The Two-Fold Cognitive Value of Fiction's Imaginative Aspect

It is common for readers to emerge from their experience of a literary work claiming that they have learned something. Yet for as long as literary works have been the object of studied appreciation, there has been debate over their cognitive value. Beginning with Plato's negative critique of *poesis* in his *Republic*, and Aristotle's response in the *Poetics* to that Platonic challenge, right up to present day debates about the nature and value of fiction, the cognitive status of literary fictional art has long been much disputed.

Within analytical aesthetics of the last half-century, this ongoing debate has developed numerous threads as it has ranged over various construals of knowledge: from truth or facts, to moral knowledge, to conceptual knowledge. Initially, this discussion focused primarily on fiction's propositional content, debating whether, and how, it is possible to derive truth from fiction.[1] More recently, with the demise of the proposition theory's influence, proponents of a cognitivist view of literary art have sought to explore other aspects of literary fictions in order to bring to light alternative, non-propositional forms of knowledge that literature can be said to offer – for instance, knowledge *how* rather than knowledge *that*; and knowledge of *what it is like* to experience something or to be a certain way. Meanwhile, opponents of cognitivism have sought to deny either that these non-propositional forms of so-called knowledge enabled by literature – the broadening of understanding via vicarious experiences of situations – actually amount to knowledge at all; or, if they do, that this type of knowledge is in any way part of literary value.[2] Thus, the debate rattles on.

My own view is a cognitivist one – I hold that literary fictions can have important cognitive value and that, when they do, this will usually add to their value

[1] Those concerned with truth in fiction include: (Elliott 1967), (Hospers 1960), (Lewis 1978), (Mew 1973), (Sirridge 1975).

[2] The cognitivist claim is generally understood to be a combination of two claims, one cognitive and one evaluative: first, that literature (or, art more generally) can teach us something, and second, that this value is part of, i.e. contributes to, its aesthetic or artistic value. See, for instance, Gaut (Gaut 2006, 115). Accordingly, the anti-cognitivist can deny cognitivism about literature by rejecting either one, or both, of these claims.

qua artworks. I do not hold that all literary works must possess cognitive value; I take a pluralist approach to artistic value, believing that there are other, non-cognitive values that literary works can and do possess, and thus that cognitive value is simply one amongst a number of literary values; it is not an essential literary value. However, I will not be arguing for these general cognitivist claims here.[3] Instead, what I wish to discuss here are the ways in which certain specific aspects of fictional literary works can be the site, and source, of cognitive value.

Now the most obvious 'aspect' of a literary fiction is perhaps the words and sentences that comprise it – the fiction's propositional content. But, as will be shown, concentrating only on the propositional content of fictions tends to yield rather puny cognitive goods – that is, while truth can come from fiction, the true statements reaped often tend to be trivial, or else somewhat insipid. Yet good fictions can bear much more full-bodied cognitive fruit than this, and to fully explore their potential for so doing requires a shift of attention away from the propositional content of fiction to one of its other major aspects, namely its imaginative aspect.

Fictions invite and induce us to imaginatively entertain descriptive representations of particular, concrete, situations and casts of characters involved in negotiating those situations. I aim to show here that this imaginative engagement on the part of the reader can itself can be cognitively fruitful in two ways: both the acts of imagining that readers are required to perform, and the content upon which we imaginatively reflect, offer possibilities for advancing our understanding via clarification, refinement and improvement of much of our practical, moral and conceptual thinking. In what follows, then, the focus will be not on the sentences or propositions of which fictions are constructed, but rather on the imaginative scenarios they present to us and the imaginative activity they call for; by coming to understand the intricacies of these two elements of fictive imaginative engagement we will come to see how fictional literary works can provide us with valuable knowledge and understanding.

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[3] For those who would like to know more about the cognitivist/anti-cognitivist debate, and see it at its most compelling, I recommend the paired chapters by Berys Gaut and Peter Lamarque in (Kieran 2006). My view aligns with that of Gaut.

Before beginning this exploration of the imaginative aspects of fictions, though, I will first briefly clarify what I understand by the notion of fiction itself, and what I will mean by it in what follows, and also provide some considerations as to why propositional truth is not the real cognitive treasure to be sought in fictions.

Literature, Fiction, and Truth

Above, the terms 'literature' and 'fiction' have been used somewhat casually, perhaps at times giving the impression they are interchangeable, but of course they denote separate phenomena, even when they do apply to one and the same object. While many literary works are fictional, not all literary works are fictions, and not all fictions are literary. Very briefly, to call something 'literature' is to indicate that it embodies certain aesthetic or artistic values, and that it has been received as, and was mostly likely intended to be, part of an artistic writing tradition; accordingly, we engage with literary texts in a very specific way which includes, among other things, being prepared to creatively interpret their meaning, and looking out for artistic qualities in them. To call something 'fiction', by contrast, is to say something quite different about the mode in which it is intentionally presented for our engagement, and the kind of basic stance we are intended to take towards its content. Again very briefly: fiction is to be defined not in virtue of its semantic or surface properties (in virtue of whether it succeeds in referring to the world, or in virtue of a particular style employed), but rather in virtue of being essentially an act of communication, consisting of what we can call a *fictive utterance* on the part of the author or teller, and a *fictive stance* on the part of the reader or audience. Fictive utterance in turn can be characterised as an utterance produced in a particular mode, with certain specific intentions – fictive intentions, let's say; these include an intention that the audience (or reader) adopt a particular kind of attitude towards the content of what is uttered (or written), an attitude that is not the regular attitude of belief that we would usually adopt towards the content of a non-fictive utterance. The fictive stance is the response the audience (or reader) adopts by way of taking up this recognised fictive intent, and consists in what I will term the imaginative entertainment of the content of the fictive utterance. So, when an author writes a fiction, she presents words and sentences with the

intention that the future reader adopt a particular attitude – not belief – towards what is written; in reading a fiction, a reader recognises the intention behind the fictive utterance, and adopts the fictive stance, and thus will imaginatively entertain the sense of the sentences uttered, while merely make-believing or supposing their truth and reference.[4] Fiction, then, is a matter of pragmatics – what we do with words – rather than semantics.

It should be noted that this account of what fiction is, is not limited only to written fictions such as novels and dramatic texts. It can also neatly extend to other varieties of fiction, such as films, dramatic representations, and graphic texts. In what follows, when I talk of fictions I will generally have in mind fictions in written form, and moreover fictions possessing a literary status. My paradigm is the novel.[5] However, what I discuss here can be taken to apply just as well to films and other narrative fictions; I do, though, exclude non-literary fictions from my discussion, for the simple reason that, if our aim is to explore the cognitive value of fiction, we are most likely to find this in those fictions that have literary-aesthetic status, rather than in those that are intended for mere amusement.[6]

It should also be noted that this account of fiction allows it to be the case that fictions can convey truths, either directly or indirectly. This may initially seem an odd thing to say, given that fiction is characterised as discourse towards which we adopt the attitude of supposition or make-belief, rather than belief; yet the definition of fiction in terms of pragmatics rather than semantics allows it to be the case that an utterance can be fictive even if the propositional content of the utterance, uttered non-fictively, would be true. Many novels contain factual content, conveyed directly in

[4] My account of fiction is the same as that put forward by Lamarque and Olsen, whose co-authored book has been an extremely influential contribution to the literature on fiction (Lamarque and Olsen 1994). I use the terms 'imagine', 'make-believe', and 'suppose' in their most ordinary senses here when characterizing the fictive stance, but it should be noted that some other fiction theorists have particular ways of using these – for example, Kendall Walton's account of fiction is based on his very particular notion of 'make-believe' (Walton 1990). In the rest of this paper, I provide further detail of the kinds of imaginings we experience in responding to fictions, but I use 'make-believe' and 'suppose' in a non-technical manner; the key thing is that these are attitudes that are contrary to 'believing'.
[5] For those interested in specific issues regarding fictions presented in visual media, such as film, a good starting place would be (Currie 1995*a*).
[6] I do not rule out that non-literary fictions can have cognitive value – many children's stories, for instance, 'teach a lesson' – but cases such as these will often tend to be overly didactic, such that the story is not much more than an illustrative vehicle for the lesson; this is not the case with our valued literary texts.

the propositions uttered. Well-cited examples of such factual content include the information provided by Melville about the nature and behaviour of whales in his *Moby Dick*, and the various geographical and cultural observations about London to be found in Dickens' many novels. At one time, such content was a problematic feature for those attempting to define fiction, since it seemed on certain accounts that such factual sentences 'popped out' of the fiction, as instances of the author stepping outside of the fiction in order to assert truths.[7] But on the present account, we can say that when Melville writes in *Moby Dick* that 'in Abetracht dieser eigentümlichen seitwärtigen Lage der Walaugen ist es klar, daß er nie einen Gegenstand sehen kann, welcher geradewegs vor ihm ist, nicht besser, als er einen geradewegs achtern sehen kann', we take this and other sentences like it to be fictional (or true-in-the-story) since it is presented to us in *fictive mode*, regardless of the fact that its content is also actually true, when uttered non-fictively.[8] The role that such sentences play in the fiction is, primarily, to contribute a realistic background to the situation being described, and if such sentences are also factual when construed about the real world – if their content would be true if asserted – then this adds a useful degree of verisimilitude to the realistic fiction.

So, although this might be an example of a way in which fictions can contain truths, and although one might perhaps learn some previously unknown fact (about whales, or about Victorian London, for instance) from reading such a fiction, it would be most disappointing if this were all we meant when we say literature has cognitive value. Indeed, the very fact that the primary role of such 'factual' sentences is to lend realism to the novelistic descriptions suggests that their construal beyond the novel, as extra-fictional statements to be applied to the world, is inconsequential. Such 'factual' descriptions are not provided in order to teach us new things about the real world that we did not know, but rather to encourage us to engage with the fictively described world of the novel as an imaginative representation of something resembling the real world; realistic descriptions help us to grasp the fictional setting

[7] As in (Searle 1975). Searle takes fiction-making on the author's part to be an act of 'pretended assertion', and as such he is driven to say that factual sentences occur when the author stops pretending to assert, and actually asserts. This has the effect of rendering fictional works a 'patchwork' of truth and non-truth, assertion and pretended assertion.

[8] We can, that is, adopt the attitude of imagining, or make-believing, to propositions that we know to be true. Truth does not preclude our adopting the fictive stance.

and situation of a novel's story, giving us cues as to how to supplement what the author explicitly describes. Their role is a fundamentally internal one. Even if we allow that they may, in addition to performing their internal role, be construed extra-fictionally there remains the question of how we know that such factual sentences are indeed factual; after all, authors may include 'realistic' detail in their novels that is – extra-fictionally – false. We usually know they are factual because we draw on what we already know of the real world to confirm them, and such 'facts' are thus already known or knowable prior to the novel's existence.

There is, though, another type of 'propositional truth' that may be found in fictions, at a more abstract or thematic level than the kinds of 'factual' descriptions discussed above. These propositions occur either when an author makes an explicit claim of a thematic or general nature that doesn't seem to be confined to a purely internal role, or when readers distil from their readings some non-explicit but rather implied statement, that can be summed up from all that has been explicitly presented. As an example of the first kind, the explicit general thematic statement, consider this sentence from the opening chapter of Theodore Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie*: "When a girl leaves home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse."[9]

Statements such as this are not like the factual descriptions just discussed; they do not simply provide more descriptive content or relate the events unfolding in the novel's story. Rather, statements like this one seem to perform a more evaluative role, commenting or reflecting upon the narrated content and making generalisations that apply to the described events and characters. Dreiser's sentence above is clearly some kind of reflection on the particular events that the narrative is describing (which, at this point of the novel, have included a description of the protagonist Carrie Meeber leaving her home and taking the train alone to Chicago), a reflection which generalises from these particulars to present a seemingly universal claim.

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[9] (Dreiser 1953, p. 5). The most oft-cited examples of explicit thematic statements in philosophical discussions of literary works tend to be those two well-known opening sentences of novels, namely the first sentence of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, and of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

An example of the second, implicit, kind of thematic statement would be when we, as readers, reflecting on the events of Dreiser's novel, pronounce that *Sister Carrie* implies the thematic statement that *the fate of human individuals is directed more by random circumstance than by conscious moral decision*. Such a statement is not uttered anywhere in the text by Dreiser, but it would nonetheless be legitimate to say that the novel implies this thematic claim. To avoid any mystery as to how a fictional novel can 'imply' anything, let alone a thematic statement, we can simply understand 'implication' here as a figurative way of describing a normal exercise in literary interpretation – implied thematic statements come about when the reader, as critic, in an act of appreciation, elicits or constructs a statement of the form of a universal generalisation, which serves to integrate all those explicit thematic comments made in the work which are best made sense of by being drawn together under a theme.[10] The elicited statement is thus a general reflection, which provides an internal point of reference, and it is what we can say the novel is 'about', or what the novel 'shows' us.

Can either or both of these kinds of thematic statements count as propositional truths, and thus as instances of knowledge from fiction? Perhaps. It depends upon whether we judge their function to be wholly exhausted by their internal role, or whether we can grant that they also have a considerable extra-fictional role to play. First, we should remember that neither kind of statement should be taken as assertions, on anyone's part. The explicit thematic statements, while uttered by the author, are uttered in fictive mode, and do play some role internal to the fiction: the Dreiser statement, pronouncing what happens when a girl leaves home at eighteen, is important in characterising the content of the fictional story, setting the scene for Carrie's venture into the wider world; it acts as a kind of forewarning, alerting us to the likely prospects faced by Carrie and giving, as it were, a benchmark against which we can measure her moral progress. Thus its role within the fiction is somewhat important, for it contributes to internal features of form and unity by indicating a viewpoint from which one can understand and consider the events that unfold in relation to the character Carrie and her evolution.

[10] This eminently sensible way of construing the notion of 'implied statements' is due to Lamarque and Olsen, see (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 327); earlier discussions of this notion include (Hospers 1960) and (Sirridge 1975).

Even the implicit thematic statements (which, obviously, are not assertions, since they are not actually uttered in the text at all) might be held to function largely in the internal role.[11] Although it might seem odd to suggest that propositions indirectly derived from a work could have largely internal, fictive, purposes, on reflection this is still the case. Our example derived from Sister Carrie, that *the fate of human individuals is directed more by random circumstance than by conscious moral decision*, is clearly important in unifying and organising the form and content of the fiction. Indeed, it must be remembered that the very method by which such implicit statements are elicited reflects their function of internal orientation: they are literary interpretations under which we gather the incidents related to us, and find meaning in them.

That thematic statements, both explicit and implicit, thus have value on the internal plane can be wholeheartedly granted. Nonetheless, it could still be argued that notwithstanding the importance of the contextual role they play, an extra-fictional role is still not ruled out. Thematic statements may serve a double purpose, both helping to organise and structure the internal unity of the work and simultaneously providing an interesting or enlightening reflection on the world in general, that at the very least can act as a hypothesis we can apply to life. Some 'no-truth' theorists will resist this suggestion, arguing that it is no part of the practice of literary appreciation to consider the real-world application or importance of thematic statements. They would point out that literary appreciation, proper, may be concerned with working out which themes apply to or in a given work, and whether the work develops those themes in an artistic and convincing manner, but it is not concerned with whether a thematic statement – taken as a hypothesis about the real world – is true.[12]

Such an appeal to the scope of literary appreciation is legitimate; however, we would do well to remember that 'literary appreciation' includes what ordinary readers do with literary works, and is not limited to the academic practice of those working in

[11] Lamarque and Olsen hold that the internal role is the primary role of thematic statements (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, Ch. 13). Their view is a contemporary version of what has been called 'no-truth' theory – they deny that literary fictions are in the business of conveying or communicating truth.
[12] Again, this is Lamarque and Olsen's view (Lamarque and Olsen 1994), which is also succinctly presented in (Lamarque 2006).

the field of literature studies. Ordinary readers may well focus on the internal relevance of thematic statements, and appreciate their value as interpretive aids to the work; but they may also reflect on the relevance such statements have in our own actual world and lives. This is far from illegitimate, given that literary works are representational artefacts that provide us with ways of seeing and thinking about our lives and our world. Such extra-fictional reflection on the thematic statements found in fictions might not end with the reader finally pronouncing, definitively, as to the truth or falsity of the view expressed, but the lack of such a formal moment of conclusion does not indicate that such reflection and consideration does not take place. As one commentator has famously put it, works of literature have a reflective 'afterlife', in which readers muse on the significance of what they have read, and this musing includes the weighing and considering of themes, and their value in showing us how real lives might be understood.[13]

I believe, then, that some cognitive value in literature can be located in propositional truths – in the form of thematic statements that, as hypotheses, serve to increase our understanding of certain aspects of our lives. Having said that, while I think it possible, I also think their contribution is limited. A key reason is that such propositions, and the thematic content they convey, can often turn out to be trite, and even unoriginal, once distilled from the rich and particularised settings of the novels from which they are drawn, and applied to life. To cite perhaps the most famous attack on the propositional theory, it is 'pitifully meagre' to pronounce that the truth stated by *Pride and Prejudice* is, in a propositional nutshell, that 'stubborn pride and ignorant prejudice keep attractive people apart'. As Stolnitz witheringly asked: 'Can this be all there is? From one of the world's great novels?'[14]

Of course, that is not 'all there is' of cognitive value to be had from *Pride and Prejudice*; but it may be all there is if we focus only on the category of propositional truths. It is unsurprising then, that most contemporary literary cognitivists have steered away from the 'proposition theory' and looked for other types and sources of

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[13] This commentator is Peter Kivy (Kivy 1997, see Ch. 5)
[14] (Stolnitz 1992, 193-94)

knowledge within literary works.[15] At this point, we too should now redirect our focus and, as promised, look to a more fruitful area for cognitive value, the imaginative aspect of fiction.

Fiction's imaginative aspect

That fictions involve the imagination is obvious –the very terms in which fiction has been defined here show that *imagining something to be the case* is what readers of fiction essentially do, at the writer's invitation. As we have seen, the reader – in taking up the fictive stance – entertains the sense of the sentences uttered; this involves the reader both entertaining (imagining) the content uttered, and supplementing that explicit content with whatever additional background information is necessary to flesh it out.[16] This entertaining-in-one's-mind, together with supplementation, is of course the work of imagination. But when a reader is fully engaged or properly engrossed in the fiction, then the imagination does more than just this. As well as entertaining or imagining that certain things are the case, readers often also project something of themselves into the situations that are fictively described to them, and become absorbed in the lives and situations of the fictional characters. We can say, then, that there are differing degrees of imaginative activity involved in fully grasping a work of fiction, and these must be carefully explored if we wish to determine in what ways the imaginative dimension of fiction might contribute to our understanding.

Within contemporary philosophical theories of imagination a distinction is commonly made between *de dicto* imagining (imagining that) and imagining *de se* (imagining of oneself, or imagining 'from the inside').[17] While one side of this

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[15] One of the first to criticize what she calls 'proposition theory' as an approach to the cognitive value of literature is Catherine Wilson (Wilson 1983).

[16] The background supplementation includes such things as imagining, or supposing, that Anna Karenina walks in a particular way, or has a certain pitch to her voice, or that she has two arms and two legs, even though Tolstoy may not explicitly describe these features of her. This supplementation may be a semi-conscious activity rather than a fully conscious one.

[17] This distinction, between 'imagining that' (i.e. propositional or attitudinal imagining) and a more active kind of imagining 'from the inside', is made by, for instance, Lamarque and Olsen (Lamarque/Olsen 1994), Kendall Walton (Walton 1990) and also Richard Wollheim (Wollheim 1974), although not always in the same terms I've used here. For example, Wollheim speaks of 'central' and 'acentral' imaginings, which correspond to *de se* and propositional imaginings, respectively (Wollheim 1974, 59).

distinction corresponds well to one of the types of imagining fundamental to engagement with fiction – namely, *de dicto* imagining being what I have thus far termed propositional imagining – the other side does not wholly capture the remaining varieties of imagining in response to fictions. *De se* imagining is certainly involved in our fictive engagement, and often; but it is not the only contrast to *de dicto* or propositional imagining. I will instead introduce below the term 'experiential imagining', which as we will see can encompass *de se* imagining, but is also broader than that.

First, propositional or *de dicto* imagining is just that employment of the imagination wherein a particular attitude is adopted towards the propositional content of the utterances in question, i.e. *imagining that p* (as opposed to *believing that p*, or *desiring* or *hoping that p*). This type of imagining is precisely what characterises the fictive stance, and thus clearly plays a crucial role in our engagement with fiction. It so happens that this type of imagining may or may not have a substantial phenomenological aspect – that is, one can adopt the propositional attitude of *imagining that p* without necessarily engaging in any sensuous or perception-like activity. When invited by Flaubert to imagine that his heroine, Emma Bovary, sits in her room with her dressing-gown wrapped loosely about her, we engage with this fictive utterance even if we just 'entertain' the content of what is said (i.e. imagine that content, in the attitude-sense), without undergoing any kind of sensory experience. But, while this is all that is strictly required for an engagement with fiction, it is nevertheless true that most of us also allow or undergo some kind of sensual or perceptual aspect to our 'entertaining' – we may, that is, in addition to entertaining the proposition *that* Emma Bovary sits in her room, also *perceptually imagine* Emma sitting there, in that we experience an occurrent state of the kind involved in perceiving. We may 'see' Emma sitting in her dressing-gown; we may actively visualise what she looks like, what colour her dressing-gown is (a detail not supplied by Flaubert). This perceptual-like state of visualising Emma is clearly something extra to merely entertaining the sense of the proposition's content, but it is undeniably a common aspect of the fiction-reading process – indeed, it would be difficult to imagine reading any novel without engaging in this sort of perceptual imaginary activity to some degree.

This sort of perceptual imagining is one kind of *experiential imagining* – 'experiential' because it involves our undergoing a perceptual-like experience. In the example just used, our perceptual, experiential imagining of Emma sitting in her dressing-gown is done from the perspective of a viewpoint external to Emma; we 'see' her from across the room, as if we are in the room with her, unknown to her. We might call this 'observer experiential imagining'. But there is also a different, further kind of experiential imagining that often comes into play in our reading of fictions, one that places us *in* the position of the character we are imagining, internal to that character rather than external. That is, sometimes we might experientially imagine what the author fictively describes, not from the viewpoint of an invisible observer of the scene but rather by taking up the viewpoint of the character him- or herself. Instead of imagining seeing Emma sitting in her room, I might imagine being in Emma's position, sitting there. This 'central experiential imagining' is what philosophers have called *de se* imagining, that is, a kind of imagining involving ourselves.

According to the definitional account of fiction here given, such central experiential imaginings, involving ourselves, are not strictly necessary to our engaging with fiction, any more than observer experiential imaginings are.[18] The basic mechanism for engaging with fiction is propositional imagining. Yet this alone would give rise to a somewhat anaemic and detached manner of engaging with fiction, which does not match with the experience of most readers. During the course of reading fiction, we readers often engage in rich experiential imaginings, and moreover we often project something of ourselves into the situations being described for us, imagine ourselves being in those situations, and it is these latter kinds of imaginings which are perhaps the most interesting in terms of the value or benefit of engaging with fictions. When we read a fictional story, our comprehension of it depends upon more than simply our ability to entertain the sense of the sentences we read, and visualise their content: it regularly requires that we not only grasp *that* a certain character feels a certain way, or experiences a certain situation, but also that we

[18] There are some accounts of fiction that make *de se* imaginings essential to fictive engagement: Derek Matravers, for instance, holds that a fundamental condition of our grasping fiction is that readers imagine themselves to be reading true reports of actual events; thus, on his view, an initial act of *de se* imagining is required for our engagement with fictions (Matravers 1998, especially Chapter 3).

understand *why* she feels that way, and what it is like for her to be in that situation. Such empathetic understanding often assists our ability to follow the story properly, to engage with the fictional descriptions and representations in a way that promotes appropriate absorption and reflection.

For example, a full response to the aforementioned Flaubert novel will quite clearly require that we first of all understand Emma Bovary's situation, not merely in the sense that we take in the descriptions given of her, but in that we come to see – come to feel, even – what that situation is like for her. Unless we can understand her situation in this way, that is, empathetically, we will fail to see her as a tragic heroine, and so in turn will be unable fully to appreciate the novel and grasp its general themes (among which are notions of the shortcomings of the bourgeoisie, and the powerlessness of the female). In order to reach this kind of understanding, we must to some degree empathetically re-enact Emma's predicament: that of being trapped in a suffocating provincial lifestyle, in a marriage to a man for whom she feels no love, suffering from frustration and harbouring a hopeless desire for a better life – or, at least, one that she perceives as better, filled with romance and passion. As readers, we must put ourselves in Emma's position, imagine ourselves having the same relevant beliefs, desires and values she has; in short, we must imagine what it is like to have her thoughts, her feelings and her attitudes. If our imagining goes well, it will indicate to us something of what it is like to be in that situation, and how we would respond to it. From experiencing such feelings in our own case, we are then able to imagine that Emma feels that way, and we can predict how Emma might act. This kind of imaginative involvement grants us deeper understanding of the heroine's plight, upon which we are then led to reflect appropriately.[19]

[19] This kind of imaginative engagement that I am calling central experiential imagining, an instance of *de se* imagining, is described by some theorists in the idiom of *simulation theory*, which originated in the field of cognitive science as a theory of how human beings come to understand and predict one another's thoughts and behaviours. Thus, this activity is often referred to as *simulative* imagining or, quite simply, simulation. I am not averse to this idiom, but I feel it is unnecessary to employ it; moreover, as there is disagreement between fiction theorists as to the extent to which simulation is a fundamental to our understanding of fiction, this usage is perhaps best avoided for present purposes. For a view that places simulation at the heart of fiction, see (Currie 1998). For a converse view, Matthew Kieran has argued against the idea that simulation is fundamental to our understanding of fictional characters and narratives (Kieran 2003). For more on simulation theory in cognitive science, see (Davies and Stone, 1995).

In this imaginative process, then, we learn something about the fictional character and her situation, over and above what the author's descriptive content explicitly tells us, such that we can fully engage with the novel. Accordingly, it can be said that central experiential imaginings play a significant part in one's response to fictions of a literary nature, since the deeper understanding they afford ultimately enables us to engage with specifically literary aspects, such as theme. Furthermore, in this kind of imaginative activity we also learn something about ourselves – namely, how *we* would feel being in the particular predicament that has been imagined – and it is often this kind of experience which, when retained in memory and transferred into the domain of our actual lives, can prove cognitively valuable.

The following sections will explore the extent to which this imaginative activity provides a fertile ground for enriching our understanding of life's complexities in a variety of ways – practical and moral – and thus show that, insofar as fictions encourage and promote such imaginative experience, they can be considered a fruitful source of knowledge.

Learning from the imaginative aspect of fiction

Having laid bare the imaginative workings of our engagement with fictions, our task now is to articulate the various ways in which fictions can promote and enrich our understanding, stemming from their capacity to present, for our imaginative engagement, descriptive representations of particular, concrete situations and assortments of characters who are involved in negotiating those situations. By inducing us to imaginatively entertain these descriptions, and consequently reflect upon them, fictions offer an opportunity for learning which, although decidedly non-propositional in nature, can involve clarification, refinement and improvement of much of our practical, moral, and conceptual thinking.[20]

It is interesting to note that in the latter years of the 20th century, much attention was paid to the idea that literature can be viewed in some respects as a

[20] Such claims for fiction have been eloquently made by David Novitz (Novitz 1987), and have also been put forward more recently by a number of contemporary aestheticians, for example: (Currie 1995*b*); (Currie 1998); (John 1998); (Carroll 2002); (Gaut 2006).

branch, or extension, of moral philosophy, most obviously in respect of the fact that literary fictions are concerned with the illustrative representation of concrete human situations, a feature which renders them highly appropriate for explorations of moral issues and dilemmas. One of the foremost and well-known proponents of this view is Martha Nussbaum, whose work embraces the notion that literature is an especially suitable arena for the convincing expression of truths about human life, and for the working-out of moral dilemmas at a level of subjective detail seldom achieved by other traditional modes of moral enquiry.[21]

While I am broadly in agreement with this view of literary fictions (although not necessarily with the claims regarding moral philosophy), I do not intend to discuss these views here in the same manner as they have been discussed by Nussbaum, and Putnam; rather, I wish to enter the debate by considering the claims that imaginative engagement with fiction can lead to improvements in our practical and moral skills not only by virtue of the content that we imaginatively entertain, but also, and more interestingly, by virtue of the *activity* of imagining that is encouraged. That is, I will be exploring in particular how we learn, and what we learn, from the acts of imagining that we perform. This learning will be shown to include improvement of our practical skills (our ability to form strategies for action and planning), our acquisition of values, and our conceptual skills.

Learning from imaginative engagement: practical knowledge, valuing, and planning

First, the claim that our imaginative engagement with fictions can foster improvement of our practical skills. By practical skills, I mean our ability to form and adopt strategies which enable the planning and execution of decisions or actions. A nice example of the way in which imagination can assist in strategy-forming is given by Hilary Putnam:

> A man is climbing a mountain. Halfway up he stops, because he is unsure how to go on. He imagines himself continuing via one route. In his imagination, he proceeds up to a certain point, and then he gets into a difficulty which he cannot, in his imagination, see how to get out of.

[21] (Nussbaum 1990). Another, early, proponent of this view is Hilary Putnam (Putnam 1978).

> He then imagines himself going up by a different route. This time he is able to imagine himself getting all the way to the top without difficulty. So he takes the second route.[22]

This mountain-ascent puzzle is a fairly straightforward problem, with an obvious and clear goal. However, in our lives we are regularly presented with more complex problems that must be negotiated, for which there is often no antecedently identifiable goal. Examples might be choosing what to do in terms of one's career, or deciding whether or not to end one's relationship with a lover. In the face of such complexities our immediate desire is to do whatever is best, yet we do not know in advance what the 'best thing' is. Theoretical reasoning alone will be insufficient for determining the best course of action in such cases, for although we may be able theoretically to identify the different possible courses that lie open to us, what is crucially required is a sense of which of these courses is the right, or best, one.

This is where imagination comes into its own. By imagining, we can project ourselves into any strategies we have theoretically identified as possible, and thus imagine experiencing each outcome. By imaginatively 'inhabiting' each possible course of action in this way we are able to 'see how it feels': successful imaginative efforts will result in our experiencing emotions in response to the possible outcomes, such that we will be able to imagine ourselves being happy if we do *a*, but unhappy if we do *b*. These emotional responses help us to decide whether a particular course is the right one, or whether we should imagine another.[23] After running through a number of imaginative scenarios such that each possible course of action is inhabited, we will eventually form a hypothesis as to which is the best thing to do, and will act accordingly.

That imagining assists us in this way when faced with complex problems is a fairly common and uncontroversial view. But how do the imaginative experiences engendered and guided by our fictive experiences assist us? Briefly, just as we can

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[22] (Putnam 1978, 85-6).

[23] I take it as uncontroversial that we can have emotional, or affective, responses to imagined states of affairs – this is after all something that is extremely common in our engagements with fiction. Recent findings of empirical research into consciousness (notably by Antonio Damasio) have shown that emotional responses to imaginative simulations, along the lines of what is described here, are in fact a vital part of our decision-making ability, crucial in helping us to make practical choices (Damasio 2000).

learn from running imaginatively through possible courses of action to immediate problems by having our own imagination do the work of conjuring possible outcomes, so too can we benefit from imaginatively engaging with the scenarios derived from someone else's imaginings, as in the case of fiction. We have already elaborated above how central experiential imagining gives us the opportunity to experience what it is like to be in the shoes of a fictional character facing all manner of fictional quandaries. And such empathetic understanding often leads us to form ideas as to what the fictional character facing the quandary should do, based on our reflecting on what we would do. In other words, we form hypotheses for responding to the fictional quandary. If that particular quandary is one we have not (yet) faced in our actual life then it is not preposterous to say that we have, in forming the hypothesis, learned something new: namely, what one would do if one were in such a quandary.

Of course, it might be argued that this does not constitute knowledge, for all we have is a hypothesis. But this objection only places our hypothesised strategy on the same footing as any other hypothesis, including scientific or mathematical ones. Like all hypotheses, a strategy or set of strategies formed from our fictive imaginative experiences must be tested out in the actual world. We must tentatively project our fiction-derived hypotheses onto the world, as relevant situations arise. If the hypotheses help us to make sense of those situations, then they may come to be asserted, or believed. Eventually they may be confirmed by life, or rejected. If confirmed, then we can surely say that the fiction responsible for generating the strategic hypothesis has imparted empathic knowledge of one of life's situations, knowledge which has improved our ability to negotiate complexities in the real world.

It is in this way that fictions encourage us to develop the practical skill of choosing desirable outcomes to life's complexities – by offering us vicarious experiences of the kinds of problematic scenarios that actual life presents. From exploring these scenarios imaginatively, we are able to form practical strategies in response, which we can put on hold until they may be called upon to help us deal with a real-life case. As Novitz puts it,

> (…) our imaginative participation in the fiction (…) furnishes us with empathic beliefs, and, partly as a result, with a set of practical hypotheses for tackling similar quandaries in the actual world. Such

> hypotheses may amount either to possible ways of *considering* such problems, or they may amount to possible ways of *tackling* them. Either way, they help furnish practical rather than purely propositional knowledge and belief.[24]

Furthermore, our imaginative experiences with fictions will often give us access to many more problematic scenarios than we would be likely to experience in real life itself, thereby affording us a greater education than real experience could. And not only do fictions offer up *more* cases than real-life experience, but they do so in a manner which allows for more refined and sustained reflection. The opportunity for imaginative projection in the case of fictions invites deeper contemplation than do the glimpses afforded us by real-life projections into other, or others', situations, as has been usefully noted by Currie:

> We may learn more from imaginative projections if we give conscious, critical attention to their results. Two (…) features of the fictional scaffolding assist this reflection. One is the fact that the projection takes place, exactly, as part of the relatively disengaged activity of reading fictions. This allows us to dedicate scarce mental resources to the task of reflecting on the result of the projection (…). The other is that a well-made narrative, with illuminating commentary, may be just the thing to encourage and guide that reflection. (…) Good fictions give us, through the talents of their makers, access to imaginings more complex, inventive and instructive than we could often hope to make for ourselves.[25]

These comments also draw our attention to the intimate connection between the aesthetic and cognitive aspects of fictions, showing that, in the best cases, the features that render a fiction aesthetically valuable – in terms of form (well-constructed narrative) and content (skilful invention) – are also the grounds for a valuable learning experience.

It may be argued here that this tendency of fictions to refine the situations they portray – illuminating the issues, by foregrounding salient factors and leaving less important factors in the background, and guiding reflection by means of commentary

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[24] (Novitz 1987, 137; italics in the original)

[25] (Currie 1998, 170-71).

– renders them unrealistic, so that the scenarios they present do not adequately resemble real life as to allow for any learning. In real-life quandaries, one may argue, outcomes are usually obscured by numerous complications and variables, and so the refined, idealised scenarios of literary fiction cannot be instructive, because they do not come close to matching specific, concrete situations in real life.

This objection, however, relies on the premise that fictions must exactly mirror our life experience in order for us to learn anything from them, yet this is not necessarily the case. For one thing, it is surely possible to learn important lessons that can be applied to life from contemplating imaginary cases that are idealised, refined and abstract, as the practice and use of philosophical thought experiments would seem to attest.[26] So the lack of exact fit between the sample scenarios of fictions and real-life complexities does not prevent the former from being instructive. Moreover, fictions need not be mirrors of life in order for us to learn from them; the point is rather that they are – to use Currie's words – *guides to the imagination*.[27] By encouraging us to engage in sustained experiential imaginings, especially of the 'central' kind, fictions afford us vital practice in the imaginative exploration of dilemmas, and the value of this can lie not only in our working out hypothetical solutions to this or that particular fictional dilemma, and building up a store of hypotheses to have at the ready, but in our becoming generally more experienced in forming hypothetical strategies for action. What is important here is not so much the content of what we engage with, but the activity of engaging in this way. This all constitutes an improvement in our practical skill of choosing desirable outcomes to life's problems.

In addition to providing opportunities for the improvement of our practical, strategic skills, the capacity of fiction to supplement and guide our imaginative activity can also result in developments with regard to our values. For those of us privileged enough to live in a world where our trajectories in life are not laid down for us, we face many important choices – notably, choices as to what to do with our time and labour, and choices as to what aims to pursue and what kinds of relationships to

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[26] Currie makes a similar point in arguing against what he calls the 'simplification objection' (Currie 1998, 176). The comparison between fictions and philosophical thought experiments is to be further explored in what follows.

[27] (Currie 1990).

engage in. Making good choices in these respects is a matter of knowing which things to value; in turn, choosing or acquiring values is a case of fully grasping the consequences entailed by holding those values, and understanding how their adoption will affect one's well-being.[28] It can, however, take a substantial imaginative effort of projecting oneself into different, and sometimes alien, situations in order to explore a value in this way, and to work out in any useful detail what it will mean to choose that value. Again, our readings of fictions can assist us in this imaginative endeavour, offering an ideal opportunity for the exploration and assessment of values. In our fictional engagements, we might find ourselves imaginatively inhabiting the values of a fictional character, that we do not ourselves hold. This could bring us to see those values as plausible, and thus we can come to desire values that we previously neglected; alternatively, our reading might put the values we do hold to the test, making us reconsider their worth and appeal, or might challenge our actual value concepts, leading us to apprehend values differently. A change in values, or a reaffirmation of values we already hold, can thus come about as a result of our fictional engagements, by virtue of much the same mechanism as has been described above; namely, our imaginings in response to the content of fictions.

This kind of improvement in practical strategic skills and in apprehending values ultimately has the result that we are likely to become better at planning our lives in general. In order to plan one's life well, one must have certain theoretical skills, but good planning also requires that one have a sound understanding of how various courses of action issue in particular outcomes, as well a grasp of which states of affairs are worth striving for. As has been argued here, this understanding can be provided in part by our experiences with fictions and the imaginings they engender. Thus, fictions can aid our capacity to plan our lives well. This has important bearing on our moral life, insofar as lives that are well-planned will tend to be comprised of commendable choices and actions, whereas, conversely, poor planning will likely issue in regrettable actions. As well as improving our practical capacities and know-how, then, our experiences with fictions can also have a positive effect on our moral nature. This is a

[28] Currie presents a similar picture of how values are chosen in (Currie 1995*b*, 253-5). The idea that our values are something that we choose is not, however, uncontroversial. For instance, G. J. Warnock has argued that they are not (Warnock 1978).

considerable claim which will reoccur in what follows, as we explore another way in which fictions offer potential learning opportunities; namely, the way our imaginative fictive experiences may also help develop our conceptual skills.

Learning from imaginative content: conceptual knowledge

The final idea to be explored here is how the imaginative experiences engendered by our readings of literary fictions can lead to the clarification, or modification, of our conceptual knowledge, in such a way that our outlook on life is somehow changed. In exploring this idea, we shall now be concerned with the *content* of fictive imaginings, rather than the activity of imagining. The view that reading fictions can bring about conceptual enrichment is neither radical nor new, but it is tricky to articulate in a convincing manner.[29] This may be due in part to the fact that much talk about concepts tends to be rather slippery, such that the notion as to what counts as 'conceptual knowledge' can be construed quite differently, from a broad sense to a narrow, strictly analytic understanding.

Here, I shall take 'conceptual knowledge' to mean our grasp of the content of our concepts, and our understanding of the criteria we use in applying them to the world.[30] Accordingly, conceptual modification takes place either when the content of one's concept is altered, or when the criteria of application of the concept are altered. This may occur through purposeful exercises in conceptual analysis, such as when philosophers engage in Wittgensteinian-style grammatical investigations of concepts (which would amount to conceptual knowledge in the narrow, analytic sense). But it can also occur as a kind of by-product of engaging in overtly different activities, which nevertheless call one's concepts into question. When modification occurs along these lines, it is not always transparent, even to the concept-user herself; often, the consequences of a change in one's conceptual scheme may only become felt or apparent in one's future behaviour, say in differences in future perception or

[29] Proponents of the 'conceptual enrichment' view include (Wilson 1983); (Novitz 1987, see chapter six); (John 1998); and (Carroll 2002).

[30] Defining what is meant by 'concept' is notoriously problematic, and definitions vary according to whether one's interest in the topic is psychological, or from the logical/semantic point of view. Accordingly, there is considerable disagreement as to what exactly a concept is; here we will simply say that a concept is understood to be the shareable constituent of a thought.

judgement. It is possible, then, for conceptual change to occur at a subtle and sub-conscious level, where it may not be available for articulation. If it results in one's going about things differently in future, though, then this would be a reason for counting it as knowledge, or enrichment, in the broad sense.

To explore the ways in which this modification or enrichment of concepts may occur through our experiences with fiction, let us begin at the most basic level, by considering how particular works of fiction might present us with conceptions of reality that are in some way new, or different, to that which we possess. What is meant by a work's 'presenting' a concept, or conception of reality? One way to spell this out is with reference to the factual beliefs that can be drawn from fictions. Earlier in this paper it was acknowledged how propositional beliefs may be acquired from one's reading of fiction. These acquired beliefs may sometimes challenge our usual ways of construing the world, by offering an alternative way of seeing things, and if this new way of looking at the world is adopted this might constitute a change in our conceptual scheme.

Novitz gives an example along these lines, suggesting 'if, in the light of Jane Austen's *Emma*, one comes to believe that pride breeds self-deception, one may come to look for, and for the first time notice, the respects in which proud people are self-deceived'.[31] That is, prior to reading *Emma*, a reader's understanding or use of the concept of pride may not include any connection with self-deception, yet having followed the events of the novel – witnessing the extent to which Emma's errors of judgement seem to follow from her overdue and somewhat smug sense of self-satisfaction – the reader may then form beliefs that forge this connection. This can result in a change in the reader's future behaviour – such as beginning to notice and look out for the way in which proud people are self-deceived – and so it could be said that her grasp of the concept of pride is altered, its content having been extended to include the notion of self-deception.

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[31] (Novitz 1987, 137).

This example offers a fairly basic account of what we might call conceptual modification, or enrichment.[32] But there are also more complex instances to which one can point, wherein works of literary fiction, instead of merely presenting an alternative conceptual scheme, offer up some kind of conceptual question or problem inviting a response from the reader that necessitates conceptual discrimination. Works can do this when, for instance, they require readers to apply concepts based on their actual (real world) conceptual commitments, but in such a way that those commitments are challenged, or thrown into question. An example of this kind of model of conceptual enrichment is discussed by Eileen John, who illustrates the model with a close and detailed reading of a short story in which the main character (and narrator) is criticised by her ex-husband for 'never having wanted anything'. This unusual, negative critique of a person's character in terms of a lack of 'wants' is somewhat puzzling, and so leads the reader into reflective consideration of the nature of 'wanting' and of the very concept of desire.[33] This story, then, places the reader in difficult conceptual territory, yet does so by initiating questions which arise within a fairly ordinary reading: the questions would occur to most readers – not only those who are in the business of conceptual analysis – since one must grapple with them in order to understand and assess the main character. The conceptual enquiry in this case is then fully integrated into the basic literary interpretive activity, and so in this sense it is precisely the literary aesthetic qualities that contribute to the conceptually illuminating role played by the fiction.

A similar case for the interrelation of literary-fictive response and conceptual activity is put by Noël Carroll, who makes the connection in a more forceful manner by arguing that literary fictions often function in a way analogous to philosophical thought experiments.[34] Thought experiments, standardly employed by philosophers across most philosophical traditions, involve reasoning about an imaginary scenario in order to invoke intuitions concerning some aspect or other or our understanding. As methodological tools, thought experiments can be employed for a variety of ends, but

[32] Novitz himself, in discussing this example, speaks of 'what, for want of a better term, I shall call conceptual or cognitive skills: skills which offer radically new ways of thinking about or perceiving aspects of our environment' (Novitz 1987, 119).
[33] (John 1998). The short story under consideration is 'Wants' by Grace Paley (Paley 1974).
[34] (Carroll 2002).

one of their major functions is to illuminate our use of concepts.[35] To this particular end, a thought experiment may consist in the presentation of a structured array of well-chosen, imaginary examples, differing from one another in sufficiently relevant ways as to provoke discrimination and reflection on the concepts under question.

To show how literary fictions can function in an analogous manner, Carroll focuses on the concepts of virtue and vice in particular, and argues that many fictions can afford us knowledge of these concepts 'by stimulating the reader to an awareness, through reflective self-analysis, of the conditions, rules and criteria for her application of said concepts'.[36] This kind of conceptual discrimination is called forth in response to what Carroll terms the 'virtue wheels' that are embedded into most narrative fictional artworks, both literary and non-literary.[37] By 'virtue wheels' he refers to the tableaux of characters exhibited in fictions, amongst whom comparisons are inevitably invited as part of an ordinary reading. The characters making up a given tableau will each possess, or lack, certain virtues to differing degrees (the virtues under question will vary from fiction to fiction, but typical virtues might be honesty, loyalty, generosity, compassion, and so on). In juxtaposing characters in such a way as to display these varying degrees of contrast, fictions encourage readers to ascribe and apply relevant concepts of virtue and vice to those characters, which exercise sharpens the reader's ability to discriminate between and within concepts, of which she might otherwise possess only vague, half-formed knowledge. It is apparent then, that the 'virtue wheel' possesses a comparable structure and function to certain philosophical thought experiments. This, suggests Carroll, is sufficient cause for thinking of fictions that exhibit the virtue wheel as 'literary thought experiments'.

Of course, one could object that being alike in structure and function does not entail that philosophical and literary thought experiments are the same in all respects. Certainly, with respect to the intentions motivating their construction and use, there

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[35] Carroll lists some of the primary functions of philosophical thought experiments as: 'defeating alethic claims concerning possibility or necessity or deontic claims of what ought or ought not to be done, or of what is or is not obligated; advancing modal claims about what is possible; and, finally, motivating conceptual distinctions – that is, refining conceptual space' (Carroll 2002, 9).

[36] (Carroll 2002, 14).

[37] Carroll reveals the presence of these virtue wheels in all forms of narrative art, from literary classics to contemporary mass art (offering examples from *Howard's End* to *Star Trek* and *Sex and the City*) (Carroll 2002).

are undeniable differences. Philosophers engage in thought experiments with the deliberate aim of clarifying some antecedently identified theory or conceptual problem, but the same cannot be said for writers of literary texts. Even where writers do make use of structured character arrays which work as virtue wheels, their intended purpose could be purely formal, and internal. Their construction may be governed by literary-aesthetic purposes, not educative purposes.

This being said, however, there is nothing to suggest that a 'virtue wheel' cannot both fulfil its literary-aesthetic purposes, and at the same time function to educate readers in the manner outlined. The continuity between reflection on character virtues in the context of the fiction and reflection on character virtues in real life is legitimised by the fact that 'character' means much the same thing to us in literature and in life: namely, an ensemble of virtues and vices. Therefore, we understand characters of fiction by way of the same 'person schemas' we use in order to understand each other, in real life. Moreover, concepts have a general nature: how they are applied in one context cannot be isolated from their use in other contexts.

If the kind of conceptual activity that is prompted in the reading of fictions is comparable to that induced by philosophical thought experiments, then this should grant it respectable cognitive status.[38] The imaginative interpretation of concepts encouraged by fictions is not merely a matter of reflective play, or utilisation of the stock of concepts we already possess; it is structurally and substantially similar to how philosophical thought experiments function, calling on what a concept-user already knows and invoking intuitions in order to clarify concepts and dispel vagueness in our use of them. If such thought experiments, used to excavate and refine conceptual space, are considered by philosophers to be productive of knowledge then literary fictions containing 'virtue wheel' and similar structures sufficiently analogous to thought experiments must also be so considered.

In all, there is a strong case for the claim that literary fictions encourage and promote imaginative reflection on concepts, and that such reflection issues in knowledge insofar as one's grasp of concepts may be altered. Moreover, such

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[38] For more discussion of fictions as thought-experiments, see Catherine Z. Elgin (Elgin 2007) and David Davies (Davies D. 2007).

conceptual enrichment occurs as part of one's literary-aesthetic engagement with fictions, rather than as the result of 'mining' a work for the nuggets of knowledge it may provide at the expense of the aesthetic experience that could be afforded, and thus is bound up with a genuinely aesthetic response to the work.

Conclusion.

In focusing on the imaginative content of fictions, and the imaginative activity they call for from the reader, I have aimed to show how the imaginative aspect of fictions can be an important source of cognitive value. In life, we learn important things not only from direct real-world experience and testimony, but also from imaginative experience. Our imaginations can help us in developing practical skills of strategizing and planning, in understanding the appeal of certain life goals and values, and in grasping and applying the concepts that form the building blocks of our knowledge. Because fictional literary works invite us to engage in extended and sustained imaginative experiences, they can be a major site for our acquiring such skills, values, and conceptual proficiency. Good works of fiction encourage active and often intimate imaginings, presenting us with valuable opportunities for exercising our practical skills; they also demand from us reflection on the imaginative scenarios presented, and on characters' thoughts, actions, and dilemmas, which can lead us to open up our conceptual repertoires to new ways of conceiving. Where this activity proves fruitful, in helping us better to negotiate life and the world, we can surely be said to have gained something of cognitive value from our engagement with fictions. Fictional works can, and often do, convey truth; but such truth as can be encapsulated in singular propositions from a novel of many thousands of words is usually not worth much; of far more value are the results of the imaginative excursions we take in the company of novels, and of the reflective afterlife of those journeys.

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