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Narrative Ethics

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1 Definition

Narrative ethics explores the intersections between the domain of stories and storytelling and that of moral values. Narrative ethics regards moral values as an integral part of stories and storytelling because narratives themselves implicitly or explicitly ask the question, “How should one think, judge, and act—as author, narrator, character, or audience—for the greater good?”

2 Explication

2.1 Characteristic Questions and Positions

Investigations into narrative ethics have been diverse and wide-ranging, but they can be usefully understood as focused on one or more of four issues: (1) the ethics of the told; (2) the ethics of the telling; (3) the ethics of writing/producing; and (4) the ethics of reading/reception.

Questions about the ethics of the told focus on characters and events. Sample questions: What are the ethical dimensions of characters’ actions, especially the conflicts they face and the choices they make about those conflicts? What are the ethical dimensions of any one character’s interactions with other characters? How does a narrative’s plot signal its stance on the ethical issues faced by its characters?

Questions about the ethics of the telling focus on text-internal matters involving implied authors, narrators, and audiences. Sample questions: What are the ethical responsibilities, if any, of storytellers to their audiences? What are the ethical dimensions of the narrative’s techniques? How does the use of these techniques imply and convey the values underlying the relations of the storytellers (implied authors and narrators) to their materials (events and characters) and their audiences (narratees, implied readers, actual audiences)? (Schmid → Implied Author [1]; Margolin → Narrator [2]; Schmid → Narratee [3]; Schmid → Implied Reader [4])

Questions about the ethics of writing/producing focus on text-external matters involving actual authors, film directors, or other constructing agents. Sample

questions: What, if any, are the ethical obligations of the constructive agents of the narrative to its materials? For example, what obligations, if any, does a memoir writer have to other people whose experiences s/he narrates? What responsibilities, if any, does a filmmaker adapting a novel have to that novel and its author? What are the ethical implications of choosing to tell one kind of story rather than another in a given historical context? For example, what are the ethics of a fiction writer living under a repressive regime refusing to write about those socio-political conditions? Does developing a narrative about one's own life help one become a better, more ethically sound person?

Questions about the ethics of reading/reception focus on issues about audiences and the consequences of their engagements with narratives. Sample questions: What, if any, are the ethical obligations of the audience to the narrative itself, to its materials, and to its author? What, if any, are the consequences of an audience's success or failure in meeting those obligations? Does reading narrative help one become a better, more ethically sound, person? (Prince → Reader [5])

These four kinds of questions roughly correspond to four ethical *positions* occupied by the main agents involved in stories and storytelling (and again individual investigations vary in how many of these positions they focus on and which ones they make most important): (1) those of characters in relation to each other and to the situations they face; (2) those of the narrator(s) in relation to the characters and to the narratee(s); (3) those of the implied author in relation to the characters, the narrator(s), and the implied and actual audiences; (4) those of actual audience members (and the ethical beliefs they bring to the reading experience) in response to the first three ethical positions.

These questions and positions shed light on the common claim by ethical critics that their investigations are different from "reading for the moral message," since such reading has as its goal extracting a neatly packaged lesson from the ethics of the told (e.g. *Macbeth* teaches us about the evils of ambition). Attending to these four kinds of question and these four positions opens up the multi-layered intersections of narrative and moral values, even in narratives such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* that offer clear answers to questions about the ethics of the told.

2.1 Literary Ethics and Narrative Ethics

Where literary ethics is broadly concerned with the relation between literature and moral values, narrative ethics is specifically concerned with the intersection between various formal aspects of narrative and moral values. Thus, narrative ethics is both broader (including in its domain nonliterary narrative) and narrower

(excluding from its domain nonnarrative texts) than literary ethics. At the same time, narrative ethics can be usefully seen as a recent development in the larger trajectory of literary ethics, one beginning in the late 1980s (cf. § 3 below).

2.2 Narrative Ethics in Relation to Politics and Aesthetic

The four questions and positions of narrative ethics shed light on how inquiries into narrative ethics can overlap with or be distinct from inquiries in two related domains, the politics of narrative and the aesthetics of narrative. Where ethics is concerned with moral values, politics is concerned with power, especially as it is acquired, exercised, and responded to by governments, institutions, social groups, and individuals. Since, in any given acquisition or deployment of power, moral values will inevitably come into play, ethics can be a lens through which some aspects of politics get examined. In addition, since an individual's or a group's application of moral values in any given situation may well be influenced by issues of power, politics can be a lens through which (some aspects of) ethical behavior are examined. In narrative ethics, then, all four categories of questions can include (but are not limited to) questions about the politics of narrative. For example, in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the ethics of the told include Darcy's struggle between his love for Elizabeth and his knowledge that her family is socially inferior to his; the ethics of the telling include Austen's decision to convey the action largely through the consciousness of her young female protagonist rather than, say, through the older, wealthier, and more socially powerful Darcy. The ethics of writing include Austen's focusing on the adventures of the Bennet sisters in the marriage market rather than on the actions of, say, male characters involved in the deliberations of Parliament; and the ethics of reading/reception include whether and how readers can legitimately claim Austen as a feminist. In terms of positions, the fourth one is where the overlap between ethics and politics will be most immediately evident, as, for example, when an individual reader's political stance against marriage as an instrument of patriarchy would lead her to find fault with the ethics of the told in Austen's novel.

Aesthetics is concerned with beauty, or, more generally, the excellence of an art work (or, indeed, of any human construction). The frequent overlap between narrative ethics and narrative aesthetics becomes evident when ethical deficiencies in the told or the telling mar the excellence of a narrative. For example, when in the final chapters of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Mark Twain has Huck go along with Tom Sawyer's "Evasion" and the various ways it dehumanizes Jim, Twain introduces a deficiency that is simultaneously ethical and aesthetic. The Huck who has come to recognize and respect Jim's humanity ought not to condone Jim's dehumanization. Because Twain does not signal anything but approval for Huck's

behavior, this section of the novel introduces deficiencies in both the ethics of the told and of the telling. These deficiencies simultaneously weaken the aesthetics of the novel because they erode the power of the narrative's climactic moment (Huck's decision to go to hell) and verge on making Huck an incoherent character.

Nevertheless, the overlap between narrative ethics and narrative aesthetics is not complete, as becomes evident in cases where ethics seem deficient but aesthetics do not. For example, many readers find the ethics of the told in Nabokov's *Lolita* to be abhorrent even as they admire the beauty of the novel's style.

3 History of the Concept and its Study

3.1 Literary Ethics in Antiquity

Although narrative ethics emerged as a clearly identified realm of study only in the 1980s, the interest in literature's capacity to influence its audience for good or for ill goes back to Plato and Aristotle. Neither philosopher explicitly uses the term ethics in his discussion of literature, but each implicitly recognizes ethics as a substantial part of its appeal to audiences. In addition, the commentaries of the two philosophers provide striking examples of how ethics and aesthetics may overlap and of how a theorist's understanding of ethics is often part and parcel of a broader philosophical vision. In *The Republic*, Plato (1998a: Book X) explains the defects of poetry (by poetry is meant lyric, epic, and drama) from the perspective of his ontological theory of forms, but that perspective has implications for the ethics of the told. Plato claims that poetry is twice removed from the truth: poetry imitates objects in the actual world, but these objects are themselves imitations of the ideal forms. A republic that welcomed such imitations would be doing its citizens an ethical disservice. In *Ion* (1998b), Plato contends that poetry has inherent deficiencies in the ethics of the telling that can lead to deficiencies in the ethics of the told: because poetry appeals to its audience's emotions more than their reason, it can lead its audience to erroneous conclusions about what is good.

Although Aristotle devoted a separate treatise to *Ethics* (actually, two treatises,the *Eudemian Ethics* (1952) and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (2002), the second a revision of the first), he also implicitly assigned ethics an important role in the *Poetics* (1920). He defined tragedy with reference to its emotional effect on the audience: an imitation of an action that arouses pity and fear and culminates in catharsis, i.e. the purging of those emotions. Aristotle's thinking about each part of tragedy follows from this conception of its overall nature, and that thinking often includes an understanding of the intertwining of aesthetics and ethics, especially the ethics of the told. His discussion of character offers a clear example. The optimal tragic

protagonist is a man who is neither extraordinarily virtuous nor extraordinarily immoral and who comes to misfortune not through some major moral failing but as a result of misjudgment. Such a protagonist will evoke fear (because he is like us) and pity (because his misfortune is greater than his ethical character warrants). In this way, Aristotle indicates that the aesthetic quality of tragedy is dependent on the ethical character of the protagonist.

3.3 Literary Ethics before "The Theory Revolution" of the 1970s

After Plato and Aristotle and before the rise of formal criticism in the 20th century, treatises on literature most often focused on the relation of text to world, as commentators continually returned to the concept of imitation. But many treatises, beginning with Horace's *Ars Poetica* (1998), and its dictum that the purpose of literature is to instruct and to delight, also found a place for ethics. By linking the two purposes, Horace emphasized the interaction of the ethics of the told (and its role in instruction) and the ethics of the telling (and its role in delight). To take just two more examples in this tradition, Sidney ([1595] 1998) put ethics front and center, as he argued that literature is superior to both history and philosophy because it has the greater capacity to lead its audiences to virtuous action. And Arnold ([1880] 1998) contended that poetry would one day take the place of religion and philosophy because the best poetry skillfully intertwines aesthetics and ethics.

During the first sixty-plus years of the 20th century, three of the four prominent formalisms—Russian formalism, the New Criticism, and French narratology—moved ethics into the background of literary theory/narrative theory, as they highlighted questions about either the distinctiveness of literature (Russian formalism and New Criticism) or about narrative as a system of signification. The fourth formalism, Chicago neo-Aristotelianism, is a notable exception, as will be discussed below. For the Russian formalists, the distinctiveness of literature resides in its ability to sharpen perceptions by defamiliarizing literature's represented objects. As Šklovskij ([1925] 1990: 5) put it, "Automatization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at fear of war. [I]n order to return sensation to our limbs, to make us feel objects, to make a stone stony, man has been given the tool of art." Literature is the art that defamiliarizes through its distinctive uses of language and through other formal innovations.

The New Critics, whose program became the dominant paradigm in the Anglo-American context between the end of World War II and the late 1960s, identified literariness as inherent in literary language with its capacity for generating complex meanings. More generally, the New Critics conceived of the literary text as an

autonomous structure of language, independent of authorial intention and reader response, and they regarded the successful work as a verbal icon whose beauty arises from the balance achieved by artful juxtapositions of linguistic ambiguities and ironies (cf. Wimsatt & Beardsley [1946a] 1954a, [1946b] 1954b); Brooks 1947; Wellek & Warren [1949] 1956). Such balance, the New Critics argued, captures truths overlooked by the denotative language of the sciences.

Although neither school explicitly addressed questions of ethics, their programs imply some concern with the ethics of the told and the ethics of the telling—and another illustration of overlap between aesthetics and ethics. The effects of defamiliarization—moving readers from automatization to fresh perceptions of the world—clearly have an ethical dimension, and since those effects depend on techniques of various kinds, this aesthetic program also implies an interest in the ethics of the telling. The New Critics' emphasis on the complex truths conveyed by literary language implies a similar double interest in the ethics of the told and the ethics of the telling.

The French narratologists of the 1960s and 1970s were concerned with neither aesthetics nor ethics, but, as heirs to the Russian formalists, with narrative "as an autonomous object of inquiry" (Ryan 2005: 344). Working within the scope of Saussurean semiology and adopting structural linguistics as a "pilot-science," they sought to explore the modes of signification of narrative in all its forms as an international, transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon (cf. Barthes [1966] 1977 : 20) (Meister → Narratology [6]).

Not surprisingly, the Chicago neo-Aristotelians followed Aristotle in making ethics an important implicit part of their approach. Dissatisfied with what they saw as the limitations of the New Critical conception of literature as a special kind of language, they looked back to the *Poetics* and asked how it would have to be revised in order to account for the very different kinds of literary works that had been written since Aristotle's day. Retaining Aristotle's interest in the affective components of form, they implicitly gave ethical judgments, arising from the ethics of the told and of the telling and how they positioned the audience in relation to characters, a significant role in the trajectory of emotional responses generated by plots. Thus, Crane (1952) shows how readers' expectations and desires in *Tom Jones* are a function of multiple factors (including Fielding's careful control of the disclosure of the truth about Tom's parentage), the general pattern of the action (Tom repeatedly gets in and out of increasingly serious scrapes), and the ethical judgments Fielding builds into his representation of his characters. Through these means, Fielding generates the "comic analogue" of fear before fulfilling the audience's desires and bringing the ethically admirable Tom to his happy union with the similarly admirable Sophia

Western. Building on Crane's work and putting even more emphasis on the positions of authors and readers in relation to each other, Booth ([1961] 1983) began to make the ethical consequences of the neo-Aristotelian approach more explicit. In *The Company We Keep* (1988), Booth revisited and greatly expanded this early effort (cf. § 3.4).

3.4 The Theory Revolution as Preparation for the Ethical Turn

In the 1960s the hegemony of the New Criticism began to wane for both intradisciplinary and extradisciplinary reasons with the result that literary criticism became more interdisciplinary. Critics began to chafe under the limitations of the New Critical commitment to the autonomy of the text, a response reinforced by the political upheavals of the decade. As scholars began to connect literature with multiple aspects of the extratextual world, they brought relevant insights of theoretical work in other disciplines to the work of interpretation. Two aspects of these developments helped prepare the way for the ethical turn of the late 1980s.

(1) The rise of poststructuralism and its critique of what Derrida ([1967] 1978: 261) called the "metaphysics of presence," or the effort to ground understanding of the world in solid foundational principles (e.g. God, Descartes' cogito, various binary oppositions such as nature/civilization). Poststructuralism argued that such foundations were either illusory or dependent on erroneously privileging one side of the binary over the other (speech over writing; God over the human; men over women; white over black; mind over body, etc.). This critique gave support to many contextualist, politically-oriented approaches such as feminist criticism, critical race studies, postcolonial criticism, and New Historicism. Practitioners of these approaches argued that what appears to be natural about the status quo—and about literary works that support the status quo—is actually a function of skewed power dynamics that needs to be revised. This emphasis on politics opened the door for attention to ethics, especially the ethics of the told.

(2) The rise and fall of Anglo-American deconstruction, the movement spawned by the engagement of such figures as Hartman, Miller, and de Man with Derrida's analysis of language as a system of signs devoid of any center (Derrida [1967] 1976). In this view, language is a system in which signifieds were determined not by any direct relation to objects or ideas in the world but by the play of signifiers. On the one hand, Anglo-American deconstruction contributed to the breakdown of the New Critical hegemony because its poststructuralist anti-foundationalism undid such valued New Critical concepts as coherence and unity. On the other hand, this development was the logical extension of New Criticism, because it perpetuated the view that literature could be equated with its language and its distinctive ways of

signifying.

Like the New Criticism, Anglo-American deconstruction was initially more concerned with aesthetics (the glory of literary language is its polysemous undecidability) than it was with ethics. Nevertheless, Miller in *The Ethics of Reading* (1987) identified the important ethical consequences of deconstruction by offering its take on the position of the reader. In a characteristic deconstructive paradox, Miller argued that the reader's ethical obligation is to respect the undecidability of the text's language. In other words, the ethical reader will recognize that the nature of language inevitably undermines the search for a determinate ethics of the told.

But Miller's case for deconstructive ethics was eclipsed by the revelation that his deconstructionist colleague at Yale, de Man, had, during World War II, written several anti-Semitic articles for *Le Soir,* a Belgian newspaper that collaborated with the Nazis. In light of the horrific consequences of Nazi anti-Semitism, the position that de Man's wartime writings do not have a determinate ethics of the told appeared to many to be the outcome not of a disinterestedly rigorous reading but of an effort to absolve de Man of responsibility for his repugnant views. After the de Man affair, literary studies became much less interested in undecidability and much more open to other ways of analyzing the intersections of ethics and literature.

3.5 The Ethical Turn: Poststructuralist and Humanist Ethics

Since the late 1980's, the ethical turn has taken two primary forms: poststructuralist ethics and humanist ethics. Because humanist ethics engages more directly with other work in narratology, it gets more attention here.

In the wake of the de Man affair, Derrida developed a greater ethico-political emphasis in his own work (Derrida [1993] 1994) and called attention to the philosophical ethics of Levinas ([1961] 1969, [1974] 1981, [1979] 1987) (see Critchley [1999] for a discussion of deconstructive ethics, focusing on Derrida and Levinas). Levinas argues that the essence of ethical behavior is to respect the otherness of the Other. He uses the metaphor of "the face" and "facing" to convey this position. One shows respect for the Other by facing his/her otherness. This emphasis on the Other dovetails with the political concerns of feminist, postcolonial, and critical race theory as well with disability studies. As a result, the poststructuralist stream emphasizes the ethics of alterity with special attention to the ethics of the told (representations of the other) and the ethics of reading (obligations to face otherness). Different theorists offered variations on the central themes. Harpham (1999: x) defined ethics as an "intimate and dynamic engagement with otherness," while Attridge (1999: 28) maintained that "ethics is [...] the fundamental relation not just between subjects but also between the subject and its

multiple others," adding that this fundamental relation "is not a relation and [it] cannot be named, for it is logically prior to relations and names, prior to logic." Hale (2007, 2009), in her meta-analyses of the poststructuralist ethics of the novel, highlighted the recurrent attention to the ethics of reading and its injunctions to respect and to be responsible to the otherness of the text itself. Hale (2007) further noted that on this point poststructuralist and humanist ethics, including the rhetorical ethics of Booth, have much in common.

Humanist ethics acknowledges otherness as important for ethical engagements with narrative, but it emphasizes the benefits of connecting across difference. Booth's *The Company We Keep* (1988) and Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge* (1990) were foundational texts for humanist ethics. While neither earned universal acclaim, together they moved ethics to a prominent place in narrative theory and prepared the way for Newton's claim in *Narrative Ethics* (1995) that the two domains are inseparable.

To appreciate Booth's reflections on ethics and literature, it is helpful to start with his work on the rhetoric of fiction ([1961] 1983). Booth initially focused on the efficacy of overt authorial rhetoric in the novel, arguing that such rhetoric cannot be judged by a priori aesthetic dicta such as "true art ignores the audience." Instead, it needs to be assessed according to its effectiveness in advancing the larger purposes of its author's construction. In developing this case, Booth reached two broader conclusions. (1) Since an author's use of any technique has effects on the novel's audience, the author cannot choose whether or not to employ rhetoric but only which kind of rhetoric to employ. (2) The effects of rhetoric on the audience include cognitive, aesthetic, affective, and ethical ones, often in close interaction with one another. In a chapter on the ethics of the telling entitled "The Morality of Impersonal Narration" (Booth [1961] 1983: 377–98), Booth noted that Jamesian center-of-consciousness narration and unreliable character narration tend to generate sympathy, even when used in the representation of ethically deficient characters. As a result, Booth pointed out, these rhetorical choices may lead readers to overlook those deficiencies. The upshot of the chapter is not to condemn these techniques, but rather to strike a cautionary note about their ethical effects.

In the Afterword to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* ([1961] 1983), Booth expressed some dissatisfaction with this argument, in part because he had let his personal moral commitments influence his rhetorical analyses. Later, Booth (1988) returned to his earlier conclusions and incorporated them into a more explicit discussion of ethics as an integral component of rhetoric. He employed the metaphor of books as friends to convey his view of the ethics of reading. Exploring this metaphor, Booth emphasized three key points: (1) friends are of different

kinds—some are good for us and some aren't—and their effects on the individual may vary depending on when, where, and why they are encountered; (2) many of these effects follow from the ways in which these friends guide one's trajectory of desires; (3) one of the key functions of narrative fiction is to expand readers' experiences as they follow these trajectories of desire. Booth offers numerous exemplifications of these principles, most notably in extended analyses of ethical virtues and deficiencies in the telling and told of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Where Booth's work arose out of a tradition of literary criticism, Nussbaum's arose out of an effort to revise a tradition of philosophical inquiry into ethics. And where Booth was influenced by Aristotle's way of thinking about parts in relation to wholes, Nussbaum, a classicist and a philosopher, was influenced by his discussions of ethics. She noted that ethics is that branch of philosophy concerned with Aristotle's question of what the good life consists of, but she was dissatisfied with the ways analytic philosophy approached that question. Its style of reasoning, she argued, created a disconnect between its form and its content: how can one adequately discuss, say, an ethical struggle arising out of being in love through the abstractions of analytic philosophy? Novels, by contrast, seek to fit content to form (and vice versa), i.e. to set up mutually reinforcing relations between the ethics of the told and the ethics of the telling. As a result, novels conduct ethical inquiry in ways that are superior to those of analytic philosophy. More specifically, novels explore the concrete particularity of ethical dilemmas faced by fully realized characters, and those explorations harness the cognitive power of the emotions. Nussbaum (1997, 2000) later went on to make a case for the value of the ethical engagements offered by novel reading when we turn to matters of public policy and to widen her scope to basic issues of human rights.

Newton departs from the Aristotelian emphases of Booth and Nussbaum as he stakes out a position that regards narrative and ethics as inseparable. He develops his own approach by sythesizing concepts from Baxtin, Cavell, and Levinas. From Baxtin ([1986] 1993), he borrows the concept of 'vživanie', or 'live-entering' (empathy with the Other without loss of self); from Cavell (1979), the concept of acknowledging (being in a position of having to respond); and from Levinas ([1974] 1981, [1979] 1987) the concepts of the Said (the told), Saying (performing a telling) and Facing (looking at or looking away). Newton (1995: 11) describes his project as the investigation of the "ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalizing person, and the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness, and reader in that process." He uses his triumvirate of thinkers to good effect as he offers thoughtful, nuanced analyses of the interrelations of the ethics of the telling and the ethics of the told in fiction by Dickens, Conrad, James, Ishiguro, and others. Like Nussbaum,

Newton (1998, 2001, 2005) has gone on to expand and develop his approach in later books, and in an essay on teaching narrative theory (2010), he revisits his conception of narrative as ethics by developing the metaphor that narrative and ethics haunt each other.

Altieri (2003) has objected to what he sees as the excessively rational basis of Booth's and especially of Nussbaum's ethics. He has thus argued for a mode that can do better justice to what he calls the "particulars of rapture," a mode of reading analogous to the sublime, in which affect overpowers rational judgment. Keen (2007, 2011 ed.) has offered another important contribution to work on the relation between affect and ethics (Keen → Narrative Empathy [7]).

Phelan (2005, 2007, 2013) has sought to extend, clarify, and refine Booth's work on the integral connection between rhetoric and ethics by highlighting the significance and centrality of ethical judgments in the experience of reading narrative. Phelan argued that, given the variety of ethical thought on display in the world's narratives, it is valuable to do rhetorical ethics not only from the outside in, as Nussbaum and Newton do, but also from the inside out. That is, rather than privilege the ethical systems of one or more thinkers, the analyst can seek to uncover the ethical values underlying the specific rhetorical exchanges of a particular narrative. As part of his work on unreliable character narration, Phelan has put forth the idea that its ethical consequences can have effects ranging along a spectrum from bonding (Huck Finn's naiveté leads him to be ethically unreliable in a way that increases the reader's sympathy for him) to estranging (Jason Compson's selfishness and pride lead to negative readerly judgments). Phelan (2011) has extended this work on the ethics of unreliability by examining the ethics of "deficient narration," i.e. narration that authors signal as reliable but readers find "off-kilter," such as Huck Finn's narration in much of the Evasion section of Twain's novel.

3.6 Ethics and the Narrative Identity Thesis

Questions about the ethics of writing/composing have extended beyond the domain of literary narrative to the domain of identity (Bamberg → Identity and Narration [8]). Many philosophers and psychologists (e.g., MacIntyre [1981], Bruner [1987], and Schechtman [1997]) have advanced the view that conceiving of one's life as a narrative is essential to having a self. As Strawson (2004) pointed out in an essay contesting this thesis about narrative identity, the view has both a descriptive psychological component (this is how human beings experience their lives) and a normative ethical component (having a narrative identity enables one to live a better life). Strawson rejected both components of the narrative identity thesis. Although he did not deny that some people experience their lives as narratives, he

disputed that all (or even most) people do. Citing his own experience, he distinguished between Diachronics (those who do experience their lives as narratives) and Episodics (those who do not). He objected even more strongly to the ethical component of the narrative identity thesis, arguing that (1) having a narrative of one's life often entails distorting the past and thus taking one further away from accurate self-understanding and (2) that one can live ethically without having a narrative of one's life.

Strawson's argument did not lead to a wholesale rejection of the narrative identity thesis, and indeed some commentators found fault with his reasoning (Battersby 2006). But both the thesis and Strawson's effort to debunk it point to the high stakes of questions about narrative ethics.

4 Topics for Further Investigation

Altieri's objections to Booth and Nussbaum indicate that the interrelations between the affective and ethical dimensions of reading deserve further examination. Hale's (2007, 2009) work indicates that those doing poststructuralist ethics and those doing humanist ethics could learn from each other without giving up their distinctive projects. The similarities and differences among the ethical dimensions of narrative in different media are also worthy of further study. (For some valuable initial work in this area on film narrative, see Richter 2005, 2007.) Ethics in lifewriting (Eakin 2004), in medical narrative (Charon 2006), in legal narrative (Brooks 2001), and in other domains involved in the narrative turn also deserve further investigation. More generally, as the recent collection *Narrative Ethics* (Lothe & Hawthorn 2013) indicates, because the domains of narrative and ethics are themselves so vast and their interactions so varied, we can expect that exploration of their intersections will continue to excite much debate and to yield rich results.

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