

Book Review

Patrik Engisch and Julia Langkau (eds.), The Philosophy of Fiction: Imagination and Cognition, New York: Routledge, 2023, 296 pp.

Some of the most challenging questions in the philosophy of art concern fiction: how should we understand the notion of fiction, our engagement with fiction and the difference, so hard to explain but so fundamental to our intellectual and creative practices, between what is fictional and what is factual? For the better part of the last thirty years, Kendall Walton, Greg Currie and Peter Lamarque's theories have dominated our philosophical theorizing of fiction. *The Philosophy of Fiction. Imagination and Cognition*, edited by Patrik Engisch and Julia Langkau, challenges such theorizing, primarily by concentrating on imagination and its role in understanding fiction and our engagement with it.

The book is thematically organized into three parts, each of which deals with one of the questions that the editors deem crucial in our philosophical attempts to, as they argue in the introduction, understand what sets fiction apart from nonfiction and what motivates our engagements with either form of representation: that of defining fiction, of accounting for our engagement with it and of explaining its cognitive value. The problem of defining fiction is tackled in the first part, entitled "Imagination and the Definition of Fiction," which opens with Richard Woodward's paper. Woodward is critical of the traditional approach to fiction, according to which the distinction between fiction and non-fiction was explained by invoking the intentions of the author. As Woodward argues however, in doing so, insufficient attention has been directed towards differentiating between a work being fiction and it merely being treated as such. For this reason, he focuses on determining how treating something as fiction matters to how we approach a given work, primarily in our classificatory and evaluative practices. Such expressivist theory is thus less concerned with discovering the nature of fiction and more with explaining our treatment of it. Patrik Engisch sets out to strengthen Derek Matravers' challenge to the "consensus view of fiction," which is grounded in the prescription to imagine something rather than to believe it. In doing so, he argues that Currie and Stock's arguments against Matravers do not hold and that one should differentiate between objects and representations that allow for confrontation and those that do not, rather than between fiction and non-fiction. Engisch maintains that one engages competently directly with confronted objects since one has a direct access to them. Competent engagement with a representation is different because the indirect access to an object leads to a greater role played by representation's content than the object itself.

Consequently, there is a difference in psychological states that underpin actions that confronted objects and representations lead to, which affects the impact that these actions have. Derek Matravers defends his original take on fiction vs. non-fiction, defending his main idea (our engagement with fictional and non-fictional representations are not fundamentally to be understood in terms of imagining vs. believing) against David Davies' criticism to it. Margherita Arcangeli challenges the traditional assumption according to which it is creative imagination that we rely on in creating fiction, and recreative imagination that is operative in our engagement with it. On Arcangeli's account, recreative imagination is best suited to play a role in creativity because it provides a substantial background for cognitive processes that underlie creativity, such as associative thinking. Recreative imagination is also employed in our engagements with fiction because it enables the subject to form non-imaginative mental states such as belief and perception and immerse themselves into a fictional world. In this sense, appealing to recreative imagination can elucidate the emergence of both imagination and non-imaginative states in engaging with fiction.

In the second part, entitled "Imagination and Engagement with Fiction," authors explore aesthetic, ethical, epistemic and artistic modes of engagement with fiction. Manuel Garcia-Carpintero discusses the role of covert narrators, claiming that they are "effaced" and only serve an aesthetic purpose and should not be factored in epistemic considerations such as those concerning the status of their fictional beliefs and knowledge. Garcia-Carpintero's account is based on the notion of "silly questions," which suggest that it is misguided to pose inappropriate or irrelevant questions about fictional characters. Eileen John discusses three aspects of our engagement with fiction which she sees as typical for fictional engagement (even if they may not be defining aspects of fiction). These include representativeness, i.e. the fact that fiction depicts individuals as representing kinds; the fact that the audience enjoys descriptions without considering any further purpose of them (an aspect John calls minimal epistemic-aesthetic interest); and judgment freedom, i.e. the fact that our experiences of fiction allow us to register and make evaluative judgments. Magdalena Balcerak Jackson and Julia Langkau challenge the standard interpretation of the orthodox view of fiction, according to which fiction is defined in terms of the necessary use of imagination. Their account emphasizes the crucial role of imagination in our engagements with fiction; as they argue, fiction requires our imaginative engagement with it in a normative way. The crucial aspect of fiction is experiential imagination, which is marked by experientially imagining fictional content, i.e. imagining what a certain experience would be like. Fictional status of poetry is debated by Anna Christina Ribeiro, who rejects the notion of poetic persona and defends the view that lyric poetry promotes engagement with the actual poets, i.e. with their thoughts and sentiments. Such account of their lived experience goes beyond autobiographical statements and represents a source of knowledge about lived experiences, thoughts and feelings. Fiara Salis discusses the paradox of fiction, which problematizes the capacity of fiction to generate emotions. After exploring the possible solutions to the paradox, Salis opts for the approach she calls "broad cognitivism," according to which the emotions we experience in the course of our engagement with fiction are genuine.

The third part of the book is concerned with fiction as a source of knowledge. Entitled "Imagination and the Cognitive Role of Fiction," this part opens with a paper by María José Alcaraz León, who discusses the role of imagination not only in our definitions of fiction, but, more centrally to her interest here, for the cognitive value of fiction. Alcaraz Leon analyzes different artistic media in order to determine different kinds of experience they generate, and specific cognitive value that such experiences can have. As she claims, each artistic medium reflectively concerns some aspect of ordinary experience, and engagements with such artistic fictional works requires that we pay attention to the particularity of each medium and the specific experience it can afford. Such experiences are nevertheless cognitive, claims Alcaraz Leon, in that they allow experiencing or becoming aware of certain condition under which we experience and represent the world. Olivia Bailey analyzes the relation between fiction, imagination and empathy, exploring the extent to which imaginative experience of others that fiction affords can expand our range of knowledge of such experiences. Bailey introduces the concept of "s-empathy," which is a type of empathy in which one embraces other person's sensibility by means of first-person simulation and evaluative apprehension. Fiction enables the development and cultivation of s-empathy because it offers a unique look at variety of different perspectives from the eyes of the fictional characters. Anna Ichino discusses the relation between conspiracy theories and fiction. She claims that conspiracy theories can be best understood as fiction if one uses Kendall Walton's (1990) notion of fiction, i.e. "walt-fiction" based on his concept of make-believe. Walton's account of fiction is, in Ichino's opinion, the best candidate for explaining idiosyncrasies of conspiracy theories. Based on the cognitive processes that underlie endorsement of conspiracies, Ichino claims that Walton's notion of make-believe is best suited to explain why their endorsement seems to be resistant to evidence. As such, conspiracy theories are best viewed as props in games of make-believe that provide a prescription to imagine scenarios that oppose the official explanation of the event to which the theory refers, not as beliefs proper. The book closes with Amy Kind's exploration of the ways in which reading fiction can support the growth of one's imaginative capacities. Kind argues that imagining is a skill which can be developed, and that fiction plays a key role in this development, and goes on to elaborate how precisely this happens by analyzing Martha Nussbaum's notion of empathetic imagination and empirical research on it. On Kind's account, fiction cultivates our imaginative skills by providing us with new source material (i.e. experience of different fictional characters that surpass our real life experience) and with opportunities to recombine material already familiar to us in new ways. Furthermore, given the engaging aspect of fiction, it keeps us motivated to explore fictional worlds (which is, on Kind's view, a kind of imaginative practice). She concludes the chapter by exploring what is distinctive of fiction, in relation to other imaginative activities such as pretense or thought experimentation, that makes it better suited than these activities to cultivate our capacities to imagine.

This rather superficial summary of individual chapters can hardly do justice to the insights available in this great collection; nevertheless, we hope we have managed to show why this book is worthy of serious consid-

eration. In addition to providing insights into most contemporary research regarding fiction and imagination, the book is insightful in offering a very comprehensive perspective on how theories of fiction have been developing over the last thirty years and in suggesting new directions in which these theories may develop in years to come. Moreover, the book is not only insightful in its take on fiction, but also in how it contributes to our understanding of what it is to imagine something, and in exploring the imaginative processes that are operative in our cognitive and emotional functioning. Many questions arise from individual papers and we are convinced that scholars from numerous disciplines will be motivated to engage with the views presented here. We strongly recommend the book to everyone interested in fiction and all the areas related to it, from literature, film and other forms of narrative art, to aesthetics, media studies, cognitive sciences, narratology, and the like. As the papers collected here show, the problem of fiction runs through many other areas of philosophy: our ethical theories are concerned with the capacity of fiction to make us better, or worse, moral agents; epistemology seeks to understand how fiction can be a source of knowledge, metaphysics is primarily concerned with explaining the ontological status of fictional entities and philosophy of language looks at ways of understanding the meaning of fictional discourses. All of these questions come together in philosophy of mind, where philosophers try to understand the nature of our cognitive, imaginative and emotional processes that are operative in our experience with fictional, as opposed to factual, representations. *The Philosophy of Fiction* is an immensely informative source for addressing precisely these questions, giving us new directions in which to expand the philosophy of fiction in analytic tradition for years to come.¹

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