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Introduction Recent Debates on Learning from Fiction

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In ordinary critical practice, we take for granted that we can learn from fictions (literary or visual), i.e., that we can acquire new warranted beliefs on that basis.¹ Thus, we assume that realist fictions include truths about the settings in which the fictional events occur, intended as such, and often backed by serious research. This makes understandable Salman Rushdie's criticism of the film *Slumdog Millionaire* that it "piles impossibility on impossibility" [*Guardian*, 24/02/2009], given the realist ambitions of the film. We similarly assume that we can acquire experiential knowledge – knowledge of *what it is like* – and knowledge-how from fictions, whether or not they differ from propositional knowledge. Even the most fantastic fictions invite readers to assume truths – say, about human psychology in *Alice in Wonderland*, to make sense of the behavior of the characters she meets and her interactions with them. But can this be philosophically justified? In the following introductory pages to this special issue of *Teorema* devoted to the topic, I'll mention some strands of the most significant recent discussions that frame the papers to be found in it, and I'll provide short summaries of these contributions.

In his classical discussion of "truth in fiction" (i.e., of how fictional content is determined), Lewis (1978/83) envisaged two ways of learning from fiction. The first he derives from the role played by an assumption that has come to be known [after Walton (1990)] as the *Reality Principle* in going beyond what is explicitly presented in fictions in order to determine their content – a principle roughly to the effect that we can take to be "true in the fiction" what is true *simpliciter*, to the extent that it is consistent with what is explicitly made part of the content of the fiction: "There may be an understanding between the author and his readers to

the effect that what is true in his fiction, on general questions if not on particulars, is not to depart from what he takes to be the truth". Along similar lines, Gendler (2000), p. 76, has explained how principles allowing the import of truths about the actual world to the content of fictions are a coin whose reverse side are corresponding *export principles*, allowing audiences in some cases (realist fiction genres, such as historical novels, biopics, etc.) to infer from fictional contents truths about the actual world. This suggests a possible mechanism accounting for how we can learn straightforward empirical truths from fictions, both about particular matters of fact and about universal truths.

Gendler calls this inferential mechanism "*narrative as clearinghouse*: I export things from the story that you the story-teller have intentionally and consciously imported, adding them to my stock in the way that I add knowledge gained by testimony". This supports complaints (such as Rushdie's regarding *Slumdog Millionaire*) about fictions that potentially mislead in so far as they allow audiences to infer falsehoods by invoking such export principles. Friend (2006) offers a good discussion of an excellent example, Gore Vidal's *Lincoln*. Here are two further illustrations of this familiar inference process that advocates of so-called "literary humanism" (Gaskin, 2013) have defended, from reviews of recent film releases, one giving praise and another criticism. The first is Christian Caryl's (2015) criticism of alleged inaccuracies in Alan Turing's biopic *The Imitation Game* (2014), providing different respects in which the movie "is a bizarre departure from the historical record". The other comes from a review by Ian Buruma [Russia and China: The Movie", <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/authoritarian-capitalism-russia-china-by-ian-buruma-2014-11>]:

The times we live in are often most clearly reflected in the mirror of art. Much has been written about post-communism in Russia and China. But two recent films, Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin*, made in China in 2013, and Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan*, made in Russia in 2014, reveal the social and political landscapes of these countries more precisely than anything I have seen in print.

As Friend (2014) and Ichino & Currie (forthcoming) make clear, however, it is not straightforward to develop an epistemology that could lend support to such contentions in a sufficiently articulated way. Part of the problem has to do with the indirectness with which the constative acts to be found in fictions that these claims presuppose are conveyed, about which I'll say more below. There are further epistemological worries,

which Friend and Ichino & Currie discuss, relating to an apparent excess of credulity to which, some empirical results suggest, readers are prone—in particular data from Daniel Gilbert and colleagues that Matravers (2014), p. 27, aligns in support of the claim that there is no significant difference between our engagement with fictions and with “representations generally”. Nonetheless, both Friend and Ichino & Currie go on to provide reasons to think that learning from fiction is possible. On the one hand, they give reasons for taking the results from the relevant experiments with a pinch of salt; as Graham (2010) and Sperber et al. (2010) argue, we also have filter mechanisms of “epistemic vigilance” (as the latter authors call them) that allow us to be far less credulous on issues that matter to us. On the other, they suggest epistemological stories that make the acquisition of knowledge from fiction intelligible.

Fricker (2012) argues against this, on the basis of the indirectness of any constative acts found in what primarily is an act of fiction-making. Consider a stock example in recent debates on the semantics/pragmatics divide. Peter asks Sally whether John will join them for a dinner Peter is about to book, and Sally replies, “John has had dinner”. There is a primary message here, the assertion that John has had dinner shortly before the dialogue, and a secondary message, the assertion that John will not want to join them for dinner. According to Fricker, only the primary message can be asserted – but not the secondary, insinuated or indirectly conveyed one. She offers two reasons. First, a secondary message will be too ambiguous for the speaker to fully commit to it. Second, the audience will have to choose to draw certain inferences and it is thus they, not the speaker, who are responsible for the inferences that they choose to draw. Other skeptics about learning from fiction have made similar points.

To assuage doubts like this, Ichino & Currie offer an alternative model to explain the acquisition of beliefs from fictions. Readers take the way the work is written to indicate something about the author’s serious beliefs; they have some confidence in the reliability of those beliefs and hence some confidence that the propositions believed are true. Thus, we might take the authors of *Leviathan* and *A Touch of Sin* to be in a position to have the knowledge of their societies given by the films. We might take them as creating the films to put us in a position to acquire it, through something like the “narrative as clearinghouse” procedure that Gendler identifies. And we might respond to the film by accepting the corresponding invitations to form beliefs. Similarly, Caryl’s criticism assumes that Turing’s biopic invites inferences of the same sort, and objects to it based on the falsity of the beliefs thereby formed. The films

are primarily fictions. They are thereby primarily subject to norms according to which they should present content that interested readers might find worthwhile imagining. But this is compatible with their inclusion of straightforward constative acts concerning parts of those contents, subject thereby to truth-related norms. It is even compatible with taking their inclusion of such assertions as contributing to their satisfying their more specific norm as fictions, given conventionally established expectations about the genres to which they belong.²

A detailed epistemic analysis of such inferences would, however, be no easy matter. Friend (2014) uses ideas on safety and epistemic competence from Sosa; in previous work [Friend (2006)] she had invoked an alternative epistemic framework for similar purposes. Graham (2010) provides an evolutionary perspective that could also be put to use. However, the genus of constatives does not only include the species *assertion*. Claims made in a philosophy talk or paper are not flat-out assertions; they are not intended to be accepted just by comprehending the force and content with which they are presented, plus perhaps the absence of reasons to distrust the agent, or the presence of positive reasons to trust her, depending on the correct epistemology of testimony [cf. Graham (2010)]. Their illocutionary point is instead to make or merely present some claims to the audience, calling their attention to considerations in their favor. Fictions also include constatives of this kind. This leads us to the second of the two ways through which we can learn from fictions I mentioned above, which Lewis (1978/83, 278-9) also envisaged:

Fiction can offer us contingent truths about this world. It cannot take the place of non-fictional evidence, to be sure. But sometimes evidence is not lacking. We who have lived in the world for a while have plenty of evidence, but we may not have learned as much from it as we could have done. This evidence bears on a certain proposition. If only that proposition is formulated, straightway it will be apparent that we have very good evidence for it. If not, we will continue not to know it. Here, fiction can help us. If we are given a fiction such that the proposition is obviously true in it, we are led to ask: and is it also true *simpliciter*? And sometimes, when we have plenty of unappreciated evidence, to ask the question is to know the answer.

Gendler (*op. cit.*, p. 76) calls this second inferential process “*narrative as factory*: I export things from the story whose truth becomes apparent as a result of thinking about the story itself. These I add to my stock the way I add knowledge gained by modeling”. Thus, to illustrate it again

with reviews of recently released films, Dan Kois writes in *Slate* that Richard Linklater's *Boyhood* is "both a singular work ... and a universal one, reflecting the elemental formative experiences of nearly every viewer, even those who don't ... have a lot in common with Mason or Samantha or Olivia or Mason Sr. It's ... a profound statement about the lives we live".³ Several writers have argued that it is in these acts of *putting forward for our consideration* (perhaps in ways that can only be fully appreciated through the conscious experiences we can obtain from fully worked out narratives) that we find the most significant forms of knowledge we can acquire from fiction. For example, Cora Diamond has argued that literature provides knowledge by leading us to "attend to the world and what is in it, in a way that will involve the exercise of all our faculties" [Diamond (1995), p. 296]. In deservedly influential work, Martha Nussbaum emphasizes how literature enriches our experience and understanding of the world: "The point is that in the activity of literary imagining we are led to imagine and describe with greater precision, focusing our attention on each word, feeling each event more keenly" [Nussbaum (1990), pp. 47-48]. Literature deepens our knowledge, Nussbaum suggests, by making details of the world salient to us.

We can illustrate this second way in which we can learn from fiction by discussing what appear to be thematic claims made in fictions about the very philosophical matter we have been discussing – the possibility of acquiring knowledge from fiction. Being professionally interested in the topic, we should expect fictions to convey constatives about it. And of course, there are many examples of this kind. In a previous paper on this topic [García-Carpintero (2007), pp. 203-4], I quoted in full (my own translation of) a short story by Julio Cortázar, "A Continuity of Parks". It features a reader "transported" to what he reasonably takes to be a merely fictional story which, unfortunately unbeknownst to him, narrates a succession of events in fact simultaneously unfolding while he reads, eventually leading to (one infers) his being killed "offscreen" in the story's denouement. As I explain there, it is reasonable to take the story to make points about the topic of this essay. Which points? An obvious one is modal:⁴ there might be fictions whose contents are entirely true. This would be a philosophical claim, contradicting some views on fiction. Drawing on recent work on the epistemology of modality, Stokes (2006) elaborates on how fictions support such modal claims [cfr. also Ichikawa and Jarvis (2009)]. The basic idea is that they make situations conceivable; under certain assumptions, developed in different ways by different philosophers, this supports a claim that what is thus conceiva-

ble is thereby also possible. Once more, Lewis envisaged this: “Fiction might serve as a means for discovery of modal truth ... Here the fiction serves the same purpose as an example in philosophy ... the philosophical example is just a concise bit of fiction” [Lewis (1978/83), p. 278].

A possible model for explaining these inferences is that of indirect speech acts [cfr. García-Carpintero (2013) and Reicher (2012)]. Grice (1975) offered a deservedly influential analysis for a specific case, conversational implicatures, in which assertions are indirectly conveyed by other assertions. The maxims that Grice provided were attuned to that case and cannot be generalized. For instance, the maxim of quality (“Try to make your contribution one that is true”, *op. cit.*, p. 27) cannot be applied to explain how assertions are conveyed by questions, or to how assertives are conveyed by fictions for that matter, because questions and fictions are not constitutively either true or false. But the Cooperative Principle (“make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange” *ibid.*, p. 26), from which Grice derives the specific maxims, should be invoked in any general account of indirect speech acts. The engagement with a fiction can be taken as a “conversation”, a cooperative undertaking involving authors and their expected audiences; one in which the partners know little of each other, but this just contributes to delineating how the cooperative principle can reasonably apply.⁵ Also, as in the previous case of facts exported from fictions, genre conventions and related assumptions will be relevant. We assume that, even though the utterly unexpected denouement for such a short story already makes it sufficiently gratifying, it is common for serious literary authors such as Cortázar to use their fictions to make claims like the one I ventured to articulate above.

The two ways of conveying constatives I have discussed rely on hermeneutical processes. Because of this, they create more indetermination than that which already afflicts those directly conveyed by uttering sentences in the declarative mood in default contexts, using expressions in their straightforward literal way.⁶ As the debate on the semantics/pragmatics divide in the past three decades has shown, and as I have illustrated above, this already requires a share of hermeneutics and hence creates a good measure of indetermination. I was tentative in stating the philosophical point of Cortázar’s story, and that was a relatively easy case because it is so short that it can be taken as a philosophical thought experiment – but a thought experiment intended to support exactly which philosophical view? It would not do for me to enlist Cortázar in support

of my own views. From what we know about him, in all probability the thought experiment was meant to support an altogether opposite view about the nature of fiction. Namely, one close to Goodman's (1976), according to which there is no constitutive difference between fiction and non-fiction, only one of degree relative to the number of truths – i.e., (for him) propositions *counted as true* by some contextually trusted epistemology. So Cortázar would not have put the point of the story as I did two paragraphs back, but perhaps rather like this: there might be works we take to be fictions that are not in fact fictions.

This is also the main point of Mariás's *Dark Back of Time*. Here the more essayistic form of the fiction makes it easier to identify it. He declares right at the beginning:

I believe I've still never mistaken fiction for reality, though I have mixed them together more than once, as everyone does, not only novelists or writers but everyone who has recounted anything since the time we know began ... words – even when spoken, even at their crudest – are in and of themselves metaphorical and therefore imprecise, and cannot be imagined without ornament, though it is often involuntary; there is ornament in even the most arid exposition and frequently in interjections and insults as well. All anyone has to do is introduce an “as if” into the story, or not even that, all you need to do is use a simile, comparison or figure of speech ... and fiction creeps into the narration of what happened, altering or falsifying it. The time-honored aspiration of any chronicler or survivor—to tell what happened, give an account of what took place, leave a record of events and crimes and exploits – is, in fact, a mere illusion or chimera, or, rather, the phrase and concept themselves are already metaphorical and partake of fiction. “To tell what happened” is inconceivable and futile, or possible only as invention. The idea of testimony is also futile and there has never been a witness who could truly fulfill his duty. ... Yet in these pages I'm going to place myself on the side of those who have sometimes claimed to be telling what really happened or pretended to succeed in doing so, I'm going to tell what happened, or was ascertained, or simply known—what happened in my experience or in my fabrication or to my knowledge [*op. cit.*, pp. 7-9].

Here Mariás seems to understand ‘fiction’ in the sense of *falsehood*, and uses familiar arguments to make his point; one of them is just the observation by Friend (2008), that non-fictions include contents presented to be imagined and not to be believed. This would also explain the reasons he provides throughout the book to mock those whom he takes to mistake fiction for reality. The book discusses the reception of his earlier

novel, *All Souls*. He questions people who (reasonably, in my view), taking the book to be a sort of *roman à clef* or autobiographical novel, make “narrative as clearinghouse” inferences of the kind we have examined above. His argument against these inferences appears to be that they are wrong in some cases, and this does not detract from the value of the work: his nameless narrator has properties that he himself does not have, for instance. His point is well taken – this is one of the main reasons I mentioned above why the epistemology of learning from fiction is tricky. As also indicated above, non-skeptics deal with this by contending that learning from testimony in general does create similar challenges; Friend (2014) and Ichino & Currie (forthcoming) argue that exercising adequate vigilance suffices to make the beliefs we acquire from fictions justified enough to count as knowledge.

Another fiction, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, also appears to reproduce considerations against learning from fiction that can be found in the philosophical literature. The book concerns the difficulties that Briony – a novelist – has writing a novel that she intends as atonement for a huge mistake she made in her adolescence:

The problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists [McEwan (2001), pp. 350-1].

As I interpret it, McEwan is here both assuming and putting forward (using the “narrative as factory” procedure) the sort of “postmodernist” view of Riffaterre (1990) and others, on which fictions cannot make reference to the actual world. This is the alleged reason why Briony cannot ask for forgiveness: the forgiveness she needs must come from someone outside her, while her fiction only refers to entities of her own made. On this basis, McEwan suggests that learning from fictions, as much as atoning by means of them, is just impossible.

Yasunari Kawabata’s novel *Beauty and Sadness* (1964) presents the alternative, non-skeptical point of view. For a main theme of the novel is how artists (a novelist and a painter) can try to cope with a tragic event in their lives (the *sadness* in the title) by dealing with it in their respective artworks (the *beauty*); and the novel straightforwardly assume that people

can justifiably obtain information about reality (about the tragic events, and the attitudes towards them of their agents) by engaging with the fictions. (What they do with that information is another matter; according to the novel – and this is the second main thematic point – it depends in part on their own temporal perspective regarding the events in the past.)

So far I have provided some elements of the philosophical conversation about learning from fiction in contemporary discussions, and in passing what I take to be some significant references; I have also suggested that that conversation is reflected in thematic claims we can find in fictional works themselves – whether justifiably or unjustifiably, depending on whether it is the skeptics or the optimists that are right about this topic. I will now wrap up by summarizing the main points made in the papers that we have selected for the volume.

MARÍA JOSÉ ALCARAZ doesn't question the optimist view that we can learn from fictions, but she objects to a stronger claim that is sometimes made, namely, that fictions provide a unique kind of knowledge. Her main point is that we should be cautious in deriving from the fact that fictions can afford knowledge the conclusion that this is a form of knowledge available only through fictions. If it were, it could not be available through a similar but non-fictional representation. She examines the features upon which the cognitive value of fictions relies (in particular, the emotions that fictions are very good at arousing) and she argues that they are not exclusive to fictional works: non-fictional ones possess them too.

GREG CURRIE'S contribution is also mildly in the skeptical camp. Plato banished the artists because of their potential danger: they can certainly promote empathy, but this is mostly put to morally and rationally dubious purposes. In Plato's wake, Iris Murdoch – who valued the strengths of fiction, in contrast to other forms such as the philosophical article or the history book, in that good fictions focus our attention on the points they convey in a unique way – was sensitive to it: "A great deal of art, perhaps most art, actually is self-consoling fantasy, and even great art cannot guarantee the quality of its consumer's consciousness" [Murdoch (1997), p. 370]. Nonetheless, she ends up emphasizing the virtues: "Art is a special discerning exercise of intelligence in relation to the real; and although aesthetic form has essential elements of trickery and magic, yet form in art, as form in philosophy, is designed to communicate and reveal" [*ibid.*, p. 454]. In his contribution, Currie examines what we can learn on these issues from current empirical research. He makes two claims: (i) It is one thing to show that literature makes us more em-

pathic, and another to show that it makes us more usefully discriminating empathizers. (ii) A serious study of the effects of literature on empathy should investigate possible ways in which literature might compromise our empathic tendencies and not focus exclusively on good news stories.

According to current orthodoxy, fictions are some sort of proposal to imagine, a point that KATHLEEN STOCK'S paper, summarized momentarily, nicely develops; hence, if it is possible to acquire knowledge from them – along previously suggested lines, or those that Stock herself suggests – there must be an epistemological story regarding how imaginings can be epistemic grounds for beliefs. FABIAN DORSCH'S paper confronts precisely this issue, and provides a detailed account supporting an argument that this can indeed be the case.

In her contribution Kathleen Stock assumes a fairly standard view of the nature of fiction, on which fictions are Gricean speech acts intended to produce imaginings in their audience. She critically discusses views on the determination of the contents of fictions, i.e., what is “fictionally true” in them. On some views (“actual intentionalism”), this is determined by the actual intentions of the fiction-maker – so that evidence from, say, a secret diary unavailable to the ordinary reader is perfectly adequate to establish the fiction's content. On alternative views (“hypothetical intentionalism”, “value-maximizing” theory) such hidden actual intentions are irrelevant; only interpretations based on evidence available to the ordinary well-informed reader of the produced text are acceptable.

Stock assumes that learning contingent truths about the world from fiction, in the way we acquire knowledge through testimony, is possible; she shows how actual intentionalism is consistent with this. She then poses a dilemma to anti-intentionalist theories. They could try to offer a model for the transmission of beliefs through fictions analogous to those they provide for the determination of the content of fictions; but this seems to conflict with the fact that the justification of beliefs acquired via testimony, on any proposed model for this, appears to be sensitive to the justification of the beliefs of the actual originator. The other horn has the anti-intentionalist accepting that the content of beliefs transmitted through testimony by fictions depends on the beliefs of the actual fiction-maker; but then they have further work to do to explain the disconnection between the strategies they defend for the interpretation of fictional contents to be imagined, and those to be believed.

TERRONE'S, ŽANIĆ'S and BOARDMAN'S papers nicely complement each other. Terrone suggests that we could take his proposal as a form of

a “neo-cognitivist” view on learning from fiction. John Gibson (2008) and Jukka Mikkonen (2015) have described as “neo-cognitivist” the approaches that treat the cognitive value of fiction in terms of “understanding” rather than in terms of warranted beliefs. This corresponds rather well to Gendler’s “narrative as factory” paradigm, of fictions as models. Mikkonen mentions the related work of Catherine Z. Elgin (1993) and Eileen John (1998) as precedents. In this framework, Terrone develops a suggestion made by Ichino & Currie (forthcoming), that what one learns from fictions can be essentially indexical: *jealousy can be like this*, with the demonstrative pointing towards characters and events in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*.

Žanić, for his part, develops in (neo-)cognitivist ways claims originally made on behalf of anti-cognitivism by Peter Lamarque (2006), concerning the role of *thematic statements* in appreciating fictions – this could be nicely applied to the examples I have provided, of fictions whose themes concern precisely the topic of this volume. In the final part of his just mentioned paper, Terrone discusses the “dilemma of paraphrase”: On the one hand, the putative knowledge acquired from fictions can be paraphrased in independent terms, and thereby vindicated as propositional knowledge in good standing; but the paraphrases that readily come to mind turn out to be trivial propositions that we do not need to be told, by fiction or non-fiction [Stolnitz (1992)]. On the other hand, the putative knowledge cannot be paraphrased; but then the claim that it is knowledge becomes suspicious. Terrone provides paraphrases using his main claim, on the one hand explaining why the dilemma has some currency, and on the other dismissing it. Now, the most general way he suggests for such paraphrases is an existential claim: “in the *actual* world, something is like this”, with the demonstrative pointing to some property exemplified [in Goodman’s (1976), pp. 52-6, sense] by some fictional character of situation. Žanić, however, gives some reasons for rejecting these existential paraphrases (for one thing, they are still too trivial sounding), and in favor of constructing the claims that articulate the sort of “understanding” provided by fictions as generics (such as *lions are wild*, which are compatible with exceptions, even with most of the *F*s lacking the ascribed quality *G*). In fact, when Terrone provides a more concrete example of the sort of claim he has in mind, about Robert Bresson’s film *Au hasard Balthazar*, he gives us a generic: “life is like this, life is Balthazaresque”.

Also in defense of cognitivism, BOARDMAN – perhaps unwittingly – illustrates the triviality horn of the dilemma, when he claims: “We might learn from *The Great Gatsby*, for instance, that obsession with status can

be mistaken for romantic obsession, and that we are capable of doing awful things to ourselves and others when in the grip of such obsessions". This is meant to illustrate one of the two ways in which we can learn from fictions, basically the Aristotelian model on which characters encode sufficiently realistic and detailed characters, and the events that befall them fittingly unfold from them. Boardman's view could thus perhaps also benefit from Terrone's proposal, by replying to the skeptics that what we learn from *Gatsby* is in fact more substantive: that obsession with status can be mistaken *like this* for romantic obsession, and that we are capable of doing awful things *like this* to ourselves and others when in the grip of such obsessions. Boardman also develops in interesting detail, and illustrates with nice examples, a second traditional model for learning from fiction, on which they, like thought-experiments, provide arguments for modal claims.

The final three papers discuss issues not so directly in the mainstream current debate about learning from fiction, but clearly related to it. ROSENBAUM discusses the puzzles of imaginative resistance in relation to learning from fiction. As the discussion over the years has made clear, and Rosenbaum helpfully summarizes, "imaginative resistance" in fact covers a plurality of phenomena. The two he discusses are the *alethic puzzle* – the resistance to taking a content we are proposed to imagine in a fiction as true in the fiction – and the *phenomenological puzzle* – the jarring impression we get in noticing that we are being asked to imagine some contents in exposing ourselves to a fiction. Rosenbaum critically discusses Gendler's influential account, on which the puzzles are explained by our resistance to export from fictions claims we take to be false in the actual world, and he opts for Weatherson's account, which appeals to an "in virtue of" principle, on which the explanation has rather to do with the resistance to accepting higher-order contents in tension with the lower-order contents that should ground them. He argues that this account makes it difficult to understand how we can learn from fictions moral claims that we do not accept, and advances a more complex account involving several factors.

It is for the reader to appraise the conflict between the considerations Boardman provides for this, and DOHRN'S rather skeptical discussion of related points. Thought experiments as used in philosophy and science are said to provide a clear case establishing how we can learn from fictions. Dohrn critically discusses an argument by Ichikawa and Jarvis (2009) that the role of thought experiments in philosophy requires us to interpret them in the same way as we interpret fictions. He argues

that everyday fictions could be interpreted through mechanisms not specially addressed at them; taken in that way, thought experiments do not establish any special or significant epistemic role for fiction. Alternatively, fictions do involve *sui generis* procedures; he considers psychological “transportation” (high emotional involvement, cf. Currie’s contribution), and a particular way of admitting conceptual incoherence. But those cases appear to be detrimental for the epistemic significance of fictions, he points out.

Finally, POZNIC examines a more specific discussion, nonetheless directly related to the general one we have rehearsed: whether proposals such as those by Roman Frigg and Adam Toon, who argue that the models invoked in scientific theorizing should be regarded as fictions, allow scientific knowledge to be obtained from these models about the actual systems modeled. Frigg’s and Toon’s view is that scientists are participating in games of make-believe when they study models, in order to learn about the models themselves and about the target systems represented by the models. Poznic critically discusses the epistemology of these fictionalist views. He accepts that both views can give an explanation of how scientists learn about the models they are studying. However, he defends a critical view regarding the main issue, arguing that how the use of models allows for knowledge about target systems is not sufficiently accounted for in such views.

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NOTES

¹ There are many nuances that I will be disregarding for my purposes here. For instance, learning does not need to involve coming to believe new truths, but merely coming to be closer to the truth. (Cf. Ichino and Currie (forthcoming) for a helpful discussion).

² Cf. Gaut (2006), p. 120, on imaginative projects whose goal is “to learn about the world”.

³ Dan Kois, “The Academy’s Failure to Recognize *Boyhood* Is Their Worst Mistake in 20 Years”, *The Slate* 23/02/2015.

⁴ I.e., one about what is possible or necessary.

⁵ Cf. Dixon and Bortolussi (2001) for considerations against this, and Gerrig and Horton (2001) for a good rejoinder.

⁶ Cf. Buchanan (2013) for a good discussion of the relevant indeterminacy, its consequences, and ways of understanding it.

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