

Existentialism in the Classroom: Practical Applications to Nietzsche

In an era that has largely been desensitized to most everything, where everything meaningful seems to have its contradictions, the search for “Truth” seems to be a joke. “Universal Truth” is not a concept that an entire classroom full of students can grasp; we are too divided, too rational, and too pessimistic. This is reality. And Friedrich Nietzsche embraced reality. Any “truth” that might be found could only be found with a tangible, concrete universe. This concrete reality is, of course, diverse, and with this diversity, there are countless contradictions, making a final “Truth” impossible. But the continuous search, or Nietzsche’s “will to truth,” is still of the utmost importance. One should not waste one’s life buried amidst deception.

Bill Readings in his *The University in Ruins* seems to have understood this Nietzschean concept. He takes the university in its ruined state and works with that, embracing reality. Through his idea of the importance of the “thinking” individual, the dialogue of dissensus, and the debt to the other, he attempts to revitalize the post-modern university. Yet, his practical approach seems less than complete. Many authors have attempted to find practical solutions in the classrooms of today, and these solutions are in tune with the existential philosophy of Nietzsche. It is extremely important to find methods in which to revitalize the postmodern university, not only for the benefit of the students, but for the professors as well. Practical solutions seem as necessary as theory in this age where true, unfaltering belief is hard to come by. This paper will focus specifically on discovering practical applications to Nietzsche in university literature

courses, though these methods can arguably be used in a variety of other departments and courses.

The decline of English departments in the university in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is a serious and largely indisputable problem. As Readings points out, English departments are suffering because of capitalism. The university is now seen as a place where what is commodifiable is worthy of support; therefore English departments seem to be falling short. It is difficult to commodify the skills obtained with an English degree. The humanities were designed to elevate one's consciousness with critical attention paid to social and individual issues. The humanities were designed to create a well-rounded individual, but this general definition of worth has little place in the post-modern university. Employers seem only concerned with monetary results, and thus, those who study English or many other Humanities driven majors, those who are not entirely concerned with the expansion of capitalism, suffer. Those with a major in English who pursue careers outside of English related fields find options scarce; those who wish to stay in English related fields, to teach for instance, find available positions even more scarce.

The worth of the humanities English course has long been under consideration. Composition courses have been separated from literature courses, and this has caused an even greater amount of attention paid to the worth of literature programs. Composition studies can be broken down into monetary worth, applicable to the job market, but how does literature fit into the "real world" of today?

Many teaching theorists have devoted much time and energy composing some solutions to this problem. But Readings has developed an intriguing solution that

proposes not to attempt to pull the university out of the ruins, but to accept the ruins as a necessary and worthwhile surrounding in which to study literature. He compares the postmodern university with the past ideologies of the university that were concerned with reason and rational thinking with the Kantian concept of reason and the culture of the nation-state with the Humboldtian idea of culture (14). Yet he proclaims that these ideologies will not work in the postmodern university; instead, he proposes a concept of the thinking individual who interacts in an environment of dissensus, and who thus sees the debt he owes to the “other.” This seems like a viable solution to the problem that humanities English is facing. It is not entirely a philosophy based on the autonomous individual, and it is not concerned with a university that elevates its students to an ideal level of understanding. These philosophies do not fit in the postmodern world.

To teach universal “Truth” is close to impossible because there are so many divided, contradictory, and different ways of believing today. Instead Readings advocates an atmosphere that still respects the idea of the individual, yet carries this respect into the post-modern world, which arguably puts greater respect on the true individual than in days past. The individual in Readings’ concept of the revised university is important, but the key to this is that every individual is important. With every individual holding equal importance, inevitably comes dissensus, and Readings embraces this as the cornerstone of the post-modern university. A student being trained to hear, and then think, about the dissenting opinions of others, and incorporating those opinions into an understanding of who he or she is as an individual would make for a great asset to the commodifiable world, or somewhat more idealistically, one who would hold the tools necessary for changing the way that this world now runs.

Readings' ideas to transform the humanities are closely tied to Existential thought, especially that of Nietzsche, which only makes sense because of the impact that this philosophy had on Postmodernism. Yet in today's classroom, the ideas of Existentialism seem to be only half-realized. Instead these existential ideas may have contributed to the lackadaisical attitude of many current students, only believing in disbelief. Readings grasps this tendency to carry his plan from what actually exists to a theory for change based on many of the theories of Nietzsche's Existentialism.

First of all, Nietzsche and Readings both proclaimed the importance of the thinking individual. But Nietzsche carries this notion of thinking further. He defends the idea that one must think for him or herself, putting all responsibility in one's own hands. The individual can be immersed in all types of surroundings, taking in all types of information and opposing opinions, but in the end, the individual must decide what is important for him or herself.

A belief in any one specific "Providence," or state, or society is not adhering to the definition of an individual. An individual, according to Nietzsche, rises beyond blindly accepting the existing, traditional structures and constantly searches for a "truth" that fits their own, unique definition of truth; "Thinking of oneself gives little happiness. If, however, one feels much happiness in this, it is because at bottom one is not thinking of oneself but of one's ideal. This is far, and only the swift reach it and are delighted" (50).

This concept of "truth" is tricky. It is not meant as the Romantics believed – that everyone will come to the same understanding of "Universal Truths," and that those "truths" could be one day be fully realized by the searching individual. On the contrary,

Nietzsche believed in the “will to truth,” which is a very different concept, one that seems to fit Readings’ notion. Nietzsche believed that both “truth *and* untruth showed themselves to be continually useful....Consequently, ‘will to truth’ does *not* mean ‘I will not let myself be deceived’ but—there is no choice—‘I will not deceive, not even myself’: *and with this we are on the ground of morality*” (449). This notion fits with Readings because it incorporates the importance of a strong, thinking individual who is conscious of what is actually occurring around him or her. This individual takes into account truth as well as untruth, but also understands that much of his or her existence will be deceived; the only option is not to deceive him or herself or anyone else.

Readings’ theory adheres to this type of logic; based on a post-modern classroom, Readings clearly announces the need to help create a generation of students who think for themselves, but this process involves an open acceptance of many different “truths, or perhaps “truth” and “untruth.” Readings believes in the importance of individual thought, as does Nietzsche. The individual must be thinking in a world that is full of contradictory opinions and ideals. Readings articulates that thought needs no ultimate purpose beyond the act of thinking. His students must be a sort of existential thinker because each individual response to the open environment of thinking is vitally important. Unique and different opinions must come into play for his theory to work; therefore, Nietzsche’s contentions that man must think outside of tradition, always striving towards a “will to truth,” seems directly tied to Readings’ assertions. Also with Readings the existential idea of “truth” is quite apparent in his concept for reforming the postmodern classroom.

Nietzsche believed in a “will to truth,” yet he was very clear about his notion that man can never really know “truth.” It is the process of continually attempting to weed through deception to try to come to something with meaning for only the individual. This notion is the aim of Readings’ classroom; many individuals articulating their thought-out beliefs, thinking about each others beliefs, and then either restructuring or standing by their original ideas. His students would be in an environment which would harbor the “will to truth” in each student by constantly introducing them to the dissenting “truths.” Therefore, it becomes very clear why Nietzsche and Readings do not believe in a “Universal Truth.”

Nietzsche states that “What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are” (46-47). Nietzsche understands that man can never fully understand an ultimate “Truth.” The attempt to always search “Truth” out is detrimental to the individual. It, ironically, seems to take the individual out of reality, which therefore separates him or her from ever getting close to whatever actual truth may or may not exist.

Therefore, Nietzsche and Readings thought it important for the individual to always test oneself in reality, always question the existing beliefs and social structures: “The better the state is established, the fainter the humanity. To make the individual *uncomfortable*, that is my task” (50). He wants the individual to look at the “real world;” he wants the individual to listen to contrasting viewpoints. He wants everything that is

simply taken for granted to be reevaluated. He claims that even the very structures that have created the society in which we live needs to be looked at with a critical eye.

Similarly, Readings is advocating an environment that is open, that discusses multiple viewpoints, that sees beyond what has merely been accepted as “truth” for generations.

In the same way, Readings is not concerned with an end result, or ultimate “truth.” He too is concerned with only the process of attempting to discover what is real and what is false, but with a clear understanding that they may not ever reach this understanding. Reaching “truth” is recognized as impossibility in his conception of the classroom; he understands that that goal is not important. What is important is not “the attention of individual subjects to individual objects, for we are not returning to the Enlightenment privileging of autonomy. No individual can *be* just, since to do justice is to require that the question of justice exceeds individual consciousness, cannot be answered by an individual moral stance” (162). What is important is that “Teaching thus becomes answerable to *the question of justice*, rather than to the criteria of truth. We must seek to do justice to teaching rather than to know what it is. A belief that we know what teaching is or should be is actually a major impediment to just teaching” (154).

So Readings, like Nietzsche’s idea about discussing the “world process” instead of the aim, understands that the process of discussing is what is important. He argues that “the dialogues between teachers and students are not synthesized in a final agreement (even an agreement to disagree) that evidences the capacity of the informed and rational subject to occupy both sides of a question. That is to say, the dialogue of teaching is not organized dialectically so as to arrive at a single conclusion that will be either the vindication and reinforcement of one position...or a synthesis of the two” (154-155).

Readings feels that “a community is not made up of subjects but of *singularities*.... singularities variously occupy the positions of speaker and listener” (185). Therefore, the classroom becomes a place where the process of listening to each individual’s thoughts, and “to think beside each other and beside ourselves, is to explore an open network of obligations that keeps the question of meaning open as a locus of debate” (165). This process inevitably leads to the “other.” If each individual is thinking, and attempting to articulate his or her thought processes then every individual is forced to continually reevaluate that which they think is true for them. It becomes a continual process where boundaries have the opportunity to be stripped away. One student may hold to one belief, but in the face of opposition, his original belief may have the opportunity to be reevaluated, perhaps even tossed aside.

Nietzsche does not discuss the importance of the “other” very often, but this notion seems implicit in his philosophy. It seems that Nietzsche desires the kind of atmosphere Readings proposes; an environment where individual voices contrast with no desire to reach consensus. Nietzsche believed in consistently testing oneself to attempt to strip away deception. Readings’ classroom seems ideal for this process. Readings identifies the need to listen to dissensus:

In the horizon of dissensus, no consensual answer can take away the question mark that the social bond (the fact of other people, of language) raises. No universal community can embody the answer; no rational consensus can decide simply to agree on an answer. To preserve the status of a social bond as a question is to tolerate difference without recourse to an idea of identity, whether the identity is ethnic (‘we are all white, we are all French’) or even rational (‘we

are all human'). It is to understand the obligation of community as one to which we are answerable but to which we cannot supply an answer. Such a community is heterogeneous rather than homogeneous. (187)

Dissensus naturally leads to an acceptance of the "other," which is paramount to Readings' revival of the Humanities.

Readings articulates a debt that we must acknowledge to those outside of ourselves, not only to come up with our own beliefs, but to obtain an acceptance of others as well; "such a community would have to be understood on the model of *dependency*....We are, bluntly speaking, addicted to others, and no amount of twelve-stepping will allow us to overcome the dependency, to make it the object of a fully autonomous subjective consciousness....There is no freeing ourselves from the sense of the social bond" (190).

It is important to realize the connection that Readings has to Nietzsche to be able to come up with practical solutions as to how Readings' theories can be realized in actual college literature classrooms. Although Readings offers many reasons why the university is in the state that it is, and although he comes up with a theory to begin to revolutionize the way that the humanities are valued, his practical approach as to how to obtain his desired end result seems to be lacking. He seems to have taken many of the basic themes of Nietzsche's Existentialism and offered a somewhat practical method for transforming these themes into the classroom, but the step beyond this seems to be largely missing. Therefore, the bond that Readings' theory holds with Nietzsche's Existentialism offers a clearer foundation from which to find practical solutions that can be tested in the literature classroom.

Paulo Freire's ideas from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* shed light on a more practical approach to the theories of both Nietzsche and Readings. Freire wrote to abolish a system of learning that was centered on a form of education labeled "banking," where the teacher expounds "truths" to the students, and the students merely sit back and absorb whatever the teacher deems worthy; "education is suffering from narration sickness. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students; "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (71-72). Freire believed that this mode of education only harbored oppression, and that this method must stop.

Freire developed a system called "problem-posing" education that treats the individual according to existential themes. "Problem-posing" education consists of recognizing the importance of each individual, and it opens the field for communication. This new type of education "affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (84). This also corresponds to Nietzsche and Readings; Freire is not concerned with his classroom discovering one, defined, universal "truth." Instead he believes in, again, the process of thinking.

Practically speaking, Freire believes that "problem-posing" education can happen if the class is open to dialogue; "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the-students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges....Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world" (80).

Freire's idea, that the teacher needs to stop viewing him or herself as the all-knowing explicator, and instead start viewing him or herself as just another individual that has much to learn in this new environment, is one practical approach to Readings' "thinking" classroom. Freire's concepts are a good place to start in order to make Readings' existential ideas pragmatic because the process must start with this realization from the teacher that he or she is no longer one who should expound truths. The teacher in a "thinking" classroom needs to be able to understand that he or she is no more important than any of the students, that perhaps much of what he or she says, especially if it is an interpretation about a given piece of literature, is little more than opinion.

Another practical approach to Readings' existential classroom could be found in Patricia Prandini Buckler's "Combining Personal and Textual Experience: A Reader-Response Approach to Teaching American Literature." She contends that "readers who apply their own critical faculties and experience to the text...become better believers with deeper understanding of, commitment to, and appreciation for the study of literature" (44). This is another good approach to Readings' classroom of thinking individuals. To introduce students early on to their own importance in relation to literary texts by showing them that their unique personal experiences can shed light on an understanding of a work, is a good way to initially reveal to them their own worth in the classroom; "By learning to value their own experiences and to validate their personal responses, introductory-level students can gain confidence. In their own critical faculties" (45). This approach immediately takes the teacher as omniscient expounder out of the picture; it also takes literature off of any imagined pedestals that may be hindering the students'

comfort in offering his or her own interpretation, so that the classroom truly can be a place that is open for dissenting discussion.

Another practical application can be found in Peter Elbow's approach to evaluating instead of ranking. He advocates that today too many students are concerned with the grade that they will receive instead of if they actually learned something. Out of this, they tend to follow the lead of the teacher; because of evaluating and the importance given to grades, students learn to compose their thoughts in accordance with what they think that the teacher wants. This fits in with the concept of the thinking individual because at some time the student of a literature class will need to compose his or her thoughts in a form that will need to be evaluated in some way so that the student may obtain a grade for the course, usually this would be a paper of some sorts. But if the classroom has been truly open to dissenting dialogue, then the students must also feel completely comfortable that if they pronounce their well thought out interpretations, then they will not be penalized because the teacher disagrees or feels that his/her opinion is better. Elbow proclaims that "ranking or grading is woefully uncommunicative" (189). Instead he advocates evaluation because evaluation "invites us to articulate our criteria and to make distinctions among parts or features or dimensions of a performance, thereby invites us further to acknowledge the main fact about evaluation: that different readers have different priorities, values, and standards" (192).

Elbow proposes that the teacher utilize portfolios, two bottom-line grades like "Honors" or "Unsatisfactory," analytic grids, or "contract grading" where a list of what is expected is handed out where if the student accomplishes everything on the list, he/she is guaranteed a certain final grade. (196). Elbow then declares that what is even better is to

have as much “evaluation-free zones” as possible. This is a direct, practical application to Readings and Nietzsche. An “evaluation-free zone” means giving assignments that will not receive a grade; the purpose being that the student will learn to grow comfortable articulating his or her responses to a given work, thus enabling his or her own unique thought. This is a practical solution because it reveals the importance that writing can contribute to a classroom of dissenting individuals, especially if the writing exercises are unmediated. Elbow gives good examples on how to accomplish this through ten-minute, nonstop freewrites, a single unevaluated assignment, or even a jump-start for his whole course which consists of him “devoting the first three weeks entirely to...freewriting” (197-198).

Undoubtedly these kinds of open assignments would allow the student to find his or her own voice and begin to feel comfortable expressing it, especially if the teacher refrained from discouraging him or her with destructive evaluation too early on. Instead this kind of environment seems to promote the growth of the student to further develop what it is he or she really believes. The compatibility of this technique mixed with open dialogue seems to be extremely important.

Another method to enable freethinking can be found in C. Mark Hulburt’s idea about “collectivist pedagogy.” The way the he has designed his courses is in agreement with the respect of the thinking individual. He developed a class where the students would read a given text; then before they came to class, they would write about any topic of their choosing in relation to what they read. These writings, like Elbow’s are not for a grade; instead, they are directly applied to class discussion. In this way the students are directing the course; “class discussion then grows directly out of our reading of each

other's interpretations" (133). This idea again ties in writing to the literature classroom; this step is extremely important because not only the understanding that their work will not be graded allows them to feel comfortable to articulate their unique opinions, but it enables the students to truly lead the class to what they deem is important.

Hurlbert values the thinking individual, as well as the benefit of his students conversing with the other members of the class; "Students need to learn how to act in the best interests of each other and that doing so is acting in the best interest of the self" (140).

Next, activities that enable the students to realize how much what they believe in is due to the culture in which they were raised seems an extremely important aspect to developing Readings' Nietzschean classroom. In "Theory as Equipment for (Postmodern) Living," by Thomas McLaughlin, he states ways in which the student's debt to the "other" can be realized. He suggests showing a class a bunch of advertisements, and he says that they will immediately have "tremendous 'cultural literacy' in the sense of being able to 'read' the nonverbal signs of their culture....With just a little prompting, students immediately understand that the meaning of the sign is cultural and historical, not natural or given" (264).

He goes on to state that once the students see what these certain objects "mean" in their given society, they can start to analyze how their culture has shaped who they are. They learn more and more that in "postmodern culture...we come to know others and even ourselves by the signs we deploy. We construct our identities by the signs we choose for ourselves, by the clothes we buy, the cars we drive, the houses we live in" (264). To grasp this concept seems quite important to Readings' idea of the student's

debt to the other. Not only will the student, through open debate and discussion in the classroom, come to an understanding of the other in his/her own classroom, but the exercises that McLaughlin proposes proves a larger debt they owe to the “other.” These exercises also will begin to strip away the “truths” that they may feel they believe in; when they see that essentially much of who they are only exists because of the culture in which they were raised, a great thinking process seems inevitable.

Another practical method that applies to both Nietzsche and Readings is the New Historicist’s take on the study of literature. New Historicism means applying historical documents from the period in which a certain text was constructed, and then comparing and/or contrasting different themes that are found. This process reveals the circumstances in which an author was dealing with at the time, and it may offer evidence as to the bigger themes behind the story. It may also point out contradictions and how some cultures have been misrepresented. New Historicism is important to not only Nietzsche but Readings as well because of many factors.

First of all, it points out one’s debt to “otherness.” It reveals issues about one’s past culture that can help make sense of today. But what New Historicism is really concerned with is the stripping away of former assumptions, or deceptions. New Historicism fits with Nietzsche’s “will to truth” in this way. A good way to initiate this realization is by choosing texts that “generate interesting conceptual problems... juxtapos[ing] works that deal with roughly the same subject but differ crucially in certain ways...[pairing] ‘canonical’ texts with ‘noncanonical’ ones of the same theme” (Schlib 65). New Historicists also spend time questioning “what constitutes ‘historical evidence’ in the study of ‘texts’.... ‘History,’ too, then, has emerged as a ‘text.’ Not only does it

require interpretation; it proves accessible only through ‘textual’ records, and historians apply their own ‘textual’ strategies to it when they write about it” (Schilb 64). The question then is raised to students on just how much of what we take for granted to be historical “truth” is accurate.

This questioning is important to understanding earlier literary texts, as well as for creating Readings’ thinking student. Nietzsche stated this belief excellently; “everything that the philosopher says about man, however, is at bottom no more than a testimony about the man of a very limited period. Lack of a historical sense is the original error of all philosophers” (Nietzsche 51).

Gerald Graff in his *Beyond the Culture Wars: How to Revitalize American Education* also raises some seemingly practical solutions that coincide with Readings and Existentialism. He raises the idea that students must be introduced to the conflicts that their teachers are dealing with in the contemporary university. This is again lessening the importance of the teacher by putting the department’s questions into the hands of the capable “thinking” classroom. Graff argues “that the best solution to today’s conflicts over culture is to teach the conflicts themselves, making them part of our object of study and using them as a new kind of organizing principle to give the curriculum the clarity and focus that almost all sides now agree it lacks” (12). One of the conflicts he proposes to raise to the students is the separation of departments.

Graff suggests bringing in “excluded cultures” into the curriculum in a connected fashion; “At the least, cultural studies and women’s studies courses should be in dialogue with traditional ones” (13). This action not only reveals the “other” to the students, but it also corresponds with Nietzsche’s “will to truth” again because the very conflict about

why they are excluded raises questions that the students must ask themselves and then even openly debate in class. This conflict of why the university has consistently left out certain cultures brings into account the whole canon debate. Introducing the students to this debate helps them not only to see that some cultures and minorities have been excluded, but it again forces them to question why and how this has affected their culture and themselves.

Today “nonwhite writers [are] traditionally erased or at best included as token ‘ethnic writers’ in introductory courses” (Kafka 180). This issue is an important one and many argue that “we have to be careful not merely to include ‘ethnic’ and ‘minority’ writers, but to avoid tokenizing non-white writers within mostly white courses, leaving them only on the shelf marked ‘ethnic’” (Kafka 180). Graff suggests that much of this can be achieved by teaching texts in relation to each other; “Contrast is fundamental to understanding, for no subject, idea, or text is an island. In order to become intelligible ‘in itself,’ it needs to be seen in relation to other subjects, ideas, and texts” (108-109). So, it seems that Graff would very much be inclined to introduce noncanonical texts directly beside canonical ones to discuss the differences as well as the similarities, but more importantly for the times, to discuss the exclusion in the first place; “Instead of choosing between the Western Conrad and the non-Western Achebe, I teach the conflict between competing views of literature” (33).

Graff believes, much like *Readings*, that dissensus can be quite beneficial; “it does not at all follow that a clear vision cannot tolerate—indeed, thrive upon—fundamental disagreement about ‘the most significant thinkers, the most compelling ideas, and the books all students should read’” (43). Like Nietzsche, as well as *Readings*,

“Universal Truth” is not his aim; this is why raising the conflicts is important. A student can understand after questioning how certain books become canonized and how some do not that what he/she once assumed was universal, was yet again another societal construct; “I find it much easier to clarify the traditional idea that great literature is universal when I teach feminist critiques of that idea” (15). Graff’s idea of teaching the conflicts very much coincides with Readings’ classroom of open dialogue of dissensus and Nietzsche’s “will to truth.” He combines the two ideas:

Teaching the conflicts has nothing to do with relativism or denying the existence of truth. The best way to make relativists of students is to expose them to an endless series of different positions which are not debated before their eyes.

Acknowledging that culture is a debate rather than a monologue does not prevent us from energetically fighting for the truth of our convictions. On the contrary, when truth is disputed, we can seek it only by entering the debate. (15)

Another practical approach to obtaining a Nietzschean classroom can be found in Wayne Booth’s theory of teaching. He absolutely values the importance of students leading the discussion in his courses, so much so that he periodically will leave the room so that they do not rely too much on the teacher’s presence. He notices often that students have a tendency to speak out about what they think that the teacher wants to hear, so he makes it clear to them the reason he left the discussion in its most heated moment was because “ ‘The purpose of this course is to make myself as superfluous as possible’ ” (1). Booth also has developed a strategy for attempting to teach ethics in the postmodern literature classroom.

Booth articulates that many literature teachers still feel that it is important to think about ethics in the classroom, but in the post-modern classroom, ethics seems a touchy subject. Yet, Booth developed a method that seems to fit in with Readings' thinking individuals. Booth acknowledges the importance of allowing the students to come by their own code of ethics independently. It is not a matter of the teacher expounding certain values; it is a matter of the teaching introducing many varied texts to the students and allowing them to take what they will from what has been introduced.

Booth suggests that "to teach reading (or viewing or listening) that is both engaged and actively critical is central because it is in stories, in narratives large and small rather than in coded commandments, that students absorb lessons in how to confront ethical complexity" (Ethics 48). He contends that English teachers, "if they teach stories ethically, are more important to society than even the best teachers of Latin or calculus or history" (Ethics 48). He believes this because he believes that "our most powerful ethical influence" is in stories, as it always has been (Ethics 48). Stories are man's way to communicate with each other, revealing a great deal of information about life past and present.

Booth offers some practical suggestions on how to achieve raising the topic of ethics in the postmodern classroom. The first of which is to always include a work that most people would find ethically repulsive, also include a rival story that reveals the first story's "dangers or stupidities." Another suggestion is to include a story where the implied author implicitly rejects the values of the characters. Also he proposes to teach the "fun of locating within a given story signs of its implied author's unintentional incoherence or inadvertent revelation of flaws" (Ethics 51). He also

advocates engaging the students in “critical oversight, the *overstanding* that results when we apply to a story values alien to it” (Ethics 52).

Finally Booth suggests the atmosphere of Readings’ classroom – to raise genuine conversation about the ethical topics that they are exploring. Booth understands Readings’ indebtedness to the “other.” He knows that “we never arrive at really good judgements of a story by ourselves; we need the opinions, the company, of other readers...No one reader’s, no one teacher’s, reading is ever complete, final, perfect” (Ethics 54). Though Booth is talking about raising a very subjective issue like that of ethics, he still seems to be applying it in terms that are connected with Existentialism and Readings’ ideas.

The fact that Booth acknowledges the “other” in relation to the individual is extremely important. He understands that ethics are also something that are derived out of cultural codes; he seems to want to raise this issue in order to have his students question what it is they have always believed in, again Nietzsche’s “will to truth.” He raises contrasting ethical values to test the students, to force them out of what they are comfortable thinking and feeling. Dialogue of these ethical questions will undoubtedly open into an atmosphere of dissensus, and Booth understands that this dissensus is necessary and good for the growth of the individuals in the course. He puts the teacher on the same level as the student by also forcing the teacher to reexamine his or her own belief system.

Booth raises the question to teachers “what ethical improvements *in ourselves* should we seek” (Ethics 45)? Seemingly in indisputable comparison with Nietzsche’s philosophy and Readings’ theory, Booth advocates that “we surely must all aim to

produce, using the world of stories; not flunkeys who can only pass tests...but self-motivated learners. They should be living in their time with us in ways that make the path to further learning irresistible” (Ethics 54).

Raising the topic of ethics brings Readings’ thinking classroom full circle. It seems that possibly the discussion of a topic like ethics might not have a place in a postmodern classroom, but raising these issues will give students something to take with them. It will produce a kind of person that will understand not only him or herself better, but will understand the world of the “other” better. Engaging students in an atmosphere that is as open as possible seems to be the ultimate purpose of Readings, and one in which Nietzsche would have embraced. Open dialogue about multiple themes will lead to dissensus, and that is the foundation for not only change, but acceptance of what exists today. It must be the teacher’s responsibility to bring about reform. And as evidenced by Nietzsche, and later in Readings, attention to practicality, concrete reality, is the only way to reform, the only way to happiness; “the only happiness lies in reason” (Nietzsche 50).

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