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### Narrative Ethics Searching for Right Answers

- “Just because you wander in the desert doesn’t mean there is a promised land.”
  - ▶ Paul Auster

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### Carl Elliott Bioethics, Culture and Identity, A Philosophical Disease

- “Moral *theories* trade in generalities and simplifications, which make it easy to forget that our moral *experience* is particular and complicated.”
- “.... ethical theories are often helpful in political and institutional questions, they are much less helpful in particular cases.”
- “We should expect moral diversity in the sort of lives people live, as well as the moral differences which inevitably follow”

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### Theory and Practice

- ... criticism , rather, is to art what history is to action and philosophy to wisdom: a verbal imitation of a human productive power which in itself does not speak" (ANAT. p.11-12)
- The central point is that the systematic study of any experience is to be separated from the experience itself less the two become confused.

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### The Encounter as Primary

- *"the essential unit of medical practice is the occasion when, in the intimacy of the consulting room or sick room, a person who is ill or believes him/herself to be ill, seeks the advice of a doctor whom she/he trusts. This is a consultation and all else in the practice of medicine derives from it."*

► *The Future General Practitioner-The Royal College of General Practice, 1972*

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### Health Care is Not Science. Science is Central to Health Care

- A professional encounter is one in which professional and client/patient/... come to joint understanding about what is best to do next.
- Consultation is embodied lived experience
- Story is revealed on occasion of consultation
- Story authored by speech and action of both
- Professional expertise has a key role but consulted to make clinical decision within continuing relationship
- Science is uncertain in the individual case.
- Joint creation of stories that make sense of uncertainty

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### Care Receiving

- Completes the relational nature of caring.
- Locates the responsiveness/reciprocity of the care receiver within the caring relationship
- Necessary for good care
- Fuller reciprocity or expressiveness or participation will enhance the relationship,
- Ensures better care giving
- Thereby contributes to the care giver's need to be a good carer.

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### Mary Johnston

- Invasive, node negative breast cancer detected on Mammo and subsequent biopsy
- Has previously donated one kidney to son
- Fearful of any damage to single kidney & dialysis
- Fatalistic re dealing with future cancer progression
- Intimate partner abuse survivor-control is very important
- Oncologist recommends aggressive chemo plus radiation
- And documents probable survival benefit of this course
- She wants to discuss her choices with family physician

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### Narrative

- This enacted story,  
existing but without substance,  
in the between of a web of relations,  
momentary but continuing,  
is difficult to describe in the scientific language of things  
although its existence is dependent  
on living human bodies who speak and act.

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### Ricoeur's Narrative

Described as "grasping together scattered events, circumstances, ends, means, interactions, contingencies and unexpected results" in a way that reflects patient values, understanding, needs and preferences.

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### At a Moment in Time & Within a Relationship

- Between two particular people
- Who have come to know each other
- Who jointly create a story
- That exists between them
- Incrementally developed
- But never identical to previous time
- "you can't read the same poem twice"

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### Conversation and Improvisation

- Anything goes ? Empty situation morality
- Responsive to history of the context and to requirements of the occasion
- Role of previous experience / Science has meaning in context of a particular person
- Highly responsive in relation to another
- "Loving conversation" between rules and concrete responses, general conceptions and unique cases"

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### Conversation and Improvisation

- Cannot set deliberative priorities in advance of confrontation with the case
- Call-Response & Jazz improvisation
- Germ of an idea & Poetry writing

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### Nussbaum's Narrative

- Perception, Variety and Fine Detail
- Realism, Surprise and Uncontrolled Events
- Emotions, Passions and Belief
- Non Commensurable Qualities
- Non Recurring Oneness & Nature of Life
  - ▶ Love's Knowledge M Nussbaum 1990

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### Perception, Variety and Fine Detail

- understanding through rich detail rather than multiple examples/scientific sampling
- understanding as product of all particulars that pertain to an end, not measurable but contextual
- "Truth" is the context of particulars

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### Realism, Surprise and Uncontrolled Events

- exact course in this person at this time
- rather than some other person & time
- metaphoric surprise-joining the dissimilar
- through symbols identifying deeper unity
- vicissitudes of intention

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### Non Commensurable Qualities Non Recurring Oneness & Nature of Life

- possibility of paradox/ambiguity/mystery
- cannot read the "same" poem twice
- the "one" beyond identity of observed characteristics

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### Emotions, Passions and Belief

- modes of knowing
- emotional is part of cognition
- to know death/loss without emotion is not to know
- cool intellectual reflection deceptively seductive
- belief necessary for emotion & vice versa

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### Narrative Opportunities

- Understanding and responding to particulars and fine detail
- Expect surprise and unintended consequences
- Understand emotion to reflect belief and embodied wisdom
- Make qualitative distinctions among non-commensurable characteristics in choosing a course of action (rather than weighing or averaging multiple factors towards a single utility)
- Strengthen and balance the relationship within which narrative created
- Imagine and create alternative futures

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### Role of Narrative in Clinical Ethics/Care

- Enlarge the Domain
- Within a Relationship
- Using Conversation and Improvisation
- Within realistic confines of time and resources
- How Do You Know When a Story is Right?
  - ▶ Voice
  - ▶ Who speaks
  - ▶ Scientific and/or narrative language
  - ▶ Roles of power and authority

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### Ethical Issues in a Care Context

- Power imbalance
  - ▶ Abuse
- Gender
  - ▶ Location as traditional women's role
- Competing interests
  - ▶ Less empowered patients
  - ▶ Do more with less

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### Ethical Problem Solving Strategies

- Do you care?
- Is it a clinical science question?
- Get particulars, understand context
- Who has or is withholding power/ who speaks

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### Ethical Problem Solving Strategies

- Explore whole person
- Strengthen the relationship
- Reflect on oneself
  - ▶ Emotions reflect belief
- Recognize the noncommensurable
  - ▶ Or when not to balance/ weigh and measure

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## Ethical Problem Solving Strategies

- Anticipatory ethics
- Buy time
- Expect surprise

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## THANK YOU

- QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

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