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Happy New Year



The Classroom of Thought

Magic of Storytelling



We believe in the power of storytelling and narrative. Do you?

Philosophy as Storytelling

When asked, “What do philosophers really do?” no answer is obvious. It is easier to know what an aeronautical engineer does, or a lawyer does, than it is to say what philosophers do. One can ask if “doing philosophy” is a practice, or an example of storytelling.

The idea that philosophy is an example of storytelling may seem odd, but appealing. Others have conceived of philosophy through the same metaphor. A book by Will Buckingham, *Levinas, Storytelling and Anti-Storytelling* (2013), is evidence of this explanation. We shall consider such evidence later in the paper. Human agency involves goals (what is happening), and techniques for achieving goals (what methods can be identified for the conducting the endeavor).

Most human practices, such as law or medicine, have their own rules, modes of operation, policies, customs, and beliefs. Practices often have societies or governing bodies, whose purpose is to over-see the projects and evaluate the results of those practitioners pursuing goals identified by their particular practice.

Agency outcomes, and goals sought are also a large part of the philosopher’s investigative agendas. Aristotle and Plato were agents whose goal was the investigation of human existence and human engagement with the world, but neither had overseeing standards of expertise, or measures of success and failure. There were no governing bodies to regulate their efforts. Simply by articulating through reason, essences (i.e. concepts, principles and laws) designed to capture how things “are”, both philosophers were then able to speculate about how things could be. Yet, in exercising their own mental capacities, they used very different methods investigating the nature of existence, and what direction we should take in instigating change. Plato used narrative methods, exemplified in storytelling. Aristotle used deductive, logical methods encompassing careful observations. This paper will not defend the methods of Aristotle, though his logical and analytic methods would become some standards against which philosophical “success” could be measured over the ensuing centuries. Rather the paper will explore Plato’s choice of stories and storytelling as a method for pedagogy, and as phenomena connected to the pursuit of philosophical problems.

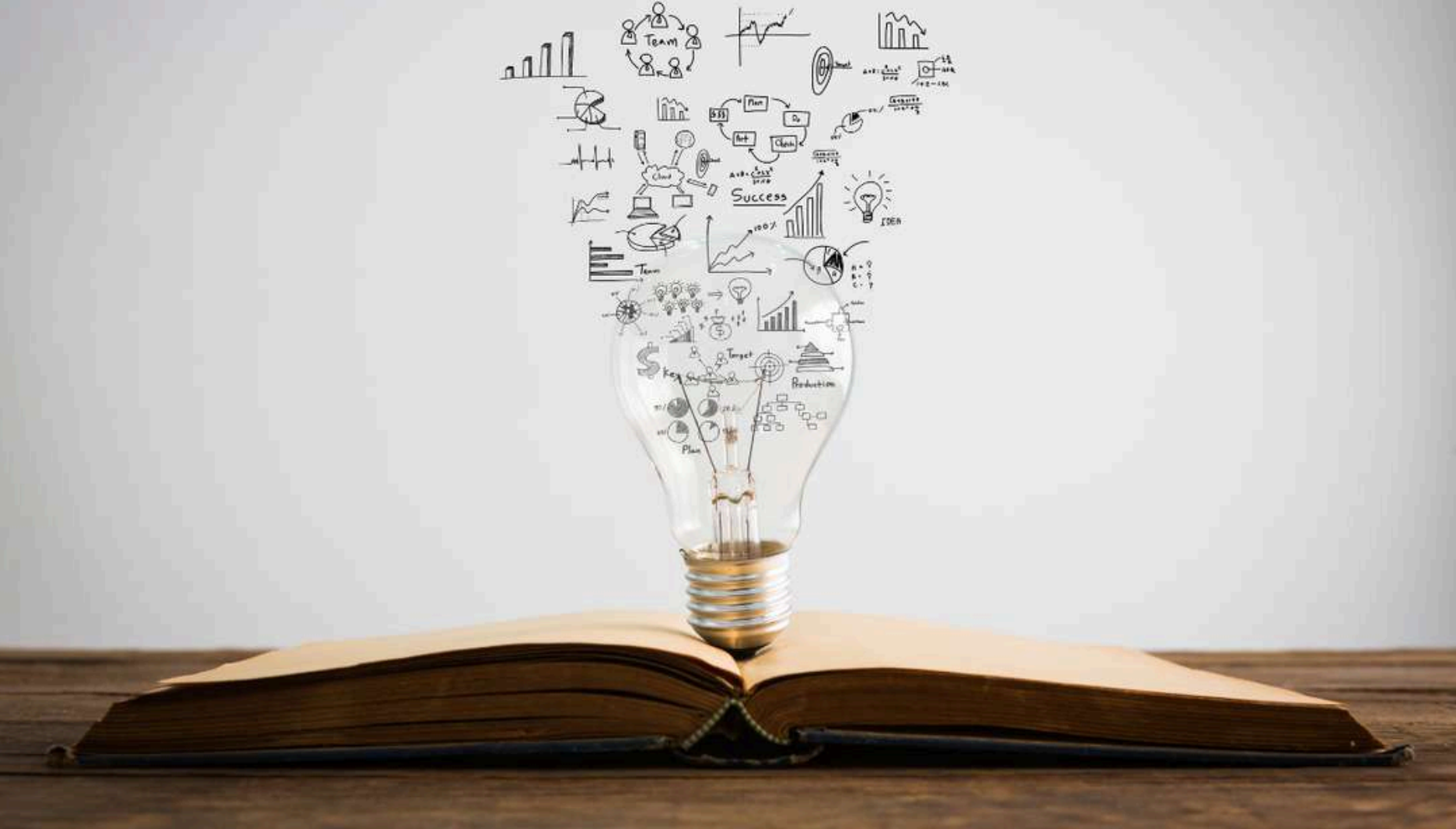
A story is a constructed tale with a quest—perhaps, an encounter with a powerful phenomenon, and an experience of change. The encounter could result in a sense of failure causing a different route to be sought out, or a different goal to be pursued, or the encounter could occasion a success, a goal reached, a hurdle overcome. There is often a moral to the story, a message about good, a warning or admonition for failure, and all of the above are painted vividly with imaginative indulgences. The story of people trying to understand what they are and how they differ from other things is still on-going. Powerful phenomena confront human beings in seeming perpetuity: weather, wars, scientific predictions, revolutions of all kinds, technology, cultural inheritances and histories infused with hate, are just a few of the forces we have faced and still do face in our journey through the time we have on this planet. What our goal as humans is, other than to survive, has fostered endless kinds of stories or narratives—religious, philosophical, mythical, and more.

Certainly historians have perpetuated narrative as the method for conveying the journey of human beings discovering what they can do and what they should do. Robert Fulford, author of *The Triumph of Narrative*, observes: ... Every historian knows, and most readers of history eventually learn, that each story is constructed, each emphasis chosen, each major character selected by a historian or team of historians. And the historians in turn are heavily influenced ..., by the intellectual tone of the period in which they are writing and by the imagined needs of the people for whom they are writing ... While certain facts and ways of emphasizing facts maybe essential, the assembling of those facts involves a vast accumulation of choices. (43–44) History may be understood as a set of stories; but, under the historian’s lens, it may also be written as a master narrative, propelled by an author’s view, one which generates a theme explaining previous occurrences and change. For history to be a master narrative, there is a beginning—perhaps the birth of an Empire, a plot—the expansion of the empire, some characters—perhaps settlements established, and then a crisis—a tragic or predictable fall, or an unexpected success (an apex and denouement). The above steps conclude with the author’s message: the moral of the story.

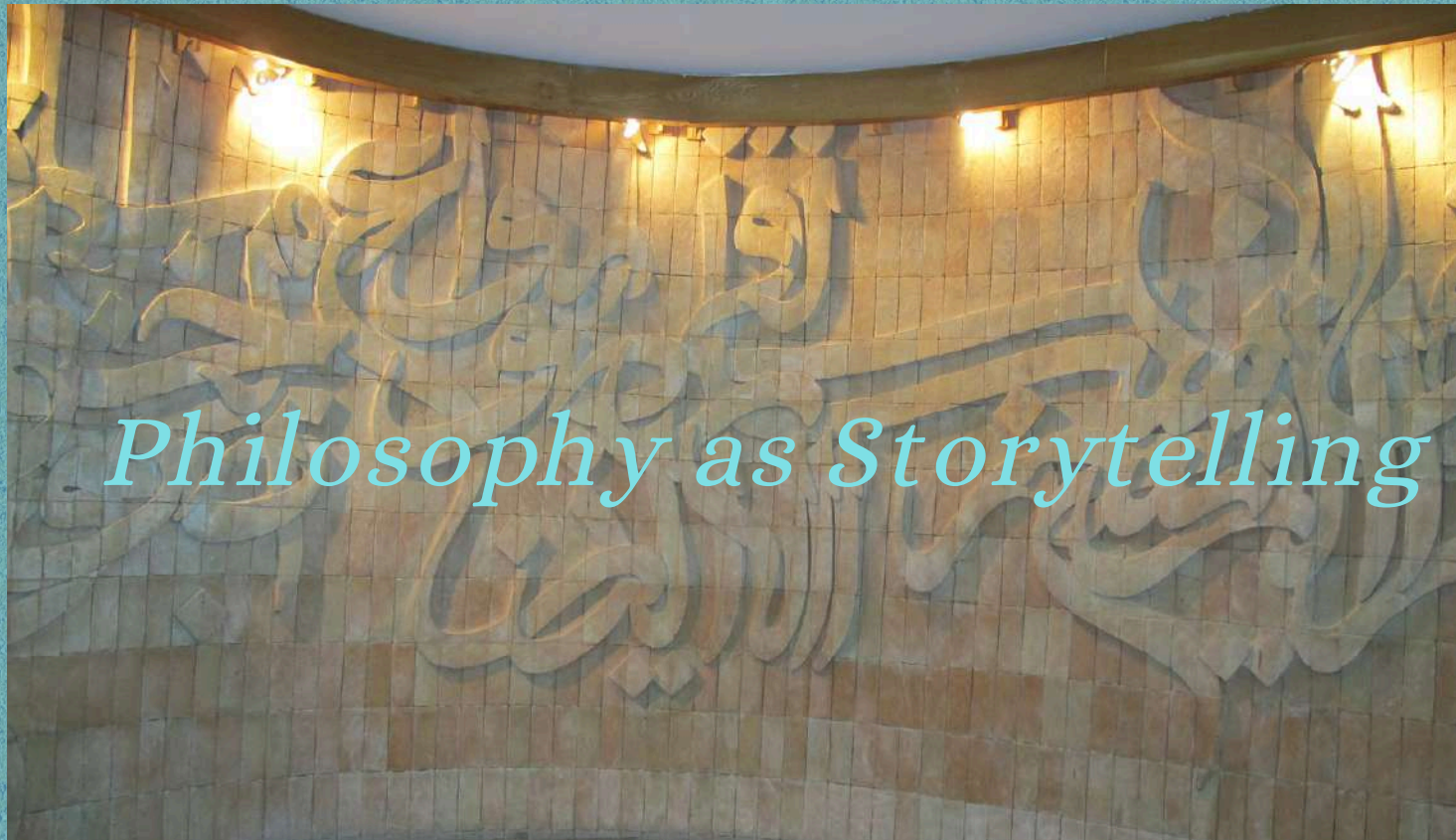
The moral of the historian’s master narrative, according to Fulford, could be the critique of organized religion as was promoted in Gibbon’s historical writings, (48) or the success of Christianity underlying Thomas Macaulay’s writings (49). Today, there is resistance to developing master narratives for history. The bin of events, as Arthur Danto described history (61), grows increasingly large, defying thematic unification.

Elizabeth Trott

STORYTELLING



FTIS FOUNDATION



Philosophy as Storytelling

Nadia Maftouni

*tells you her stories
of philosophy*

Dec 31 Session 2

9:30-10

DisCafe

The Will to Power as Art
Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche on art

Nietzsche's view of art interpreted by Heidegger

The classroom is buzzing with the excitement of a new semester. Zoe walks into the room, her presence calm but authoritative. The students, Elen, Eudokia, and Theophil, along with a few new faces, are ready for the next step in their philosophical journey. Zoe places a copy of Heidegger's "The Will to Power as Art" on the desk in front of her.

Zoe gently

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to this semester's class. We're going to venture into some deep waters this time—Nietzsche and Heidegger on the nature of art. Nietzsche's view of art, when interpreted by Heidegger, takes us to a place where art isn't just about representation or beauty. Art is about power—specifically, the will to power.

The students exchange glances. Eudokia seems skeptical, Elen is intrigued, and Theophil looks like he's already lost in thought.

Zoe

To understand Nietzsche's art, we must first understand his concept of the will to power. Nietzsche argues that the fundamental force in life is not survival or pleasure, but the drive to assert and expand power. Art, in his view, is one of the clearest and most familiar expressions of this will to power.

Elen raises her hand, her voice filled with curiosity:

So, art is... about domination? Power over others?

Zoe

It's not about domination in the traditional sense, Elen. Nietzsche sees the will to power as something far more complex. It's not just power over others—it's the force that drives creativity, self-expression, and even self-transformation. Art is an expression of the artist's internal struggle and the transformation of chaos into something meaningful.

Elen nods, understanding the distinction.

ART AS WILL TO POWER

Zoe continues her lecture, now focusing on Heidegger's first major statement on art: "Art is the most perspicuous and familiar configuration of will to power." She writes the quote on the whiteboard, and the students lean in, absorbing the words.

Zoe

Nietzsche's idea of the will to power is about becoming—about asserting your own existence in a world that often feels indifferent. Art, for Nietzsche, is the most visible expression of this drive. It's the way humans impose their will onto the world, shaping and reshaping it.

Philosophy as Storytelling

Eudokia frowning

But if art is all about power, does that mean that the artist is just imposing their vision on the world? What about the truth of the art? Isn't there a risk that art becomes just a tool for manipulation?

Zoe smiling

That's a good question, Eudokia. Nietzsche and Heidegger would say that this isn't manipulation, but creation. Art isn't just about imposing a foreign vision; it's about the artist creating their world, revealing their truth through their own expression. The artist is not simply representing the world as it is—they are actively creating new possibilities for how we see and experience reality.

Theophil quietly

So, art is like a force of nature—like the artist is channeling something that has to be expressed, rather than just imposing their will on others?

Zoe

Exactly, Theophil. The artist becomes a conduit for the will to power—not in a controlling way, but in a transformative one. Art is life-affirming, it's about shaping existence.

ART IN RELATION TO THE ARTIST

Zoe writes Heidegger's second statement on the whiteboard: "Art must be grasped in terms of the artist." She pauses and looks at her students, knowing this is where things will get tricky:

This second statement emphasizes that art cannot be separated from the artist. Heidegger follows Nietzsche in saying that art is an expression of the artist's innermost being, their most personal and unique will to power. The artist is not just a creator—they are the creator, and the act of creation is a reflection of their very essence.

Eudokia skeptical

But does that mean that the artist is more important than the art itself? What if the art transcends the artist? What if the artwork has its own life?

Zoe

That's a great point, Eudokia. But according to Heidegger, art is inseparable from the artist because it is an expression of their will. The artist, in a sense, embodies the work—they bring the world into existence through their art. But this doesn't diminish the artwork's importance. It's just that the artist's essence is so closely tied to the creation of the art that it cannot be detached from them.

Theophil nods slowly, taking in the connection between the artist and their creation:

So, art isn't just a product—it's an act of becoming. It's the artist's way of asserting themselves in the world.

Zoe

Exactly, Theophil. Art is a manifestation of the artist's will to power—a way for the artist to become who they truly are. And in this process, the artist creates not only their art, but themselves.

ART AS A COUNTERMOVEMENT TO NIHILISM

Zoe moves to the next statement from Heidegger: "Art is the distinctive countermovement to nihilism." She writes it on the board:

Nihilism is the belief that life has no inherent meaning or value.

Nietzsche saw nihilism as the great danger of modernity—this belief that nothing matters, that life is ultimately meaningless. But Nietzsche believed that art could be a powerful antidote to nihilism. Art is a way to affirm life, to give meaning and value to existence, even in a world that sometimes seems empty or indifferent.

Philosophy as Storytelling

Eudokia surprised

So art isn't just about making something beautiful—it's a response to the despair of nihilism?

Zoe

Exactly, Eudokia. Art becomes a form of resistance against nihilism. It's a way to assert that life has meaning, that we can create meaning in our lives. Through art, we resist the emptiness that nihilism threatens us with.

Elen nodding

It's like art gives life meaning, rather than just reflecting it.

Theophil looks contemplative, almost meditative, as he thinks about the connection between nihilism and the transformative power of art.

Theophil softly

Maybe that's why art feels so powerful—it's like it carries a message of defiance. A reminder that, no matter how empty the world seems, we can still create meaning.

ART IS WORTH MORE THAN TRUTH

Zoe's voice grows more passionate as she presents the next statement: "Art is worth more than the truth." She emphasizes the phrase as if it's a provocative challenge:

Nietzsche and Heidegger argue that truth, as we typically understand it, is not the highest value. Art, in its transformative power, is more important than truth. Why? Because art doesn't just reveal facts—it reveals meaning. Art gives us a deeper understanding of existence. Truth, in the traditional sense, can be limited and finite. Art, on the other hand, opens up infinite possibilities.

Eudokia frowning

But isn't truth the highest pursuit? Shouldn't art serve truth, not replace it?

Zoe

It's not about replacing truth, Eudokia. It's about understanding that truth is not just facts or rationality—it's something deeper. Art allows us to experience a truer reality, one that goes beyond what we can logically grasp. Art, in this sense, is a kind of higher truth—one that touches the essence of being.

ART AS A STIMULANT OF LIFE

Zoe finishes with Heidegger's final and most profound statement on art: "Art is the greatest stimulant of life." She pauses, letting the weight of these words settle in:

For Heidegger, art isn't just something that reveals truth—it's something that gives life. It is life-affirming. Art reawakens us to the world, invigorating us, challenging us, and pushing us to become more than we are.

Elen in awe

So, art is a force that propels us forward—it keeps us alive in a way that nothing else can?

Zoe

Yes, Elen. Art awakens us to the fullness of existence. It makes us aware of the possibilities that life holds, and it urges us to become more than just passive beings. Through art, we can experience the vitality of existence itself.

The students sit in quiet reflection, each absorbing the idea that art is not just a pursuit of beauty or truth—but a force that shapes and affirms life in ways they hadn't imagined.

In this second semester, Zoe explores Nietzsche and Heidegger's ideas in a way that challenges the students to think about art as not just an aesthetic experience but a powerful force that shapes life and meaning. The ideas discussed are deep and complex, pushing the students to reconsider their previous notions of art, truth, and existence.



Philosophy as Storytelling

The Will to Power as Art
Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche on art

penned by
Nadia Maftouni

Contributions Are Welcome!
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