

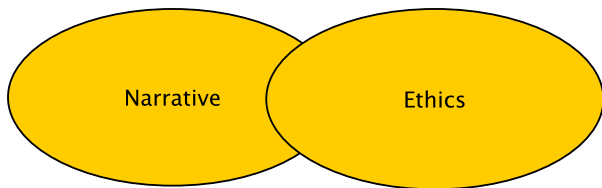
# Testing reader ethical judgments over the course of a narrative

Greg Lessard\*, Michael Levison\*\*

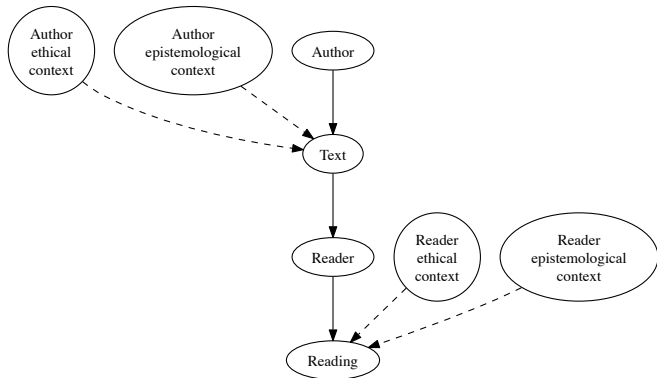
\*French Studies/\*\*School of Computing  
Queen's University  
Kingston, Canada  
greg.lessard@queensu.ca; levison@cs.queensu.ca

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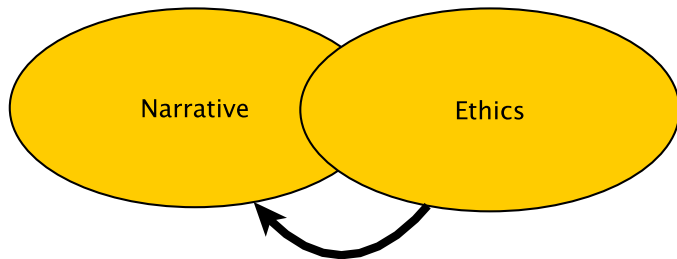
# The narrative and ethics overlap



# A basic overview



## One model: ethics influences narrative



## A simple example: the ant's dilemma

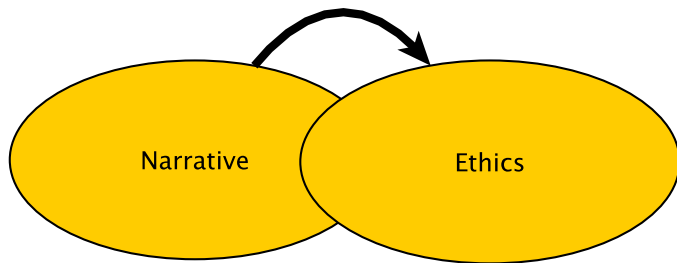
```
# ethical principles
a = "help[should](rich, poor)"
b = "help[should](all, self)"

# available options
c = "feed(ant, grasshopper)"
d = "feed[not](ant, grasshopper)"

# set the parameters
weight(a) = x
weight(b) = y

# test values and choose option
if (x > y) then c, else d
```

## Another model: narrative influences ethics



# Test environment

The issue: what happens to ethical decisions as one progressively reads a text?

A simple case: the tale of the Ant and the Grasshopper.

## A story

Once upon a time there was an ant and a grasshopper.

They both lived in a large field.

All summer long, the ant worked hard to collect food for the winter.

The grasshopper did no work and collected no food.

Next

NEG <--- Evaluate the grasshopper's behaviour. ---> POS



Next

## Progressive revealing of elements

Once upon a time there was an ant and a grasshopper. They both lived in a large field. All summer long, the ant worked hard to collect food for the winter. The grasshopper did no work and collected no food.



## Progressive revealing of elements

Once upon a time there was an ant and a grasshopper. They both lived in a large field. All summer long, the ant worked hard to collect food for the winter. The grasshopper did no work and collected no food.

**Evaluate the grasshopper's behaviour.**

## Progressive revealing of elements 2

EITHER:

He was old and ill.

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OR:

He sang in the sun and  
mocked the ant for its  
laborious behaviour.

## Progressive revealing of elements 2

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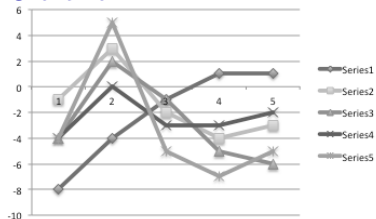
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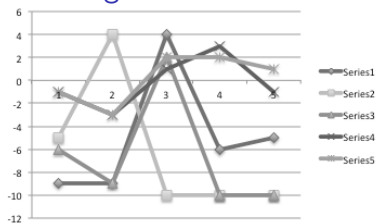
**In light of this new information, evaluate the grasshopper's  
behaviour.**

# Progressive revealing of elements 3

## Old and ill



## Mocking



# Ethical coherence 1

At the end of the summer, the ant had a lot of food stored away, but the grasshopper had none. When the first frost came, the grasshopper approached the ant and asked for food. The ant told the grasshopper that since he hadn't worked, he deserved no food.

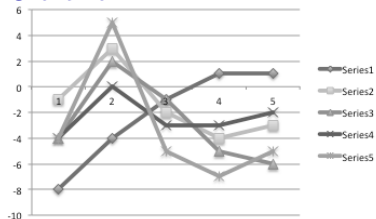
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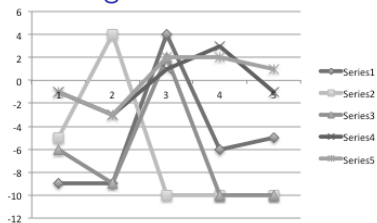
**How much do you agree with this decision?**

# Ethical coherence 2

## Old and ill



## Mocking





# Ethical consequences and moral agency 1

The grasshopper slowly starved to death.

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**How appropriate is this outcome?**

# Ethical consequences and moral agency 1

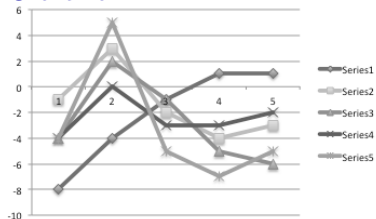
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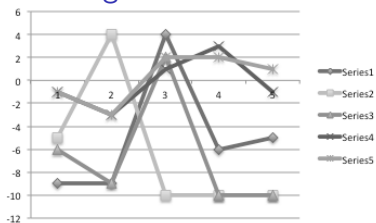
**In light of the whole story, evaluate the ant's behaviour.**

# Ethical consequences and moral agency 2

## Old and ill



## Mocking



## Some applications of the model

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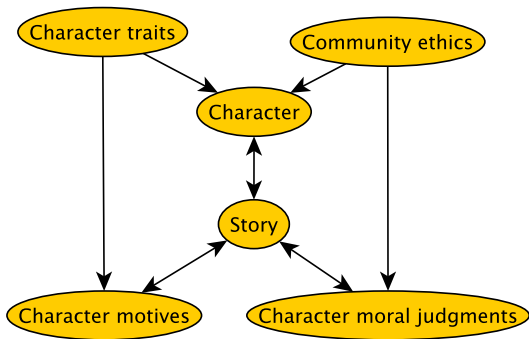
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- ▶ a locus for discussion in a teaching environment
- ▶ a device for crowdsourcing reader ethical judgments or for 'shopping' possible narratives for optimal ethical effect
- ▶ one component of a dynamic narrative framework



## Next steps

- ▶ enrich the narrative complexity of the texts under study
- ▶ use human rather than anthropomorphized agents
- ▶ tie narrative values into the DAG framework (previous work by Lessard and Levison)
- ▶ develop a more complex model of the ethics-narrative interface to take account of motives and the role of other agents

## A slightly more complex model of ethics in narrative



Thanks for your attention...