang-bang, you're dead". When one plays cops and robbers one acts according to conventions of the game. One doesn't have the desire to act like a cop. But this can be accounted for by bringing more complicated desires into play. The idea is to take on board Andy and Tyler's criticism of the Stich/Nichols model, but to bring into play more complicated desires rather than to introduce i-desires. The more complicated desires are desires to make *p* fictional. Andy and Tyler reject this option on the grounds that it cannot deal with imaginative immersion. They don't spell out why an account that deals with imagination in terms of such complicated desires cannot deal with imaginative immersion. It's not obvious why it could not. So I'll end with a question: What is the difference between an imagination/desire pair, where the desire is to make *p* fictional and an imagination/i-desire pair, where the i-desire is presumably something like a pretend-desire?