USING FICTIVE NARRATIVE TO TEACH ETHICS/PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION: THE PROJECT

What moves students to think philosophically? What does it mean to think philosophically? There is some disagreement on this, but from the point of view of teaching it must include a disposition to inquire about everything—especially foundational principles concerning the good, the true, and the beautiful. David Hume called this sort of temperament: mitigated skepticism. It has driven exploration into the core areas of philosophy: ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, and logic.

Socrates (a model for many of us in the Western tradition) called himself alternately a stingray and a midwife to describe his own teaching role in breeding and nurturing future philosophers and citizens of Athens. Following the example of Socrates, how can philosophers in today’s classroom engage and stimulate students in just this manner so that they undergo enhanced capability to enter into the philosophical quest?

Some choose a quasi-mathematical approach. These are the folk who position logic front and center in the enterprise. Most philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition feel some keen sensibility to this approach. There is something very central about logic and philosophy. But this is not the entire story. Logic is a necessary but not a sufficient condition in learning to think philosophically. There is more: harkening back to Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” These words invoke both ethics as a sub-category to philosophy but they also call philosophers into the practical realm (including epistemology and metaphysics). Philosophers have to speak to the human condition in ways that regular people (such as our students) can understand.
Philosophy is not just about some esoteric audience but is essentially exoteric—with a message to all.

To this end a group of us set up an empirical study at a mix of universities to try to measure secondary outcomes (students reporting on their own learning experiences) in a class taught conventionally, for the most part, with the addition of fiction (five of the six institutions) and film (one of the six institutions). What we wanted to ascertain was what effect did fiction have in teaching philosophy within a traditional framework featuring direct discourse non-fictional works? Is the addition of fiction into the traditional setting positive? If so, then our study would be a beacon for structuring curricula: include some fiction within our traditional philosophy courses. What follows are the results of this study.

**SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS**

The philosophy courses varied from introduction to philosophy to topics courses in social/political philosophy to communications ethics to medical ethics. They are broadly representative of courses open to undergraduates studying philosophy. The institutions vary from private universities: Brown University (USA) and George Washington University (USA) to larger public universities Youngstown State University (USA) and Charles Sturt University (Australia) to a small private university Marymount (USA) and a small public college (St. Mary’s College of Maryland, USA). Thus the institutions are also broadly representative of various educational environments.

The fiction used in three cases (Brown, Youngstown State, and George Washington) was Michael Boylan’s “Eichmann and Heidegger in Jerusalem,” in one case (Marymount) it was Felicia Nimue Ackerman’s, “Applicants” for three classes and Michael Boylan’s novel *The Extinction of Desire* (two classes), and in the final case (St. Mary’s College) it was Andrew Gregg’s “Worth Living.” Charles Sturt University used the following films, “Return to Paradise” and “Broadcast News.”

The evaluation form and the summarized results can be found in the appendix. There is a considerable unanimity in the student responses between the various colleges/universities. In both the quantitative and the qualitative responses around 80% of the students found fiction an enriching element in their learning experience.
Quantitative Questions

Let’s address the quantitative questions first. The initial two questions of the questionnaire sample whether the student could understand the story and link it to the themes of the class. Upper classmen and those with one or more previous philosophy classes did better here. That may be because they have had other classes that have provided them with additional tools of analysis that are always useful in the process or integrating various inputs. Brown, Youngstown State, and St. Mary’s College scored slightly lower here compared to the six-school average. I believe this may be an artifact of student expectations of what a philosophy class is like within their program. George Washington and Marymount were above the average on these questions.

Science students scored slightly higher on these questions than humanities/social science students. This result is surprising.

The third question tests enjoyment of the fiction. This puzzled me some. Again freshmen and those with no previous philosophy class reported that they do not enjoy fiction as much as students who have had more background in the college/university. But a few other data points are also interesting:

1. Men enjoy the fiction input more than women (despite the much larger number of female literature majors in the university and despite the much larger number of female fiction readers in the general population). In discussion with various colleagues as well as a student post-study discussion group that I convened to discuss this project, the general opinion on this datum point was that the female students who were devoted to the study of literature, as such, felt that the inclusion of fiction into another venue changed the perceived vehicle of fiction so that they became less comfortable with this new application. Whether they might turn around if this practice became more widespread was generally thought to be a probable conjecture.

2. It was also interesting to me that science majors were the most appreciative of fiction in their philosophy class. My post-study group of current and former students thought that this could be accounted for by the fact that science students get a straight textbook approach throughout their educational experience and might enjoy the nuance of fiction in the midst of normally straight forward philosophy. Others thought that it had to do with scientists being very concrete in nature and that fiction is more concrete than abstract philosophy. It might be the equivalent of a science lab (a
concrete instantiation in the midst of a generally abstract presentation). Still, others in the post-study group thought that science majors were the brightest folk on campus and that another mode of analysis appealed to their enhanced intellectual capabilities.

I am a little leery at this last suggestion (made by former science students) but the others are equally plausible to me. Among the universities and colleges tested Youngstown State, Brown, and St. Mary's College were also a tad behind the mean enjoyment factor. This may follow naturally from the similar dip on questions one and two: if one does not understand the story nor can link it to themes in the class, then certainly they will not enjoy the experience, as such. However, as in the first two sections, this is a very small dip of .2-.4 that is barely above the statistical error of .2.

The last two questions refer to the functional effect of fiction to achieve the teaching objectives of the class: important insights and integrating concepts from the stories into the general concepts of the class. Here there is general agreement among all the schools tested that these questions rated lower. In my student post-study group the general opinion was that these last two questions could challenge students in the class by suggesting that they could not get the point unless they were presented with the fiction. This corresponds with the student responses that they appreciated fiction along with the general presentation of the subject but they would not like to have it replace it completely. This seems plausible to me since the enjoyment factor was greater than these last two questions and the open-ended responses tended to be very positive.

Qualitative Questions

The qualitative responses ranked the fiction contribution into a traditional philosophy class higher in their overall positive rating than did the more narrow quantitative questions. The most common sort of response in the qualitative questions was very positive and asked for more fiction and less traditional, non-fiction philosophy (in addition to film and other art forms). I confronted my student post-study group again on this and there was a mixture of opinion on whether some students felt that fiction was “easier” than primary text reading in philosophy: one might prefer a story to Aristotle or Kant. This spin of this interpretation suggests that students like fiction because they are lazy. But maybe students like fiction in their philosophy/ethics learning experience because they find it reaches them more effectively.
The second most popular response was that fiction only worked because it was given a context by the traditional non-fiction direct discourse philosophy that provided a structure by which students could identify relevant philosophical claims. The student post-study group agreed with the qualitative responses that students preferred stories along with Aristotle or Kant. Because the regular canon authors are heavy-going and abstract, a story brings things into an applied focus that is easier to integrate into their lives. Under this interpretation, fiction provides another venue into a primary text. Texts need to be interpreted, and fiction offers a tool to facilitate this. After all, even in the standard tradition, textual commentaries have provided for centuries alternate visions into texts. Texts become alive when interpreted. Fiction and commentaries are two tools toward this end.

The third, less common, response was that teaching fiction wasn’t really philosophy and so it detracted from the course. My student post-study group thought that these individuals were composed of those invested in the traditional philosophy curriculum and so thought they were being cheated by losing space for another direct discourse reading. This interpretation by the post-study group of this qualitative response (by a small minority) seems correct to me.

Thus, to summarize the qualitative responses for the issue of students’ self-assessment of their learning experience in reading traditional direct discourse texts alone versus the insertion of some fiction into the mix was that three sorts of qualitative responses came forth in order: (a) Fiction is great, give us more; (b) Fiction is great within the context of traditional direct discourse primary texts; and (c) Fiction is not really philosophy. The (a) and (b) responses were around 90% of the respondents.

A very general recapitulation of the statistics is that students generally enjoyed having fiction presented in their philosophy class, but they were happy to have the structure of the traditional direct discourse presentation to give it context.

INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

BROWN UNIVERSITY, PROVIDENCE RHODE ISLAND, USA: FELICIA NIMUE ACKERMAN

The philosophy department at my university offers several introductory courses, each in a particular area of philosophy. My
introductory course deals with epistemology. This course includes a unit on knowledge about ethics, and one class session in this unit focuses on a short story. Usually, it is one of my own stories. In 2009, however, in connection with the project that Michael Boylan describes in the introductory section of this paper, I used his story “Eichmann and Heidegger in Jerusalem,” which presents a fictional Bard College student’s “dramatic rendition of Hannah Arendt’s book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* . . . set in the context of the life and influences upon Dr. Arendt.” Like most students at my small, private, and very selective university, the students in this class were of traditional college age (approximately 17–22), well prepared for college, and generally hard-working.

My questionnaire results indicate that student reaction was overall very favorable. This confirms my other experiences with using fiction in philosophy courses. In addition to regularly using a story in my introductory epistemology course, I teach a course on ethics in the novel and on ethical themes in the contemporary American short story. Virtually all the assigned reading in those courses is fiction. I also teach various seminars that combine fiction with conventional philosophical works.

Why do I use fiction to teach ethics? Primarily because fiction can provide what might be called enhanced hypothetical situations. Since our discussion of Boylan’s story occurred near the end of the term in my 2009 introductory epistemology course, students were already well aware that analytic philosophy relies heavily on hypothetical situations, especially those that are what John Martin Fischer calls ‘streamlined,’ that is, “schematized hypothetical scenarios in which only a few details are filled in, and all the other details are left out.”3 As the course’s earlier discussions in the ethics unit illustrated, streamlined examples can be invaluable for uncovering the boundaries of our moral intuitions, but they can also be so sketchy and so alien to our experience that we lack sufficient emotional grasp of the situations to make creditable moral judgments about them. Fischer discusses how “the brunt of the criticism [of the use of streamlined examples in ethics] is based on the idea that...streamlined examples—are not *realistic*...[where] being realistic implies a certain sort of richness of detail...the richness of detail present in *reality*”4—and how, accordingly, some philosophers advocate using fiction as a source of ethical insight.

Such a rationale for using fiction in ethics invites some objections. First, although fiction provides much greater richness of
detail than do streamlined examples, fiction never has the richness of detail present in reality. Fiction is always selective.

Second, the way fiction can provide enhanced hypothetical situations is by enabling readers to enter imaginatively into the characters’ inner lives and thus to grasp the characters’ viewpoints “from the inside.” Real-life accounts sometimes do this, too. Israel’s Attorney General Gideon Hausner, who headed the prosecution of Eichmann, was not a Holocaust survivor. Boylan’s story includes Hausner’s explanation for talking with survivors: “Even though I have a mountain of evidence, I thought that I had to become—even secondhand—a personal witness. . . . I had to feel it personally.”

Real life, though, does not always provide people who are willing and able to describe their situations, emotions, and perspectives, let alone to describe them vividly enough for others to “feel it personally.” Fiction can go beyond real-life accounts in enabling people to experience vicariously what they have not experienced directly.

In order to do this, however, fiction need not be entirely realistic. It need not conform to the laws of nature. It need only be psychologically realistic and compelling. It needs a richness of characterization and of event that gives readers an emotional grasp of what it is like to be a certain sort of person in a certain sort of situation, where the “sort” of situation is defined not by physical externals, but by morally relevant conditions. Half my course on philosophy in the novel deals with Malory’s *Morte Darthur*. This great work of medieval literature is hardly realistic in the physical sense. It includes magic. Malory’s characters, however, have realistic and compelling personal psychologies. Conversely, even a long list of realistic details will fall flat when it fails to engage someone’s imagination enough to enable him to step outside his frame of reference and assumptions. Anyone who teaches bioethics has probably encountered students who take it for granted that being quadriplegic or old and ill is a fate worse than death. My teaching experience has shown me that a list of realistic details about such conditions often fails to make healthy young people question their assumptions about when life is worth living. Fiction that enables readers to enter imaginatively into the mind of a quadriplegic or a sick old person often proves better at accomplishing this.

Moreover, as Fischer stresses, streamlined examples have a place in ethics. Empathy is hardly sufficient for ethics. It must be combined with philosophical analysis and argument, which may well include streamlined examples. Fiction is most valuable as a source of empathy-providing
enhanced hypothetical situations when it enables readers to grasp perspectives that are apt to be overlooked, underrated, or overrated.

The view that such understanding is important for moral judgment is reflected in the maxim, “To understand all is to forgive all.” I am not endorsing this maxim. Boylan’s story quotes Eichmann’s defender Robert Servatius as saying that Eichmann “did what he thought was his duty to the state. He saw the state, as many patriots do, as almost a secular religion.” Understanding Eichmann in these terms does not incline me to forgive him. Even with less terrible, potentially forgivable moral transgressions, understanding an agent may render him less forgivable rather than more so. Suppose we reach the following understanding of the outlook of a certain man who is invariably rude to waiters and other service workers: He figures that their status is too low for them to be either worthy of respect or able to retaliate. Suppose we further understand that he is and has always been extremely self-confident as well as generally happy and that his contempt for service workers arises from his overriding confidence in his own superiority. I think I can vicariously experience the inner life of such a person, but this understanding hardly inclines me to forgive him.

My questionnaire results suggest that many students appreciated the philosophical value of fiction as a source of enhanced hypothetical situations. The most common benefit mentioned in their unscripted responses falls under the general heading “provide philosophical examples/thought experiments.” Of course, some of the students may have been unduly influenced by me, to the point where they mentioned this benefit partly or even entirely because I suggested it—or because the student film-maker in Boylan’s story makes the point that “some messages you just can’t put into the sort of arguments Professor Tode requires.” But students often disagreed with me about other claims I made in the course.

The empathy gained through fiction can thus make students better philosophers by expanding their imaginative reach. Will it make them better people? Not necessarily. Empathy is an essential component of sadism as well as of kindness. One of my own short stories, “Entertain the Thought,” involves a man who serves as a volunteer witness to executions. He relishes this role because his empathy with the condemned men heightens his pleasure in contemplating the disparity between their situations and his own, making him feel, in contrast, “safe and innocent and alive and free.” As Nancy Gubman points out in a recent letter in The New York Times, “Empathy is a necessary condition for
a civilized society, but not enough. How one uses the knowledge about another gained via empathy, is equally important. But it is not equally important to my job as a philosophy teacher, which is to make students better thinkers, not to make them better people.

What sorts of students can benefit from this approach to philosophy and fiction? Many of the students in my courses on philosophy in literature fall into three categories. Some are philosophy students who want to study ethics through richer cases than the conventional streamlined examples. Others are literature students who want to discuss fiction by considering people and their lives rather than symbolism and deconstruction. Still others find philosophical ideas intriguing but find conventional philosophical texts dry and unengaging. Students in all these categories often enjoy and learn from studying philosophy through fiction. Of course, this approach does not work for everyone. Does anything?

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY, YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO USA: GABRIEL PALMER-FERNANDEZ

The Context

Youngstown State University, founded in 1908, is an urban research university located in Youngstown, Ohio. During the early decades of the twentieth century it was known as the Youngstown Institute of Technology, then as Youngstown College, and finally renamed in 1967 after becoming a public institution. Today it offers a general undergraduate curriculum with over 100 majors, 35 masters programs, doctoral degrees in educational leadership and physical therapy, and a doctorate in mathematics in cooperation with Rhodes University. Along with University of Akron and Kent State University, it offers a BS-MD program through the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine and Pharmacy. YSU engineering students can pursue doctoral studies in cooperation with the University of Akron and Cleveland State University. Current enrollment is slightly above 15,000 undergraduate and graduate students. There are approximately 2,100 full and part-time employees, 426 full-time and 543 part-time faculty members, and a student to faculty ratio of 19:1.

The story selected was “Eichmann and Heidegger in Jerusalem.” It is set in the context of a senior thesis defense via a dramatic presentation of Hannah Arendt’s book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Three primary characters emerge—Arendt, Martin Heidegger, and Adolf Eichmann—with most of
the action centering on Arendt: her philosophical and sexual relation with Heidegger; her studies with Jaspers; and especially her reporting on Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem for *The New Yorker*. The story explores the nature of evil, obligations to obey the state, and various notions of moral responsibility. In addition to Heidegger and Jaspers, there are references to the work of St. Augustine, Stanley Milgram, Edmund Husserl, and Kant, as well as to several of the primary figures in the Eichmann trial, for example, Judge Moshe Landau, defense counsel Robert Servatius, and chief prosecutor Gideon Hausner.

I used this story in two courses—2621 Moral Issues and 3760 Ethics of War and Peace. Both courses satisfy general education requirements in the domain of Personal and Social Responsibility. The lower-level Moral Issues covers a wide range of topics (e.g., abortion, euthanasia, economic justice, affirmative action, famine and hunger, war and terrorism) and various theoretical views (virtue theory, utilitarianism, deontology, contract, and natural law) and is offered several times a year by different faculty members. Ethics of War and Peace is offered only once a year and is fairly comprehensive. Topics include evolutionary, archeological, and anthropological views on war and peace; robotics and autonomous weapon systems; just war theory; revolution; terrorism; pacifism; genocide; humanitarian intervention; and cosmopolitanism. Along with departmental majors and a general undergraduate audience, the course attracts some ROTC cadets, reservists, and veterans.

Overall, students in both courses could understand the story and enjoyed having it included in the syllabus. Question #3, “I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class,” received an average of 4.25 among all students. Seniors and students in Ethics of War and Peace were marginally more positive in their evaluation than those in Moral Issues. A difference is noted in Question #2, “I could link the story to the themes of the class.” Students in 2621 scored an average of 4.4 and those in 3760 averaged 4.95. In spite of that difference, the story clearly connected with the themes of the course. A slightly greater difference is noted in Question 4, “The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten,” with a score of 4.2 in 2621 and 3.5 in 3760. The greatest difference is in Question 5, “The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class,” with 3.9 in 2621 and 4.9 in 3760.

I think the reason for the difference in Question 5 is this. As a whole, students in 3760 were much more academically experienced than those in 2621 (in the former nearly two-thirds were seniors) and
therefore more prepared to integrate ideas and to appreciate different forms of presentation. Also, 3760 carries the prerequisite of one philosophy course, and twelve out of twenty-two students had taken at least two philosophy courses. They had some experience at identifying and examining claims. A factor that may well have been crucial in enhancing students’ connection to the story in Ethics of War and Peace is that they had already gone through a substantial body of scholarly literature providing them a broad and meaningful theoretical background; and especially, immediately prior to reading “Eichmann and Heidegger in Jerusalem,” students read the whole of Seyla Benhabib’s _Another Cosmopolitanism_, which opens with the Eichmann trial, touches on Arendt and Jaspers, and leads to a sustained discussion on cosmopolitan norms of justice. Moral Issues has no prerequisite and students were not presented with the same theoretical material. They did briefly read and attend two lectures on just war theory, view a film on the massacre at My Lai, and discuss Milgram’s experiments on obedience to malevolent authority. But the backgrounds were uneven and this, I think, helps to explain differential scores.

A suggestion follows from the above. Preparation and timing are crucial. While the use of fiction in a traditionally theoretical discussion has benefits, simply including a piece of fiction in the syllabus and requiring students to read it won’t do. Instead, laying out a general theoretical background and addressing the specific topic of the narrative before it’s use in the classroom are crucial.

In using a story I wondered about the relative merits of fictive narrative and traditional argumentation in conveying claims. Are they both equally apt at this? Or is there a kind of division of labor with fictive narrative better suited to convey claims of a personal or interpersonal nature and traditional argumentation better suited for other, more generalized claims. Certainly fictive narrative is unrivaled in bringing to life the particularities of the intimate relation of Heidegger and Arendt, revealing later in the story that Heidegger faced charges of being a Nazi sympathizer, and Arendt’s defense of her former professor and lover. But what exactly is being claimed here? What is the point? Is it to understand Arendt’s motivation or her courage before charges that she was a self-hating, anti-Semitic Jew? Shortly after publication of _Eichmann in Jerusalem_, Arendt faced very harsh criticism within the Jewish community, both here and abroad, and some of that vituperative debate has recently reemerged. But that cannot be the point here, as it would have to be read into the story, which I did in lecture. So, then, is the point reflexive? Is it
that narrative works by connecting with the life experiences and values of
the reader, and drawing conclusions not so much about the story but the
reader’s own experiences and values? Narrative seems to work not at the
level of knowledge (i.e., verifiable claims) but beliefs.

If narrative works that way, then it may need its own mode of
classroom presentation. I had no novel or particular strategy for using
fiction in the class; instead, I linked it to my default pedagogy: lecture and
discussion, but mostly lecture. I used the “Eichmann” story in the same
way I used Rousseau’s essay “The State of War.” That was perhaps a
mistake. Do different kinds of texts require different approaches? A bit
later students did respond to a survey on the story and at the end of the
semester had the opportunity to write one of their optional final exam
essays on it. But that seems insufficient. Rather than the standard lecture
with some discussion, students might derive greater benefit and
enjoyment from small group discussion guided by a few questions. As in
a conversation, each student can build on others’ responses and later
present a summary of views to the larger class. Discussion among peers
about fictive narrative, live or through an online discussion board, likely
has greater educational value than its alternative. In addition to small
group discussion, other academic activities might enhance learning—for
example, have students pursue a bit of historical research and then write a
case analysis or a narrative on part of the (real) story (say, on the
cross-examination of Albert Speer by Robert H. Jackson or the very
moving opening address by Francois de Menthon of France).

Finally, it is important to observe that the issues of the story
“Eichmann and Heidegger in Jerusalem” are at some distance from the
historical knowledge as well as moral experience of (at least most of my)
students. But the narrative form does not. In some instances, it may
therefore help to bridge that distance and better connect with students.
So much of our own formation and development, our basic moral values
and indeed moral identity emerge from stories told to us by our parents
and religious communities that the story form itself often brings a sense
of intimacy and authenticity. Understanding the use and development of
that familiar form might assist a more robust comprehension of the
process of learning.
I have, for many years, introduced music, poetry, and film clips in philosophy courses to illuminate ideas in texts and help students grasp complex ideas more readily. Recently I assigned, for the first time, a complete fictional text: a short story authored by a former student as his senior thesis in philosophy. “Worth Living” is the coming-of-age story of Teddy, an all-too-average guy about to graduate from Susquehanna College, an institution bearing an uncanny resemblance to our own small, rural liberal arts college. Teddy has spent four years in a “funk”, struggling to find meaning in life. Noting the loss “some time in high school” of his sense of connection with the world, he has drifted through college, each year largely indistinguishable from the rest. Now his friends are excited about launching their bright futures, but for Teddy graduating merely signifies “finding some desk job which would make his parents proud of him and simultaneously create a foundation of boredom which would stay with him for the rest of his life.” An unexpected event prompts him to reflect upon his life and the lessons in meaning that have long been available to him: lessons in love from Plato, the life of activity from Aristotle, happiness from Mill, and caring from Noddings. In his final months of college, Teddy begins to see his unremarkable life in a new light.

I recognized in “Worth Living” an opportunity to accomplish three objectives in my introductory ethics course: (1) to honor the good will of students who take a chance with philosophy, by making their first experience of it accessible and enjoyable; (2) to demonstrate that philosophy is relevant to students’ lives and useful to them; and (3) to introduce resources that illuminate and reinforce key ideas and arguments of our central texts. My primary objectives in assigning fiction have been the first two: to increase students’ enjoyment of philosophy and their awareness of its relevance. The third objective, facilitating better understanding of philosophical concepts and arguments, has of course been important, but secondary in this case. Accordingly, I assign “Worth Living” during the seventh week of the course, as a transitional “break” between our units on ethical theory and applied ethics. The story comes after the students’ exam on ethical theory, and so is a reward for having prevailed through six weeks of difficult reading. The further reward is that students discover that they are now philosophical insiders; they “totally get” Teddy’s appropriations of Aristotle, Kant, Mill, and Noddings for his analyses of life events—the wild carryings-on of
students at a house party, or his awkward attempts to speak to an attractive woman. Because the action takes place where my students live (or a place very much like it), they become engrossed in the story. They recognize themselves in the characters and discover both that and how philosophical reflection can enhance their lives.

Students in two sections of Introduction to Ethics volunteered to take Michael Boylan’s Fiction and Philosophy Survey during the last two weeks of class. The most striking result was the emergence of two camps: students who found the use of fiction helpful to their study of philosophy (a clear majority) and those who did not (an articulate minority). Students who reported benefitting from reading fiction cited four main reasons: (1) it provided content students could relate to more easily than that of traditional philosophical arguments, making abstract ideas more tangible, real, and accessible; (2) the style was more enjoyable; (3) it allowed them to enter into the experiences of others; and (4) it presented clear and concrete applications of philosophical concepts. One student summed up these reasons eloquently:

Many times it’s hard to connect the abstract with the concrete. In the case of philosophy, sometimes it can be hard to see how a certain theory actually applies to real life. Often times the philosopher will provide concrete examples to make this easier. I think fiction serves this purpose as well, and perhaps even more effectively: in the depth of detail, it is easier to imagine oneself as emotionally invested in the situation, and so the moral dilemma being discussed becomes more relevant.

Students who did not find the use of story helpful also cited four reasons: (1) fiction is less authoritative than traditional philosophical argumentation; (2) the argument may be obscured by superfluous detail, perhaps essential to good storytelling but not to the articulation of philosophical ideas; (3) fiction is therefore inefficient, both time consuming to read for philosophical purposes and an allocation of time that might be better spent on studying more philosophers; (4) it is not sufficiently literal and linear, and thus not the most effective way to absorb information. Concerning the problem of efficiency, one student wrote:

Convincing characters and elegant prose are both fine things in a piece of fiction but don’t do anything to facilitate a philosophical discussion…I think there was a lot of stuff in [the story] that didn’t have anything to do with philosophy.
Thus, some portion of the work that went into reading it was unnecessary work.

Dissent was also expressed in remarks like, “It is strange, because you are using fiction to teach “facts”. So how can the facts be true?” and “I feel like the writings we should focus on should be nonfiction writings just because they are truthful, and discussion would be based off of factual information.”

Just the Facts, Ma’am!

Notwithstanding some students’ feeling that they don’t benefit much from the use of fiction in philosophy courses, I agree with Boylan and others that it should be incorporated more widely because, as Boylan puts it, fiction “fulfills the goal of integration very effectively (in many cases more effectively than direct logical discourse, alone).” By “integration” Boylan means “a student’s ability to confront and understand some body of information and then to be able to situate it into novel situations including those in his or her own life’s experiences.” Students should absorb into their worldviews philosophical ideas introduced in our courses and be able to apply them in new contexts, including their own experiences.

Student responses to the survey make clear that fiction facilitates this kind of learning successfully, but I urge us to distinguish two kinds of integration: intellectual and moral (to borrow Aristotle’s terminology). We legitimately expect students to achieve intellectual integration in philosophy courses, by which I mean students should absorb new ideas into their cognitive worldviews; they should learn new philosophical concepts and be able to apply them. But can professors legitimately set moral integration as an expectation, if by that we mean students should integrate into their moral worldviews ideas encountered in our courses? Are we justified in expecting their moral views to be altered, even modestly, by studying philosophy?

Moral integration surely is a legitimate objective, or goal, but perhaps it is not a legitimate expectation. The dissenting minority reminds us that some students study philosophy not to have their personal worldviews altered but simply to learn about the views of others. This resonates with an eye-opening experience I had while covering a colleague’s Eastern ethics class. I asked the students to share how their exposure to Eastern philosophy was reshaping their worldviews. Most of the students spoke eloquently of both subtle and dramatic transformations, but one student confessed, “It’s not reshaping my views at all, because I just came here to learn about it, not to be influenced by it.” I was taken aback and critical
of this student’s position until I recalled that if I am serious about respecting students’ full moral personhood, I must be willing to acknowledge the legitimacy of their own purposes and objectives (upon evaluating them). Perhaps expecting students to achieve moral integration in the strong sense I have been talking about is, in fact, a violation.

And yet the idea of permitting students passively to take a “banking” approach to the study of philosophy—wherein professors deposit arguments into students’ minds and later withdraw them via exams and papers—seems not quite right either. After all, a fundamental objective in philosophy courses is to employ and cultivate critical thinking. Students should not only reproduce philosophical arguments but also analyze and evaluate them. But to evaluate ethical arguments, in particular—practical philosophy—students should, at some point, test them against experience. We might say, if we imagine the study of ethics as involving Gadamerian “fusions of horizons,” that students should bring their own horizons to the table as a lens through which they actively and critically engage ethical arguments. The outcome of reflection may be what Boylan terms “dissonance/rejection”; students may still refuse to integrate new ethical ideas into their moral worldviews. However, if rejection is indeed the result of critical reflection, students will have acquired new reasons for reaffirming their moral views. Their positions will have been affected by the encounter with new arguments. In any case, we can and should inform students that ethics courses may differ from courses in other disciplines, for here we expect them to do more than accumulate facts. We expect them to engage ethical arguments critically, and they may find this is done best by testing those arguments against experience and their own moral worldviews. We might call this process of engagement “moral integration” in a weak sense: students either expand or reaffirm their personal moral worldviews through critical engagement with new ethical positions.

That said, a significant number of students (and perhaps a majority generally) clearly desire to achieve moral integration by studying philosophy, and I have argued that we may legitimately expect dissenters to achieve it in the weaker sense I have just described. I therefore recommend that fiction be used more widely in philosophy courses for reasons well documented by Boylan and Charles Johnson. Most notably, as they put it, “Because of its greater number of contact points, empirically suggestive, narrative-based philosophy is able to engage the personal worldview of most readers more strongly than direct, deductive-based presentations (which offer fewer worldview contact
This is just to say, as the majority of students attest, that fiction often presents philosophical content in a form that students can relate to, more easily than they can relate to the abstract content of traditional arguments. This in turn makes philosophical ideas and arguments more tangible, real, and accessible to students.

**CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY, AUSTRALIA: EDWARD SPENCE**

This section provides a description and an explanatory theoretical rationale of how narrative works in teaching philosophy—particularly ethics. The narratives used were philosophy plays that form part of the Philosophy Plays project, first conceived by myself in 1997. It has been adapted and extended to the use of fiction in the form of films to provide a Neo-Socratic Model for Teaching Ethics to University students undertaking vocationally orientated degrees.

In order to effectively teach professional ethics attention must be given to two overarching conditions for rational decision-making: (a) justification and (b) motivation. Though necessary, these may not always be sufficient conditions, as external compliance through an outside agency may also be required in cases where one is both rationally convinced that there is justification for doing something and moreover motivated to act on his justified conviction but fails to do so because of weakness of the will or some other such reason.

With regard to the Philosophy Plays as a method for teaching professional ethics and as adapted and extended with the use of fiction in the form of films, justification will primarily appeal to the intellect aroused dialectically with learning mediated through philosophical arguments. Such arguments are designed to provide justificatory reasons for action in decision-making, including ethical decision-making. Motivation, on the other hand, will primarily appeal to feelings and emotions aroused rhetorically with learning mediated through the dramatic plays and films.

The decision-making model described above that comprises both justification and motivation and corresponds respectively to philosophical arguments and dramatic plays as well as films consists of two main levels: the theoretical and the practical. Since the discussion that follows will exclusively address the use of the methodology of philosophy plays as adapted for teaching professional ethics to University students through fiction in the form of films, the decision-making model referred to henceforth, will be an ethical decision-making model; a model...
designed to provide both justificatory and motivating reasons for thinking and acting ethically both within and outside the various professions for which the relevant cohorts of students receive their training and education.

The theoretical level comprises, in turn, two sub-levels: the **meta-ethical** and the **normative**. The practical level comprises three sub-levels: the **meta-motivational**, the **relevant-contextual**, and the **motivational**.

**The Theoretical Level**

The *meta-ethical level*: at this initial and highest theoretical level, the ethical enquiry seeks to determine through a critical and interactive dialogue with the students (dialectic), what legitimate authority, if any, morality exercises or at least ought to exercise over us. I refer to this question as, *the authoritative question of morality*: the question of “why be moral?” The authoritative question of morality seeks in effect to determine if there are any rational reasons for thinking and acting morally that are justificatory and motivating, capable at least of motivating moral action through the agent’s own rational internal compliance.

To be sure, there might indeed be instrumental reasons (means-end reasons) for acting morally even when one is not rationally convinced that there are authoritative internal reasons for doing so. Such instrumental reason may have nothing or very little to do with the authority of morality to prescribe moral conduct. Such reasons might be those of self-preservation, emanating from fear or anxiety of being caught and punished by others or the state, for one’s moral transgressions. Thus a person might abstain from shoplifting not out of any rational conviction that shoplifting is morally wrong but out of fear of being caught and sent to prison.

What if, however, in the absence of authoritative and convincing internal reasons for moral conduct, one could act immorally at will without fear or anxiety of ever being caught and punished by others or the state? In other words, what if one could act immorally with total impunity? Would there be any reason, under these circumstances, for acting morally, especially if one was convinced, under our hypothetical scenario, that there were no internal reasons and certainly no instrumental reasons, for doing so?

The *normative level*: It is precisely at this point when the students’ intellectual curiosity is aroused and their imagination fired by the question posed by the Myth of Gyges “why be moral?” that
contemporary normative theories of ethics are introduced as possible solutions to the authoritative question of morality. Apart from functioning as a dramatic and heuristic prop for examining possible solutions to the authoritative question of morality, the authoritative question of morality is also used to provide a comparative evaluative analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the normative ethical theories examined. The teacher, through the use of the Myth of Gyges as a pedagogical tool, functions effectively as a Socratic mid-wife, helping the students give birth to their own knowledge and understanding.

The Practical Level

The motivational level: The introduction of the virtues at this point of the dialectical enquiry is crucial in showing that ethics is not merely about the acquisition of theoretical knowledge regarding certain ethical rules and principles embedded within ethical theories but is, more importantly, about ethical practice, both with regard to individual and collective action. As Aristotle points out in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we study ethics not merely to acquire knowledge about what ethics is but to learn how we can become ethical persons. Knowing what ethical conduct consists in, is not the same as engaging in ethical conduct. As argued earlier, ethical action requires not merely justification for acting ethically but also motivation for doing so. And the virtues provide the additional motivational power that can through habituation translate ethical thought based on intellectual justification and abstract, impersonal, rational motivation, into ethical action based on personal motivation through excellence of character. The inculcation of the virtues translates theoretical knowledge (knowledge that) into practical knowledge (knowledge how or know how).

It is precisely in exhorting students through instructive examples by way of case studies, dramatic plays, films, role models and other rhetorical devices that the protreptic component of ethical education becomes essential: as Aristotle reminds us, we study ethics not to know what the good is, but how to become good persons. This brings us to the relevant-contextual stage of the dialectical learning process.

The relevant-contextual level: The importance of this level cannot be emphasized enough. For it is at this level of the dialectical learning process that the abstract theoretical ideas are rendered concrete and contextualized in relation to the students’ own pre-theoretical subjective and inter-subjective experiences. For unless the ethical principles, theories, rules, values, and virtues can be shown to be relevant to both
the students’ own personal and cultural experiences as well as to their chosen professions, the ethical pedagogy that so far incorporates ethical theory, both meta-ethical and normative, and character virtues, will only provide a rational and theoretical motivation for ethical conduct which may not prove adequate by itself in motivating ethical conduct in concrete situations; situations similar to those that students are likely to confront in their personal and professional lives. The relevant contextualization of ethical education is engendered through various rhetorical devices including live performances of dramatic plays, feature films, documentaries, and real-life professional case studies all designed to wed the theoretical ethical pedagogy with the students’ own personal and cultural experiences and knowledge, rendering the ethical pedagogy thus contextualized, a personal transformative and existential experience, and not simply an informative abstract intellectual exercise.

The meta-motivational level: The problem facing the teacher who undertakes to teach professional ethics as a service subject to students who are studying for vocational degrees in journalism, advertising, policing, engineering and medicine amongst others, is that these students do not usually have any background knowledge in philosophy, let alone moral philosophy. The study of professional ethics through moral philosophy as described above is on the whole an entirely new and challenging experience for such students. The problem is not merely to effectively motivate the students to think and act ethically using the theoretical and practical elements of the pedagogical methodology described under the various levels above; the problem initially is one of establishing an efficient and effective mode of interactive communication between the teacher and the learners; that is, getting the students to listen and be receptive to the information that is being communicated to them.

The problem of reception (the reception problem) that I have outlined above (getting the students to be receptive to the ethical information communicated to them), can be compared to the problem concerning the authority of morality: the question “why be moral” is now preceded by the question that can be posed by a putative student “why should I listen to what Plato or other philosophers, both ancient and modern, have to say about morality, especially since they don’t speak my language. In any case, what does all this moral philosophy have to do with journalism or the police?” The reception problem is a problem that concerns not merely moral philosophy but also effective communication. The moral information communicated to students in class must be capable of being communicated to them in a way that
speaks their language: it must be relevant to their personal, cultural and professional interests and experiences.

The philosophy plays as well as films that are designed to engender successful receptive communication with students, solves conceptually and practically the reception problem of motivation at the metamotivational level of enquiry, as the students are approached in a way that they can understand and access through their own cultural language; a cultural language that renders Socrates’, and Plato’s words generally, more concrete and accessible than it would be possible if those words were merely communicated to the students directly through Plato’s dialogues without any contextualized cultural filters. The philosophy plays as well as films function as cultural and linguistic filters enabling philosophy come alive and become relevant to the students’ own lives.

MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA USA: MICHAEL BOYLAN

Robert Paul Churchill in an article entitled, “Becoming Moral Agents: On the Personal Worldview Imperative” speaks convincing about the process of integration.24 By integration he means a student’s ability to confront and understand some body of information and then to be able to situate it into novel situations including those in his or her own life’s experiences. This is what is behind the concept of the personal worldview imperative and I think that the same thing is happening here with fictive narrative philosophy. Because of my own work on personal worldview, it should be of no surprise that I believe this process of integration to be one of the key objectives that we should have before us as we initiate our students to philosophy and ethics.

For my part of the empirical study I evaluated two instances of fiction in the philosophy, “Applicants” by Felicia Nimue Ackerman25 in three different sections of medical ethics taught in three different terms and The Extinction of Desire, my philosophical novel in two sections of introduction to philosophy.

The context for “Applicants” was in a section of the course on organ transplants. This course is about applied ethics. In Ackerman’s story there is an academic (well known historian at UCLA) who needs a transplant but according to the rules of who will be eligible for a transplant the claimant needs family. Unfortunately, the protagonist, Yvonne Sibley, has no living parents and her sister disowns her. She is single without a fiancée in sight. Enter Nick. Nick is an historian (at
Tomlinson State College, a small unknown school). He is struggling to come up with a peer-reviewed publication so that he might be granted tenure. On the other hand, Yvonne is tenured at UCLA and a rising star in the profession.

Yvonne has often snubbed Nick at conferences when someone in the profession who can help her enters the room. It’s called networking. Now Nick is about to come up for a tenure decision at his college. Unfortunately, he has not produced anything of significance. Thus he will probably be denied tenure and forced to step down: ‘up or out’ as they say. His career will probably be over. Each party has a need: Yvonne needs a pro-forma fiancée for her transplant application and Nick needs a significant publication to garner him tenure. The devilish deal is that Nick will pretend to be Yvonne’s fiancée (so that she can rise up on the transplant chart) in return Yvonne will give Nick her new book manuscript that can be published under his name and assure him tenure.

I won’t reveal the end of the story, but I will report that students lit up to read this tale in the context of having already read four regular philosophy articles on organ transplants in the context of deserts and life-style choices (e.g., should smokers have any penalties in the queue for lung transplants). The fact that this story made some of these controversies come alive and mixed in other issues in personal ethics made the unit as a whole come together for much of the class. Some nursing students attending the class in the first term kept me after almost an hour discussing the fine points of the story in light of the four essays that gave it context. The story was a hit and enhanced the pedagogical experience. I felt that the experience was a great success.

In the second instance I taught one section of introduction to philosophy two terms using the generating theme: fictive narrative philosophy. This course deals with metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. We began the course reading Plato’s Protagoras. This work is self-reflexive on the use of narrative. Protagoras continually counters Socrates with stories rather than arguments. Socrates responds with literary dynamics of his own (all, of course, set within the context of a literary dialogue). I call this level of fictive narrative philosophy the first-level apologue (in which the philosophy overwhelms the narrative).

The second work we examined in this class was Nietzsche’s Thus Spake Zarathustra. In this case, the rather bizarre action is equal to the message conveyed. In fact, students cannot get “the point” unless they try very hard to reconstruct the various vignettes that go from caves to
islands and back again. I characterize this level as being equal between message and action.

The third work is my novel, *The Extinction of Desire*. In this book there is considerably more detective work required for the student to understand the fictive action as philosophy. The generating ideal is to *show* rather than to *tell*. Thus on this level, the reader is required actively to engage the story in order to discover the claims that arise from the characters and plot.

The effect of this combination was less spontaneous than the effect of Ackerman’s story in the context of articles on transplants. Part of this other dynamic is probably due to the fact that we spent five class sessions on the novel itself. Students made short presentations on directed sections and their classmates critically responded. Both presenters and critics were evaluated. Thus, because of the length of the presentation the connections took longer to make, but in the end the evaluations of the two events were well within the sample error +/- .2 (on the quantitative chart). I conclude that both short and long narrative work equally well in the classroom.

In evaluating the qualitative open-ended questions I detected two sorts of groups:

GROUP A: I believe from this study that fiction works with those students who: (i) like and honor stories, (ii) are able to use stories to help in the process of integration, and (iii) are drawn by the story detail (that mirrors empirical richness) and the dialectical interaction that stories encourage.

GROUP B: I believe from this study that fiction doesn’t work as well with those students who: (a) think stories are mild diversions but are like a meringue on a pie, filled with fluff and sugar without substance, (ii) those who feel threatened by considering anything but direct narrative philosophy as real and sincere (cf. those fundamentalists who proclaim that stories in the Bible or the TANAK are not stories in any way but unerring direct discourse), (iii) those who think that the process of interpreting stories is similar to a magic act (they pull meanings out of thin air).

This empirical study has shown to me that Group A had far more adherents than Group B.

Why is this the case? As mentioned earlier, one reason may be that the process of claim integration to one’s personal existence is more effectively achieved via fictive narrative philosophy than by straight direct discourse. This is due to the way each mode of transmission occurs. In
straight direct discourse the logical argument is the vehicle of dissemination. What this mode of transport has going for it is that it can be exact and very clear. What it has against it is the artificial level of abstraction: (a) many will have difficulty integrating the claims into their personal worldview (a pedagogical point) and (b) a highly abstracted vision of reality may fulfill the requirements of formal systems analysis, but at the same time may be false when applied to the messy reality of lived existence. The first point agrees with many of the student comments about how stories make more relevant the topics presented in the direct discourse mode. The second point acts rather differently. Economists face this problem all the time. Kenneth Arrow might look at the voter paradox (candidate A can defeat candidate B while candidate B can defeat candidate C, but nonetheless Candidate A cannot defeat candidate C) and generate his so-called ‘Impossibility Theorem’ as a challenge to social choice theory. As interesting as these abstract puzzle pieces might look by themselves, they may be dwarfed by the larger puzzle presentation. In fact, the larger presentation may run contrary to the suggestions of the atomic unit.

This second point is effectively countered by fiction that makes claims (fictive narrative philosophy). Fiction presents a large integrated picture filled with the sort of details that make our own experience intelligible to us. Acting in this way fiction is an antidote to the overly narrow, purely analytic presentations. It allows students to step back and evaluate the tight argument that they have encountered in direct logical discourse in a more holistic context. Fictive narrative philosophy empowers them to integrate claims into their lived experience and it lets them confront a bigger picture so that they might detect puzzle pieces that don’t properly fit into the larger pattern. These two functions are unique to fictive narrative philosophy and enhance the way philosophy is taught in the classroom and in the public square. Thus, I conclude that fictive narrative philosophy should selectively find its way into philosophy courses across the country—because it reaches students and fulfills the goal of integration very effectively (in many cases more effectively than direct logical discourse, alone).

Conclusions

Between the various authors, this empirical study went on for over a year. However, most of the participants had used fiction in their teaching before this study. Each presenter has a different account of the way that fictive narrative philosophy works in the classroom.
Felicia Nimue Ackerman emphasizes the richness of detail involved in stories (though not necessarily realistic detail). She has used her own and others’ stories for years as an invaluable resource for uncovering the boundaries of our moral intuitions. They can act as enhanced hypothetical situations that propel us into an examination of the philosophical claim. Another outcome that fictive narrative uniquely stimulates is ‘empathy.’ This emotional response is not often addressed by traditional direct philosophical arguments, yet it is an essential skill for students to develop as they seek to understand and to contextualize philosophical claims. This is because without empathy they are liable to be lacking in discerning judgment about the impact of claim upon lived experience.

Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez’s experience was that the timing of the fiction input in the course is crucial. First, one needs to present the traditional direct non-fictional accounts to set and develop the boundaries of discussion. Second, the input of fiction needs to be presented to the class, which would then break-up into small discussion groups. The way that fiction works, according to Palmer-Fernandez is not via the realm of knowledge but of beliefs. Beliefs surround our understanding of philosophical issues so that this input can be useful in the student’s overall ability to evaluate the claims more holistically.

Sybol Cook Anderson emphasizes how fiction can facilitate moral integration and that it offers a unique teaching moment. In response to those who are inclined to reject out of hand the claims made in fictive narrative philosophy just because they are not factual or difficult to understand, Anderson is not daunted. Rejection is not a game breaker because it can elicit dialectical interaction within the classroom. This sort of interaction is what most of us are after—especially since none of us is in the “disciple business.” But the way that students go through a process of examination before they accept or reject the claims is important. Immediate rejection of claims out of hand (without reflection) is not an outcome that we should endorse.

Edward Spence focuses upon applied ethics via film (in this empirical study) but more broadly in ethics and metaphysics in his philosophical plays that he has engaged in for years. Within the context of this project Spence feels that film works via justification and motivation at the theoretical (meta-ethical) and at the practical level (meta-motivational, the relevant contextual, and the motivational). Each of these categories is enhanced by the fictive narrative experience.
Michael Boylan emphasizes two ways that fictive narrative philosophy can make a positive difference in the classroom: (a) many will have difficulty integrating the claims into their personal worldview (a pedagogical point) and (b) a highly abstracted vision of reality may fulfill the requirements of formal systems analysis, but at the same time may be false when applied to the messy reality of lived existence—fictive narrative philosophy can correct this because of its holistic perspective.

In the end each author endorses the use of fiction in the classroom to teach philosophy and ethics. We would all welcome increased discussion and attention to this important tool than can introduce philosophy effectively to the more people.

APPENDIX: FICTION AND PHILOSOPHY/ETHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

COMBINED SUMMARY

The Questionnaire

Part One: Student Information. Directions: fill in the bubble that correctly identifies you.

1. I am a: 0-freshman, 0-sophmore, 0-junior, 0-senior
2. I have had the following number of previous philosophy or ethics courses: 0-none, 0-one, 0-two, 0-three, 0-four or more
3. My major is: 0-undeclared, 0-humanities & social sciences, 0-sci-ences, 0-business, 0-other
4. I am: 0-male, 0-female

Part Two: Class Evaluation. Directions: Fill in the bubbles from 1-5 according to the following scale

0                 0                 0                 0                0
1                 2                 3                 4                5
strongly disagree  disagree     neutral       agree     strongly agree

1. I could understand the story.

0                 0                 0                 0                0
1                 2                 3                 4                5
strongly disagree  disagree     neutral       agree     strongly agree
2. I could link the story to the themes of the class.

   0 0 0 0 0
   1 2 3 4 5
   strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

3. I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class.

   0 0 0 0 0
   1 2 3 4 5
   strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

4. The story helped me integrate various concepts we've been working on in class

   0 0 0 0 0
   1 2 3 4 5
   strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

5. The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would have not gotten.

   0 0 0 0 0
   1 2 3 4 5
   strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

**Part Three:** Unscripted Response. Respond to the question with your own personal reactions.

1. In your opinion, how does the use of fiction best support the teaching of philosophy or ethics?

2. What bothers you about using fiction to teach philosophy or ethics?

3. How would you like to see fiction incorporated into a future philosophy or ethics course you might take?
SUMMARY OF THE DATA

Results (1-5 scale with 5 at the top) [standard deviation + or - .2]

Generalized Results as per Evaluation Form

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.46
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.33
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.32
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 3.95
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 4.01
Qualitative Questions = 86% positive, 8% neutral, 6% negative

Overall Women

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.31
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.30
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.28
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 3.52
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 4.08
Qualitative Questions = 72% positive, 25% neutral, 3% negative

Overall Men

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.50
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.35
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.4
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 4.35
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 3.95
Qualitative Questions = 85% positive, 10% neutral, 5% negative

Overall Freshmen

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.26
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.28
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.27

Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 3.75

Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 4.02

Qualitative Questions = 75 % positive, 20 % neutral, 5% negative

Overall Sophomores

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.59
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.37
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.33
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 4.08
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 3.84

Qualitative Questions = 82 % positive, 10 % neutral, 8% negative

Overall Juniors

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.54
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.11
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.11
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 3.69
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 3.69

Qualitative Questions = 77 % positive, 17 % neutral, 8% negative

Overall Seniors

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.52
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.51
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.55
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 4.24
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 4.59

Qualitative Questions = 84 % positive, 6 % neutral, 10 % negative
Overall Humanities & Social Science Majors

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.41
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.25
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.29
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 3.98
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 4.08
Qualitative Questions = 78% positive, 15% neutral, 7% negative

Overall Science Majors

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.63
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.47
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.58
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 3.79
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 3.64
Qualitative Questions = 82% positive, 13% neutral, 5% negative

Overall Business Majors

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.60
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.12
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.34
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 4.13
Question #5: The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 4.19
Qualitative Questions = 80% positive, 14% neutral, 6% negative

Overall Number of Philosophy Classes (None) (One or More)

Question #1: I could understand the story = 4.32 4.57
Question #2: I could link the story to the themes in the class = 4.23 4.40
Question #3: I enjoyed reading and responding to a story in my class = 4.25 4.39
Question #4: The story provided me with important insights into the themes of the class that I otherwise would not have gotten = 3.77 4.19
Question #5 The story helped me integrate various concepts we’ve been working on in class = 4.03 3.99

Qualitative Questions for None = 83% positive, 12 % neutral, 5 % negative
Qualitative Questions for One or more = 74 % positive, 19 % neutral, 7 % negative

Sample Qualitative Responses

#1 In your opinion, how does the use of fiction best support the teaching of philosophy or ethics?

*It gives an interesting twist to a dry subject*
*Fiction supports ethics. It makes it easier to formulate your reactions*
*It integrates a complicated philosophical theory with everyday life events*
*I got more insights than I did with the regular texts*
*I think it helps you understand it better because you can relate to a story [most popular sort of response]*
*Discussion is easier because you talk both about the story and what it means*
*Helps the student think about philosophy on a real-life level*
*It gives good examples of points*
*Even though it’s fiction it seems truer than Rawls essay we had to read*
*I raise ethical questions in momentous proportion more directly*
*I never gave it much thought. I don’t know what I think*
*I think it kinda helps to understand and apply philosophy to “real” or everyday situations.*
*I’s different than I did in my other philosophy classes*
*You can come up with different conclusions; I don’t like that*
*I don’t like stories*
*I’s told from someone’s view so it isn’t about reality*
*I’s fine because we had the traditional stuff earlier*

#2 What bothers you about using fiction to teach philosophy or ethics?

*Nothing [or variants on this was by far the most popular answer]*
*Left blank [second most popular response]*
Sometimes it might be hard to pick out the right points because in fiction there's a lot going on.
Because the story didn't actually happen you might be twisting the philosophy just to make a point.
Because the story isn't true it's hard to understand.
Sometimes it was hard to find the points to pick out because stories have so much in them.
Sometimes you disagree with a story. It isn't always valid because it's the artist's vision.

#3 How would you like to see fiction incorporated into a future philosophy or ethics course?

I would really like this because it incorporates how I live (most popular sort of response).
Okay so long as you also present the regular philosophy stuff (second most popular response).
This fiction stuff isn't really philosophy (a small minority opinion).
More stories and discussion like this.
It would make the class more interesting.
Have a whole book of fiction incorporated into the class. It would help non-majors like me.
I would like to see more of it because it makes me think.
Movies, too.
The same way you just did it.
Not particularly, though I wouldn't discount it entirely.
It's hard for me to go back and forth between fiction and philosophy.

NOTES

1. On July 10, 2010 I hosted a group of students who were in or recently graduated from college and discussed these results with them. I was curious at their contemporary perspective.
4. Ibid.: 5-6. (Italics in original.)
5 Boylan: 238.
6 Ibid.: 240.
7 Ibid.: 244.
10 Andrew Gregg, “Worth Living” (St. Mary’s Project, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, 2007).
11 Gregg, “Worth Living,” 1, 3.
12 Gregg, “Worth Living,” 23.
13 Michael Boylan, “Using Fiction to Teach Philosophy/Ethics” (remarks at the ninth annual meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, Cincinnati, OH, March 6, 2010.)
14 Boylan, “Using Fiction to Teach Philosophy/Ethics.”
20 Boylan and Johnson, Philosophy, 12.
21 See Spence, E. (2004) Philosophy Plays: A Neo-Stoic Method for Teaching Ethics. Utah, USA: Teaching Ethics Volume 5, Number 1, pp 41-57. Please note that though Spence has been using fictive narrative philosophy for years, only his use of the aforesaid films are a part of the empirical data collected for this essay.
22 Alan Gewirth refers to this question as the most fundamental question in morality in his book Reason and Morality, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978).
23 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics