

Stoic Fictions: The Prehistory of Analysis

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The following essay is conceived, rather modestly, as a thin slice from a thick and much-entangled history of the notion of fiction. To justify the choice of my particular subject matter and to situate it in that history, a caveat and some further introductory remarks are in order.

There is little doubt that the prevailing use of the term "fiction" in today's philosophical discourse connects to the issues of reference and possible worlds that form an important part of the (mostly) Kripkean legacy. Sometimes, while pointing at some medieval forbearers, this use extends to the discussion of Frege's understanding of meaning and reference or to Meinong's noneism (and its defense: Priest 2005 is the most thorough effort of this kind). By extension, it serves to shed a non-trivial light on the hotly disputed topic of the creation and description of fictional objects and characters, thus overlapping with the traditional domain of literary (or drama and film) studies. At the same time, it is obvious that such an extension needs to carefully avoid any confusion of the possible worlds as treated by modal logic with the talk about the possible and impossible worlds of literary fiction.¹

As this publication contains several examples of this richly diversified approach, it may be useful to remark that, at its heart, this use of "fiction" tends to focus on how *fictional particulars* as bearers of various properties are created and spoken about. Interestingly, this now predominant semantic approach (whose great forebear is no doubt Leibniz as both the author of the *Discourse of Metaphysics* or *Theodicy* and the admirer of the baroque novel *L'astrée*) is probably less present in the history of philosophy than another line of inquiries about fictionality. In this historically well-established line, the main object of discussion is not the logical and semantic coherence of a given group of propositions with a more or less pronounced narrative dimension, but the legitimacy of abstract concepts and their formation. From this perspective, the issue of fictionality seems to point towards the problem inherent in human thought insofar as the latter is forced to reason in *universal* terms whose reference cannot be reduced to descriptions of particulars of any one kind. The resulting worries that return throughout the history of philosophy, and not only in the nominalist form, can thus be summarized as worries about "abstract objects" as distinct from "standard purely fictional objects" such as Zeus or Sherlock Holmes (I borrow these terms from Priest 2005, 136).

¹ Lewis (1978) is the starting point for various efforts at using the gapless possible worlds of modal logic in order to fill in the gaps in the literary worlds. Many recent efforts at avoiding any particular ontological framework (including Lewis' strong modal realism) while keeping the possible worlds framework fol-

By and large, this distinction can be traced back to the ancient thought where its two sides can be given a separate philosophical ancestry. To a large degree, the "standard purely fictional objects" and the narratives they imply are exactly what lurks behind Aristotle's often quoted saying that fiction, in contrast to historical narrative, is not about particular facts in the sense of "how things were", but about "how things *might have* been."² Admittedly, a lot of philosophical work has had to be done to connect this germ of possible worlds to some more extended mediations on modality (which Aristotle himself discusses in other contexts), but this part of the history of fiction is precisely what I prefer to leave aside (together with the closely related discussions of intentionality or "aboutness") in order to focus on the apparently simpler problem of concept formation, which I wish to trace back to its Platonic ancestry and, especially, to the Stoic reversal of the latter. The Stoics-Platonists debate, I submit, is the root of many later (indeed contemporary) discussions since it concerns the proper issues of the ontology of fiction. Namely, it delimits in the clearest possible way *the* problem that follows from all standard definition of fiction: its lack of direct or efficient causation and, collaterally, the danger of conceptual panfictionalism that would subsume all contents of thought under the category of fiction.³

Such a danger is an obvious consequence of defining fictional entities as what has no power of efficient or moving causation.⁴ This broad definition, based on a primary ontological fact, would ultimately encompass all propositional contents and mental images. In contrast, a distinction between, say, a logical system of concepts and a novel would become secondary. Which is why we are easily tempted to conclude that the ontology of fiction is too elusive to be truly helpful there where we wish to take a closer look at the variety and proper function of fictional entities and their meanings regardless of the apparently intractable problems implied by ontological dualism.⁵ Typically, when such ontology was first attempted by Plato, it relied on *both* a distinction in degrees of being *and* a conflation of linguistic or artistic fictions with material artifacts (see *Republic* 10). As a result, if Plato is clear that, like artifacts, all fictional entities must be intentionally created,⁶ he is forced to

2 Aristotle, *Poetics* 8. 1451b2-10. See also Laird (2007, 301), including remarks on Aristotle's attention to *paralogismos* and the use of antecedents in narrative fiction.

3 Using the label of *conceptual* panfictionalism, I modify the term panfictionalism in the narrower sense of a denial of the distinction between the non-fictional texts and the works of literary fiction (Gibson 2005, 147-157).

4 This simple yet crucial point is well summarized in Priest (2005, 135-136).

5 It is important to distinguish this issue from Russell's and Quine's reference-centered attacks on Meinong's nonexistent objects as inherently disorderly. See especially the criticism of nonexistent objects in Quine (1948). For a richly Meinongian reply to Quine's "influential period piece" see Routley (1982).

6 See Thomasson (1999, 12). Cf. also Smith (1980, 104) on Ingarden's constructivist understanding of fictional objects as opposed to the Meinongian approach. Collaterally, we could discuss how intentionally crafted and rationally controlled fiction serve as heuristic tools in various thought

simultaneously reject the very possibility of a metaphysically legitimate concept formation. Thus objects of intellect (the Forms or Ideas) are simply posited as fully existent objects apprehended by intellect (whether or not this apprehension receives an explanation through some of the fictions or narratives of the soul and recollection). Now if all ancient philosophers, Plato's successors in the Academy included, kept on vilifying this split of the wide non-experiential domain into either irrelevant fictions or the proper and most real beings, it is the Stoic line of attack that is particularly apt to enliven the modern discussions including the problem of conceptual panfictionalism. By reorganizing their ontology under the supreme genre of "something" (*to ti*), which includes being and non-beings alike, the Stoics shed an original and moderately nominalist light on the uneasy status shared by fancy fictions like centaurs and "serious" man-made concepts.

In a nutshell, this is why the following pages focus on those dimensions of the Stoics' rejection of Platonism which have clear implications for the understanding of fictionality. By contrast, I will leave entirely aside the possible repercussions of the Stoic (largely nominalist) approach to concepts and fictions on various later authors, be they medieval, early modern or contemporary. Such an extended treatment must be left for another time.

Stoic understanding of fictions and fictional entities follows quite directly from their distinction between Platonic Forms, which they clearly reject as simply nonexistent entities or "nothings", and common entities or concepts, which they do not take for beings yet admit to their ontology as "not full blown existents".⁷ Despite many technical difficulties due to the fragmentary nature of our sources, we can confidently reconstruct the core of the early Stoic position and some of its later variants.⁸ Thus, although it has been commonly assumed that the Stoics were radical materialists about beings and nominalists about concepts and other abstract entities, it is equally possible, in the light of recent research, to describe their position about concepts as moderate realism.⁹ However, instead of quarrelling about labels, we must try to grasp the fundament of the Stoic view, starting with their distinction between being and non-beings as two types of "somethings".

Succinctly, not without a certain ascetic elegance, the Stoics had identified the highest and broadest genus of what is legitimately thinkable as "something" (in Greek *to ti*, with a rather misleading Latin equivalent *quod est*, "what is"). Canonically, this genus divides into bodies (*somata*) and incorporeals (*asomata*), of which only the former are capable of efficient causal interactions. Only bodies are

experiments and in the important part of the pragmatics of law (Rosen 2005; on the early history of juridical fiction see Thomas 1995).

7 I borrow this expression from Caston (1999, 177).

8 The most detailed recent overview is Brunschwig (1988). Equally important is Caston (1999).

9 See especially Kahn (1969), whose views are partly modified by Sedley (1985). Many further references are listed in Caston (1999, 146-147).

thus legitimately designated as beings (*ta onta*). By contrast, the incorporeals (that comprise time, place, void and the so-called *lekta*¹⁰) are not only ontologically dependent on the states of bodies, but truly incapable of originating any modification of the real and tangible universe. It is obviously the notion of *lekta* (usually translated as "expressibles" or "sayables") that is pertinent to the question of where to place concepts and fictions in this particular ontology. At the same time, it is most important not to confuse *lekta* with concepts: whereas the former, while not full-blown physical beings are "somethings", the latter's status is much more doubtful.

First of all, we must bear in mind what is the proper nature and role of *lekta*. Since for there is nothing like an incorporeal mind for the Stoics, all thoughts are corporeal states; still, they have incorporeal *contents* that are expressed in propositions. With some simplification, *lekta* can be described as precisely these contents and the propositions that express them. This seems to imply that human thought, while interacting with material impressions (*phantasiai*), is rather thoroughly propositional or, all things considered, linguistic.¹¹ Jointly, the expressed contents of thought belong among the mental propositions and not the extra-mental states of affairs, although it is the latter that are constitutive of the Stoic frame of referential truth or falsity. This frame comprises, besides that which signifies (*to semainon*), what is signified (*to semainomenon*) and the object of reference (*to tunchanon*). From this triad, only what is signified is thus a *lekton* or an incorporeal content of thought; by contrast, that which signifies and the object of reference are bodies.

In this perspective, the issue of fiction in the sense of the fictional objects of reference as non-existent particulars seems rather easy to outline and, indeed, to enclose: since they are not bodies, entities like the centaur Chiron or the winged horse Pegasus are not objects of reference and any dialectical discourse about the truth or falsity of propositions that concern these entities is simply immaterial. The real problem, however, lies obviously elsewhere: even if they are themselves not propositional *lekta* (since complete propositional *lekta* are not the isolate meanings of nouns¹²), they still are objects of thought. And, at least for some of the Stoics, to be an object of thought equals to being something. Quite like Meinong, those Stoics apparently assume that nonexistent objects possess certain attributes or series of attributes while lacking being entirely. Never mind that those attributes are

10 Here I simply follow the list of the incorporeals in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 10. 218. I will not discuss the slightly different lists quoted in Cleomedes, Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch. On these see Duhot (1989, 92).

11 Which is why they are (at least in some versions of Stoicism) as ontologically fragile as particular linguistic utterances. Cf. Long (1971, 97), on Chrysippus: "*Lekta* are defined in terms of language and presentations and this points to their temporal dependence on the duration of thoughts and sentences. *Lekta* do not denote a world of propositions but the content of thought and significant discourse." For a still challenging account of *lekta* see Bréhier (1908).

12 As I will emphasize below, the so-called "deficient" *lekta* seem to include the bare grammatical subjects. For a defense of this option see, for instance, Mates (1953, 16-17).

predicated about them falsely; they still are objects of thought. Among the later Stoics, it is Seneca who summarizes probably not quite orthodox position with much clarity:

Some Stoics think that the primary genus is 'something' (*quod*). I will add an account of why they think so. They say, 'in nature, some things are, some are not, but nature embraces even those things which are not and which occur to the mind (such as Centaurs, Giants, and whatever else is shaped by an erroneous thought process (*falsa cogitatione formatum*) and begins to take on some appearance (*imaginem*), although it does not have reality).'¹³

Now my aim is not to worry about the vexed subtleties of Stoic views. Instead, I wish to tentatively submit that the fictional objects of thought without any corresponding referent or *tunchanon* can be subsumed under a broader category of the thinkable "not-somethings" (*outina*). Since I borrow this seemingly curious label from the context of the Stoic discourse on universals or concepts (namely from Simplicius, *In Categ.* 105. 11), it is clear that I would also like to suggest that, in this narrow respect, the issue of fictional *particulars* can be seen as akin to the problem of *universals*. In fact, the recognition of Chiron or Pegasus as fictional cannot rely on the particular acts of experience since, by definition, there cannot be any; thus it necessarily relies on the lack of experience *together with* the mental possession of universal notions (*ennoemata*) like "horse" and "man". But what guarantee do we have that the latter are not fictions of their own kind? Lacking direct particular referents, could they be but other figments of human mind?

It is of course the understanding of concepts or universal notions as "not-somethings" that can fuel such a suspicion.¹⁴ While useful in demarcating the Stoic position on universals from the position of Platonic Form as causally influential entities, the very label of "not-something", which is distinct from the canonical non-beings belonging to the highest genus of "something", implies the ambiguity of entities conceived mentally, with relative independence on sense-perception. On the lexical level, this situation is confirmed by the Stoic use of the noun *phantasma*, which they use to describe both concepts and hallucinations. Centaurs and giants, although we are able to picture them with amazing clarity, are the latter: they are *names*, and they are *only* names whether we think or speak of them in general ("centaurs used to educate famous heroes") or in particular ("Chiron was the teacher of Achilles"). In both cases, they are represented in and by stories or narratives without any accompanying abstraction of the *concept* "centaur". In this sense, *phantasmata* as hal-

¹³ Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 58. 15, quoted after Seneca (2007, 5).

¹⁴ Here I follow Brunschwig (1999) who, *pace* Long and Sedley (1987), warns against including both the concepts and the fictional characters into the broadly construed genus of "somethings" (on Long and Sedley's account, they are "neutral somethings"). A view contrary to Brunschwig's is defended in Caston (1999, 165-168).

lucinations are clearly derivative from concepts: by aggrandizing man, we get a giant; by combining man and horse, we get a centaur.¹⁵ Which only leads us back to the basic problem: are the concepts of man or horse legitimate unities of thought?

Let us begin to search for the first elements of an answer in a testimony about Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoa. According to Stobaeus, Zeno claims that "concepts are neither somethings nor qualified, but figments of the soul (*phantasmata tes psuches*) which are quasi-somethings and quasi-qualified" (Long - Sedley 1987/1, 179). Clearly, not-somethings are not pure non-entities; at least not in the sense of what could not even be thought (this is what the critics of the Stoicism assume in order to claim that Stoic concepts cannot be used to learn anything). The strangeness of their ontological status thus does not preclude the concepts from serving as reliable guides to the structure of physical world. This is because the concepts or *phantasmata dianoias* like "man" or "horse" are not qualified individuals, yet they are, still in Zeno's words, "as if suchlike" (*hosanei poion*).¹⁶ Not qualified things themselves, they are like images of *qualified* things and, precisely in virtue of being *as if* that thing of which they are images or representations, they connect to the real thing in question.

Thus concepts are fictions of their own particular kind, which makes their indirect yet intuitively graspable connection to existing individuals strikingly different from the Platonic scheme of instantiation or exemplification. Whereas the latter presupposes either the universals' capacity of causal influence or an intervention (metaphorical or not) of an actual thinking producer-craftsman, Stoic concepts remain quasi-likenesses of what literally and fully exists, viz. bodies. And, strictly speaking, it is only from bodies as objects of perception that these quasi-likenesses can be derived. In other words, while not posited in the manner of Platonic Forms, Stoic concepts are not results of abstraction either: they do not follow from comparing different specimen of thus construed species; instead, they arise, much more directly, as cognitively grasped impressions or *phantasiai logikai*, which are produced (or *installed* in the soul) by rational mental processes. These cognitive impressions enable us to articulate the conceptual quasi-likenesses in speech, whereby we *express* our mental states and *designate* the state of bodies in the world.¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, it is the designating function that makes it possible to reveal a fictional entity as what has no particular object of reference, which could be identified as a clearly graspable source of some original impression. And yet, for the Stoics, this possibility to neatly distinguish between cognitively sane concepts and standard fictional entities like centaurs or giants (whether considered as fictive individuals or nonexistent species) does not *a fortiori* mean that, in the case of the latter, "[m]erely physical acts and events are not enough to generate a fictional

15 For a summary of other operations of this kind see Diogenes Laertius 53.

16 See Diogenes Laertius 61 (the description of concepts as *phantasmata dianoias* seems equivalent to Aetius's above-quoted expression *phantasmata tes psuches*).

17 For a good summary of this rather difficult doctrine see Gourinat (1996, 5051).

character" (Thomasson 1999, 142). More exactly, they make ample room for situations where the *material* states of a deranged mind generate, for instance, a centaur's false presence to the mind. Of course, these cases are quite different from what Thomasson has in mind since they produce and handle (or mishandle) generic images rather than the *intentionally* created and full-blown fictional individuals. Still, before we turn to some further considerations and, finally, summarizing remarks on Stoic concepts and fictions, it is worth taking a closer look at how the Stoics (or at least Chrysippus) conceive of the situations where fictions arise as a direct consequence of seriously mistaken judgments. In other words, we what can happens in the mind between that which signifies (*to semainon*) and that what is signified (*to semainomenon*) once we lose connection to the object of reference (*to tunchanon*).

First of all, we must not forget that, for the Stoics, some (though not all) products of our perception and imagination are *about* real things, but *not* representative of our true relation to these things and of the latter's real nature. Whether these products consist in simple misidentifications of the objects of reference or in some further and propositional elaborations whereby our mind misses its target (Chrysippus call these elaborations *paratupotikas*), they exhibit various ways of being untrue to what they ultimately and naturally *mean* to represent. Now if it is customary to emphasize, as the Stoics themselves do, that they are typical of melancholy men or madmen, some of them differ from our everyday daydreaming only in degree of distortion. To make this point clearer, I will quote a rather famous fragment of Chrysippus, besides offering some terminological clarifications, presents us with two (or rather, by implication, three) different cases of an empty (fictional, unqualified, and fantastic) representation:

The particular imagination (*phantastikon*) is an empty attraction, a mental experience which comes about without there being anything to produce the impression, as in the case of one who fights with shadows and punches at emptiness. For an impression (*phantasia*) has something underlying it, but the particular imagination (*phantastikon*) has nothing. The fiction (*figment*, *phantasma*) is that to which we are attracted in the empty attraction which is the particular imagination (*phantastikon*). This happens in the case of those who are melancholic and insane. At least, when Orestes in the tragedy says

Mother, I beg you, do not set upon me
those maidens bloody-faced and snakelike,
for they — they are leaping nearer to me!
he speaks as one who is mad and sees nothing but only thinks he sees. Hence
Electra tells him,
Stay calmly in your bed, poor thing;
you are not seeing any of those things

that seem so clear to you.

So also with Theoclymenos in Homer.¹⁸

By quoting Euripides' *Orestes* 255-259, Chrysippus clearly illustrates the case of an empty attraction: in this particular instance, Furies are fictions of the soul, its own figments (*phantasmata*). Unlike impressions, they are not defined by their capacity to reveal both themselves (as mental states) *and* the physical objects that are their cause. Also, unlike those other *phantasmata* that are concepts, they lack the cognitive identification and confirmation of what the object of representation truly is and, first of all, *that* it is not simply a something, but a being or the latter's inherent quality. Now before we turn to this latter issue, one more thing must be added concerning Orestes' situation.

In Euripides' play, Orestes does not suffer one, but *two* Furies-related illusions. There is a crucial distinction between Orestes hallucinating Furies standing at Electra's side and then, when Electra takes his hand, mistaking herself for a Fury.¹⁹ It is this latter case that is analyzed by Sextus Empiricus who speaks then about Orestes' impression being "true *and* false"; this is because "in so far as he had an impression of an existing thing it was true — for Electra existed — but in so far as he had an impression of a Fury it was false — for there was no Fury. So too a dreamer's false and vacuous attraction when his impression of Dion, who is alive, is of Dion's actual presence."²⁰ This explanation seems to complement Aetius' account: in having an existing yet misrepresented correlate, the mistaken impression of Electra as a Fury is not entirely unlike a dream image of an actually existing person. In modern terms, it is quite like a fictional narrative or a fantasy that projects existing persons in unreal situations. In this respect, it belongs to the same division of impressions as many inner visualizations of future events (counterfactual memories are basically the same kind of mental events). In contrast, it is quite unlike both hallucinations (the plainly false fictions about what is not even there) and those *phantasmata psuches* which are the generic or universal notion that are, says Sextus, neither true nor false.²¹

To put the mistaking of A for B and the dreaming about the existing yet actually non-perceived A in the same division of impressions is helpful in understanding the last case of a "fantastic" mental experience quoted by Chrysippus: the case of

18 Aetius, *Views of Philosophers*, 4. 12, quoted after Graver (2007, 113), with terminological modifications derived from Long — Sedley (1987/1, 237).

19 For a good remainder of this distinction see Gourinat (1996, 40-42). The verse in question is *Orestes* 264 (quoted after Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 249).

20 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 244-245, as translated in Long — Sedley (1987).

21 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 246. For more on his issue see below. Concerning the dream images, we must equally distinguish between the dreams about actual persons (Dion, Electra), and dreams about non-existing entities (Furies, dragons).

Theoclymenos in Homer. While neglected by most readers, this case is very interesting from our point of view. There is no doubt that Chrysippus has in mind *Odyssey* 20. 350-357, where Homer lets Theoclymenos describe his actual vision in the present tense (it is a vision of the post-slaughter state of the banquet hall in Odysseus' house and of the ghosts of those slaughtered). The seer's speech is false now, in its present tense, but *partially* true about a future state of affairs. This case of *seeing as* is yet another example of falling under the spell of a present *phantastikon* whose content (*phantasma* as that to which one is attracted) consists in an anticipated state of affairs. In the present state of the speaker's mind, the high degree of graphic intensity of his vision prevails over the likelihood (or indeed impossibility) of this or that happening. Other than that, however, his impression is not different *in kind* from seeing oneself with a huge amount of gold. Here our preconceived notions of the ordinary and the extra-ordinary (which is not the same thing as the natural and the super-natural) must not stand in the way of analyzing how the mind works and how fictions get entangled with both concepts and perceptions.

By means of examples like the one of Orestes or Theoclymenos, Chrysippus and other Stoics are striving to account for the falsity of most propositions that we attach to a wide range of imaginary situations. This is why they elaborate a complex epistemological scheme of various *phantasiai* and *phantasmata*, a scheme oriented by their material ontology of soul, which helps to distinguish the cases of hallucinations from the erroneous perceptions of real objects. Beyond the strict context of the narrow epistemology of cognitive impressions, they extend their interest towards situations where a stock of human conceptions is confronted with broadly speaking rational, but not necessarily cognitive mental imprints. From this perspective, fictions belong to the contingent impressions that need to be handled in a wide variety of ways, including (besides the logical models based on calculation or deduction) the deliberate dialectical (and ethical) use of other and intentionally created mental images.

Leaving aside the details of this intriguing issue, which I cannot venture into here, it is nevertheless important to emphasize that the Stoics *did* allow for a fully developed, *kataleptic* impressions of objects that are not physically there as objects of perception. On this point, we possess an elaborate, analogically construed explanation quoted in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8. 409-410:

The Stoics say that sometimes a gym-teacher or a drill sergeant teaches the student to make certain movements by taking the student's hands and moving them rhythmically, whereas sometimes he stands off at a distance and makes the rhythmical motion himself so as to offer himself to the student as a model for imitation. In the same way, some objects of impressions as it were get into direct contact and lay hold of the mind and make the imprint in it that way (e.g. white, black, and bodies in general), whereas others are of such a nature that the mind

takes an impression *after* them (*ep' autois phantasioumenou*), but is not impressed by them (*ouch hup' autori*); these are the non-corporeal expressibles (*ta asomata lekta*).²²

The interest of this text lies in how it makes the non-causal relations to non-perceptual content legitimate. It seems clear that the contrast between the objects of direct impressions and the "non-corporeal expressibles" (which include the incomplete *lekta* including predicates as well as the fully developed propositions) is meant to convey the non-hallucinatory origin of various (though not all) non-perceptual contents. Thus it would be wrong to conclude that the truth takes us by the hand, whereas the fictions would just wave at us, fuzzily and sloppily, from afar. In Stoic naturalism, truth and fiction in the broadest possible sense of both terms are equally derivative (or parasitical) upon sense perception. Here the Platonic notion of a "true belief", which was introduced by Plato in order to diversify the realm of our claims on knowing things, does not and cannot apply. According to the Stoics, who refuse to mollify the strict separation between knowledge proper to the Sage and mental states of all other persons, there simply are no *true* beliefs and opinions. At the same time, that *all* ordinary beliefs are false does not imply all propositions implied in and by the latter are false as well. This is confirmed by the obvious fact that we do not give our indiscriminate assent to fiction, which is what comes to us spontaneously and without a necessary recourse to some special logical apparatus. Indeed, we seem to have a natural propensity for recognizing fictions, not only on the narrative but also on the conceptual level.²³

Still, there is a difference between encountering the standard fictional entity such as a centaur (i.e. a kind) and being confronted by this particular centaur Chiron. We have already seen that, for Aristotle, narrative fictions "are (primarily) about kinds rather than particulars, and where they are about particulars these are particulars-under-certain-aspects rather than particulars *per se*."²⁴ This reasonably general reading captures the Platonic flavor that persists throughout the Aristotelian reversal of Plato's commitment to the fullest reality of universals. If the Aristotelian account implies, anti-Platonically, that the universals are somehow less real than particulars, its focus on fiction remains a straightforward and epistemologically quite careless focus on the former rather than the latter. Asking how fiction is to be done and how it should affect its spectators-listeners, Aristotle leaves the issue of concept formation

22 I slightly modify the English translation by Brennan (2005, 78-79), who offers a concise interpretation of this text together with a good summary of the issue of *katalepsis* in the rest of the chapter.

23 This issue should be connected to Stoic conception of *capacities* (not ideas) that are innate to human mind. For more on these see Scott (1995, 201-210). It is worth noticing that, without sharing in other assumptions of Stoic naturalism, many modern authors believe that, in the presence of fiction, we spontaneously abandon the question of truth. Cf. Frege (1970, 63) on narrative fictions as natural source of (only) aesthetic delight.

24 Lamarque - Olsen (1994, 122), on *Poetics* 8. 1451b2-10.

and/ or propositional content aside. For the Stoics, such a carelessness (that follows from having already understood "fiction" as a particular *genre*) seems impossible. Their position, which relies on a different ontological stratification that accompanies the very notion of *lekton* (be it incomplete or part of a proposition) implies a thorough and so to say primary attention to various *modes* of presentation and the connection of propositional truth or falsity to some, but not others of these modes.

It is thus rather easy to suggest that the Stoics, in this respect at least, anticipate the modern attention to fictional mode of presentation. And it *is* legitimate to claim that the Stoic propositions (in other words to complete *lekta* or *axiomata*, 'assertibles') resemble Fregean propositions to quite a remarkable degree. Yet at least one crucial difference must not be overlooked: for the Stoics, "truth and falsehood are *temporal* properties of assertibles."²⁵ And it is this fundamental point that plays a rather important role in distinguishing between two types of fictions: the concept of a centaur and this centaur Chiron.

The difference in question, much like the temporal character of propositions, follows from the above-mentioned and severe ontological strictures on what is and is not. Here we must remember that the causally inefficient entities are not pure nothings; they are somethings which, somehow, are there or subsist. Indeed, "to be there" (*huparchein*) and "to subsist" (*huphistanai*) are technical terms coined by the Stoics in order to account for the vast and not generically unified realm of incorporeal stuff that includes predicates or propositions just like it includes time.²⁶ Now as for the concept of a centaur, it undoubtedly belongs into this realm in virtue of being a concept, and *not* because centaurs, as we know, do not really exist. By contrast, this particular centaur Chiron is a fictional entity because he or it is not really a *this*, in other words a particular that could have been, at any time, an object of reference linked to some act of sense perception.

At the first sight, this difference is a remarkably lucid semantic consequence of a less obvious ontology. Yet, even if this basic intuition is right, still the whole scheme has some less trivial corollaries. To identify and explain these, let me start with a reminder concerning truth and falsity.

Thus far, we have only learnt that the Stoics describe some impressions as *both* true *and* false (the case of Orestes who, upon seeing his real sister, mistakes her for a Fury), and added that they take other entities or mental states for *neither* true *nor* false. It is the latter that include concepts as, strictly speaking, notional entities that cannot be analyzed into or derived from either corporeal impressions or non-corporeal propositions that they would have been previously abstracted from. The concept of a centaur is a universal which, as such, is neither true nor false. To evoke "centaur" is, at least at first, nothing more than to make present to our mind a vague

25 Bobzien (2003, 87). Italics are mine.

26 For the sake of clarity, it should be immediately addend that propositions are included into this realm regardless of their truth or falsity. Thus even false propositions *subsist*. See Frede (1994, 116-117).

pre-notion that includes the equally vague types of "man" and "horse". It is an unqualified *phantasma*, to which even its specific compositional character does not add anything of some independent analytical or synthetic value. With only a slight exaggeration we can thus say that, before we start to think and speak about various centaurs in different contexts, the very concept of a centaur is of the same type as "tree", "water" or, indeed, "man". It is once we start to bring the concepts together in propositions, and thus to qualify them, that the possibility of the truth or falsity starts to emerge. Indeed, it is exclusively the propositions that complete the concepts: in and by them, the concepts become part of complete *lekta*, and it only the complete *lekta* that belong to the *either* true or false propositions.

All this implies that the level of bare concepts is inhabited by fictions of a non-causal and non-narrative type. Still, these concepts-fictions must possess some degree of (even quite vague) intuitiveness and thus correspondence to the physically determined impressions. They are universals, but not abstractions in the now current sense of the term. One might say that, even in his delusion, Orestes' composed yet propositionally bare concept of a Fury is intact, since it does not rely on his freedom to exercise, in a given situation, his intellectual abilities. By contrast, Orestes' impression, his *phantasia* of Electra-Fury, which is itself true *and* false, can be analyzed into a true assertion ("someone is standing over there") and a false assertion ("that someone is a Fury").

But what about the propositions that concern the particular centaur Chiron, whom we encounter through the stories about the heroes of ancient times? He or it is certainly not a universal, since he or it is a member of a kind, and he or it is not a hallucination either. More than anything else, he or it is something close to an ill-applied concept. While we can make perfect narrative sense of a particular story about Chiron, it is still true that listening to stories is a sort of controlled insanity that leaves open the interpretative option of an "as if" mode of listening. To a degree, this option is the most natural one insofar as concepts that we employ in understanding a story (concepts like the ones of a man, a horse, a centaur) are themselves (as we know already) unqualified and only "as if suchlike" (*hosanei poion*) so that we qualify them while we mentally represent the content of the unfolding story. In other words, it is precisely when we understand the story that we cross, perhaps illegitimately but naturally, the boundary between kinds and individuals.

This crossing leads us back to a previously stated Stoic claim, namely that the fictional nature and thus falsity of some mental and linguistic items, *manifests itself in the time of their (silent as well as audible) utterance*. Of course, from the orthodox Stoic perspective, the fictional status and the correlative truth-value of universals and of *some* kinds of particulars cannot change in time, not in the sense that the physical structure of the world would be liable to changes that could bring about centaurs. Yet utterances about the wide realm of both real and fictional entities are a more complex matter; after all, it is not uncommon to lose one's status of a being (for instance, by dying) and to become a fictional entity (like the Socrates of Platonic dialogues, a set of texts which strongly rely on the power of modal imagination:

indeed, in those circumstances and at those moments described by Plato, Socrates might have said this or something like that).

If we keep in mind the intrinsically temporal character of Stoic propositions, this last example seems to direct us towards the following suggestion: from the Stoic point of view, the broadly applied label of fiction connects quite naturally with the issue of hypothetical expressions, which are not propositions but belong to the same non-propositional (thus only negatively delimited group) as questions, imperatives, optatives, prayers or appellations.

As for hypothetical expressions or suppositions, suffice it to repeat here with Jonathan Barnes that, for the Stoics, a hypothesis is "either the act of making a hypothesis or else the content of the act - the item which I hypothesize. Hypotheticals in this sense of the word are distinguished from assertibles or *axiomata*. But although they are not assertibles, and hence are themselves neither true nor false, they will [...] *contain* assertibles."²⁷ Leaving aside all technical detail, it is easy to see that hypotheticals contain universals in their various qualified forms. Hence, among other things, their unmistakable proximity to the mental operations that we engage in while reading (or listening to) fictions. The overall situation is quite close to what the moderns call a suspension of disbelief since, in both cases, the supposition or fiction *contains* qualifications of concepts-fictions that are themselves *not* objects of that operation. Also, in both cases, the mental operation in question is of a limited duration, regardless of the degree of fictional imagining (which is undoubtedly much higher in the case of Orestes than in the Stoic logician's case). Rather than the degree of internal consistence, it is this temporal character that distinguishes the hypothetical attitude from the relatively stable (yet usually false) beliefs.²⁸

Rather than including a special class of fictional objects, be they universal concepts or particulars, Stoic ontology and correlative semantics imply what we might call fields of fiction in the sense of temporarily held sets of assumptions about the mental objects that are not directly derived from and durably conform to the sense perception and its inherent present tense. These "fields" are not the possible worlds in either the modern logical or the literary sense: they are not the former since their basic shape is always determined by an independent ontology; and they are not the latter because the Stoics do not work on the modern default assumption that fictional stories imply the mental creation of fictional worlds — in fact, those stories can (and should) be re-described as the consequences of either the temporary

27 Barnes (1997, 86). See also Bobzien (1997), Gourinat (2000, 187-191). It is impossible to summarize here the Stoic classification of argumentative devices (an original enterprise unparalleled in Ancient times and rarely equaled in the Modern ones). The most detailed recent guide is Gourinat (2000).

28 For a clear summary of this point see Currie (2002, 208). It follows that to prolong the fictional imagining is to enter a mental state where such an imagining tends to transform into *pathological* beliefs, on which see Coltheart — Davies (2000). I leave aside the fact that, for the Stoics, all beliefs of an average human being are to at least some degree pathological.

held hypotheses or the durably false beliefs. In both cases, fictions lack in positive ontological specificity. More modestly, the stories that contain them in their qualified form might remind us of Stalnaker's "diagonal propositions" in that they imply variations of semantic values in different contexts; see Stalnaker (1978).

Correlatively and unsurprisingly, it is typical of thus contained fictions to employ the indexical elements including, prominently, temporal markers. It would even seem possible to consider these fictions together with the so-called changing arguments (unfortunately a badly preserved and apparently not formally defined group of arguments) and the closely connected "changing assertibles" (*axiomata metapiptonta*),²⁹ since the issue discussed under this label is, roughly speaking, the problem of changes in the truth-value of certain statements, namely those changes that are made possible by the very presence of indexical elements. Crucially, the latter are present in sentences employing expressions of time and place (including verbal tenses), adverbs and, in some cases, pronouns. And because even a singular qualification of a concept by a unique adjective (with a complex but incomplete *lekton* for a result) seems to imply some further circumstances, these indexical elements are present at almost every level of discourse, including the temporal indexicals typical of almost every fictional narrative.

In themselves, these elements are of course insufficient to turn even the hypothetical utterances into fiction, more exactly into a fiction (a story) about fictions (concepts). Still they create the conditions for such a fiction on each occasion where the ultimately perceptible object of reference is absent. As for deciding whether these conditions are fulfilled, there is no set of formal criteria that could replace repeated recourse to experience, in other words the reliance of true discourse on strong physical continuity with impressions of what is actually there and what we perceive as "signs" or the air's vibrations that pass through our soul. On the other hand, in some situations, even the physics of perception is not enough to distinguish between the soul's states that misrepresent their real causes and the false representations that arise from some pathological internal states. Fortunately for the *philosophical* epistemology, the Stoics are confident that various ill-derived concepts are as inherently pathological as the most bizarre and unverifiable stories: they go against our *natural* capacity to recognize fiction when we encounter one. No amount of intellectual effort can supplant this capacity, whose constant exercise keeps at bay the danger inherent that in the primary ontological intuition, namely that the concepts, contents of propositions, mental images and other suchlike entities are all fictions.

Less fortunately, we possess no similar capacity to recognize propositional falsity. In all, we are thus prone to get lost in those many fictions that arise, as hybrids of truth and falsity, through the completing and combining of the *lekta* including the "as if" likenesses that are the concepts. These hybrids then tend to "subsist" (and indeed prosper) in a modal network of propositions with temporal indexical elements, a

29 For a detailed explanation and references see Barnes (1997, 99-125).

network where fictions echo, develop and hopefully discipline and restrict other fictions. While it can rely only on the psychological quasi-causation that connects mental contents and remains of a strictly non-efficient kind,³⁰ Stoic logic was conceived as a powerful tool capable of handling the large conceptual errors as well as everyday pathologies. I take it that this aspect of Stoic thought about what we call fiction is at least as important and historically influential as the more often recognized and equally original Stoic practice of the allegorical reading of classical literary fiction.³¹

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30 For the Stoic theories of causation and the problem of psychological causation see Duhot (1989, 101-105).

31 Few modern readers seem to have recognized that Stoic logic, besides its interconnection with Stoic physics, has something to do with the issue of the conceptual content of fiction including poetry and painting. For a remarkable exception see Imbert (1980) and (1992, 89-118).

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