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Learning from Literature

IT HAS LONG BEEN a commonplace in literary studies, encouraged by the Aristotelian tradition which sees poetry as aspiring to universal truth, that literature has cognitive value *in some sense or other*. The difficulty has always been in spelling out exactly how works of the imagination can be, in Horace's enigmatic terms, "utile" as well as "dulce." Plato's warnings of the deceptiveness of poetic fictions and his insistence that true knowledge is grounded in rational argument alone have served to temper more extravagant claims for literature's cognitive powers and kept alive the need for periodic 'defences of poetry.' The debate once engaged soon gets drawn into the wider reaches of metaphysics—concerning truth, reality, knowledge, imagination—while the proliferation of elusive theoretical conceptions, 'mimesis,' 'realism,' 'representation,' 'poetic truth,' and so forth, only makes the commonplace assumptions all the harder to defend.

This paper barely scratches the surface of the protracted historical debate.[1] Its aim is modest and focused: to draw attention to some apparently innocuous facts about learning and reading practices and to follow through some less obvious implications for literature's cognitive aspirations.

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[1]An outline of the history of the debate about truth and art can be found in Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, "Truth," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 4: 406–15.

Preliminaries About Learning

Learning involves acquiring beliefs or skills. I take the process of learning to be fundamentally causal (transforming input to output) and I am inclined to think that more or less any process which results in the acquisition of beliefs or skills can be described as learning. The paradigm is that in which a learner actively, self-consciously and intentionally engages in the quest to learn and acquires, perhaps through rational reflection, beliefs and skills that the learner takes to be of value. Not all learning fits this paradigm. We can learn without seeking to learn and we can do so in the most mundane circumstances of life and 'experience' without even realizing that we have acquired new beliefs. Furthermore we can be coerced into acquiring beliefs or skills which we have not actively sought. In an extreme case, perhaps through a knock on the head or the injection of a drug, we can acquire beliefs (or skills) through a process over which we have no control, with which we did not cooperate and of which we are barely aware. It might seem odd to call the latter a learning process—given its distance from the paradigm—but I am inclined to do so if only to emphasize the instrumental nature of learning which seems to me at its core.[2]

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[2]It still might be objected that the claim that learning is causal is either trivially true (what other mechanism could be involved?) or hopelessly obscure (what exactly causes what?). The point, though, is not to engage epistemological matters—are there innate ideas? is learning, as Plato thought, a kind of recollection?—but only to highlight a feature, obvious enough in itself, which might get sidelined if the paradigm of *pedagogy* is too prominent. The contrast I have in mind is between *causality* and *intentionality*. If the teaching paradigm is emphasised it might be supposed that essential to the process of learning are intentional notions: a teacher *intends* and *aims* to impart beliefs (skills), a learner *seeks* beliefs (skills), and so forth. My view is that this paradigm is misleading. Learning can occur without intentions, desires or effort, indeed in extreme cases even without the mediation of thought. As infants we learn skills without consciously seeking them and without necessarily any active teaching. Learning does not need to be directed, purposeful, self-reflective, or rational. It is for this reason I am inclined to stress its causal nature. From different kinds of stimuli, different beliefs (skills) result. That is the basic pattern. The relevance of this to learning from fiction is (a) that such learning might occur without being consciously sought or intended, and (b) that in some cases its occurrence is just a matter of fact, not of design. The important conclusion is that from the mere fact of learning from fiction (which I am not disputing) we cannot infer that learning is a *goal* of fiction. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for insisting on more clarity on this point.

That we can learn from fiction—acquire beliefs or skills as a result of reading works of fiction—is, on this account, an obvious matter of fact and not even especially interesting. We can and do acquire beliefs about all kinds of things from reading fiction: the nature and feel of a place, historical or biographical facts, matters of etiquette, how people behave when they are angry, greedy or jealous. We can learn about horse racing from the novels of Dick Francis, Navajo folklore from Tony Hillerman, rural deans from Anthony Trollope. Likewise we can acquire skills or practical knowledge from fiction: how to fix a broken carburetor, how to survive in the wilds, how to rob a bank. The possibility of learning so easily from fiction arises from an obvious characteristic of imaginative storytelling, namely that 'made up' stories must perforce rest on a factual or experiential base. As David Lodge nicely puts it, "Novels burn facts as engines burn fuel."[3]

The facts that readers pick up from fiction—usually about the background against which novels are set—should be distinguished from another kind of belief acquired in the reading process, beliefs *about a fictional world*. Readers learn about fictional personages (Mr. Allworthy, the Green Knight) and fictional places (Rummidge, Wonderland) and are required to construct imaginatively scenes and events presented to them. The beliefs so acquired are genuine beliefs but are about what is *fictionally* the case rather than what is *actually* the case. We will see how these two sets of beliefs intersect, but my concern in this paper is with what can be learned about the actual world.

The theoretically interesting question is not whether we can learn from fiction but whether there is anything integral to fiction which promotes distinctive opportunities for learning or makes possible distinct learning outcomes. In short we must ask if learning is embedded in any special or essential way in the practice of fiction. I will argue that while fiction can provide distinctive opportunities for learning (i.e. acquiring beliefs or skills) it is nevertheless not an essential feature of the practice that it should impart (non-fictional) beliefs or knowledge. This is a preliminary to raising the parallel question about imaginative works of literature, namely whether they, in some essential way, have a learning func-

[3] David Lodge, *The Practice of Writing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997) 27.

tion. Again I will argue that although we can of course learn from literary works it is not in the nature of literature, *qua* literature, or part of what is valuable about literature, that we should do so.

Practices and Learning

First of all, we need to identify and characterize a practice in which learning is an integral part. There are many such: most of the discourses of science, history, and philosophy, as well as the practices of sermons, agony-aunt columns in newspapers, parables, moral homilies, or mathematics lessons. Take the case of philosophy. The very point of philosophical discourse is to try to say things that are true (more than trivially so), well argued, and able to advance understanding in some established area of controversy. Philosophy is written for a particular readership. Readers of philosophy read with the aim of advancing their understanding. Their hope and expectation is that they will acquire not only true beliefs but also a kind of enlightenment or insight on a subject that interests them. That writers of philosophy have the aim of bringing about such insight, and readers of acquiring it, is not merely incidental to the practice of philosophy but is integral to it and a criterion of its success and value. Note that the process of learning in philosophy is through rational persuasion. A person reads a text, reflects on it, identifies the flow of argument, assesses the truth of its component propositions, and, if suitably persuaded, comes to acquire a relevant set of beliefs. This process is still causal though the route from input to output is mediated by cognitive or rational appraisals. What is interesting in the case of philosophy (and other cognitive disciplines) is not that the learning process is causal but the fact that the very nature of philosophical discourse—characterized by argument, truth-assessment, clarification, definition, analysis—is structured to promote the transmission (and evaluation) of belief. In this sense the practice of philosophy is *constitutively cognitive*; the process of learning is what gives value and purpose to the practice. Those who engage in the practice do so with the expectation of rational persuasion and insight as a prime motivating factor.

It seems clear that nothing comparable is the case with the practices of either fiction or literature. It is not just that literary

fictions do not rely, as does philosophy, on rational persuasion, rather they are not 'constitutively cognitive' in the sense described; they do not have the transmission of belief as part of their very nature. Or so I will argue. We need to distinguish the core or defining features of a practice from contingent or instrumental purposes which might motivate participants on an occasion. Someone might tell a joke with the deliberate aim of insulting or hurting a listener, yet insulting or hurting is not constitutive of joke telling. A preacher might give a sermon with the aim of admonishing specific members of the congregation, yet it is not integral to sermons that they should target particular individuals, even if it is not uncommon that they do so. Taking a drive in the country might yield eye-opening observations, but learning hardly constitutes the point of driving. Similarly, fictional stories can be told with the aim of instructing an audience. Didactic fiction, parables, moral tales, and propaganda are genres of fiction which have such an aim. Aesop's Fables are didactic; so too, arguably, are *Hard Times* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* But it is not constitutive of fiction as a practice that fictional stories should have an instructive purpose and many have no such aim. Nor, incidentally, would we admire Dickens or Orwell as literary authors if there was nothing more to their works than didacticism.

The practice of fiction is defined broadly through a certain kind of intent on the part of the storyteller and a certain kind of response on the part of a reader or listener.[4] Paradigmatically the storyteller makes up character and incident and offers a text to the reader for imaginative reflection. The fictive stance, as I call it, adopted by the reader involves entertaining the sense of propositions and imagining, but not believing, that the propositions are true. This stance contrasts vividly with that adopted by readers of philosophy who, as we have seen, seek truth, rational persuasion, and insight. Unlike in philosophy, learning and the expectation of learning are not integral to the response demanded by fiction *qua* fiction. This of course is compatible with readers in particular cases

[4]The remarks in this paragraph provide only the barest outline of a theory of fiction. A full account on which this sketch is based can be found in Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) Part I.

acquiring all manner of beliefs or skills from their reading of fiction, or storytellers having the supplementary aim that they should do so.

Fiction and the Potentialities of Learning

So far we are barely beyond preliminaries on the topic of cognitive values. For one thing I have spoken of fiction only, not literature. The terms 'fiction' and 'literature' are neither synonymous nor co-extensional. Fictionality is but one device utilized in works of literature and is not even a defining feature of literature. More on that in a minute. Before then we must explore some of the characteristics of the practice of fiction which do seem to yield peculiar opportunities for learning.

There are undoubtedly aspects of fiction which can be exploited for cognitive ends—as is apparent in the uses of fiction in philosophy or pedagogy in general—but this, to repeat, does not alter the fact that fiction *per se*, as a mode of discourse, is neutral as to an instructive function. The characteristics that concern us are not those that involve the overt appropriation of factual material in fictional stories, the factual background or 'setting.' What we are looking for are features of the reading process itself, peculiar to fiction, which yield a distinctive potential for learning.

At the base level of responding to fiction readers entertain propositions (in the fictional and nonfictional content) and this affords the obvious possibility of bringing to mind imaginatively what otherwise might not have occurred to them. This is one of the simple pleasures of reading stories. Hilary Putnam identifies a cognitive payoff here by suggesting that "our conceptual and perceptual repertoire becomes enlarged, ... we now possess descriptive resources we did not have before."[5] Admittedly he is talking about the effect of reading *Don Quixote*. In less elevated fictions the payoff in terms of new descriptive resources might be meagre.

An extension of the basic imaginative reflection demanded by fiction is engagement of the emotions. A reader not only entertains propositions but reacts to them. Bringing to mind character

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[5] Hilary Putnam, "Reflections on Goodman's Ways of Worldmaking," *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979): 614–15.

and incident can elicit the kinds of responses normally accorded to real life events: sympathy, pity, fear, dismay, outrage, envy, etc.[6] A notable feature here relates to the idea of an 'appropriate' response. The emotional response to a disturbing fictional representation (say, a tragedy), although strong and deeply felt, is likely to be more controlled than the response to any comparable event in the real world.[7] Fiction, in other words, can provide imaginative material for training the emotions. Of course the outcome can be more or less valuable depending on the quality of the fictional representation and the nature of the control exercised by the writer. Emotions elicited can be debased or manipulated or they can be constructively guided by literary description and form. We will return to this when we come to the idea of points of view within fiction.

At the next level of response comes imaginative supplementation of fictional content, the filling in or rounding out of fictional character and incident beyond what is explicitly presented. Here we find the intersection of beliefs about the fictional world and beliefs about the real world. Readers have to draw on what they know of the real world to supplement detail in a fictional world. Also needed is knowledge of literary convention, for in particular genres of fiction—the fairy tale, science fiction, the whodunit, magical realism—there are conventional constraints on legitimate inferences beyond what is given. Of greater import for the learning dimension are the kinds of judgements readers are required to make in drawing such inferences. One kind of judgement is that of the reliability of the information presented. Narrators and other speakers can be depicted as unreliable. Even concerning information deemed reliable readers must make judgements: sometimes of a quasi-factual nature, about physical or circumstantial detail, sometimes of a psychological nature, about motives or desires, sometimes of a moral nature in the assessment of character. In responding to fiction it is not uncommon for readers to have to call on resources of thought or imagination quite outside their normal ex-

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[6] For a useful account of the role in literary appreciation of emotional responses to fiction, see Susan L. Feagin, *Reading With Feeling* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996).

[7] B.J. Rosebury makes some penetrating observations on this in "Fiction, Emotion and 'Belief': A Reply to Eva Schaper," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19 (1979): 129–30.

perience. Of course they can fail in the task. They can miss the point, respond inappropriately, or adopt a distorted vision of the whole. What is important to note is that imaginative supplementation of this kind is not merely incidental but is integral to the mode of reading conventionally required by fiction.

We move nearer to literary considerations when we introduce the third level, that of point of view. It is a feature of fiction, again in contrast to other discourses such as science or philosophy, that *mode of presentation* becomes as salient in fictional reading as does content. One reason why we attend only incidentally to the style of philosophical language, except in special circumstances, is that we look beyond surface structure to the substance (including truth and validity) of what is said. Certainly where the presentation is vague, careless, or ambiguous we remark on the fact, disapprovingly, in that the substance itself is likely affected by these qualities, but it is a characteristic of philosophy that the very same point, more often than not, can be expressed in different ways to the same effect. In fiction the manner of presentation is altogether more intimately connected with the content conveyed.

The expressive properties of fictional description serve not just to characterize but to individuate what is being described. Description itself can embody a point of view on character or incident such that recognition of that point of view is a precondition of the imaginative grasp of content. Examples of this abound. Dickens is a paradigm case of an author who invests description with moral weight and the lens of judgement. In *Our Mutual Friend* there are numerous characters—with names like Veneering, Boots, Brewer, Podsnap—who are utterly hollow in their obsession with money and status. The very tone with which Dickens presents these characters indicates the attitude readers are invited to adopt to them. The daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap is a minor character whose introduction mainly serves the purpose of shedding light on her parents, and their ilk:

> There was a Miss Podsnap. And this young rocking horse was being trained in her mother's act of prancing in a stately manner without ever getting on. But the high parental action was not yet imparted to her, and in truth she was but an under-sized damsel, with high shoulders,

> low spirits, chilled elbows, and a rasped surface of nose, who seemed to take occasional frosty peeps out of childhood into womanhood, and to shrink back again, overcome by her mother's head-dress and her father from head to foot—crushed by the mere dead weight of Podsnappery.[8]

The character, little more than a vignette, takes shape through the predicates in the characterization. Miss Podsnap is a pathetic frightened creature, starved of warmth ("chilled elbows," "frosty peeks") and crushed by the oppressive weight of her unspeakable parents. In fictional, unlike, say, historical or biographical discourse, depiction is not separable from identity. How a character is depicted is internally related to what the character is. One consequence of this is that writers of fiction are largely able to control the imaginative vision and moral stance that readers acquire with respect to fictional personages and states of affairs. A reader sensitive to literary forms will be aware of the controlling hand of the author in shaping a response at the same time as engaging imaginatively and emotionally with fictional content. This affords a unique potential in fiction for exploiting the twin perspectives of literary artifice and imaginative involvement, the creation of a world and a world created.[9]

Point of view also shows itself in the potential for irony. Irony is the concealment of meaning, the interplay between surface and hidden significance. Fiction makes possible a unique form of irony being able to embed a thought or proposition in the speech or attitude of an invented character, thus altering its resonance, even its truth-value. At the end of *Our Mutual Friend*, members of Society, so-called—the Veneerings, the Podsnaps, et al.—gather to discuss the marriage of society lawyer Eugene Wrayburn to the river girl Lizzie Hexham. In condemning the marriage, as they all do (except for Mr. Twemlow, who is thereby redeemed) they condemn themselves. Mrs. Podsnap remarks in what would have been an *idée reçue* for the Victorian middle classes: in these matters "there should be an equality of station and fortune, and ... a man

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[8] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: Signet, 1964) 152.

[9] These ideas are developed in detail in Peter Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996).

accustomed to Society should look out for a woman accustomed to Society and capable of bearing her part in it with—an ease and elegance of carriage" (892). But in the mouth of Mrs. Podsnap, whom we know to be vain, shallow, lacking in sympathy, and quite unequal to the moral worth of either Eugene or Lizzie, this commonplace is exposed as pompous and self-serving. In the context of the novel the very idea of equality has been thoroughly deconstructed and "equality of station and fortune" shown to be a fragile and ephemeral thing, in contrast to deeper moral and emotional commitments. Only fiction can so embed a proposition that its connotations become radically transformed in this way.

Literary Themes and Learning

It is at this point that we are led inevitably to literary considerations, which go beyond the merely fictional. What has emerged so far is that certain features relating to conventions of reading fiction seem to provide a distinctive potential for learning (about the real world), apart from simply picking up facts from the background 'setting.' These features derive from the mode of presentation of fiction (the very nature of storytelling) and the imaginative response demanded by fiction. Once again it should be emphasized that the presence of such features does not imply that the aim of fiction (constitutively) is to impart learning, only that certain kinds of learning are facilitated by fiction.

Clearly to the extent that literary works (novels and dramas, if not lyric poetry) are fictions, then they too share this potential for learning. Yet closer reflection on literary qualities seems to reveal an emphasis away from learning. Certainly literary works engage, or stretch, the imagination in ways we have noted, but as works of art they make other demands on readers and exploit the imagination to their own specific ends. This is not the occasion to attempt a definition of literature, if such were possible, but one feature is generally agreed to be important and is of special relevance to this discussion. A work of literature in its very conception explores and develops themes, in a sense in which not all works of fiction do so.[10] To appreciate a literary work is, in part, to see how the work

[10]The importance of themes to the conception of literature is explored in Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* Part III.

coheres round its themes into an aesthetically unified structure. Literary interpretation is, again in part, the exercise of eliciting and characterizing themes and showing precisely how subsidiary elements in the work are related to these significance-bearing ideas. Because literary themes are usually matters of general human interest, often of a philosophical, moral or theological nature, such as desire and forgiveness, pride and prejudice, social and personal duties in conflict, love, hope, and despair, they are commonly thought to be at the heart of literature's cognitive contribution, indeed the very matters on which literature most obviously provides 'instruction.'

However, while the universality of such themes attests to the *seriousness* of literature, it would be wrong simply to take for granted the next step, that the aim of literature is to yield knowledge through its thematic content. Returning to our earlier example, here is the critic J. Hillis Miller describing a central theme in *Our Mutual Friend*:

> If money is the ascribing of value to valueless matter, the base of its power for evil over man is his forgetting of this fact. *Our Mutual Friend* is about a whole society which has forgotten. Instead of seeing that man has made money of dust and is the source of its value, this society takes money as the ultimate value-in-itself, the measure and source of all other value. ... The novel is a brilliant revelation of the results of this false worship of money.[11]

Assuming the general aptness of the description, can we derive the interest and power of the novel from the intrinsic content or truth-value of this theme as stated? Surely not. The theme of 'the false worship of money' is in itself thin and banal. It is a theme endlessly treated in literature—from the story of Christ driving the money-changers from the temple, through the Roman satirists, Chaucer, Shakespeare, the eighteenth-century novel. The value of Dickens' novel lies not in the fact that this is its central theme nor in the objective truth of the critic's generalizations characterizing the theme but in the way that the details—the story, the subplots, the characters, the sense of place—cohere round the theme and

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[11]Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: Signet, 1964) 903.

make it vivid. Likewise, an interpretation that simply elicits thematic generalizations will fail to do justice to a novel without an analysis right down to the level of minor incident and expressive description illustrating the manifestations of theme from part to whole.[12] This indeed is what Hillis Miller offers.

To take a literary interest in a work, to appreciate it as a work of literature, is to engage in just this kind of exercise: both an imaginative immersion in the world of the work and an exploration of the vision of the work through its themes. It does not seem to me that learning, acquiring beliefs about the world at large, is an integral or even important feature of this response (or mode of reading). It is often supposed that literary value resides, at least partly, in the insights to be gained from reflection on a work's themes. However, to ground the value of *Our Mutual Friend* on the fact that it reinforces our general belief in the corrupting power of money is to trivialize the artistic achievement. Certainly the theme can be expressed, as Hillis Miller's discussion shows, in propositional form ("If money is the ascribing of value to valueless matter, the base of its power for evil over man is his forgetting of this fact") and propositions have truth-values. But it is not the independent truth of this proposition that establishes, or even contributes to, the literary value of the novel. The proposition's significance lies in the manner in which it serves to organize and make sense of the particularities of the novel's content. As part of the reading process, readers might bring to mind such propositions and tacitly assent to them, but neither widespread nor deeply felt assent is a criterion of literary greatness. It seems unlikely that people like the Veneerings would be persuaded by reading *Our Mutual Friend* to change their values, and for most other readers the thematic content simply reinforces what they believe already. The novel's achievement is an artistic achievement, not a cognitive one (in the sense of belief-acquisition). The vividness, clarity and subtlety of the handling of its themes, and the interest, coherence and connectedness of the detail, are at the heart of the work's literary value.

When we embark on a reading of *Our Mutual Friend*, in contrast, say, to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it would be eccentric to

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[12] For a useful account of the conventions of literary interpretation, see Stein Haugom Olsen, *The Structure of Literary Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978).

do so with the overriding expectation (or desire) that we will learn something from our reading. Learning, acquiring beliefs, seeking rational or other kinds of persuasion, are not part of the practice of reading literature (which includes interpretation and evaluation), as they are with philosophy. They would not normally be part of the motivation for reading novels, any more than seeking to learn about human nature is a common or reasonable motive for going to an art gallery or a concert. We come to literary works—as to other art forms—with quite different expectations from those brought to, say, philosophical or historical works and we apply different criteria of success. Of course we might learn from a novel, as a matter of causal fact. We might even read a novel like *Our Mutual Friend* as social or cultural historians seeking information about Victorian attitudes to class and money. But that would be to engage a different practice. Our interest would not be a literary interest.

The literary development of themes runs parallel to the philosophical development of similar themes (the great issues of human nature as outlined above) but they do not compete—they complement each other. A culture without a literature that explores its central concerns is an impoverished one, for it lacks an imaginative realization of these concerns. Those offering 'defences of poetry' (Sidney, Shelley, and others) have repeatedly attempted to assimilate the literary enterprise into something like the philosophical one (even claiming that poetry 'transcends' philosophy), as if the only value is the value that knowledge gives. This is the legacy of Plato. Yet behind these 'defences' we can recognize a more general plea for the seriousness of poetry and the importance of the imagination in human thought. It has been my contention that that seriousness can be acknowledged and explained without appeal to a learning function.

In his recent introduction to aesthetics, *Philosophy of the Arts*,[13] Gordon Graham argues for a strong cognitivism across the arts, especially in literature. As so often in this debate, however, he constantly resorts to metaphors—such as "illuminating experience"

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[13]Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 1997).

or "enhancing understanding"—to spell out the cognitive payoff. In the end this yields very little. It seems a pretty anodyne truth that art can "enhance understanding" and there are no doubt even senses of the phrase which do not imply the acquisition of belief. But it does prompt a question for all such knowledge-based cognitive theories: how is this "illumination" or "enhanced" understanding manifested? Would we expect that those immersed in the great works of literature understand people and the world better than those who are not so well read? Yet there seems no evidence that such readers are especially knowledgeable about human traits, as are psychologists or social scientists or even philosophers. Literary critics are not sought out as experts or advisers on human affairs. Perhaps, as Putnam suggests, these readers have improved descriptive resources and a wider stock of references, drawn from the canonical works, for illustrating their discussions of the human world. But this is not equivalent to insight or understanding. If what is meant by "enhanced understanding" is something more like practical knowledge or wisdom (*phronesis*) then we might expect readers of literature to show a marked sensitivity and sympathy to others—yet again there seems little empirical evidence that literary connoisseurs stand out in this respect.

Conclusion

My conclusion is that we do not capture the essence of literature by appeal to cognitive terms like knowledge, truth, or understanding. What we can learn from works of literature is not a measure of their greatness, as it might be a measure of philosophical value. Literary value is a species of artistic value. The great works of literature are products of creative imagination at its best, they treat of the deepest human concerns through verbal artifice which invites a distinctive mode of appreciation unlike that associated with philosophy or science. They develop and illuminate themes of human interest and take their place beside, but not in competition with, philosophy. All this is surely sufficient to endorse the commonplace that literary works are cognitive *in some sense*. It might even be enough to accommodate the Horacian "utile." We have seen that there are aspects of fictionality—propositional content, imaginative supplementation, manipulation of points of view—

which can be exploited for direct cognitive ends, but again there is nothing about fiction *per se* that requires it to be a vehicle for learning or the transmission of beliefs. We must not confuse contingent by-products of fiction or literature, however desirable they might be, with the very nature of the practices themselves.[14]

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[14] An earlier version of this paper was presented to a meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association in Ottawa in May 1998. I am grateful to the participants for the lively and helpful discussion.