

7

Pretense Part I

Metaphysics and Epistemology

7.1 Introduction

The project of this and the following chapter will be to explain pretense and the imagining it involves, without invoking any folk psychological states other than beliefs, intentions, desires, judgments, decisions, and the like. The specific mental states to which I appeal—judgments, intentions, and desires with particular contents—are ones that those who posit a *sui generis* cognitive attitude of imagination to explain pretense must *also* allow pretenders to have. So the reductive approach here has parsimony on its side (in the sense explained in section 2.7). It doesn't just do without a *sui generis* attitude of imagination; it also does not add any states not also appealed to in theories that invoke *sui generis* imaginings. I will do my best to lend credence to the view by showing how it can be applied to a number of paradigmatic cases of pretense, including those typically cited in support of positing *sui generis* imaginative states. Because some pretenses require hypothetical and counterfactual reasoning on the part of the pretender, I'll also be arguing that the kind of conditional reasoning that occurs during pretense does not require *sui generis* imaginative states. More general arguments about the role of imagination in conditional reasoning were already put forward in the previous two chapters. Now we'll be able to see the "belief-only" approach defended there in action.

7.2 Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Psychology: Three Questions about the Relation of Pretense to Imagination

It is common to draw a distinction between imagining and pretending (Currie & Ravenscroft, 2002; Langland-Hassan, 2014b; Nichols & Stich, 2000; Picciuto & Carruthers, 2016; Van Leeuwen, 2011). Unlike imagining, pretending seems to require some form of outward behavior on the part of the pretender—behavior connected to what is being pretended. For instance, while I can imagine that I am running a marathon while sitting in my office, I cannot pretend that I am running a marathon while doing the same—not unless sitting in my office is in some way tied in to the pretense (as it might be if I were pretending to take a breather in my

office while running a marathon). By contrast, I don't owe an account of how sitting in my office ties in to what I am imagining when I say that I am imagining that I am running a marathon. Likewise, I might pretend to be a dead cat simply by lying on the floor. While this does not involve "outward behavior" in the *movement* sense, I still have at hand an account of how my lying on the floor ties in to the pretense that I am a dead cat—an account I don't owe when I am simply imagining that I am a dead cat.

With this distinction in place, there are three questions we can ask about the relationship of imagining to pretending. I will call them the *metaphysical*, *epistemological*, and *psychological* questions, respectively. Each has received a good amount of discussion, even if they are not always recognized as *distinct* questions. The metaphysical question concerns *what it is to pretend*: what features, mental or otherwise, make it the case that a person is pretending, as opposed to not pretending? To answer is to give some non-trivial set of necessary and sufficient conditions, or something approaching such, that sheds light on the nature of pretense by identifying features that distinguish pretense from other kinds of non-pretend actions. (See Austin (1979), Langland-Hassan (2014b), and Picciuto & Carruthers (2016) for attempts.) The metaphysical question is relevant to the project of explaining imagination for the following reason. Suppose that, when we try to specify what it is that qualifies someone as pretending, we are unable to do so by appeal to their beliefs, desires, decisions, and intentions alone. Suppose that there could always be someone else with the same beliefs, desires, and intentions who was not pretending. (Or, in a similar vein, suppose that the beliefs, desires, and intentions that qualify someone as pretending must make use of a primitive *concept* of pretense (Leslie, 1994), where that concept cannot be explicated without appeal to a *sui generis* mental state of imagining). In that case, it might seem that the only way to capture the difference between sincere and pretend action is by appeal to a *sui generis* imaginative (or "make-believe") mental state that is exploited during pretense (see, e.g., Picciuto & Carruthers, 2016).

On the other hand, if we can explain what it is to pretend without appeal to *sui generis* imaginative states, the question of whether we *ever* need to exploit *sui generis* imaginative states during pretense takes on additional force. A desideratum on this analysis is that it reveal what is common in a variety of different kinds of pretense, including childhood games of pretense, deceptive pretenses (as when prisoners dress as guards to escape jail), and the theatrical pretenses of actors on a stage.

The epistemological question concerns how people—especially young children—are able to determine that *someone else* is pretending, so as to join in the pretense. This is a question of concern especially among developmental psychologists interested in how and when children develop a theory of mind (Friedman & Leslie, 2007; Friedman, Neary, Burnstein, & Leslie, 2010; Leslie, 1987; Lillard, 1993; Richert & Lillard, 2004). Imagination enters the picture on the assumption that recognizing that someone is pretending requires judging that

person to be imagining something or other.¹ The link to imagination then becomes especially significant for our purposes if no account of what it is to understand someone as imagining can be given in more basic terms.

Finally, the psychological question concerns the mental tools and resources by which people are able to pretend. This question has received the most discussion of the three among philosophers, with imagination universally held to be a central resource. Of course, it is a mere platitude that a person who is pretending that *p* is, at least often, imagining that *p*. There are two deeper questions at issue. First, whatever we take imagining to be, is it *necessary* that we imagine while we pretend? Or is it, instead, only something we *very often* do while pretending? While some will hold that any action *not* guided by imagination is *ipso facto* not pretense (Picciuto & Carruthers, 2016), others defend a more moderate position where imagination typically guides pretense, even if other kinds of states are at times sufficient to drive pretense as well (Currie & Ravenscroft, 2002). Second, does the imagining in question involve a *sui generis* imaginative state, or is such imagining instead explicable in more basic folk psychological terms?

It is important to appreciate the difference between the metaphysical and psychological questions, given that answers to each will likely appeal to specific types of mental states. An analogy might help. We can ask the metaphysical question about firefighters, querying what makes a person a firefighter—viz., what distinguishes firefighters from those working in other fields. And we can also ask the equivalent of the psychological question about firefighters, which becomes a question concerning *the tools typically relied upon* in firefighting (such as hoses, ladders, and water). We can answer the metaphysical question about firefighters without mentioning hoses, ladders, and water. Yet any adequate account of the *tools relied upon* in firefighting will inevitably mention them. Similarly, even if one can give an account of what it is to pretend that makes no appeal to imagination—as in Langland-Hassan (2014b) and Austin (1958)—it may be that many or even all *actual* pretenses rely upon *sui generis* imaginings as a cognitive tool. For it may be that, given the nature of the human mind, the only way *we* are able to pretend—or the easiest way for us to do so—is by exploiting *sui generis* imaginative states, even if some other intelligent creatures could pretend without the use of such states (just as firefighters of the future might make no use of hoses, ladders, and water). Nevertheless, while the metaphysical and psychological questions are indeed distinct, answers to one will influence answers to the other, in ways I'll endeavor to explain. This is why it is important to see them as distinct questions.

I will address the metaphysical question first, the epistemological second, and will conclude (in Chapter 8) with the psychological question, which is the thorniest.

¹ A view along these lines is defended by Leslie (1987) and Friedman & Leslie (2007). In their terms, recognizing pretense requires use of a *sui generis* PRETEND concept. Their notion of a PRETEND concept plays much the same role as the notion of a *sui generis* attitude of imagination in other accounts. See Nichols & Stich (2000) for discussion of that link.

7.3 The Metaphysical Question: What Is It to Pretend?

I have written at length on the question of what it is to pretend elsewhere (Langland-Hassan, 2014b). I will briefly summarize the conclusions I came to below, without repeating the full arguments that led to them. The take-away from that discussion is that we can give a substantive account of what it is to pretend without invoking the notions of pretense or imagination in the account itself. If that is right, then the project of explaining imagination in more basic folk psychological terms is not put in jeopardy by a need to invoke a *sui generis* notion of imagination in explaining what it is to pretend.

Note that my project is not only to show that pretense does not call for a *sui generis* attitude of imagination (or of pretend); it is also to show that we can explain pretense without appealing to a *sui generis* notion or concept of imagination (or of pretend). Alan Leslie, author of some of the most influential work on pretense in psychology, concurs with me on the first point while diverging on the second. Partly to account for results in developmental psychology, he argues that “pretense representations” can be “decoupled” from their ordinary cognitive role through use of a primitive (and innate) concept *PRETEND* (Leslie, 1987, 1994). Suppose, for instance, that a mother and daughter are pretending that an empty cup is full of tea. Leslie’s idea is that, instead of a child’s confusedly thinking of her mother as representing that an empty cup is full, her mother-directed thought has the structure: Mother *pretends* of the empty cup “it is full” (1994, p. 220–1). This pretense-guiding thought can still have the force of a belief; it need not be seen as a representation toward which the child takes an attitude of imagining. In this way, Leslie’s theory is an important predecessor to my own. However, there is a key difference, revealed in Leslie’s claim that the concept *PRETEND* is *primitive*. Here he explains this notion of primitiveness:

My assumption is that there is a small set of primitive informational relations available early on, among them *BELIEVE* and *PRETEND*. These notions are primitive in the sense that they cannot be analyzed into more basic components such that the original notion is eliminated. (1994, p. 218)

Leslie uses the notion of belief to clarify the sense in which these “informational relations” are primitive:

While one can paraphrase ‘John believes that *p* is true’ in a number of ways, one does not thereby eliminate the notion *believes*. For example, one can say ‘*p* is true for John’, but that just gives another way (and alternate set of sounds for) saying ‘John believes that *p* is true’ (p. 218)

Whether or not belief is a primitive notion, it would be bad news for my project if Leslie were correct that pretending (or imagining) does not admit of any

elucidating explanation in more basic folk psychological terms. For then there could be no explanation of pretending (or imagining) in such terms. It is no comfort to me to do without a *sui generis* attitude of pretense (or imagination) at the cost of positing a *sui generis* concept thereof. For that reason, I place Leslie in the opposing corner.

As earlier noted, I've argued elsewhere (2014) that the question of what it is to pretend can indeed be answered without appeal to the notions of pretense or of imagination—and that, therefore, those notions are not primitive after all. Evidently unaware that I'd put this matter to rest, Picciuto & Carruthers (2016) have recently argued, to the contrary, that no action can possibly be a case of pretense if it is not guided by one's imaginings. Further, they hold that such imaginings are a *sui generis* type of mental state to be sharply distinguished from one's beliefs, desires, and intentions (2016, pp. 316–17).² If they are correct, there can be no explanation of pretense in folk psychological terms that makes no mention of imagination. It will be instructive to consider their reasoning.

Picciuto & Carruthers begin by distinguishing merely “acting as if” *p* and pretending that *p*. In one sense of acting “as if,” I am now acting as if I am writing a sentence—for I am acting *as would be appropriate* if I were writing a sentence. That's a good thing, as writing a sentence is exactly what I aim to be doing. But I am not pretending to write a sentence. Likewise, we cannot simply characterize pretending as “non-serious” action. A moment ago, I was acting non-seriously when I picked up my phone to scroll through my Twitter feed. It was non-serious action in the sense that I was just wasting time, procrastinating, not doing anything that mattered much to me. But I wasn't pretending to check Twitter. So it was not non-serious action in the right sense. If it turns out that all our attempts to characterize pretense in other terms similarly fail, we might be tempted to conclude, with Leslie (1994, p. 218), that pretense involves use of a primitive psychological state—one as difficult to describe in more basic folk psychological terms as belief itself.

For Leslie, this primitive state is one that involves use of the innate concept PRETEND. Picciuto & Carruthers (hereafter, “P&C”) instead view *imagination* as the crucial cognitive ingredient for pretense, where pretending involves having one's actions guided by one's imaginings (2016, p. 317). Stich & Tarzia (2015) likewise propose that pretense occurs when a person acts out “a sequence of events that is saliently similar to the events represented in the PWB” (p. 6), where the PWB is the “box” found in the cognitive architecture of Nichols & Stich (2000)

² Picciuto & Carruthers' (2016) arguments for seeing imagination as a *sui generis* cognitive attitude are all of the sort explored in Chapter 1.

that corresponds to uses of “propositional imagination.”³ However, as P&C themselves recognize, we do not yet have a sufficient characterization of pretense in noting that it is action guided by imagining. For, very often, our imaginings guide non-pretend actions. Paused at a corner, I may imagine myself pulling into traffic to determine whether I can make it across the street before an oncoming car approaches. A detective may imagine interviewing a suspect while in the act of interviewing that subject, in order to plan questions and anticipate responses. I might imagine tying my tie as an aid to actually tying my tie. There is no pretending to pull into traffic, no pretending to interview a suspect, no pretending to tie a tie in these cases. The imaginings are still guiding action, however. Hence the added parenthetical within Picciuto & Carruthers’ formal definition of pretense:

To pretend that *P* is to act as if *P* (without believing it) *while imagining that P*. A child who pretends that the banana is a telephone needs to suppose that the banana is a telephone, or to imagine the banana *as* a telephone, and act accordingly. (p. 317, italics in original)

So, pretending that *P* is not *simply* a matter of having one’s actions guided by an imagining that *p*; one must also act as if *p* “without believing it.” This explains why my tie-tying is not pretense. For, in that case, I believe that I am tying a tie. The same goes for the interviewing and driving examples. Yet this amendment solves one problem by creating another: it forecloses the possibility of pretending that *p* while one believes that *p*. A datum driving the debate about pretense over the last twenty years is that we can, in fact, pretend that *p* while believing that *p* (Nichols, 2006a). A commonly cited example occurs within Leslie’s (1987) tea party pretense, discussed in more detail below, where a child both pretends *and* believes that a certain cup is empty. Other examples are easy to find. Suppose that I draw a card that says ‘philosophy professor’ during a game of charades. I then go on to pretend that I am a philosophy professor—rubbing my chin, nodding in recognition of a profundity—while believing that I am one. This difficulty is not addressed by P&C. I will return to it shortly. First, however, I want to show why P&C never give us good reason to think that pretending *always* requires imagining.

Picciuto & Carruthers are clear that imagining (or, equivalently in their usage, *supposing*) not only serves as a tool for guiding a pretense, but is essential to

³ On the one hand, it is not clear that Stich & Tarzia mean to be giving a criterion for what is to pretend with this characterization; they likely see themselves as offering an empirical hypothesis concerning (just some of?) the cognitive states employed during pretense. On the other, they never give any indication that something *more* is needed to transform an ordinary imagination-guided action into pretense.

pretense: “pretending only lasts for as long as imagination actively guides one’s movements” (2016, p. 317). Remove imagination as a guide, they propose, and one’s actions are no longer pretense. “A child might set out on Halloween night not only dressed as a witch but pretending to be a witch,” they explain:

Yet as she walks around the neighborhood chatting with her friends, she may no longer be imagining herself as a witch. In that case, although she is dressed as a witch she is not pretending to be a witch. (2016, p. 317)

For P&C, when imagining stops, so does pretense. Their reasons for holding this are not clear. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that we accept P&C’s claim that pretending that p requires one to act as if p while believing that not- p (setting aside our ability to pretend that p while believing that p). Why, then, do we need to *add* that the person’s action is guided by an imagining? Why can we not just say that a person acts as if p while believing that not- p ? One possible reason traces the fact that we might *unintentionally* act as if p . After stubbing my toe on a bar stool, for instance, I might hobble around, swearing. In such cases I am (unintentionally) acting as if I am an angry, peg-legged pirate, while not believing that I am one. But neither am I pretending to be one. On the other hand, if my hobbling and swearing is guided by an imagining that I am a peg-legged pirate, the problem appears solved.

Yet we needn’t have introduced imaginings to solve the problem. We can make do with intentions instead, holding that pretending that p is intentionally acting as if p while not believing that p . This does all the same work in terms of discriminating relevant cases. When I stub my toe on the bar stool, my hobbling and swearing is not done with the intention of acting as if I am a pirate. P&C will need to appeal to some such intention in any case; pretense is always an *action*, on their account, and actions require motivating intentions.

P&C may respond that their concern is with the states that *guide* pretense, as opposed to the intentions that initiate them. They emphasize that “when pretending one performs an action of one sort (holding a banana to one’s ear, say) not only *while* imagining it as an action of a different sort (talking on a telephone), but *because* one does so” (p. 317, emphasis in original). Supposing this were true, P&C could respond that, while an intention to act as if p (while believing that not- p) is what initiates the process of pretense, pretending only occurs insofar as that intention triggers imaginings which then serve to guide the pretense. It would then remain correct to characterize pretense as *essentially* connected to imagination.

But this simply gives us a better view of the question at issue: why should it be that *only* an imagining can guide an episode of pretense? After all, beliefs guide behavior, too; and we have plenty of them. Granted, when I pretend that p , the beliefs that guide the pretense will not include the belief that p (supposing, for the

sake of argument, that pretending that p really requires one not to believe that p). But there is no reason such a pretense cannot be guided by *other* beliefs. I gave some examples of such in Chapter 1: Uncle Joe pretends that the mud pie is delicious by retrieving beliefs about how people act around delicious desserts; a child pretends that a banana is a telephone by noticing a similarity between telephones and bananas. Consider P&C's own example of the child out on Halloween. We can agree that she is no longer pretending to be a witch when she simply walks around in the witch outfit, chatting with her friends. But suppose that, after this respite in the pretense, she resumes acting on the intention to make herself witch-like, while not believing herself to be a witch. Does she need to elicit a *sui generis* imaginative state to carry this out? It is hard to see why she would. She already knows a lot about how witches are supposed to act. She has numerous beliefs about the stereotypical behaviors of such characters—that they cackle, ride around on brooms, stir cauldrons, and so on. Those beliefs suffice for her to act on her intention of making herself saliently witch-like. In so doing, she is once again pretending to be a witch.

It might be responded that, in order for her to know how to make herself witch-like, she must make use of a *sui generis* imaginative state—one with the content “I am a witch”—that allows her to consider what would occur in such a situation. This is the key idea behind views that hold that *sui generis* imaginings are a central *tool* for many pretenses (Currie & Ravenscroft, 2002; Nichols & Stich, 2000). I will consider that idea in depth when addressing the psychological question about pretense. In the context of addressing the metaphysical question, however, this idea only has relevance if it simply isn't possible to have relevant pretense-guiding beliefs without exploiting *sui generis* imaginings in the process. But, surely, before our trick-or-treater ever put on her costume, she already knew that witches fly around on booms and that they cackle, cast spells, pet black cats, and so on. This is why she wanted to *be* a witch! These beliefs ought to be sufficient resources to guide her efforts in acting saliently witch-like. There is no need for her to contemplate possible worlds where she herself *is* a witch.

Will such a belief-guided pretense be emotionally disengaged, or depressingly un-childlike (Velleman, 2000)? I think not. But I'll set the question of one's emotional “immersion” in (some) pretenses to the side. (The question is revisited, in depth, in Chapters 10 and 11 on our immersion in fictions.) Our question now is whether pretense is *possible* when guided by such beliefs. It is hard to see why it would not be.

On the kind of cognitive architecture for pretense proposed by Nichols & Stich (2000) (and cited approvingly by Carruthers (2006)), *sui generis* imaginings play a central role in guiding pretense by allowing one to generate relevant conditional *beliefs*—beliefs of the form ‘if p then q ’—that, in turn, guide the pretense behavior. (Imaginings, on this sort of view, do not *directly* guide action, as they occur

“offline” and therefore have no direct links to action-generating systems (Nichols & Stich, 2000, pp. 125–8.) On this sort of picture, there is no reason a person cannot store such beliefs and use them *again*, at a later date, to guide another pretense of the same sort—this time without triggering the imaginings that were (supposedly) needed to generate the beliefs in the first place.

Even if it is clear that not all pretenses require *sui generis* imaginings, a positive case remains to be made that pretense can proceed through the use of beliefs, desires, and intentions alone. Intentionally acting as would be appropriate if *p* while not believing that *p* may be sufficient for pretense; but it appears not to be necessary. As earlier noted, we are able to pretend what we believe. The door remains open for imagination to reveal itself as a crucial ingredient in any comprehensive characterization of what it is to pretend. Moreover, given that we can pretend both what we believe *and* what we disbelieve, it might seem that whether we are pretending cannot hinge on our beliefs themselves. Of course, we have already seen that merely acting on an imagining is not sufficient to render an action pretense. But one might propose, instead, that pretending occurs when one acts on an imagining *with the intention to pretend*.

Emphasizing the role that mental imagery plays in guiding pretense, Neil Van Leeuwen argues that “if an explicit desire or intention to *pretend* causes the [action-guiding] image, the process that follows will be full pretense” (2011, p. 76).⁴ Such a characterization still doesn’t gain ground on the metaphysical question, however, as it simply pushes the question back to what it is to intend to pretend. How, for instance, does this intention differ from the intention to make oneself saliently like some other thing, or the intention to mirror in one’s actions characteristics of what one is imagining (as when we imagine tying a tie in order to really tie a tie)? Neither intention appears sufficient to transform an act into pretense. Further, Van Leeuwen still only offers a sufficiency condition for pretense; unlike P&C, he does not suggest that an act is pretense *only* if it is caused by an intention to pretend and guided by a mental image. So the depth of the connection between the intention to pretend and pretense remains unclear.

7.4 What It Is to Pretend

The relationship of imagination to the metaphysics of pretense remains obscure.⁵ It still remains to give a positive account of what it is to pretend that doesn’t appeal to a *sui generis* state of imagination. That is the project of this section. I’ll begin with a general criterion for what it is to be involved in a *Pretense Episode*. With that in place, I’ll then define what it is to pretend any arbitrary proposition.

⁴ The sort of imagistic imagining that Van Leeuwen has in mind here would be by my—and, I suspect, his—reckoning also qualify as an attitude-imagining.

⁵ This section greatly condenses some arguments made in Langland-Hassan (2014b).

My definition of a Pretense Episode begins with the intuitive idea that, when pretending, we act as though something is the case that we do not believe to be the case:

Pretense Episode: An agent takes part in a Pretense Episode when (and only when) she intentionally makes some x y -like, while believing that x is not, and will not thereby be made into, a y .

Before addressing the worry that we can pretend what we believe, let's consider a few examples of how we might fill in the x s and y s. If I intentionally make myself pirate-like, while believing that I am not, and will not thereby be made into a pirate, I am engaged in a Pretense Episode—one of pretending to be a pirate. I am the relevant x here; a pirate is the relevant y . If I intentionally make a pencil on my desk rocket-like by throwing it across the room tip-first, and do not believe it will thereby become a rocket, I am engaged in a different pretense episode—one of pretending that the pencil is a rocket (the pencil being x , and a rocket being y). In this way we can account for the kind of “object substitution” pretenses highlighted by Friedman & Leslie (2007), which do not, strictly speaking, involve making *oneself* act like some type of thing one believes oneself not to be; for one need not be the relevant x that is intentionally made y -like. Notice also that, unlike Austin's (1958) characterization of pretense,⁶ a Pretense Episode requires no intention to *deceive* someone with one's actions; nor does it require any public performance. I can pretend to be a pirate in the privacy of my own home, just as a child can pretend to be Luke Skywalker while playing, by himself, in the backyard.

However, this definition of a Pretense Episode seems to clash with the datum that we can pretend that p while believing that p . Earlier I gave the example of pretending to be a philosophy professor while believing myself to be one. Leslie (1987) recounts a case of a child pretending that a cup is empty while believing it is empty.⁷ Yet we can accept this datum without succumbing to the too-strong conclusion that what we pretend is in no way constrained by what we believe.

⁶ According to Austin, “To be pretending...I must be trying to make others believe, or to give them the impression, by means of a current personal performance in their presence, that I am (really, only, &c.) *abc*, in order to disguise the fact that I am really *xyz*” (1958, p. 275). This immediately rules out solitary pretenses—a child pretending on her own, in the backyard, to be a superhero. And it also seems to overlook the many pretense games we take part in just for fun, without any implicit aim at generating a false belief. Austin seems alive to this worry, granting that when, during a party game, he pretends to be a hyena, “there is no question of my trying to convince you *seriously* that I am something other than myself.” Why, then, is it a pretense, on his account? His answer is that “on the party level, my performance [is] convincing” (1958, p. 274). However, it is unclear what it could be for the performance to be convincing “on the party level,” if it does not cause anyone to believe he is a hyena.

⁷ In this example, the child is having a pretend tea party using two (empty) cups. The cups are both pretend-filled with tea by the experimenter. The experimenter then takes one of the cups, turns it upside down, and shakes it. The child is then asked, as part of the pretense, which cup is now empty. Her pointing to just one of the cups is taken as evidence that she is pretending that the one cup is empty; and she also plausibly believes that it is empty.

Instead we can note that instances where we pretend something we believe will always occur in the context of a larger pretense where *something* is pretended that is not believed. That is, pretending what we believe will always occur the context of a related Pretense Episode. I will offer two arguments for this claim. The first appeals to the absurdity of pretenses where, *per impossible*, a person pretends a set of propositions *all of which* he believes; the second is an inference to best explanation, appealing to the fact that, for any clear case of pretense, there is always some pretended proposition the person does not believe.

Taking the absurdity argument first, consider the following cases, which I will call “Hand” and “Standing”:

Hand: Waving my hand in the air, I say: “Look, I am pretending that I have a hand!” You say, “Pretending that you have a hand and *what else?*” “Nothing else,” I say, “just pretending that I have a hand.”

Standing: Standing before you I say: “Look, I am pretending that I am a person standing up!” You respond: “A person that is standing up who is...?” “No,” I say, “just a person who is standing up. A person with arms and legs and so on.”

In both cases I speak falsely. I am not pretending what I say I am. I *cannot* be pretending these things. At least, I cannot pretend these things without *adding* to each pretense something that I do not already believe. Waving my hand in the air, I can pretend that I have a hand *that is on fire*. This is, *ipso facto*, to pretend that I have a hand. But, I cannot *merely* pretend that I have a hand—not so long as I believe myself to have one. And, standing before you, I can pretend that I am a soldier standing at attention, and thereby pretend to be a person standing up. But I cannot *merely* pretend that I am standing up, while I am doing so (provided, again, that I believe myself to be standing). Pushing the point to its logical limit: we cannot pretend the world is exactly the way we believe it to be. So it is one thing to say that we can pretend what we believe; quite another to propose the absurd—that we can pretend a set of propositions *all of which* we believe.

And, indeed, when we look at specific pretenses where something is pretended that is believed, we find that there are always other propositions being pretended that are disbelieved. In Leslie’s (1987) tea party example, the child pretends that a cup that has been turned over and shaken during the pretense is empty while believing it is empty; yet the child *also* pretends that she is at a tea party while believing she is not at a tea party. Put in terms of the Pretense Episode criterion, the pretender is *x*, and *y* is someone at a tea party. The child tries to make *x* *y*-like while believing that *x* is not, and will not in the process, become a *y*. During the game of charades where I pretend to be a philosophy professor (and believe myself to be one), I act as though I am a person having deep thoughts. I am *x*, and a person having deep thoughts is *y*. I am making myself *y*-like while believing I am not a *y*, and that I will not become one in the process. (The *proviso* that I “will

not become one in the process” serves to screen off non-pretenses where we make ourselves like some other kind of thing with the idea that we will become that sort of thing in the very process of the action—e.g. as when copying someone so as to genuinely be like them. See Langland-Hassan (2014b, pp. 411–14) for more on this subtle distinction between copying and pretending.)

Once a Pretense Episode is afoot, any number of propositions can be pretended that are also believed, so long as they are pretended as part of that Pretense Episode. When the child in Leslie’s experiment pretends that the empty cup is empty, her doing so forms part of the Pretense Episode that is initiated by her intentionally acting as though she is at a tea party (while not believing she is at one). When I pretend that I am a philosophy professor, my doing so is part of the Pretense Episode that is initiated by my intentionally acting as though I am having deep thoughts (while not believing that I am). To determine whether an action is carried out “as part of” a Pretense Episode, we have look at the purpose of the action in question and compare it to the purpose of the action that initiated the Pretense Episode. When they are both undertaken for the same general purpose, they are both actions undertaken as part of the same Pretense Episode. The most common purposes that drive pretense are to play a game (as in childhood pretense), to deceive, or to entertain (as in the theatrical arts). So long as we can characterize such purposes without appeal to the notion of pretense (or imagination), the account avoids circularity.

So, for instance, the child’s purpose in acting like she is at a tea party is to play a game.⁸ If pointing to the cup and saying it is empty is done with the purpose of playing that game, the action is part of that Pretense Episode. By contrast, if the child checks the cut under a bandage on her finger during the pretense just because it is itching, that action is not done for the purpose of playing the game—and so is not a pretended action. Similarly, suppose that John is a security guard at First National Bank. He then pretends, as part of a heist, to be a security guard at Ultimate Savings Bank. He is engaged in pretense because he is acting like a security guard at Ultimate Savings Bank, while believing that he is not one. His purpose for acting in this way is to deceive people into thinking he works at Ultimate Savings Bank. Now, he is also acting like a security guard while believing that he is one. This action qualifies as pretense because it is carried out for the same purpose as the action that initiates the Pretense Episode—namely, that of deceiving people into thinking he is a security guard at Ultimate Savings Bank.

We can now define what it is to pretend any arbitrary proposition that q is r :

Pretending that q is r : An agent is pretending that q is r if she intentionally makes q r -like, as part of a Pretense Episode.

⁸ The very notion of a game does not presuppose the notion of pretense. Most games—checkers, baseball, croquet—require no pretense at all.

This criterion applies to a wide array of pretenses—indeed, it aims to cover them all—including *deceptive* pretenses (such as the bank heist just mentioned), pretense games undertaken *for fun* (such as a game of charades, or child’s play), and *theatrical* pretenses, where actors pretend to be characters they are not, for purposes of artistic expression. It also sheds light on the close relation between copying an action and carrying out the action as pretense. Suppose that I copy the way Gottfried knots his tie because I like the shape of the Full Windsors he wears. I am intentionally making my tie (x) Full Windsor-like (y -like). Yet it is not pretense, because I think that I will indeed have success in knotting it into a Full Windsor. I think that x will, in the process, become a y . If, on the other hand, I am quite sure that I will not succeed in completing a Full Windsor knot, yet carry through with intentionally making the tie Full Windsor-like anyway, then my action shades back toward pretense.

A potential counterexample worth considering trades on imprecision in the intentions we might ascribe. Neil Van Leeuwen (personal communication) suggests a case where he intends to make some wire horseshoe-like, as a means to creating a croquet wicket. Acting on that intention, it seems he intentionally makes the wire horseshoe-like without believing it will become a horseshoe in the process—and also without pretending that the wire is a horseshoe. My response is that the intention ascribed (to make the wire horseshoe-like) is too broad. After all, he doesn’t intend to make the wire saliently horseshoe-like *in whatever respects possible*. He won’t be satisfied if, for instance, he simply succeeds in making the wire *stiff* like a horseshoe, or *associated with luck* like a horseshoe. (This distinguishes him from the girl on Halloween who wants to make herself witch-like in whatever salient respects possible.) There’s really only one way that he wants to make it horseshoe-like: he wants to make it horseshoe-*shaped*. His (quite narrow) intention is to make the wire horseshoe-shaped; and he believes he will succeed in that endeavor. That is why it is not pretense.

There is still some open texture here between what will constitute sincere efforts at imitation and copying and what will be pretense, as further explored in Langland-Hassan (2014b). This is to be expected, as copying and imitation are already intuitively close to pretense. What we want from a criterion for pretense is that it identify the most salient features of pretense and not include as pretense, or as pretense-related, lots of acts that bear no family resemblance.⁹ And this it appears to do. While I have focused on childhood games of pretense, it is easy to see how the account extends to deceptive and theatrical pretenses. Prisoners pretending to be security guards in order to escape jail are intentionally making themselves security-guard-like while believing they are not security guards; the

⁹ In just the same way, our analysis of what it is to be a chair can be accurate, even if there are borderline cases (e.g., love seats); the point is to avoid a definition that includes many things—screwdrivers, toasters—that bear no salient family resemblances, while shedding light on what it is to be a chair.

actor pretending to be Julius Caesar is intentionally making himself Caesar-like while believing that he is not Caesar. The present criterion thus gives good reason to think that pretense does not, as matter of metaphysics, require anything over and above beliefs, desires, and intentions of various kinds. Nor need we invoke the notion of *imagination* or of *pretense* within the contents of those states to capture why it is that their possessors qualify as pretending. Finally, the specific beliefs (about how to make some x y -like, and that x will not become a y) and intentions (to make x y -like) are states that all sides will in any case have to grant pretenders possess. There is no reason to go further and invoke, in addition, a distinct state of imagining when characterizing what it is to pretend.¹⁰

7.5 Answering the Epistemological Question

How do we recognize pretense in others?¹¹ Our answer to the metaphysical question offers a quick response to the epistemological one. When we notice that someone is intentionally making some x y -like without their believing that the x is a y , and without their believing that the x will become a y in the process, we can safely judge them to be engaged in a pretense episode. We can then determine that other specific propositions are pretended by determining that some q is made r -like as part of that pretense episode. The question of how a person detects pretense reduces to the more general question of how we detect another person's intentions and beliefs.

There is a wrinkle in this answer, however. We know that children are able to distinguish pretend play from sincere action by two years of age, or younger (Harris & Kavanaugh, 1993; Lillard, 1993; Onishi, Baillargeon, & Leslie, 2007).

¹⁰ A referee observes that my characterization of pretense may focus too narrowly on the intentions of pretenders, insofar as there may be propositions pretended whose specific contents never find their way into the minds of those pretending. For instance, according to Walton (1990), many pretenses are governed by certain *principles of generation*, which are “rules about what is to be imagined in what circumstances” (p. 40). In one of his examples, two boys agree that any stump in the woods will count as a bear. With that principle in place, they can be construed as pretending that there is a bear at each specific location where a stump happens to be, even if they have no idea where most of the stumps are located (and so no intentions to pretend—or imagine—that bears are at thus and such specific locations). Such principles can easily be woven into the general account I have sketched. Like any other kind of game, games of pretense may at times have game-specific governing rules that generate truths about what is being pretended. The point remains that no pretense can get off the ground without the necessary and sufficient conditions I've identified in place, and that we needn't invoke *sui generis* notions of imagination or of pretense to understand what is being pretended in any situation. Principles of generation can be understood as rules concerning what should be considered true in a certain game of pretense (as opposed to rules about what is to be imagined). To accommodate the truths that they generate about what is being pretended, we can expand the second aspect of my definition of pretense as follows: *Pretending that q is r* : An agent is pretending that q is r if she intentionally makes q r -like, as part of a Pretense Episode, or if there is a principle of generation in place within the Pretense Episode, according to which q is r .

¹¹ This section summarizes, expands, and refines several points made in Langland-Hassan (2012).

Yet there is evidence that children cannot reliably apply mental state concepts like *BELIEVES* and *INTENDS* to others until about the age of four (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001). This evidence lies primarily in their performance on various iterations of the “false belief task” (Gopnik & Astington, 1988; Hogrefe, Wimmer, & Perner, 1986; Wimmer & Perner, 1983). If such children can nevertheless recognize pretense in others, this suggests they are not doing so by attributing beliefs and intentions of the sort just suggested. A few comments are in order.

First, more recent studies have cast some doubt upon earlier findings that young children lack mental state concepts like *BELIEVES* and *INTENDS*. Studies that use looking-time as a proxy for surprise (Onishi & Baillargeon, 2005; Scott & Baillargeon, 2009), or an “active helping” paradigm to assess knowledge of another’s epistemic state (Buttelmann, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2009), suggest that even pre-verbal infants can understand others as having (false) beliefs. As a result, there is now little consensus concerning when children acquire an adult-like theory of mind. Supposing that infants and young children really are able to reliably discern the beliefs and intentions of others, we could explain their ability to recognize pretense by appeal to their ability to recognize the relevant beliefs and intentions. On the other hand, given the conflicting nature of the evidence concerning theory of mind abilities in children younger than four, it would be preferable to explain how pretense games are recognized without relying on the claim that children exploit a well-developed, adult-like theory of mind. And, in any case, I doubt that most pretenses *are* recognized via detection of the mental states that define them.

One alternative proposal is that children recognize another’s pretense by noticing that “the other person is *behaving in a way that would be appropriate if p were the case*” (Nichols & Stich, 2000, p. 139, emphasis in original). To understand that Mommy is pretending that the banana is a telephone, it might seem that the child need only discern that Mommy is “behaving in a way that would be appropriate if the banana were a telephone” (p. 139). In recognizing this, the child need not attribute to Mommy any mental states. Unfortunately, as noted by Friedman & Leslie (2007) (“F&L” hereafter)—and later acknowledged by Stich and Tarzia (2015)—this simple behavioral criterion has serious shortcomings. The first is that it fails to distinguish cases of acting in error as if *p* (because one falsely believes that *p*) from pretending that *p*. A second is that it suggests that children will over-interpret people as pretending that *p* whenever they happen to note a similarity between the person’s actions and the actions that would be appropriate if *p*. That is, people who act as if *p* without *intending* to do so will nevertheless be interpreted as pretending that *p*.¹² A third is that we typically act

¹² Notably, Lillard (1993) showed that children *do* sometimes make this kind of error. However, F&L might reply that *pervasive* confusions of this kind do not occur, despite the fact that one’s actions are almost always appropriate to some other kind of action than what one intends.

as would be appropriate if p when we correctly believe that p , intend to act as though p , and are in no way trying to pretend! This was noted above when considering the necessary conditions for pretense itself. Right now, you are acting as would be appropriate if you were reading this sentence. This is not sufficient for your pretending to read the sentence. If recognizing that someone is pretending that p were just a matter of recognizing that they are acting as would be appropriate if p , almost any sincere act could potentially be confused for an act of pretense. F&L levy this critique as a means of motivating their own theory, according to which both pretense and pretense recognition require use of a primitive, innate mental state concept of **PRETEND** (Friedman & Leslie, 2007; Friedman, Neary, Burnstein, & Leslie, 2010).

However, we can preserve a non-mentalistic account of how children recognize pretense if we simply highlight the relevance of *manner cues* and the notion of a *game*. The relevant manner cues include winks-and-nods, characteristically unusual tones of voice, exaggerated gestures, stopping actions short of normal goal points, and so on. When such cues are detected *together with* some behavior that would be appropriate if p —particularly when it is salient that not- p —a child (or adult, for that matter) can reliably infer that a certain kind of game has been initiated. It is a game where people act like something is the case that is not the case. In determining that someone is pretending that p , then, a child looks for three things together: some of a particular cluster of manner cues, some behavior that would be appropriate if p , and its being clear that not- p . Through experience and positive reinforcement, the child learns that when these conditions are met, the right thing to do is to follow along with the adult in acting in ways that would be appropriate if p , even if (as is usually the case when such cues are detected) p is obviously not the case. These are the rules of the game, and they can be learned in the same way the child learns the rules to any game—such as kickball, or freeze-tag—that does not require the representation of another’s mental states.

However, F&L are well aware that (what they call) “behavioral theorists” would like to appeal to manner cues for help. They argue that behavioral theories cannot appeal to such cues because the very cues that enable one to reliably distinguish episodes of pretending that p (the winks, the nods, the exaggerated expressions, the stopping short of completing an action) will not themselves be behaviors that would be appropriate if p (2007, p. 112). In their view, this clashes with the behavioral theorist’s claim that recognizing a pretense that p involves recognizing that someone is acting as would be appropriate if p .

But the behavioral theory has ample room to maneuver here. Once the account is amended to include the detection of manner cues together with *some* behavior that would be appropriate if p , the fact that some of the manner cues themselves will involve acting in ways that would *not* be appropriate if p poses no problem. For to act as would be appropriate if p , in the behaviorist’s sense, does not require that one act *exactly* as would be appropriate if p , but rather that one act *in some*

salient respects as would be appropriate if *p*.¹³ Suppose that we are pretending that containers of mud are chocolate cakes. We can agree with F&L that the knowing looks and the stopping-short-of-eating are *not* behaviors that would be appropriate to engage in with chocolate cake. Yet, in concert with *some* salient behaviors that it would be appropriate to engage in with chocolate cakes (e.g., cutting them up, saying “Mmm, I love chocolate cake”), the manner cues enable the child to recognize the context as one where she should also act in ways that would be appropriate if the mud containers were chocolate cakes. With this in mind, we can summarize the revised behavioral heuristic as follows:

Behavioral heuristic: a person can be reliably recognized as pretending that *p* by being recognized as acting in some salient ways that would be appropriate if *p*—typically while it is obvious that not-*p*—and while offering some of a familiar cluster of manner cues, which serve to draw attention to the subject matter of the pretense.

Friedman and Leslie might nevertheless press their case by arguing we have secretly attributed the child the concept PRETEND in giving the child the ability to “look for” combinations of specific manner cues together with instances of acting in ways that would be appropriate if *p*. (As they emphasize, “one must guard against secretly interpreting act-as-if as act-as-if pretending” (2007, p. 119).) In one sense, we certainly *have* ascribed the child the concept PRETEND, to the extent that being able to detect and play such games constitutes understanding pretense. In *this* (behavioral) sense of ‘pretend,’ the child fully understands that the parent is pretending—and indeed that the parent is acting as if pretending. The important point is that we have not thereby given the child the concept of a mental state. Rather, we have given the child the concept of a kind of *game*, the recognition and playing of which does not require an understanding of mental states. Only by begging the question in favor of their own account can F&L hold that understanding someone is acting as if pretending *necessarily* involves understanding that person as being in certain mental states.

Recognizing that someone is pretending does not, then, require the possession of mental state concepts, nor the attribution of beliefs, intentions, or imaginings to others (at least, not in the case of the pretenses that children reliably recognize). Stich & Tarzia (2015) reach the same conclusion in their own response to F&L—which, they note (fn. 10, pp. 5–7), builds on a strategy outlined in Langland-Hassan (2012). However, instead of holding that pretense is recognized

¹³ Compare: we easily recognize the actor playing Hamlet as behaving in ways that would be appropriate if he were Hamlet, while recognizing that he is also behaving in ways that would *not* be appropriate if he were Hamlet (e.g., ignoring the 500 people watching him from the theater). Recognizing the two together enables us to recognize that he is merely pretending to be Hamlet. There is no difficulty in the matter.

by means of recognizing behavior that would be appropriate if p (together with relevant manner cues), Stich & Tarzia find a necessary role for the PWB (i.e. the “possible worlds box” of Nichols & Stich (2000)). Here they describe the process of pretense recognition with respect to a case where a father pretends to be sleepy:

Once the child has hit upon a pretense premise that enables her to understand what Daddy is doing (he is behaving in a way that is similar, in salient ways, to what he is represented as doing in the imaginary world of the PWB) she can, if she wishes, join in the pretense game by giving Daddy a good night hug and kiss.

(Stich & Tarzia, 2015, p. 7)

My only qualm is that the appeal to a PWB here is gratuitous. Stich & Tarzia specify that the child does not know what sort of processing to get going in her PWB until she *first* determines what sort of actions Daddy is mirroring with his own. Only then can she put “Daddy is very sleepy” (as opposed to some other proposition) into her PWB, allow other inferences to unfold therein, and, finally, judge Daddy to be acting in ways that are saliently similar to how he is represented as being in her PWB. Simply determining what the pretend premise is, together with noticing relevant manner cues, will suffice for the child to have determined Daddy to be pretending. So we need not bring the theoretical notion of a PWB into the characterization of how pretense is recognized. Even if children *in fact* notice thus and such occurring in their PWB when they recognize pretense—a fact I will dispute next chapter—their doing so is inessential to explaining how pretense is recognized.

7.6 Summary

This chapter began by distinguishing the importantly different metaphysical, epistemological, and psychological questions we can ask about pretense. I then argued, with respect to the metaphysical question, that we needn’t invoke *sui generis* imaginative states in order to give an informative analysis of what it is to pretend. We can characterize someone as pretending (or not) simply by describing their active intentions and beliefs, none of which need incorporate the concepts of pretense or imagination. This analysis of pretense has the added benefit of allowing us to see what childhood games of pretense, deceptive pretenses, and theatrical pretenses all have in common.

I next moved to the question of how pretense is recognized in others, focusing in particular on how young children recognize and learn to take part in pretense. There I explained how the kinds of pretenses children are able to detect can be recognized by noticing certain behavioral features—including stereotypical manner cues—of the people pretending. We need not, as some have argued, deploy a

primitive mental state concept of PRETEND in recognizing someone as pretending. While a full metaphysical analysis of the essence of pretense will, if I am right, invoke the mental states of belief and intention, we need not suppose that people are only able to recognize pretense in others by recognizing and attributing those states. Like many things in nature whose essence lies below the surface, pretenses can be distinguished (as reliably as we *do* distinguish them) by their superficial features.

I move on in the next chapter to address the third, *psychological* question concerning pretense—viz., what sort of mental states do we in fact rely upon in order to pretend? Even if my accounts of what it is to pretend and of how pretenses are recognized are correct, it might still be that we usually make use of *sui generis* imaginative states in carrying out a pretense. I will argue that this is not so.