Introduction to *Fictionalism in Philosophy*

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It is easier to feel the force of fictionalism in philosophy if one begins by considering a problem that emerges from some of what we say and appear to believe. We will illustrate the problem as it emerges from mathematical discourse ("math-talk", for short), but, as we could show, the same problem emerges from a consideration of moral-talk, possible world-talk, and a host of other fragments of discourse.

A face-value reading of standard, mathematical discourse seems to commit those who use it to abstract objects (e.g., numbers, functions, etc.), entities whose existence, upon reflection, we may well think we have good reasons to doubt, perhaps because we think that such entities have no place in a naturalistic account of the world. Recognizing the apparent difference between, on the one hand, what math-talk appears to commit us to, and, on the other hand, our best take on what the world is like, might suggest an error theory according to which the sentences of math-talk are simply untrue, much as sentences that mention yetis or phlogiston are untrue. When we are confronted with systemic error of this kind in an area of discourse, one familiar response is to invoke an eliminativist strategy that both denies the existence of the alleged "entities" and commits to stop using the offending discourse. But here we face the problem alluded to at the start: This familiar strategy seems to fail us, for math-talk is so useful—as a number of philosophers have pointed out, it is virtually indispensable—that it seems that we cannot afford to dispense with it altogether. We appear to be in a quandary: We have good reasons for wanting to retain much of math-talk, but also compelling reasons for refraining from using that discourse, given its apparently erroneous commitments. We thus seem damned if we retain the discourse, and damned if we do not retain the discourse. What can be done?

A fictionalist will propose a way out of this quandary. A fictionalist will explain how we can retain much of math-talk without either committing us to a troubling ontology or landing us in an unacceptable error theory. But how precisely should a philosopher understand *fictionalism*? And, so understood, what are its reach and limits? This volume explores answers to these questions and provides readers with some of the most current and up-to-date work on fictionalism as a trend in philosophy, both for and against. As such, the volume is intended to provide an indication of how the discussion of fictionalism has advanced over the last ten to fifteen years, in particular since the publication in 2005 of Mark Kalderon's *Fictionalism in Metaphysics.* In this introduction, we prepare readers for diving into the remainder of the volume by first discussing how best to understand the idea of fictionalism before providing brief summaries of the chapters.

1. We begin our discussion by considering a fairly influential view of fictionalism in philosophy that was presented by Mark Kalderon (2005a). Kalderon (Ibid.) contends that what is central to fictionalism—what he (Ibid., p. 3) calls "the distinctive commitment of fictionalism"— is that the acceptance of a sentence in a given domain of inquiry is not truth-normed and does not involve belief in the content of the accepted sentence. To say that it is not "truth-normed" is to say that the relevant sentence is not to be evaluated in terms of how accurately it represents the world; instead, the norms that actually govern acceptance are such that, so long as the sentence displays certain non-truth involving virtues, we have sufficient reason for accepting the sentence.[1] Thus, when we accept and utter such a sentence, we need not be asserting the sentence (or what it says), and we need not believe what it says.

This characterization of fictionalism renders it effectively an epistemic view. Kalderon is clear about understanding fictionalism in philosophy as an epistemic position, for he notes (2008, p. 40) that "[f]ictionalism is not primarily a semantic thesis. It is a claim

about the nature of acceptance." But why call his view "fictionalism"? According to Kalderon, the label is appropriate because there is a particular analogy between our attitudes towards fictional discourse and our attitudes towards other, putatively problematic, types of discourse. To clarify the analogy, Kalderon considers a passage from Melville's *Moby-Dick* and notes (Ibid.) that in *Moby-Dick*, "Melville literally asserts nothing about Ahab's madness, and the witting participants of the fiction literally believe nothing about Ahab"—[i]n a fictional context "the utterance or inscription of a sentence is not the assertion of the expressed content, and the acceptance of a sentence is not belief in that content." That shows, he thinks, that "the acceptance and pragmatics of sentences from a fictionalist inquiry thus parallels, at least to this extent, the acceptance and pragmatics of fictional sentences on one natural understanding of fiction."

The relative popularity of this kind of epistemic take on fictionalism is borne out by some other characterizations of fictionalism. Thus, for example, Christopher Daly (2008, p. 424) echoes something similar to Kalderon when he claims that "fictionalism is an account of the attitude we should take towards the sentences of [some subject matter] S." And a number of fictionalists have come on record as claiming that, with respect to their target discourse, we neither assert nor believe (or should neither assert nor believe) what the sentences from that fragment of discourse purport to say.[2] Nevertheless, we think that Kalderon's view of what fictionalism involves is overly restrictive in that it rules out certain accounts that are commonly thought of as "fictionalist". For example, as Richard Joyce notes (forthcoming), so-called "cognitive fictionalists" about moral discourse think that utterances of sentences from moral discourse are genuinely assertoric; it is just that the assertions concern the content of a fiction, using a story-prefix operator, e.g., 'According to the fiction of morality'. As Joyce notes (Ibid., p. 3), "[t]his view therefore allows for moral beliefs, moral truths, and (potentially) moral knowledge." This all seems to be incompatible with Kalderon's view of

what fictionalism involves, since the concept of acceptance does not seem to be on the radar; instead, the view is characterized in semantic terms. It thus seems that cognitive fictionalists about moral discourse, as described by Joyce, are not fictionalists on Kalderon's favoured conception of fictionalism. Cognitive fictionalists are in good company here, for the same can be said of other apparently fictionalist accounts, including Stephen Yablo's (2005) figuralism about math-talk, Kendall Walton's (1990) fictionalist account of existence-talk, Kroon's (2001) pragmatic pretense account of identity-talk, and Armour-Garb and Woodbridge's (2015) semantic pretense account of truth-talk. These accounts take fictionalism to be primarily a semantic (or a pragmatic) thesis, and none of them offer any particular insight into the nature of acceptance.

We think that where Kalderon goes awry is by insisting too much on an epistemic element to fictionalism and by not considering a semantic (or a pragmatic) element, which, for at least some fictionalists, is also crucial. To be sure, some self-identifying fictionalists might take their account of fictionalism to involve taking some stance on the nature of acceptance, but surely Kalderon's contention, that "fictionalism is a claim about the nature of acceptance", is too strong as it stands. Indeed, as we will see, it seems that one can be a fictionalist without making any claim about the nature of acceptance and one can make a claim about the nature of acceptance without engaging in fictionalism at all. (As we will discuss, Bas van Fraassen makes a claim about acceptance, but he is no fictionalist.)

But if, as we have claimed, there are problems with Kalderon's view on what fictionalism amounts to, then how should we think about fictionalism in philosophy? That is, what exactly is a "fictionalist" view?

Surprising though this may seem (or perhaps unsurprisingly for those readers who have struggled with the question themselves!), it is much harder to answer this question than one might have thought. This is because 'fictionalism', not being a natural kind term, tends to

be used differently by different theorists. Indeed, as we will see, there are incompatible accounts of how to understand 'fictionalism', as offered by different putative experts in the field. This creates a problem for us, qua editors, as we introduce the subject to the reader. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that we both have views about how one should understand this term. So, in our introduction, are we to be, in a sense, pluralistic, allowing for various accounts of the term, 'fictionalist', without deeming any proposed account to be incorrect, or should we be doctrinaire, offering an opinionated view of how one should understand fictionalism, even if this means ruling out, as "non-fictionalist", accounts that have been put forward by putative experts as fictionalist? While we see virtues in adopting either of the afore noted approaches, we are inclined towards a different one, following something akin to a method of reflective equilibrium (or, if you like, a broadly coherentist approach). On this approach, we begin by admitting views that are widely agreed to be fictionalist, in virtue of their clear link to some notion of fiction, and then see what happens when we relax the requirement of such a link. If the latter results in the inclusion of views that few of us, or perhaps even their proponents, would be prepared to count as forms of fictionalism, or if the generalization seems to rest on a kind of identifiable error, this would show that we should be suspicious of relaxing the link to that degree. We stress that the resulting way of classifying views as "fictionalist" is to a degree arbitrary: There may be different reflective equilibria, depending in part on which cases we are prepared to see as paradigmatic, and some will no doubt refuse to acknowledge that what we see as errors are genuine errors (including some of our own contributors!). As editors, we don't see that as problematic, so long as interested parties appreciate the nature of the demarcation problem that we are trying to solve

2 As we have said, certain theorists make seemingly incompatible claims about how to understand fictionalism in philosophy. To illustrate this, we highlight differences between

Matti Eklund's general statement of fictionalism and Daniel Nolan's approach to fictionalism, and contrast both with Mark Balaguer's statement of mathematical fictionalism, all of which appear in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. According to Eklund, "[f]ictionalism about a region of discourse can provisionally be characterized as the view that claims made within that discourse are not best seen as aiming at literal truth but are better regarded as a sort of 'fiction'." What Eklund takes to be central to a fictionalist account is what he calls the "linguistic thesis", viz. "that utterances of sentences of the discourse are best seen not as efforts to say what is literally true, but as useful fictions of some sort." In his entry on Fictionalism, Eklund stresses the importance of connecting a fictionalist account with some specific aspect or feature of fiction. Thus, he resists the move to connect fictionalism with fiction on a loose or analogising sense, in contrast with Daniel Nolan who, in his entry on modal fictionalism, invokes a loose analogy of this kind when he claims that "[f]ictionalism is an approach to theoretical matters in a given area which treats the claims in that area as being in some sense analogous to fictional claims: claims we do not literally accept at face value, but which we nevertheless think serve some useful function." To get a sense for the difference between these two ways of thinking about fictionalism in philosophy, notice that J.L. Mackie's (1977) view of ethical terms would end up as fictionalist according to Nolan, but not so according to Eklund, since Mackie advocates an error theory about moral statements while, at the same time, highlighting the utility of moral discourse.

By contrast to Eklund and Nolan, Balaguer in his entry on fictionalism in the philosophy of mathematics downplays the importance of even an *analogy* with fiction. As he puts it, "despite the name, fictionalist views do not have to involve any very strong claims about the analogy between mathematics and fiction." Moreover, while Eklund highlights various ways in which fictionalist accounts might understand our treatment of a certain fragment of discourse, or our epistemic attitude towards that fragment, Balaguer's view about

what fictionalism amounts to as applied to the philosophy of mathematics seems to be incompatible with much of what Eklund and Nolan claim about how to understand fictionalism. In addition to denying any strong claims about the analogy between mathematics and fiction, Balaguer claims that "[mathematical f]ictionalism … is the view that (a) our mathematical sentences and theories do purport to be about abstract mathematical objects, as platonism suggests, but (b) there are no such things as abstract objects, and so (c) our mathematical theories are not true." He goes on to note that "fictionalism is a version of mathematical nominalism, the view that there are no such things as mathematical objects."

Now, while Balaguer is no doubt right that many mathematical fictionalists are also nominalists about such abstracta, it seems unduly strong to identify mathematical fictionalism with some form of nominalism, for that ignores the possibility that a fictionalist will be agnostic about the status of "mathematical entities"—more on this, below. Balaguer must classify the latter position as a view that merely resembles fictionalism. There is, we think, a clear classificatory advantage to taking the positions to be more unified than that.

There are also more general reservations one can have about Balaguer's characterization of mathematical fictionalism. For one thing, he is amongst the minority of theorists who, as we saw, deny the need for any significant connection between fictionalism in philosophy and some aspect of fiction. Without any such connection, one might wonder why we should call the type of view that Balaguer outlines a "fictionalist" view. Indeed, for all that he has said, the view is compatible with eliminativism, which is antithetical to most, if not all, fictionalist accounts that are currently on offer. At the very least, Balaguer must agree that the utility of math-talk means that people should continue to engage with it, just as we should continue to engage with fictional discourse despite the fact that many of its claims are untrue. There should be at least this much of an analogy between fictional discourse and math-talk.

To get to our other reservation about Balaguer's characterization, note that it seems important, when trying to understand fictionalism in philosophy, to distinguish the motivations for endorsing a fictionalist view—the goals of a fictionalist account—from the aspects of a proposed account in virtue of which it is appropriate to characterize the view as a fictionalist one. We may consider this to be the lesson of the observation above, viz., that one can (arguably) be a fictionalist about math-talk yet simply be agnostic about whether mathematical objects exist. If this is so, then there is a motivation for being a mathematical fictionalist that is different from the ontological one that Balaguer insists on. Something similar can be said about the motivation for moving to a fictionalist account of moral talk. This suggests that motivations for, or goals of, fictionalist accounts are not—certainly need not be—aspects of fictionalist accounts themselves.

We suspect that this tendency to build an ontological motivation into the very meaning of "fictionalist" might arise from the seeming ambiguity in the word 'fiction'. Indeed, outside of the philosophy classroom, the term 'fiction', as commonly used, does seem ambiguous. On the one hand, people use the term so that it means that some statement is false or that what it posits is unreal; e.g., consider someone's statement that astrology is a "fiction", or an assertoric utterance of 'phlogiston theory was just a fiction', where this is intended to convey that the theory was false or that what it purports to posit was unreal. Call this the derived sense of 'fiction'. But people also use the term to describe a certain type of discourse; e.g., consider an assertoric utterance of 'Sherlock Holmes stories are my favourite works of fiction'. Call this the primary sense of the term. This ambiguity is no accident, for fictional discourse is frequently taken to be untrue in the sense that, in general, statements of fiction are not put forward as true, and, in general, the "things" it purports to talk about are not taken to be real.[3] Hence, it's not surprising that people may have decided to bend the primary sense so that it came to be used to convey, in the derived sense, that some theory,

statement, or even belief possessed many of the attributes that we commonly associate with discourse that we deem to be "fictional". But—and now we are back in the philosophy classroom—it can be dangerous to use the term 'fiction' or 'fictional' in philosophical discourse and treat it only in the derived sense, e.g., saying that because there are no moral properties, we should treat moral discourse "as a fiction", for, as we have seen, that is compatible with adopting an eliminativist stance—to stop using the discourse—because the discourse itself is false or, anyway, defective in some way.

3. There is a related error that we should guard against when our focus is on fictionalism in philosophy. Some self-described fictionalists—we think, for example, of Kalderon (2005) and Mark Sainsbury (2009)—take the beginning of contemporary, modern fictionalism in philosophy to emerge with work by Hartry Field (1980) and Bas van Fraassen (1980). Thus, according to Kalderon (2005a, p. 1), "Modern fictionalism emerged in 1980 with the publication of Hartry Field's Science without numbers and Bas van Fraassen's The Scientific Image." And we find Sainsbury (2009, p. 139) saying something similar: "One main source of fictionalism as discussed nowadays can be precisely dated to 1980, in which year were published two highly influential fictionalist theories: the constructive empiricism of Bas van Fraassen's The Scientific Image, and the mathematical fictionalism of Hartry Field's Science Without Numbers."

We find these claims to be somewhat surprising, since Field (1980) neither describes his position as fictionalist nor identifies any aspect of the view that he develops as fictionalist (though see Field (1989), where he extends his view in a way that he describes as "fictionalist"), and since van Fraassen (1980, p. 2) makes no appeal to any notion of fiction and even identifies fictionalism as an untenable position regarding science. So, why would

Kalderon and Sainsbury identify these works by Field and van Fraassen as the beginnings of contemporary, modern fictionalism in philosophy?

We think that, at least in Kalderon's case, a charitable reading is that he really means that Field and van Fraassen set the stage for fictionalism in philosophy. After all, Kalderon notes (Ibid.) that "Field maintained that mathematics does not have to be true to be good, and van Fraassen maintained that the aim of science is not truth but empirical adequacy." These positions, by van Fraassen and Field, do not seem to be varieties of fictionalism, even on Kalderon's epistemic account of fictionalism. After all, Field has nothing to say about a notion of acceptance, and van Fraassen has nothing to say about the broader reasons for which individual scientists accept scientific claims (his is a view about science, not scientists). Rather than claim that the work by Field and van Fraassen in 1980 marks the beginnings of contemporary modern fictionalism in philosophy, it seems more accurate to claim that their important work set the stage for fictionalism in philosophy and have served to influence and explain how contemporary work on fictionalism has developed and evolved.

Along those lines, the work by Mackie (1977) on ethics, who contended that ethical claims do not have to be true to be good, can also be seen as setting the stage for contemporary fictionalism in philosophy, without being an instance of this approach. According to Mackie, moral statements are assertoric and those who assert them believe in, and take themselves to be expressing, moral truths, which, if really true, would commit its users to the existence of moral properties, like goodness and badness and rightness and wrongness. But there are no such properties and, as a result, standard moral statements are not true. Since ordinary moral agents go about asserting moral statements and take themselves to be expressing truths, they, and what they assert, are in error. But this should not keep the agents from asserting such statements for, according to Mackie, and this echoes work by Field (1980, 1989), statements do not have to be true to be good. Near the end of his

(Ibid.) book, Mackie notes that ethical statements are "a useful fiction", but he seems to mean 'fiction' in the derived sense, and does not develop the idea further. So, although Mackie should not be identified as a fictionalist, arguably, his work paved the way for other philosophers (e.g., Kalderon (2005b), Nolan, et al. (2005), Joyce (2005), and others) to develop fictionalist accounts of moral discourse.

4. Returning to our earlier discussion of fictionalism, as we have seen Eklund insists that reference to some aspect of fiction must be present, in order for such an account to be considered fictionalist, whereas Balaguer explicitly rejects that requirement. So, who is right, Balaguer or Eklund? Since, as we noted, 'fictionalism' is hardly a natural kind term, we fear that this question does not admit of a particularly satisfying answer, one that will please virtually everyone working in the fictionalist industry. We propose two ways of thinking about fictionalism, what we might call the "inclusive attitude" and what we might call the "exclusive attitude". The exclusive attitude is in turn consistent with a number of different accounts, although we think some stand out as more cohesive, offering more explanatory unification, than others.

On an inclusive attitude towards fictionalism in philosophy, Balaguer's account would count as fictionalist simply because he calls it "fictionalist". In a sense, the inclusive attitude to being fictionalist makes the concept *response-dependent*: An account can be deemed "fictionalist", in the inclusive sense, because, say, its developer deems her account to be "fictionalist", or, perhaps, because others see it as fictionalist. In that case, van Fraassen's account qualifies as "fictionalist", as does early Field's (1980) account, since, as we have seen, a number of theorists (though, notably, not van Fraassen himself!) have characterized van Fraassen's (1980) and Field's (1980) account as "fictionalist".

As we have already indicated, we are inclined towards taking a more exclusive attitude towards the application of 'fictionalist', one that would require there to be certain specific conditions that would have to be satisfied in order for an account to qualify as "fictionalist"—conditions that emerge as we search for a kind of reflective equilibrium in our judgments about the what and how of fictionalism. But what conditions? We are still left with a number of choices. We could, for example, follow Balaguer, and catapult a narrowly focused ontological motivation for being a fictionalist into the very definition of fictionalism. Or we could provide an epistemic account of fictionalism, along the lines that Kalderon favours. In what follows, we offer another exclusive view, one that takes account of what a number of other philosophers have said about fictionalism. Prior to doing this, however, we return to the motivations one may have for adopting a fictionalist view, so that we can discuss what may seem like a bit of an outlier in the literature on fictionalism in philosophy. Our goal is to explain this version of fictionalism and to highlight a few of the issues that surround it. We can then apply some of the lessons learned to the question of how best to define an exclusive account of "fictionalism".

5. Although ontological concerns drive many fictionalist accounts (in the inclusive sense), not all fictionalist accounts are motivated by those concerns. We have already mentioned the kind of epistemological concerns that provide a motivation for agnostic forms of fictionalism. In the philosophy of science, the motivation for endorsing a fictionalist view of modeling is not driven by metaphysical or epistemological concerns, though, as we will see, there are metaphysical issues that are relevant to such accounts. There, it seems, the goal of fictionalism is to say something methodological about model-building, and to contend, as (e.g.) Suarez (2009) does, that the imagination is indispensible in making representational

model systems. (This is not to say that methodological motivations are absent from other fictionalisms.)

Fictionalism in the philosophy of science emerges from the style of science known as "model-based" science. As Peter Godfrey-Smith (2009, p. 2) describes model-based science, "[t]his is the style in which a paper may begin: "imagine a population of self-replicating molecules …". What this seems to be is a style of theoretical work in which an imaginary system is introduced and investigated … The behavior of the imaginary system is explored, and this is used as the basis for an understanding of more complex real-world systems." As Godfrey–Smith describes these things (e.g., an imagined population of self-replicating molecules, frictionless planes, or ideal gases), they are "fictions" and seem "analogous to fictions of literature" in that what is considered does not exist and is merely imaginary. They are also fictions in the sense that the models need not be treated as true, in order to be useful for science. Godfrey-Smith (Ibid.) notes that, in model-based science, model systems do not exist but would be concrete if real, which "suggests an analogy between model systems and fictional objects introduced in novels and other forms of literature. The world of a novel is something that does not actually exist, but would be concrete if real; it is apparently a candidate for physical existence." (Ibid., p. 5) So, the idea behind a fictionalist approach to model-based science is that one imagines that certain things are the case, in order to draw conclusions about genuine, real-world systems.

We say more about fictionalism in model-based science in our summaries of the chapters, when we introduce the paper by Frigg and Salis. But we have said enough about the variety of motivations for "going fictionalist" — ontological, epistemological, and now methodological — and enough about some worries about what some philosophers have said about fictionalism, to be able to turn to the task of elucidating fictionalism on our preferred understanding of the term. We will begin by providing what we take to be central to

fictionalism and will move on to set out conditions the satisfaction of which we take to be necessary for an account to be properly characterized as "fictionalist".

6. When an author writes a novel, she appears to be reporting facts, though she is really doing something else; and when an actor delivers his lines in a play, he seems to make assertions, though he is really doing something else, something non-assertoric. Broadly put, and to be clarified below, what we take to be central to fictionalism in philosophy is that, with respect to some of what we do or some of what we say, we seem to be doing one thing, though we really are (or really should be) doing something else. Fictionalists exploit, employ, or rely on certain aspects of fiction or pretence, in their explanation for how this something else is (or ought to be) accomplished.[4] To clarify this point, about what we take to be central to fictionalism, we consider an example.

When we utter the sentence 'Murder is wrong', we seem to be asserting that murder is wrong, thereby attributing a property of wrongness to the act of murder, and conveying our belief in the proposition that murder is wrong. According to a fictionalist about moral-talk, we are not (or should not be) doing all that we seem to be doing, e.g., we are not (or should not be) asserting that murder is wrong, but asserting something else, something that does not commit us to a property of wrongness; alternatively, we are not (or should not be) asserting at all, but are performing some other act, which likewise does not ontologically commit us to any such property. Different fictionalist accounts will provide different explanation for what we are (or should be) doing, and how we are (or should be) doing it. Similarly, when a scientist considers a model and makes inferences about features of it, she seems to be drawing conclusions about the elements of a model, though she is really drawing conclusions about features of the world. Fictionalists aim to explain how this works, by appealing to pretence or to other aspects of fiction.

We might summarise these various goings on, each of which we take to be central to fictionalism, by claiming that fictionalists describe (or prescribe) a type of redirection, a redirection away from how things seem to be to how they are (or should be). Such redirection could be semantic, epistemic, or pragmatic in nature. Having identified a central feature of fictionalism, we now offer three conditions that must be satisfied by an account in order for it to be properly characterized as specifically a "fictionalist" account.

The first condition highlights something already mentioned above. For a theorist's account to be a deemed a "fictionalist" account of a specified domain D, the account must incorporate some aspect of fiction or pretence, or be related in some way to some aspect of fiction or pretence, in a way that allows it to explain the nature and purpose of such a redirection. It could involve co-opting the attitudes that we take (or should take) towards fictional discourse, and maintaining that we (should) take the same, or similar, attitudes towards some sentences of D; or it could involve taking some features, or aspects, of the semantics of fictional discourse, and applying them (or prescribing them) to sentences of D; or it could posit, or propose, some acts of pretending, analogous to the acts of pretending implicated in games of pretense, as a means for conveying, pragmatically, something different from what is (or should be) expressed by assertoric utterances of some of the sentences of D. Without this particular condition, it would be mysterious how an account would earn the right to be called a "fictionalist" account. Crucially, satisfaction of this condition is supposed to contribute to explaining how the kind of redirection that we see as central to fictionalism is achieved. A major goal of the satisfaction of this condition is to provide a means whereby speakers can continue to use the discourse without being committed to the troubling ontology that ordinary uses of D would normally seem to commit those who use it to.

A second condition on fictionalism about some domain D is that, in general, we do not (or should not) believe what would be expressed by a face-value reading of the relevant sentence of D. We may be agnostic about the existence of numbers, for example, and, as agnostics, we would not believe that there are numbers, which, of course, is different from believing that there are no numbers. Alternatively, we might adopt a stronger attitude and maintain that, if interpreted literally, at face value, the positive (that is, unnegated) sentences of D would be semantically odd or infelicitous in some way—in particular, false or without a truth-value. Whichever of the two stances we adopt, if we are fictionalists about math-talk, then we do not believe what would be expressed by a face-value reading of the (positive) sentences of math-talk, sentences that purport to be about numbers (or functions, etc.). Thus, a fictionalist about D thinks that the users of D do not (or should not) believe what would be expressed by a face-value reading of the (positive) sentences of D. The reason for imposing this condition traces back to the motives, or goals, of fictionalist accounts. If we do, or should, believe what would be expressed by a face-value reading of the (positive) sentences of D, then we would have no reason for endorsing, or proposing, a fictionalist account for D. It bears noting that this condition also applies to fictionalism about modeling in the philosophy of science, for what is considered a "model system" in a case of modeling is taken to lack actual existence (Cf. Godfrey-Smith, 2009), and, thus, modelers are not to believe that a model system is about anything in the world (Cf. Frigg, 2010, p. 254).

This second requirement, that a fictionalist does not (or should not) believe what would be expressed by a face-value reading of the (positive) sentences of D, explains why the account of mathematical discourse that Bueno (2009) puts forward as a "truly fictionalist" account of mathematics (without, however, explicitly endorsing it) is not "fictionalist". On the account that Bueno proposes, numerals pick out the same sort of "entities" that Amy Thomasson (2015) thinks fictional names refer to.[5] But one who endorses Bueno's proposed

account would believe what would be expressed by some (positive) sentences of that discourse (e.g., '17 is prime'). Hence, while Bueno is saying something about the ontology of mathematics that piggy-backs on Thomasson's view about the ontology of fictional discourse, we would be disinclined to characterize his proposed account as "fictionalist". For consider: If Bueno's proposed account of mathematical discourse is characterized as "fictionalist" then, since it is modeled on Thomasson's account, it follows that Thomasson's "deflationary" account of fictional discourse must be characterised as "fictionalist" about fictional discourse. But Thomasson's view is not, and should not be, so characterized.[6] Thus, the same applies to Bueno's proposed account of mathematical discourse; it is not a "fictionalist" account.

Finally, to be a fictionalist, you must think that there is some reason for retaining at least some of the (positive) sentences of the relevant discourse in some way, some utility afforded by retaining some aspect of that talk. This is crucial for fictionalism, since a fictionalist's rival theorist is the eliminativist who agrees with some of what the fictionalist contends but advocates that we stop using that discourse altogether. This last condition also applies to fictionalist accounts of models, since, as a number of fictionalists about models have noted (Frigg (2010), Godfrey-Smith (2009), Suarez (2009), and others), the models, while crucially important for doing science, need not be treated as true in order for them to be useful for science.

These three conditions codify our preferred account of the genus of fictionalism, one that conforms to an exclusive, rather than inclusive, attitude towards the question of how best to understand it, but at the same time encompasses a broad array of positions. In particular, it encompasses positions that do not make significant use of the notion of acceptance, unlike Kalderon's account of fictionalism, as well as positions with motivations beyond the ontological one on which Balaguer's account of fictionalism is focused. In line with our

general approach, however, we do not claim any *a priori* entitlement to using the term 'fictionalism' in this way, and acknowledge that other authors in this volume use the term in other ways.[7] As a result, readers are encouraged to compare the accounts of fictionalism that the contributors present in their chapters to the one that we present in this introduction. Our hope is that this will deepen their understanding of fictionalism in philosophy.

Chapter Summaries

We have ordered the chapters according to the following plan. In line with our desire to show how discussion of fictionalism has progressed over the last ten to fifteen years, we begin with chapters that take a broadly reflective stance on fictionalism vis-á-vis its competitors. These are followed by a couple of chapters that focus on moral fictionalism in particular and the intense critical focus it has received in the literature over recent years. The final grouping contains chapters that have advanced the debate about fictionalism in quite a different way, by covering new areas that have seen the potential benefits of fictionalist treatments.

Metaphysics as a Fiction, by Gideon Rosen

Rosen compares and contrasts two possible communities, the gnostic realists about science, mathematics and metaphysics, who believe to be true the theories that they accept, and the agnostic antirealists—fictionalists, according to Rosen—about the same, who accept without being committed to the truth of what they say. For these fictionalists, the aim of inquiry is to construct a model of the world in a way that is compatible with the methodological constraints that they impose on theory building. Rosen raises the question of whether both sides occupy rational positions and argues that both stances towards natural sciences and

mathematics are, indeed, permissible. He then takes up the question as to whether it is rationally permissible to view metaphysics in accordance with the two stances, gnostic realism and fictionalism. After distinguishing two kinds of metaphysics, "scientific metaphysics" and "speculative metaphysics", Rosen contends that it is rationally permissible to view speculative metaphysics in accordance with the two stances, but argues that there is some pressure to adopt a fictionalist approach to speculative metaphysics, where metaphysics is viewed as an exercise in model building, even if one is a gnostic realist about science and mathematics.

Fictionalism as a Phase (To Be Grown Out Of), by John Burgess

Having distinguished certain aspects of fictionalism in philosophy from those of literary fiction, Burgess considers Matti Eklund's discussion of fictionalism and responds critically to some of the objections to the brands of fictionalism that Eklund discusses. He also identifies the specific aspects of fictionalism on which he will focus. In particular, the sort of fictionalism that he discusses is both *linguistic*, in that it subscribes to the thesis that utterances in a given area of discourse are best seen as attempting to do something other than expressing truths, and *hermeneutic*, in the sense that we have specified previously (Cf. footnote 5). How should we think about fictionalist approaches to certain fragments of discourse, according to Burgess? By going through a number of examples, including, but not limited to, those that involve medical and psychological terminology, in addition to mathematical and scientific cases, Burgess describes a series of temporary stages, or phases, regarding our attitudes towards, or understandings of, certain fragments of discourse, beginning with a phase in which an error-theoretic account of some subject matter is appropriate, to a phase in which a fictionalist account of that discourse is appropriate, and

ending with a phase in which a fictionalist view is rejected and a straightforward, non-error-theoretic approach is deemed appropriate. If Burgess is right about these phases, and, in particular, about their temporality, then we should see a proposed fictionalist account of some subject matter as, in a sense, fleeting, as temporary or as merely provisionally appropriate eventually to be superseded by a phase in which users of the relevant fragment of discourse "aim at truth".

Fictionalism and Reasons, by Chris Daly

Daly notes that revolutionary forms of fictionalism reach conclusions that seem immodest by the relatively modest means of weighing up one set of reasons against another. To convey the sense in which fictionalist projects can have good reasons he identifies what he calls a "revealing pattern" in fictionalist projects: we can distinguish *apparatus*, *selected role*, *resulting attitude of exploitation*, and *shifted norm*. In mathematical fictionalism, for example, the *selected role* is facilitating deductions within nominalistic theories, and its practitioners *exploit* mathematics —many other fictionalists talk of 'acceptance' —by focusing on this role without believing mathematics and while shifting the norm of truth to nominalistic conservativeness. The chapter defends fictionalism so understood against a range of objections. One such objection challenges the distinction between belief and exploitation. Daly argues that the attitude of exploitation is one we routinely see on display in the way scientists make use of defunct scientific theories such as Newtonian mechanics; fictionalists simply offer distinctive reasons for taking this attitude. And against the complaint that the fictionalist's appeal to exploitation assumes an untenable distinction between ordinary and philosophical contexts, he urges that fictionalists need only grant the distinctive but otherwise unproblematic philosophical *nature* of the reasons for taking the

attitude. He also dismisses Blackburn's objection that fictionalism assumes another invidious distinction (that between worlds possessing, and not possessing, a rejected posit such as colour) before dismissing a final set of worries: fictionalism's apparent inability to explain the success of false theories that are given the fictionalist treatment, or the place in such theories of theoretical claims that play no useful role. The upshot, Daly thinks, is that there is nothing untoward in the way fictionalism appeals to reasons.

Against Hermeneutic Fictionalism, by David Liggins

Liggins characterises hermeneutic fictionalism about the beliefs and assertions apparently involved in a discourse as the thesis that those engaging in the discourse only *appear* or *pretend* to make assertions; hermeneutic fictionalism about mathematical discourse, for example, holds that those engaging in math- talk are not really asserting claims about mathematical objects. His chapter contrasts this descriptive thesis with a rival error theoretic descriptive thesis according to which the discourse should be interpreted at face value as expressing beliefs and assertions about the items it appears committed to (eg, numbers), even though these beliefs and assertions are for the most part not true. Liggins thinks that, at least in the case of forms of hermeneutic fictionalism motivated by metaphysical concerns, the latter view is, by and large, to be preferred. Thus, he argues that in the cases under consideration it can be entirely rational to admit to error, contrary to appeals to principles of charity that might suggest otherwise; furthermore, that in rejecting error theory about mathematical discourse hermeneutic fictionalists end up replacing the appeal to one kind of error with another arguably more serious one, since they hold that participants in the discourse are wrong about what they really think and believe. The last argument Liggins discusses is perhaps the best-known objection to hermeneutic fictionalism — the "phenomenological" objection, which he

defends against recent criticisms by Stuart Brock and by Armour-Garb and Woodbridge, who think the objection doesn't apply to their de-psychologised account of pretense. As he is at pains to point out in the concluding section, however, he doesn't take his arguments in this chapter to show that error theory is always to be preferred to hermeneutic fictionalism; if anything, they help us to see what sort of evidence might succeed in establishing particular forms of hermeneutic fictionalism.

Fictionalism: Morality and metaphor, by Richard Joyce

After explaining some of the motivations for moving to a fictionalist account of some putatively problematic discourse, Joyce directs his attention to fictionalism about moral discourse and surveys some of the different aspects of fictionalist approaches to that discourse. His goal is to consider, and to put to rest, certain objections to moral fictionalism, by highlighting certain misunderstandings of what a number of moral fictionalists are actually claiming. In particular, he responds to the "phenomenological objection", which is often directed at hermeneutic fictionalists, and the "unconstrained fictions objection", which is often directed at revolutionary fictionalists. The former objection assumes that fictionalists maintain that speakers of the relevant fragment of discourse for which a fictionalist approach is attributed are pretending, when they utter what they do, and notes that speakers do not seem to be engaged in any pretense in those circumstances. The latter objection contends that there is a multitude of possible fictions from which a revolutionary fictionalist may choose and no non-arbitrary way of choosing among them. Joyce argues that both objections can be answered by reflecting on the nature of *metaphor* and on the sort of pretense or make believe accounts that a number of fictionalists have taken metaphor—or, more specifically, metaphor-talk—to involve.

Should the Mathematical Fictionalist be a Moral Fictionalist too?, by Mary Leng

As Leng points out, there is a strong metaphysical motivation for mathematical fictionalism, namely the utter *strangeness* of the Platonist's abstract mathematical objects, and in particular how we could come to have knowledge of things of that sort. Since something similar is often said about the moral realist's appeal to a realm of objective and categorical moral *reasons*, this might suggest that the motivations for mathematical and moral fictionalism are equivalent. But, as Leng points out, to be a fictionalist, rather than an unbeliever, there is a debt to pay. In the case of mathematics, we need to say (1) *what* it is that mathematics is being used to do, and (2) *why* we should expect our mathematical theories to be useful in this way if we don't take them to be true. While mathematical fictionalists have well-developed answers to these questions, she doubts that the same can be said about the answers that moral fictionalists have provided to the moral versions of such questions (she focuses on Nolan, Restall and West's broad construal of moral fictionalism as well as Mark Kalderon's expressivist version and Richard Joyce's prudential version). She concludes that it is far from clear that the best way to take account of the alleged motivational parallel between mathematical Platonism and moral realism is to adopt moral fictionalism. In the final part of her chapter, she suggests that there is a better way of extrapolating from mathematics to morality, arguing that if a Quinean naturalism lies behind the worries about mathematical Platonism, then we have an answer to the worries about moral realism: the very same Quinean reasons for trusting our inherited scientific worldview argue for trusting our inherited normative worldview.

How to Be a Fictionalist About Material Constitution (And Just About Anything Else), by

Mark Balaguer

Balaguer articulates a general strategy for developing error theories—versions of what he calls "Error-Theoretic Fictionalism" (henceforth, "ETF")—of discourses about various kinds of controversial objects, and for explaining why the sentences of these discourses are "correct" in a certain objective sense despite the fact that they are not literally true. In addition, he proposes a way for advocates of ETF to explain both the utility of the sentences of that discourse and the harmlessness of the fact that they are not actually true. To further clarify his favoured version of ETF, Balaguer discusses a few features of fictionalism in philosophy, and identifies the one that he associates with ETF, what he calls "non-revolutionary assertional fictionalism", and applies it specifically to mathematical discourse. According to the non- revolutionary assertional fictionalist about mathematical discourse, although the assertions that we make when we assertorically utter certain mathematical sentences are not true, there is nothing wrong with this because the mark of goodness in mathematical discourse is truth in the story of mathematics, rather than truth full stop. Since our mathematical assertions are (usually) true in that story, they are (usually) in that sense good; hence, no major revision to mathematical practice is called for. Having incorporated non-revolutionary assertional fictionalism into his favoured version of ETF, Balaguer goes on to apply this version of ETF to a number of other types of discourse familiar from work in metaphysics. He identifies mereological ETF, which he takes to be analogous to mathematical ETF, and considers both temporal ETF, regarding claims about the past and future, and modal ETF. Balaguer offers a general recipe for generating such ETF-ist approaches and, armed with the general recipe, develops, and motivates, an ETF-ist view directed at claims made about coincident objects and, in particular, those about material constitution.

Folk Stories: What Has Fiction To Do With Mental Fictionalism?, by Craig Bourne and

Emily Caddick Bourne

Bourne and Caddick Bourne contend that a necessary condition for an approach to some subject matter X to count as a *fictionalist* approach to X is that it suggests that X can be understood by appealing to some notion of fiction. They investigate how certain features or aspects of some theories of fiction impact on the prospects for mental fictionalism, which is a fictionalist approach to folk psychology, and contend that reflecting on the nature of fiction raises a number of issues for mental fictionalism. They argue that fictionalists should not assume anything about the nature of fiction without considering theories of fiction. They also critically evaluate Adam Toon's fictionalist approach to folk psychology, which explicitly invokes Kendall Walton's work on fiction and make-believe. They take Toon's approach to show that even when theories of fiction are consulted, there is a danger that resources assumed to be helpful for a particular fictionalist account (e.g., Toon's approach to folk psychology) turn out to be inappropriate. They also unearth new ways in which approaches to the nature of fiction might benefit a mental fictionalist, e.g., by offering a novel solution to the "suicide problem", which seems to plague certain species of mental fictionalism, and by arguing that reflection on the relationship between impossibility and fictional content suggests the prospect of a position between fictionalism and quasi-realism. (The "suicide problem" emerges for a fictionalist when she finds that some of the very notions about which she adopts a fictionalist approach end up being appealed to in that approach.)

Of Rabbits and Men: Fiction and Scientific Modelling, by Roman Frigg and Fiora Salis

Frigg and Salis ask what account should be given of descriptions of models in science and the objects, if any, they describe. Like a number of other philosophers of science,

Roman Frigg and Fiora Salis ask what account should be given of descriptions of models in science and the objects, if any, they describe. Like a number of other philosophers of science, Frigg and Salis think that such questions are best answered by drawing a parallel between scientific models and literary fiction, and in their chapter they present their preferred view of this parallel. The view claims that descriptions of systems are best understood as props in authorised games of make-believe as understood in Kendall Walton's seminal work on fiction. Frigg and Salis note that props count as representations on this Waltonian view (p-resentations), and they contrast this conception of representation with a different, although in their view complementary, conception from the philosophy of science that takes representation to be a relation between a model and its target: t-representation. On their analysis of this notion, a model is an object that is interpreted/represented as something, say Z, and as such can be said to represent a target T if it denotes T and permits the imputation of certain Z-related properties to the target on the basis of properties of the model. As they see it, the two notions of representation are linked in so far as the appeal to make-believe is needed to make sense of the idea that non-concrete entities like perfect spheres exist and have properties. But this still leaves them with the perplexing problem of how merely imagined (and so non-existent) entities of this kind can ever be said to denote their target. After addressing this problem, they briefly respond to the worry that the fiction view of models undermines the authority of science.

Religious Fictionalism and Pascal's Wager, by Stuart Brock

Brock asks whether Pascal's famous pragmatic argument in support of wagering for God can be construed as an argument for a version of revolutionary fictionalism about Christianity. To answer this question, Brock first considers the objection from Doxastic Involuntarism to wagering for God: we can't freely choose what to believe. Pascal himself grants this

objection — he thought that we should *indirectly* try to come to a belief in God — but Brock

points out that the focus on *trying* to form beliefs not only ensures that Pascal is

not a fictionalist, but also that Pascal's Wager fails: since *not* wagering for God also has a non-finite chance of leading to a belief in God (so is an act with infinite value if God exists), why wager for God? (There are, of course, numerous other arguments against the Wager, which Brock sets aside for the purposes of this chapter.) Brock then develops a fictionalist response to this argument by articulating a non-doxastic notion of propositional faith that invokes acceptance rather than belief. Practitioners have genuine propositional faith, not belief, that God exists, an attitude that has infinite value for them if they are right that God exists. Because the act of accepting that God exists is under our direct voluntary control, this seems to yield an argument for a (fictionalist) wagering for God that circumvents the objection from Doxastic Involuntarism. Brock finally considers, and tentatively answers, an objection to Pascal's Wager that on the surface also applies to the fictionalist's wager — there are mixed strategies that are no less voluntarist but that have the same (infinite) expectation as the pure strategy of wagering for God.

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[1] These virtues will depend on the domain of inquiry; according to van Fraassen (1980), for example, empirical adequacy is such a virtue if we are engaged in science-talk.

[2] Care is needed here, on a number of fronts. No fictionalist thinks that we should believe or assert what a face-value reading of the sentences of their target discourse say. But some fictionalists (e.g., Armour-Garb and Woodbridge (2015), Walton (1990), and Yablo (2005)) think that what is actually expressed is different from what would be expressed by a face-value reading of the sentences of their target discourses, and maintain that we do and should believe and assert what those sentences say. Others (e.g., Rosen (1990)) think that what should be expressed is different from what is actually expressed, given a face-value reading of the sentences of their target discourses, but maintain that we should believe and assert what those sentences would say if they were read as they should be read.

[3] This is not to say that the statements cannot be true and that what a fiction purports to be about must be unreal, but, in general, it is mutually known by both writers and readers of fiction that neither truth nor existence are the aims of the authoring of fictional discourse.

[4] The contrast between an explanation of how something is accomplished and of how it ought to be accomplished is the contrast between a fictionalism that aims to describe an existing practice and one that prescribes what that practice should be like. More specifically, the contrast marks the difference between

hermeneutic and revolutionary fictionalist accounts. This distinction traces back to Burgess and Rosen (1999) and Stanley (2001).

[5] We also presume that an advocate of Bueno's proposed account must subscribe to Thomasson's view on the nature of "fictional characters".

[6] Cf., Brock (2002) or Walton (1990), for a genuinely "fictionalist" account of overtly fictional discourse.

[7] As, indeed, does one of the editors (Kroon) in a different context (Kroon et al 2018).