Weeks 11–13 Discussion: Fiction and the Attitudes

1. Berys Gaut maintains that there are conceptual connections between evaluative judgment, desire, and pleasure/displeasure. According to Gaut, for example, *necessarily*, *typically*, someone judges a state of affairs to be *bad* only if she *desires* to *avoid* that state of affairs; and *necessarily*, *typically*, she desires to avoid that state of affairs only if she finds the idea of that state of affairs to be *unpleasant*. We need to add the "typically" operator, claims Gaut, because otherwise we would have to say that intuitively possible scenarios involving "abnormal" individuals (such as psychopaths) are really *conceptually impossible*. Putting all this together, we get Gaut's *evaluation thesis*, which he claims dissolves the paradox of horror. Applied to the emotion of *disgust*, the evaluation thesis says: *necessarily*, a person is disgusted by something only if: (i) she *negatively evaluates* the object of her disgust; (ii) *typically*, she desires to avoid the object of her disgust; and (iii) *typically*, she finds the object of her disgust to be *unpleasant*. Why is this thesis supposed to dissolve the paradox of horror? How might a dissenter object to it?

2. According to Kendall Walton, a person can fear an object or situation only if she believes that the object or situation puts her in danger, or something along those lines. As a result, if someone knows that a horror movie is fictional, then, even if she exhibits various physiological/psychological symptoms commonly associated with fear, it can't be true that she genuinely *fears* the fictional characters or situations represented on screen. Nonetheless, it might be *make-believedly* true that she fears these fictional characters or situations. What implications might Walton's view have for the paradox of horror?

3. Here is a description from the website of the Grand Canyon Skywalk: "You're standing on a platform made of glass. The rim of the Grand Canyon is 70 feet behind you. The other side of it is 3 miles in front of you. Then you dare to look down and see ………… nothing – nothing but 2,000 feet of air between you and the bottom of the Grand Canyon." Suppose the architects explain to an inquisitive tourist why it is perfectly safe to walk the platform. She nods the whole time, and when finally asked if she believes that the Grand Canyon Skywalk is safe, she responds with a confident "Yes." Yet, when she later looks down and sees 2,000 feet of air between her and the bottom of the Grand Canyon, she gulps, begins to tremble, and feels her knees about to give out beneath her. Is she *afraid*? What should Walton say?

4. It may be true in the fiction that James Bond (occasionally) works for MI6. But is it true in the fiction that James Bond looks like Daniel Craig? Why or why not?

5. Here are two sentences drawn from Wikipedia on the fictional character of James Bond: (a) "Ian Fleming created the fictional character of James Bond as the central figure for his works" and (b) "James Bond is the culmination of an important but much-maligned tradition in English literature." Here are two sentences drawn from Fleming's *Casino Royale*: (c) "Bond had once worked in Jamaica" and (d) "Bond liked to make a good breakfast." According to Peter van Inwagen, only sentences like (a) and (b), but not sentences like (c) and (d), have bearing on the truth of fictional realism, the view that fictional characters exist. Why does he think that? Do you agree? Why or why not?

6. Are you inclined to accept fictional realism? Why or why not?

7. According to Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions, ordinary names (such as "Mark Zuckerberg") are really definite descriptions of the form "the F." This theory purports to solve a number of puzzles—for example, how it is that we can meaningfully say that Pegasus doesn't exist, given that "Pegasus" doesn't have a referent. Thus, if "Pegasus" *really* means "the unique winged-horse who served the muses," then when we say that Pegasus doesn't exist, what we are *really* saying is that it is not the case that there is something that satisfies the description—no problem! One challenge for this theory is to say *which* definite description is synonymous with a given name. Let's suppose for the sake of argument that this challenge can be met and that "Mark Zuckerberg" means something along the lines of "the inventor of Facebook." Saul Kripke raised a number of objections to the theory of descriptions, which many philosophers consider to be decisive. One goes like this. If "Mark Zuckerberg" means the same thing as "the inventor of Facebook," then we should be able to substitute these expressions for each other in sentences without altering their truth-values. But consider the following two sentences: (i) "Mark Zuckerberg could have not been the inventor of Facebook" and (ii) "Mark Zuckerberg could have not been Mark Zuckerberg." The theory of descriptions predicts that these sentences have the same truth-value, yet according to Kripke (and the majority of this class!), (i) is true whereas (ii) is false. So, the theory of descriptions is false. Are you persuaded? Why or why not?

8. Since Kripke rejected the theory of descriptions, he put forward an alternative *causal theory* of names, which states that the meaning of a name is its referent, or what it picks out. According to the theory, *one way* a name can acquire a meaning is through an initial dubbing. For example, when Mark Zuckerberg was born, maybe his parents publicly declared that he is henceforth to be known as "Mark Zuckerberg." We can use the name "Mark Zuckerberg" to refer to Mark Zuckerberg because we stand in a causal chain that stretches back to this initial dubbing. However, fictional characters (if they exist) are totally unlike ordinary people in that they can neither be perceived nor causally interacted with whatsoever. How, then, could the name "Sherlock Holmes" refer to Sherlock Holmes as opposed to some other abstract object?