What Fictive Narrative Philosophy Can Tell Us: Stories, Cases, and Thought Experiments†

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Resumen

Este ensayo discutirá algunos de los modos en que la narrativa trabaja para promover la filosofía, llamada filosofía narrativa de ficción. La estrategia es discutir las maneras en que trabaja el discurso directo e indirecto y mostrar por qué el discurso indirecto llena un vacío importante que el discurso directo no puede satisfacer. En el curso de este examen, serán analizados diferentes filósofos de la narrativa ficcional como Platon, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Murdoch, Johnson, y Camus. Ellos utilizan el discurso indirecto para hacer plausible a los lectores la visión que están presentando. El artículo muestra algunas restricciones a este proceso.
PALABRAS CLAVE: Platón, ficción, filosofía narrativa de ficción, experimentos mentales, casos de ética.

Abstract

This essay will discuss some of the ways that narrative works to promote philosophy, called fictive narrative philosophy. The strategy is to discuss the ways that direct and indirect discourse work and to show why indirect discourse fills an important void that direct discourse cannot fulfill. In the course of this examination several famous narrative-based philosophers are examined such as Plato, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Murdoch, Johnson, and Camus. These practitioners used the indirect method to make plausible to readers the vision that they were presenting. This article also offers some constraints in this process.
KEY WORDS: Plato, fiction, fictive narrative philosophy, thought experiments, ethical cases.

Most everyone would agree that narrative literature can create a *display* that is amenable to interpretation via various critical theories (among which are philosophical). In this case the philosopher is the critic who reconstructs his close textual reading with a theoretical overlay. What is more controversial is whether narrative literature can on its own *set out claims* that are relevant to philosophical discussions and contribute (as narrative) to the philosophical debate.[1]

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† Examples of this pedagogy can be found in my co-authored book with Charles Johnson. A version of this essay was presented at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles as *The Larkin Lecture.* I also presented this talk at Universidad de Valparaiso, Chile. Recibido: octubre 2013. Aceptado: noviembre 2013.

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[1] The literature on this question is quite eclectic. Various writers approach the question quite differently. For

This essay seeks to discuss ways various sorts of narrative work to promote philosophy in this second sense. I will call such strategies: fictive narrative philosophy. The direction of the presentation will focus first upon the narrative presentation of philosophical concepts from a highly select historical survey that points to certain positions and second to critically evaluating this application through stories, cases, and thought experiments.

Part One: Narrative Presentations

Why fictive narrative philosophy? Though philosophy today is largely about direct deductive discourse, this has not always been the case.[2] The most famous practitioner of narrative as a vehicle for philosophical discourse is Plato. In his early dialogues there is often sprightly fictive action (generally with some historical underpinnings) that conscripts the audience to enter the dramatic scene wherein the argument is engaged. Audiences connect to this method of presenting philosophy. Students connect to this. Most philosophy teachers have used early and middle Platonic dialogues (such as the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *The Republic*) to present issues in ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics to introductory students. One of the reasons for this is that students are more likely to get the point of Plato's presentation than they would of Aristotle's or Kant's (who don't employ narrative). Why is this?

It has been my contention in the past that the acceptance of normative theories requires the introduction of empirical content[3] to situate the claims into a possible world context in order for the agent to make an authentic decision.[4] This is because authentic decisions are made within the context of one's personal worldview.[5] The personal worldview contains one's understanding of all legitimate facts and values about the world. These facts and values are generally understood by the agent in some mental form that is quite empirically suggestive. For example, if one held that euthanasia is permissible (as an example of a value) this might be connected to her experience of her mother's terribly debilitating death whose intense pain in hospice went on for twice the estimated time (with no perceivable quality of life). Whenever she thinks about euthanasia, her mother's story is always in the backdrop. In a similar way, abstract principles

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some of the literature that influenced this essay see the following that are at least somewhat sympathetic to my approach: Ross (1969), Gooding-Williams (1986), Skilleas (2006), Leigh Anderson (1992), Blanchot (1992), Mulhall (2002 and 2007). For those opposed see: Mueller (1948), Richards (1949)—especially 274, 279, Nelson (1997), and Megill (1985). I should also mention an eclectic presentation of the philosophy of narrative that engages issues related to but differently directed than this essay: Noël Carroll (2009).

[2] Some would say that it must contain direct deductive arguments, see: Megill (1985): 61-62.

[3] 'Empirical content' throughout most of this essay will refer to the descriptive detail that is present in stories. This descriptive detail helps make the story *picturable* to the reader so that she might be able to situate the claim within the context of her imagined, vicarious lived experience. It is to be contrasted to a presentation that was largely symbolic or abstract. It is especially effective when the proposed events are explicitly causally linked: (a) "The King died, and then the Queen died" has a sort of empirical content, but (b) "The King died, and then the Queen died of grief" is much richer, cf. E. M. Forester (1954).

[4] 'Authenticity' and 'sincerity' are given specification in Boylan (2004): 21-31, 43-45. These acts together to enable integration of the claim into the reader's own life experience. For a description of the mechanics of this process in the context of my work in social/political philosophy see: Churchill (2011): 7-26.

[5] This connection to authenticity and sincerity to personal worldview is set out in Boylan (2004): ch. 2.

gain both integration and intensity when presented within the context of a narrative: either from one's actual life or vicariously via a gripping story.

The personal worldview is holistic.[6] It combines our scientific understanding of the world along with our values about beauty, ethics, and religion. Most of us aren't as compartmentalized as Aristotle so that when we are confronted with claims that aspire to be *about* our experience in the world, we try to fashion our understanding of the claim and our responses to it from a characterization of the empirical manifold as dictated by our personal worldview. (As opposed to Aristotle who, along with Kant, seemed to be able to pigeon hole the inputs into a segregated, non-holistic table of categories—at least that is what they profess.)[7]

What happens here cognitively is that various aspects of our consciousness are stimulated in a synergistic manner. The message presented is very enthymematic. Lots of material is left out precisely because this is the *modus operandi* of indirect discourse (the presentation mode of fictive narrative philosophy). It is up to the audience (each individually) to fill in the gaps. This requirement creates the necessity of active audience participation since, in a very real way; they are part of the reconstruction process. The manner of the reconstruction is a dialogue between the text and the personal worldview of the reader. However, it is *not* the case that any reconstruction will do. Narrative-based philosophy makes specific claims (as opposed to fashioning a general *display* that may be interpreted in contradictory manners by various philosopher-critics). These narrative-based claims require readers not only to reconstruct the claims within the narrative context of the presentation but also within the real-life experience of the reader. A similar process occurs when direct deductive presentations are made. The difference is that the direct deductive-based presentation may have less variance in reader reconstruction (due to its simpler structure) than indirect fictive narrative presentations, but it will also have less suggestive application. This is because direct deductive-based philosophy (aka direct discourse philosophy) consciously limits itself to straightforward propositions and inferences. On the other hand, indirect fictive narrative philosophy creates a directed blueprint for the exploration of a problem from a particular point of view (the narrative claim).

The empirically suggestive (descriptively detailed) indirect fictive-narrative philosophy-presentation is more gripping than the more simple architecture of direct deductive-based philosophy because it connects to the personal worldview in more ways than a simple abstract rational presentation. (The more touch-points to the personal worldview, the more *real* the presentation seems to the agent. The *real* in this context is that which is easier to project into one's personal worldview and thus to imagine in all of its potential global significance. The act of worldview projection allows the reader to be able more completely to imagine the claims presented in a situated context.)[8]

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[6] My views on the nature of a personal worldview and its normative structure are set out in Boylan (2004): ch. 2 and Boylan (2009-a): ch. 2.

[7] My treatment of Aristotle's and Kant's aesthetical theories can be found in part three of my book, Boylan (2008).

[8] 'Projection' of a claim into a rich background has other uses as well, cf. Goodman (1955): chaps. 3 - 4 and his use in evaluating claims in the philosophy of science. It should also be noted that Goodman was also

Now, it is true that most of us (academic philosophers) are just fine with abstract deductive presentations that are largely devoid of empirical content. But it is my conjecture that the reason for this is that we provide the empirically suggestive content to ourselves as part of the process of our *understanding* a theory (Boylan, 2004: 11 – 13). We do it so very quickly and efficiently that we may not even be aware that we are doing it.

If this process of understanding novel normative theories is correct, then empirical suggestiveness is necessary for all of us. Either we provide it ourselves or the author does it for us. If we cannot provide this empirical content and if the author hasn't done it for us, then we will not be able to present the theory to our personal worldview for proper evaluation.

I became convinced of the necessity of empirically suggestive content for understanding philosophical claims early in my teaching career when my students were unable to answer the question I posed to them about whether John Rawls (from his presentation in *A Theory of Justice*) would support the "trickle-down" economic policy of Ronald Regan (then a contemporary example). The students, for the most part, were at a loss. They could do very well when I questioned them *within* the theory. But they were not so good at providing empirical content to address a novel normative situation.

Now some readers might say that I just had poor students. This might be true. But why were they 'poor?' I would suggest that it was because they could not supply the empirical content that would allow them to project Rawls's theory into their personal worldview.

Plato is very good here because his narrative accounts (especially when enhanced by a knowledgeable instructor) captivate the reader with an empirically suggestive presentation. They can make all sorts of applications based upon the author's indirect presentation via empirical content (descriptive detail). When Socrates dies after having all sorts of opportunities to escape, his argument in the *Crito* resonates to readers about a strong obligation to obey an implicit contract with the state. Or when Euthyphro or Thrasymachus becomes impatient with Socrates' dogged arguments, the dramatic irony of each situation gives the argument more power. To fully get the point, one must engage not only in argument reconstruction but also literary criticism.[9] The combination is stronger than a mere direct deductive presentation.

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keenly interested in the philosophical dimensions of art. A related concept comes from German art criticism in the form of 'empathy.' 'Empathy' is a word that (according to the Oxford English Dictionary) entered the language in 1912 as a translation of *ein* (in) + *fühlung* (feeling) into English after the writings of Lipps (1912). Lipps set forth a theory of literary criticism based upon one's ability to project himself into the work of art. This is similar in content to Keats's "negative capability" or Eliot's "objective correlative." For a discussion on the historical development of this term in English see: Wispé (1987). Wispé puts the date into English at 1909. This essay would accept the affective input as an instance of how narrative-based philosophy operates differently from deductive-based philosophy.

[9] Here I'm thinking of a sort of literary criticism that holds the text as having a certain objective status. This objective status can be enhanced by various contexts. This is no different from any direct deductive presentation: there is the text; there are the claims derived from the text; there is a reconstruction of the argument for the claims; but finally there is the context in which all of these are *understood*. Herein lies the place for literary criticism in narrative-based philosophy, cf. Boylan (2008):188-208.

But what exactly happens when Plato presents one of his dialogues? Some would say that in Plato, it is the direct deductive argument that goes on between Socrates and his foil (that can easily be reconstructed into formal or informal notation). This direct deductive argument is all the philosophy that is taking place. Everything else is merely noise or pretty trappings. But it isn't philosophy. These might be what Robert Gooding-Williams calls the *Carnap sympathizers*.[10] These individuals are especially suspicious of any philosophical presentation that isn't directly related to Humean matters of fact (empirical science) and relations of ideas (mathematics used to express claims in empirical science). These Carnap sympathizers believe as sincerely in the absolute separation of empirical statements and theory statements as they do between direct deductive-based philosophy and indirect fictive narrative philosophy. For the Carnap sympathizers direct deductive-based philosophy is grounded in hard-nosed scientific empirical truth. The role of indirect fictive narrative presentations is merely to entertain: an amusing light diversion.[11]

This essay will not support the 'light diversion' approach and instead will seek its solution from Plato. Plato presents a powerful reflection on this sort of argument as he draws attention to his own methodological reflections on big philosophical questions at the beginning of the *Timaeus*.[12] It might be that on some of the most central issues of philosophy (especially if one grants a legitimate role to traditional metaphysics contra Carnap), that there are *gaps* in what we can argue. I have elsewhere described this gap as the 'rationality incompleteness conjecture' (Boylan, 2008). The rationality incompleteness conjecture calls into question the sort of certainty that William Kingdom Clifford depicts as the common test of knowledge (empirical science only) that can exhaustively explain all there is (Clifford, 1901). If Clifford is correct, then so are the Carnap sympathizers.

The rationality incompleteness conjecture claims that it isn't as simple as that. Whether we are monist-materialists or dualists (or some hybrid), the rationality incompleteness conjecture suggests that some the topography of truth is often hidden from direct physical inspection. For those intrepid souls who agree with Plato and me, there is a necessity for a mode of expression that is suggestive of that hidden territory. Indirect discourse fictive narrative philosophy is the best candidate to put these sorts of these conjectures forward. This is also consistent with Plato's argument in the *Timaeus* (27d6-29e) in which he sets out that the best we can obtain in exploring fundamental cosmology is *a likely story*. Though there is specificity in Plato's argument, one can extend the point generally to the fact that humans have only limited exposure to the Forms so that we are forced to fill in the rest. So how do we fill things in? Plato chose indirect discourse fictive narrative philosophy, and I think he's right.

Presenting Indirect Discourse Fictive Narrative Philosophy. Some philosophers present a complicated narrative structure within the conceit of examining a short

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[10] Goodings-Williams (1986) is referring to Carnap's remarks about Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* in the context of deflating metaphysics: Carnap (1978).

[11] I discuss some of this antagonism within the philosophical establishment with fiction in my article, Boylan (2011).

[12] Timaeus 29d 2, ton eikota muthon.

fictive account. Søren Kierkegaard takes the Biblical story of Abraham being called on by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. One can read Kierkegaard's account and come up with the following deductive reconstruction:[13]

1. Abraham was willing to kill his son Isaac—[F]act

2. [Killing one's son is murder]—F

3. [Murder is beyond the ethical]—F

4. Abraham was willing to go beyond the ethical—1-3

5. Offering one's child to the Lord means attaching your child to God—[A]ssertion

6. Attaching your child to anything is weaning the child—A

7. Weaning the child is a sad experience—F

8. Offering Isaac to God is a sad experience for Abraham—5-7

9. If Abraham did not act as a monster, Isaac would not have been weaned nor gone to the Lord—A

10. [As a man of faith, Abraham had to do what was necessary to deliver his only child to God]—A

11. [Doing what is sad and acting the part of the monster alienates the self from others]—F

12. The man of faith alienates his friends and loved ones in his quest beyond the ethical—4, 8, 9, 10, 11

Though this may be a justified reconstruction of one of the many interpretative arguments that Kierkegaard gives, it is by no means complete. The reason for this is that fictive narrative is so suggestive in empirical content that it beckons the reader to delve further. The deductive claims are external for all to see and reconstruct.[14] But there is more. Thus, the reader enters into the worldview of the perceived narrator (not Kierkegaard) to complete the task that is only just suggested—in this case a version of the Abraham-Isaac story. Because the reader is enlisted as a partner in the enterprise, she feels empowered to add what she feels is necessary to give the scene its requisite wholeness. This more empirically suggestive version bubbles over with complexity. Its nuanced character reminds the reader of the rich variety of lived experience. In this way

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[13] From Kierkegaard (1941): 26-29. I would like to note here my discussions with Seán Boylan on indirect discourse and Kierkegaard. These discussions helped me formulate my views on this text.

[14] I go through a mechanical process of translating visual and narrative data into direct deductive discourse in Boylan (2009-b): chapter 4.

the narrative rises to some sort of level of realistic imitation. And as critics throughout history have suggested, imitation is a principal draw in aesthetics.[15]

Another practitioner of the use of short narrative to stimulate a philosophical discussion is Friedrich Nietzsche. In his work, *The Joyful Wisdom* he relates a short original narrative of a town that declares God is dead. The stranger who enters the town (the reader) is confounded by this situation and forced to make some sense of it. One deductive reconstruction of the argument is:[16]

1. The modern prophet must declare that God is dead—[A]ssertion

2. [God had provided the raison d'être of morality]—A

3. The modern prophet must declare a new grounding of morality—1, 2

4. There are two sources for a new morality: (a) from the noble masters, or (b) from the base slaves—A

5. The masters stand for noble virtues: gratitude, friendship, love of freedom, instinct for happiness, and a passion for love—A

6. The virtues of the masters are exalted and good—A

7. We should accept the masters' morality—5, 6

8. Slave morality is the opposite of the masters' virtue; it is based upon crass utility—A

9. [Crass utility is bad]—A

10. Slave morality should be rejected—8, 9

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11. With the death of God, the new morality should be modeled after the noble master morality as opposed to the base slave morality—3, 4, 7, 10

What makes Nietzsche's reconstruction different from Kierkegaard's is that in Nietzsche's case he created the fable. Kierkegaard made use of a text well entrenched in the cannon of Western consciousness. The presenter was a narrator who was, himself, a character in the presentation. Because of this, the cornerstone of truth in Kierkegaard's case was the text he chose. The text was secure and now only the interpretation by his separate narrator was novel.

In Nietzsche's case, the text and the interpretations were novel. There is thus no cornerstone of accepted canonical truth that readers will accept almost automatically. In its place, Nietzsche offers a bizarre tale that stands on its own as a small piece of

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[15] I go over some more prominent examples in part three of Boylan (2008).

[16] Nietzsche's The Joyful Wisdom—see also Zarathustra.

literature. Its internal beauty confers its place of acceptance. In cases in which the philosopher and the fictive presenter are the same, there is a double burden. If the fictive piece is not compelling, the comments on the same will dissolve into the morning mist. It will never be examined except by an inspired few. In Nietzsche's case the narrator is the author. This adds a direct dimension to an otherwise indirect process.

When the fictive author and the philosopher are combined (Plato and Nietzsche),[17] then we can assume that there is some sort of complicated interaction between: (a) the direct deductive presentation of an argument in the simplified realm of formal or informal logic, and (b) the indirect and empirically more suggestive/complicated presentation in an imitation of experience that would resonate within the personal worldview of each member of the audience.

Some of this has to do with the content that the author wishes to express to his audience. Nietzsche and Plato have rather complex messages. What they want readers to accept are major worldview alterations. This is a tough task. Whereas direct discourse deductive presentations are persuasive for minor alterations of worldview architecture, they are not very good for major changes. We have only to look at the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea and his paradoxes of motion. He had wonderful deductive arguments that could not be surmounted, but he had few converts that motion was an impossible illusion. Likewise, Anselm of Canterbury garnered few converts with his ontological argument. The reason for this is that major worldview changes in the audience only come about when something richer than a mere deductive presentation is offered. What is missing is the empirically suggestive (narrative detail) content that allows people to imagine changing the way they think about things in a major way. Since the downside of major change is substantial we are naturally very conservative about considering this.

What is needed is a form of presentation that is more holistically engaging: fictive narrative. Only with an empirically suggestive (narrative detail) presentation can philosophers really change readers in a fundamental way.[18]

So far in this essay the examples of fictive narrative philosophy have been from philosophers who have used narrative in a minor (though important) role in their presentation of complex ideas that belie regular direct discourse philosophy. If we were to create a way to track this process, it might look like this:

(Level-One)	(Level-Two)	(Level-Three)
Claim dominates Story	Balance	Story dominates/Claim hidden
Table One: The Continuum of Story and Claim in Fictive Narrative Philosophy[19]		

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[17] There is a great debate on when the historical Socrates ceases to be a figure in his own right and then becomes a transparent mouthpiece of the author, Plato. For an introduction to this debate see: Osborne (2006), Ebert (2002), and Morrison (2000).

[18] Many philosophers don't care about changing the worldviews of their readers. They see themselves engaged in a sort of 'king of the mountain' game in which they put forth a claim with a deductively elegant argument. The challenge to other philosophers is to try to prove them wrong. If others do not, then they can trot out a *mission accomplished* banner and strut about well pleased.

[19] In the thought experiment section of this essay I will make one emendation: ground zero as a sub-category of level-one fictive narrative philosophy.

What this table intends to convey is that there are two poles: the story and the claim. When the story takes a backseat to the claim (as in Plato and Nietzsche), we have a level-one presentation of fictive narrative philosophy. However, there are two other levels to consider (when they are balanced and when the story predominates and the claim must be ferretted out). This leads to the final set of examples: those whose fictive presentation are more substantial—such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Iris Murdoch, Charles Johnson, and Albert Camus. These four follow a bit on a continuum of thinkers who are keen on conveying philosophical ideas indirectly via fictive narrative. Beginning with Sartre, there is a background of published conventional writings on philosophy—from the continental tradition of philosophy. These writings set out in direct fashion his ideas on existentialism and the history of philosophy. This body of well-received conventionally presented philosophy allows Sartre to be less didactic in his fictive presentations than earlier writers such as Plato, Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche. In those cases, there was always a direct touchstone to apologue. However in "No Exit," *Nausea*, and *Troubled Sleep*, Sartre presents narratives that stand on their own terms as stories. Those readers unaware of Sartre's philosophical works can enjoy the presentations as plays or novels in their own right. The critical understanding of what these works *mean* is tied up with the texts themselves. Thus, Sartre's philosophical writings become a mere device in "author-intent" criticism. Others, who choose not to employ author-intent in their assessment of the work, will seek alternate means to ferret out meaning. They will rely upon contemporary theories of critical theory for their detective work such as: formalism, structuralism and deconstruction, reader-response, psychoanalytic, Marxist, new historicism, cultural studies, feminism, queer theory, and post-colonialism, et al. The independence of Sartre's fictive writings was so extraordinary that he was offered the Nobel Prize in literature in 1964 (which he declined). However, because of Sartre's separate philosophical writings, he must always hover around level-two in the figure-one chart.

Murdoch is in somewhat the same position, except that her fictive writings were her front line of communication. Though she published around thirty non-fiction philosophical pieces (reviews, essays, books), they were never the touchstone of her primary identity to readers. She was foremost a novelist.   In such critically acclaimed works as *An Accidental Man, The Green Knight, The Sea, the Sea* (winner of the Booker Prize)*,* and *The Black Prince*, Murdoch fictively presents stories that excite our interest in foundational ethics and epistemology.[20] Since Murdoch leads with her fiction, her philosophical writings are secondary. Thus, there is an even purer sense of letting fiction, itself, carry the author's message forward.[21] In this case one should use her fiction to illuminate her non-fiction. This is turning Sartre on his head! But what follows from this? It is simply that the empirically suggestive indirect discourse connects with the audience such that they feel they have entered her worldview perspective. Thus, when

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[20] In a very suggestive published dissertation Guy Backus believes that the best example for Murdoch is *The Unicorn*. He thinks that metaphysics as ontology is Murdoch's primary goal (seen in the context of neo-Platonism). Some of the works I mention above he believes to be too close to the living-breathing author so that narrative-based philosophy really doesn't happen. Backus' position is rather toward the apologue in my chart. See: Backus (1986).

[21] Much of Iris Murdoch's philosophical writings can be found in, Murdoch (1970 and 1993). For an evaluation of Murdoch's philosophy in relation to her novels—especially *The Unicorn* see: Bachus (1986).

Murdoch engages in her direct deductive discourse, the rather sparser landscape is enhanced by the reader's previous experience of the more vital fictive presentation. Murdoch is thus a step between level two and level three.

Charles Johnson moves us one step away from Murdoch (toward step three). He is an academically qualified philosopher (Ph.D.) who taught English/American literature in the academy. However, unlike Murdoch, Johnson has no sustained philosophical opus in academic philosophy journals that we can use to engage in criticism as we could with Sartre. Johnson's presentation of philosophy begins with his worldview tenets of Buddhism and the African-American experience—both in the distant past in *Oxherding Tales,* 1983, *Middle Passage,* 1990 (National Book Award), and in the recent past *Faith and the Good Thing,* 1974/2001, *Dreamer,* 1998. In this way Johnson connects to Sartre's historicism as he produces novels of social protest and beyond—determined via the connection to shared community worldview.[22]

In Albert Camus, (Nobel Prize for literature, 1957) we make the classification complete (step three fictive narrative philosophy). Camus was not an academic. He was not trained professionally in philosophy and yet in his works *The Stranger*, *The Fall*, and *The Plague* he left an indelible philosophical mark on his audience. This may be the purest sense of fictive narrative philosophy: novels written by non-academics who see the indirect discourse of fiction as their only way to communicate what they see as true.[23] Because of this, it is unclear whether the narrator's vision and the author's vision are separate and should be differentiated.

The continuum of this presentation can be given a simple depiction as follows:

	Plato	Kierkegaard	Nietzsche	Sartre	Murdoch	Johnson	Camus
Uses Fiction To deliver a message via indirect discourse	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Uses long fictive presentations	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Has a body of direct-deductive philosophy apart from the fictive presentations that is *primary*	n	n	y	y	n/y	n	n
Uses fictive narratives as the *primary* presentation of philosophy	y	y	n	n	y	y	y
Overwhelmingly	n	y	n	n	n	y	y

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[22] A very interesting collection of essays on Johnson as a philosophical novelist is: Conner and Nash (2007).

[23] Camus did write popular essays, but they were more directed as popular commentary than academic philosophy.

devoted to fictive narrative expressions							
Is openly di-dactic	y	y	y	y	n	n	n
Is coy in the presentation requiring the audience to fill in the enthy-meme gaps	y/n	y	y	y	y	y	y
Is part of the academy	y	y	y	y	y	y	n
Table Two: Various Approaches to Narrative-Based Philosophy							

Table two focuses upon a few aspects of presenting fictive narrative philosophy. Some of the key points to mention are: 1. Some philosophers lead with their direct deductive presentation (level-one) while others lead with fictive presentations (levels-two and three). 2. Some philosophers are openly didactic exploiting the advantages of indirect discourse while not wanting to throw the door open to just *any* interpretation (levels-one and two). 3. Some philosophers prefer to be non-didactic and by taking this strategy allow for a greater range of interpretations (level three).

In the end, each of these various categories exists on a continuum (table one). It would be my contention that when an author wants to create major worldview change on the part of his audience that he will be more effective if he employs some form of narrative: long fictive apologue, long conventional fiction, or short narratives (stories, parables, thought experiments, and cases). The reason for this is because of the suggestive empirical content that the fictive presentation brings forward. I have contended elsewhere that suggestive empirical content helps most people understand a claim to such an extent that they are able to project it into their personal worldview.[24] Because of the greater number of contact points that empirically suggestive narrative-based philosophy engenders, it is able to engage the personal worldview of most readers more strongly than direct, deductive-based presentations (that offer fewer worldview contact points). It also sits as an invitation for personal reconstruction in ways not entirely conscripted by the author. The line of demarcation between *narrative-based philosophy* and *fictive display* that is amenable to a philosophical reconstruction is that in the case of narrative-based philosophy the text presents itself (with or without author intent) as making truth claims that take the form of being *likely stories* that suggest ways to illumine those inevitable shadows that lurk about the topography of truth.

The structure of fictive claims can be discovered within the text through the examination of various narrative devices—such as carefully crafted plot situations or the presentation of physical detail within a context, or dialogue between characters that

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[24]I make this point in Boylan (2004): ch. 2. A related—though very different—perspective comes from the particularists. For an example of their views see: Dancy (2006), cf. Raz (2006), and Lance and Little (2006).

present truth claims. The boundaries of the claim made in fictive narrative philosophy will be less precise than deductive presentations, but they are many times more engaging to readers. Fictive narrative philosophy creates a stronger partnership of author and reader. The greater the suggestiveness of the narrative, the greater the audience engagement and cooperative ownership is likely to be. Because this process is so powerful, it is very important that practitioners obey some guidelines unless they want to be subject to the charge of corrupting their audience—a serious offense that mistakenly cost of life of at least one prominent philosopher.

Part Two: Applying Fictive Narratives, Cases, and Thought Experiments

In part one the advantages of fictive narrative philosophy were set out on a scale of three levels. At the end was an ominous caveat of a downside of using the power of fictive narrative philosophy to corrupt. So what is there about the process of the audience engaging with fictive narratives (of any length), novels, short stories, cases, and thought experiments that needs some rules to prevent audience corruption? I have argued elsewhere that *sincerity* and *authenticity* are necessary dispositions for the creation of the good will.[25] I take 'sincerity' to mean those who approach their considerations about truth using their highest capacities. Those sincere folk who also fulfill their quest within a reliable framework will also be called 'authentic.'[26] Those who present fictive narratives that are structured principally to be persuasive (without regard for what is ultimately true) are engaged in mere rhetoric. Like Plato's attack on Gorgias, rhetoric (for its own sake simply to win an argument) is the scourge of philosophy, which is concerned with the passionate quest for truth. Thus, those who use narrative as a powerful device merely to put forth a position persuasively, fail at least in *authenticity* (using the most epistemologically reliable means possible) and possibly also in *sincerity* (seeking the truth for its own sake) because the rhetorician puts winning the point (and its ensuing prudential advantages) above all else. If one were to fail in either sincerity or authenticity, then there is the distinct possibility that he will be corrupting his audience. If this is done with intent, then the speaker may not properly call himself a philosopher.

Fictive Narrative Philosophy. As set out above there are three levels of fictive narrative philosophy according to the balance between the claim and the presentation of the story (see table one). The reason that level-one presentations (apologues) are relatively safe from corruption is that the moral is so clearly presented and the fictive clothing relatively transparent. The stories are told with few modifications of the real world or if presented in a fantasy realm, the conditions of the fantasy realm are consistent with the common body of knowledge.

The *common body of knowledge* is a term I use to describe what any given social group of people might accept as a given set of facts and values about the world.[27] These shared assumptions allow discourse to proceed. When someone with an aberrant

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[25]Boylan (2004): ch. 2. The good will ensures completeness one of the four parts of the personal worldview imperative.

[26] I argue for one reliable framework that I call the Personal Worldview Imperative, Boylan (2004) ch.: 2.

[27]I first set out my depiction of the common body of knowledge in Boylan (1988): ch. 1. I have expanded this in Boylan (2004): ch. 5, Boylan (2008): part 2, and Boylan (2009-b): ch. 1.

maxim from the community's agreed body of knowledge and values puts forth a claim based upon these novel assumptions, then there is often a clash. For example, in the Jim Crow South (U.S.) a speaker who assumed that African Americans were people wholly entitled to equal rights under the law, might confront a social community that didn't accept her assumed common body of knowledge. As a result, her audience might turn off right there and no meaningful rational discourse would follow.[28]

When the common body of knowledge for any given community, itself, is set-up for scientific rational scrutiny, then it is the case that some versions will be shown to have been false. 'False' here means that they have violated either epistemological or ethical standards for making reliable judgments. Because apologues are so transparent in their presentation, the dangers of their corrupting the audience are relatively low.

The risk of corruption rises only slightly in the level-two presentations. This is because the claims (though they are balanced with the story) are still evident. Because of this, the dynamics of the level-one presentations will more or less still hold sway.

However, in level-three presentations, the claims are merely implicit within the story. This means that the reader must ferret them out from the story which dominates. If the story doesn't work there is no need to go further. The reader is confronted first with whether the work counts as good fiction. Does it fulfill various critical expectations—such as imitating nature, reading clearly, plotting convincingly, etc.? These primary sorting devices will enable the reader to toss out a work that is fictively deficient *before* considering anything else. Because it is assumed that a work that fulfills these critical expectations is sufficiently vetted (because these are the touchstones to the true),[29] one may be less concerned about the possibility of using the powerful communicative device of fiction to promote bad falsehoods. However, there is the possibility that a wonderful storyteller will put forth a false or immoral claim and thus lead her readers astray. This possibility is what lies behind Plato's condemnation of the poets in the *Republic* and the ensuing arguments about censorship of art.[30] A discussion of this is beyond the scope of this essay.

Cases. Cases are fictive presentations that are structured so that the reader is enjoined to come up with his own response at the end. Some cases are open-ended so that the author is really interested in stimulating autonomous thinking within broad boundaries that limit the reader's evaluation. Others are closed; structured for *right* answers. Still others are structured so that students are to show how much technical expertise they possess in solving practical problems (often the situation in business school and law school cases). The advantage of cases from the perspective of the distinctions in this essay is that they resemble level-one fictive narrative philosophy and share the same upsides and downsides. In the situation of open-ended cases, these resemble level-two fictive narrative philosophy.

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[28] I discuss this in Boylan (2004): ch. 2.

[29] This is obviously very slanted to the correspondence theory of truth. I believe it works for coherence and pragmatic theories as well—see Boylan (2008): chapters 5 & 6.

[30] Plato, *Republic*: 389c-401d.

An example of an open-ended fictive case is the following:

JUSTICE VRS. CARE

In a small New England town in the USA before the First World War, there lived a man named Obadiah who was married to a woman named Martha. Obadiah was important in the town. He often ran the annual town meeting. Sometimes he even preached in the town's Christian non-denominational church. What was not well known (except by the women of the town) was that Obadiah used to beat his wife, Martha. She lived in pain and terror for years. One day Martha created a poison that her mother had given her to kill animals. Martha administered it to Obadiah and he died. Then she took an axe handle and beat her husband with it to look as if he had been overcome by an attacker. She threw the bloodied instrument in the woods, cleaned herself and called on a neighbor. When the neighbor's wife accompanied Martha home, they discovered the body. An alarm was sent out. The men in the town gathered upstairs in the kitchen where the dead Obadiah was. They pondered about various theories and decided that it was some stranger who had passed through. They split up into teams to comb the woods. The women congregated in the cellar. The women knew what a violent man Obadiah had been. They also suspected Martha.
The men were unsuccessful and chalked it up to the head start that the murderer had. The women kept their mouths shut. At the time the penalty for murder was hanging. Were the women right to keep silent? What factors need to be considered to evaluate this case?

Obviously, a case such as this will engender a wide variety of responses. This is the nature of open-ended cases. One can write on the status of women, the institution of marriage at the time, the laws on domestic violence, et al.

Unlike level-one or two fictive narrative philosophy, the case study is highly artificial in its structure—though not to the point that it becomes a game (this is reserved for thought experiments). It goes beyond fictive apologues to a more conscripted vision of the world. These cases present a vision, and then they request an audience response from that particular frame only. As an example of a closed case, let me focus upon one of my own cases.

MURDER IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A small remote town in Northern Ireland is comprised of Irish Catholics (20%) and Irish Protestants (80%). All the Catholics live in one section of town on a peninsula that juts into the river just east of the main section of town.
One morning a young Protestant girl is found raped and murdered next to the town green. General consensus concludes that a Catholic must have committed the crime. The Protestants form a citizens' committee that makes the following demand to the constable: "We believe you to be a Catholic sympathizer. Therefore, we do not think you will press fast enough for this killer to be brought to justice. We know a Catholic did the crime. We have therefore sealed off the Catholic section of town. No one can go in or out. If you do not

hand over the criminal by sundown, we will torch the entire Catholic section of town, killing all 1,000 people. Don't try to call for help. We have disabled all communication devices."

The constable worked hard all day in an effort to determine who did it, but he could not. At one hour before sundown, he didn't know what to do. His deputy said, "Why don't we just pick a random Catholic and tell them that he did it? At lease we'd be saving 999 lives."

"But then I'd be responsible for killing an innocent man," replied the constable.

"Better one innocent die and 999 be saved. After all, there's no way the two of us can stop the mob. You have to give them a scapegoat."

This case study is rather pointed (therefore closed). Like most case studies it tries to narrow the focus of consideration upon a limited range of topics. In this case it seeks to evaluate the idea of whether human life is additive and whether consequentialism is the proper way to think about such cases. If human life is additive and if simple consequentialism is the proper way to think about such cases, then the final answer is clear: pick-up a random Catholic and turn him over to the mob. You will save 999 lives. It doesn't matter whether the scapegoat was guilty. You've just saved 999 lives.

Often this sort of case is examined from the utilitarian point of view. But depending upon the time horizon and whether there are utilitarian *rules* at stake, it is unclear (even under utilitarianism) what the final result should be.

The protocols for cases are that they follow some scenario that could actually happen. We are constrained by the common body of knowledge to create cases that seem plausible to the reader. Outlandish cases are of little interest since their implausibility renders their probability of occurrence at very close to nil. Why should readers pull their hair out to solve a case that could never be? A case is meant to simulate a choice situation in real life. The parameters are narrowed so that there is more focus on some particular aspect of life. However, in the end it is assumed that the presentation and solution of case-exercises aid the reader in practical decision-making. Finish enough cases and one is more likely to have improved his decision-making ability. The emphasis is upon empowering the reader to think for himself within a narrow context. Because of this terminal objective, cases can only corrupt when they offer false parameters or false choices based upon skewed empirical data. Famous examples of these perversions of the case method were those presented during the Communist scare within the USA in the 1950s: "Better to be RED (a communist on the winning side) than DEAD (a fighter for democracy and freedom on the losing side)." Thus the case writer creates an artificial set of choices (which history has proven wrong). This is an example of the possibility of corruption within the case study genre.

Thought Experiments. Thought experiments are fictive presentations that are structured in a particular way in order to challenge the reader to think about a traditional problem from a conscripted point of view. Like cases, thought experiments call for an action response on the part of the reader. Readers are supposed to go through a thought experiment and derive an outcome. However, unlike cases, a thought experiment often sets exact game rules. The author of a thought experiment intends to offer a practical problem (just like a case) but then also suggests additional criteria that will alter the way

that the reader approaches the problem. In this way a thought experiment is more like a game: an outcome is given and the rules of play are set out. The outcome, if the reader succeeds, is to finish the game according to the rules and then to contemplate how she got there.

Let us turn to one of the more famous thought experiments over the past sixty years, The Prisoner's Dilemma.

THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA

Tanya and Cinque have been arrested for robbing the Hibernia Savings Bank and have been placed in separate isolation cells. Both care much more about their personal freedom than about the welfare of their accomplice. A clever prosecutor makes the following offer to each. "You may choose to confess or remain silent. If you confess and your accomplice remains silent I will drop all charges against you and use your testimony to ensure that your accomplice does serious time. Likewise, if your accomplice confesses while you remain silent, they will go free while you do the time. If you both confess I get two convictions, but I'll see to it that you both get early parole. If you both remain silent, I'll have to settle for token sentences on firearms possession charges. If you wish to confess, you must leave a note with the jailer before my return tomorrow morning."[31]

What the prisoner's dilemma means to show is that if one's worldview is socially invested, then the best result is mutual silence. However, if one is individually oriented in worldview (such as is assumed by Rawls),[32] then the best result is for you to confess (while the other remains silent). In versions of the dilemma where one party is able to cheat the other by making her think that she will be silent when really she has no intention of doing so, there is a stark disconnect between social and selfish. Thus, this thought experiment has been viewed by many as a watershed to separate the distinct worldview orientations of the *social* versus the *egoistic*.

However, if both parties are trying to cheat each other, then a bad outcome is likely to result. David Gauthier wishes to enter this arena in which each party can put her mutual cards on the table in order to cooperate successfully (Gauthier, 1986; 1990). The same mini/max game rules are employed to minimize large-scale downside outcomes. However, Gauthier adds this twist (contra Rawls) that concessions calculated by mini/max be put into a context of the bargainer's ideal outcome. He calls this *mini/max relative concession*. This procedure (according to the modified rules) is in everyone's interests. Just like Hobbes, it can be agreed that situations of extreme uncertainty work to no one's advantage.

The thought experiment thus engages its audience by presenting a carefully crafted level-one fictive situation (like case studies) but then also creates added game

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[31] The Prisoner's Dilemma was developed by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher for the Rand Corporation in 1950. There are many variations on the Prisoner's Dilemma. The above depiction is taken from Steven Kuhn, cf. Kuhn and Moresi (1995).

[32] Rawls (1971): ch. 3.

rules that are meant to steer the reader to one sort of outcome: unless you play by these rules, you won't win. Winning is paramount, thus (by the backdoor) the audience is conscripted to think about this sort of problem in the manner advocated by the author of the thought experiment. The upside of this approach is to appeal to the natural curiosity of the reader to mentally compete within a game context. There is something very pedagogically stimulating about the exercise.

What makes thought experiments more dangerous than cases is that they act as if the game rules are transparent: they change nothing. But as mentioned above, this is not true. The game rules are important because they can affect the outcome. When these rules are overly prejudicial, the end result is not reader autonomy but reader enlistment in the cohort of those who will approach problems *in this sort of way*. It is rather evangelistic in its motivation.

Because of this evangelistic mission, purveyors of thought experiments take on an extra burden of responsibility over those who merely create cases or those who present fictive narratives. What this extra burden amounts to is: 1. Do not twist empirical facts of the world to an unrealistic level and then afterwards seek application in the world in which we all live (the common body of knowledge), and 2. Call attention to the game rules and invite scrutiny. An example of the first condition comes from *the ticking time bomb* thought experiment. If torture doesn't work as an interrogation device, then assuming it does in the ticking time bomb thought experiment forces a false conclusion. An example of the second condition is prevalent in decision theory. If most people are not *homo economicus* then assuming these game rules will corrupt the result.[33]

There are many thought experiments that would fall prey to these critiques. Thought experiments are very powerful fictive vehicles because they possess the force of level-one fictive narrative philosophy while superimposing game rules for interpreting the story. If practitioners of thought experiments do not pay heed to the way they are ask others to behave in the world their narrative (as understood via the game rules), then there is a very real possibility that they may propagate an artificial fictive scenario based upon fanciful boundary conditions which count as rules. When the game is over what has been demonstrated? Only that in such a fanciful possible world, outcome α probably occurs. The improper slide is then to suggest that α applies as well to our world. This is an equivocation. The application to our world is yet to be demonstrated. If the thought experiment employs either (a) non-empirical criteria or (b) game rules that are overly artificial, then the final application to life (as we know it) is likely to be false. To suggest otherwise is sophistic rhetoric.

Because of these caveats, thought experiments (among all narrative-based philosophy) is most susceptible to the charge of being inauthentic and/or insincere and thus corrupting the audience.

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[33] For a more complete view of my objection to this characterization of humans in the context of economics see: Boylan (2014).

       This section has examined fictive narratives, cases, and thought experiments as they contribute to the readers' quest for sincerity and authenticity in their own lives. It is suggested that though each category has definite advantages of pedagogical presentation, some cautions should be observed. The potential for corrupting rhetoric, aka evangelistic propaganda, is most pronounced in thought experiments. Thus, I would propose that all of us present our students and readers with a cautionary note that I call the thought experiment fallacy. This occurs when the artificial nature of the thought experiments distorts our understanding of a practical outcome. Most thought experiments try to focus upon some extremely narrow point in order to evaluate it. However, when the thought experiment makes some unrealistic assumption about human nature in its presentation or in its game rules, then the result may be false. Though we philosophers are keen on abstract and imaginative fictive renderings in just this way, this caveat is very important.

Conclusion: This essay has sought to bring forward a methodological type of philosophy that I have called *fictive narrative philosophy.* Fictive narrative philosophy can make contributions to all branches of philosophy, but probably works best when its empirically-suggestive descriptive detail is exploited. This occurs most in applied philosophy (though David Chalmers has used the film narrative of the *Matrix* to explore abstract principles of metaphysics).[34]

       Narrative-based philosophy works on the principle of indirect discourse. It makes claims which amount to offering an explanation that is a likely story. This is because it highlights ranges of truth that are not amenable to direct deductively-based discourse. The presentation of indirect fictive narrative philosophy ranges on a continuum from level-one to level-three (table one). What one *loses* when one chooses fictive narrative philosophy (as opposed to direct deductive discourse) is exact precision in the presentation of the claim. What one *gains* (as opposed to direct deductive discourse) is an ability to uniquely engage the personal worldview of the audience. This gain is because of the empirical suggestiveness of narrative that creates an interactive partnership with the reader that is especially effective on problems that fall prey to the rationality incompleteness conjecture.

       With such power, the principal caveat of narrative-based philosophy is to adopt procedural rules that will lessen the probability that one is corrupting her audience. Corruption of the audience along with approaches by the author that are inauthentic and/or insincere is the greatest violations in which philosophers can engage. It has been the contention of this essay that by keeping the common body of knowledge at hand, that practitioners using fictive narratives, cases, and thought experiments (most at risk) will be less likely to fail in their mission as philosophers to first seek truth and then to communicate to others in a way that enhances audience autonomy while considering novel ways of thinking about the world.

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[34] David Chalmers gave such a talk on the movie "The Matrix" in June 2003 at the Australian National University, Canberra, ACT. I was in attendance, and it was spectacular.

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