

and interpretation. At the outset Ward signals his allegiance to a form of metaphysical idealism, in which ‘the universe ... has the ultimate goal of being united to Absolute Mind’; in its Christian mode, this amounts to saying that Christ ‘taught a spiritual way of overcoming egoism and participating in the life of God through the indwelling of the Spirit’ (p. 14). The idealist theme, however, is not so far as I can see developed in any extensive way—and to my mind it is certainly not required by Ward’s interpretation of Christian ethics, unless one were to take the dubious step of supposing the notion of the spiritual must necessarily be construed in idealist terms; nor does Ward engage with recent tendencies among theologians and philosophers to advocate instead a more corporeal and embodied interpretation of the Christian worldview.

In the area of moral philosophy, which will be the main zone of interest for philosophical readers of the book, Ward develops an interesting and highly thoughtful interpretation of the teachings of Jesus as a ‘participative virtue ethics’—one that encourages us to look to the biblical texts not for precise moral rules, and certainly not for ‘divine commands’, but for insights into the excellences of mind and character that are supremely revealed in the loving and self-sacrificial life of Christ. Overall, there is much food for thought in this committed and deeply humane volume, and it is greatly to be hoped that it attracts the readership it deserves, not just among those who work in the philosophy of religion, but in the wider philosophical community.

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*Narrative, Emotion, and Insight*. EDITED BY NOËL CARROLL AND JOHN GIBSON.  
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This collection is the sixth volume in the Studies of the Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium, edited by Michael Krausz. It has its genesis in a conference funded by the Consortium. The conference, held in 2006, was entitled Fiction, Emotion, and Insight. The title of the book, it will be noticed, substitutes ‘narrative’ for ‘fiction’. The substitution is significant not only in terms of the book’s history, but also for understanding its philosophical value. The conference was convened on the naïve assumption that there was something new to say about two of the standard – and tired – debates in analytic aesthetics: fiction’s status as a source of knowledge, and the status of emotional responses to fiction. The papers, and the ensuing discussion, revealed that, although these had become arid debates, they are quickly reinvigorated when the focus shifts from ‘fiction’ to ‘narrative’.

Given the developments at the conference, contributors to this volume were given the following brief: ‘Discussions of the nature of emotional responses to art and the cognitive value of art tend to concentrate almost exclusively on the problem of *fiction*: how can we emote over or learn from objects we know do not exist? How will aestheticians be able to say something new about these questions

if they instead frame the matter in terms of having *narratives* – rather than, or in addition to, fictional characters and events – as the objects of emotional and cognitive attention?’ (p. 2).

The eminence of the contributors who responded to the call speaks for itself: the pantheon of analytic aesthetics is well represented by Berys Gaut, Noël Carroll, and Susan Feagin, to name but three of the nine. Moreover, these distinguished aestheticians have all written new essays for this volume (only one essay was delivered as a paper at the original conference, and only four of the contributors were speakers at that conference). Not content with the rarefied atmosphere of analytic aesthetics, they have descended Mount Olympus, and have endeavoured to draw out the implications of their aesthetic deliberations for other branches of philosophy. Some of the non-aesthetic philosophical ideas with which they are concerned include the following concepts: autonomy, emotion, epistemological concepts including confirmation, morality, selfhood, thick (ethical) concepts, thought experiments, and the anxiety of modern life.

The authors of the essays are to be commended both for the range of art forms that they discuss, and the specific works with which they directly engage: cinema (‘Memento’ and ‘Sunset Boulevard’), poetry (Goethe’s ‘Wandrer Nachtlied II’), rock songs (Jurado’s ‘Letters and Drawings’ from *Rehearsals for Departure* album and Ingmar Bergman’s *Scenes from a Marriage*), theatre (Wajdi Mouawad’s *Scorched*), and the novel (Faulkner’s *Intruder in the Dust*, Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, Roberts’s *Shantam*, von Armin’s *The Enchanted April*, Barfoot’s *Exit Lines*, Shriver’s *We Need to Talk About Kevin*). The essays also address a number of central topics in aesthetics and the philosophy of art: the sentimental education and moral education offered by art (and the no-argument and banality objections thereto), immoralism, artistic expression of emotion (in particular, negative emotions in music), and the classic paradoxes of fiction and tragedy (including painful art more generally).

The nine essays are helpfully arranged so as to begin with those addressing issues of a more general nature, and moving through to finish with those treating more specialised topics. This should make the volume more accessible to readers not immersed in the shoals and shipwrecks of contemporary analytic aesthetics. Space permits only a sentence or two about each of the essays.

1. Goldie argues that we tend to engage in ‘narrative thinking’ in order to understand ourselves and our lives, however, he suggests, this narrative approach to self has adverse consequences, partly because it makes our lives seem more like those of fictional characters than is the case: in fiction, there is an author who structures the narrative, but, Goldie thinks, our lives lack such structure.
2. Gaut argues that backwards narration can be used in art – specifically, in film – in a way that enables the work to provide confirmation for the claims that it makes about reality: this challenges accepted ideas about art’s inability to provide the confirmation that would be necessary if it were to serve as a source of knowledge.

3. Carroll argues that narrative art can function as a thought experiment, and that this has implications both for our understanding of how thought experiments function in philosophy, and for such art's capacity to promote 'pop philosophy' through mass culture.
4. Gibson argues that Ryle's distinction between thick and thin descriptions (made fashionable by the use of 'thick ethical concepts' in Williams's moral philosophy) can be applied to narratives: 'thick narratives', he argues, provide an ethical dimension to literature which has often been neglected when theorists focus on the ethical claims that a literary work might make.
5. Mullin argues that literary narrative can serve as a sentimental education by improving 'meta-affective skills' (our ability to judge the emotions of others and to relate to them), and hence literature can enhance our capacity for autonomy (understood as our ability to live personally meaningful lives).
6. Eldridge argues that literary (lyric) narrative can provide a means of coping with the anxieties of modern life by finding meaning in life: the narrative in a poem can provide a rehearsal of a range of emotions in a way that enables us to work through our experience of life and to achieve a fuller appreciation of our attention to life (and to how we give expression to that attention).
7. Smuts argues that we value the experience of painful emotions aroused by some works of art (e.g. his case study of sad rock songs): although the experience intensifies the unpleasant emotion, the imaginative activity through which one engages with the narrative in certain artworks, such as rock songs, invites associative-emotive engagement, in which the listener reflects on his own important experiences in a new and profound way.
8. Feagin argues that a specific form of plot, which she calls a 'discovery plot', is central to the cognitive value of certain ancient tragedies, and that there appears to have been a resurgence of interest in discovery plots in the modern theatre.
9. Matravers argues that the classic paradox of fiction should be reconsidered in terms of the implications of responding to a representation, rather than the implications of responding to a fiction: what matters is that, when we are gripped by a narrative, we are responding to a representation, and the implications of this are the same whether that narrative is fictitious or documentary in nature.

The collection is significant for analytic aesthetics in the shift that it signals from thinking about 'fiction' as a central concept, to thinking about 'narrative' as a central concept, and the fruit that this shift might yet bear. More generally, it demonstrates the developments that are possible in philosophy when its practitioners cooperate to identify a new concept in need of investigation. The style and content of the contributions makes this a showcase of the vibrancy that might be glimpsed more often in contemporary analytic aesthetics.

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