

## 京大過去問 2021年 第1問

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Telling stories is an activity that has been with human beings from the beginning of time. We might go so far as to say we are story-telling animals born with narrative instinct. We go to work in the morning, see our officemates, and tell them what happened on the previous night; we go home in the evening, see our family, and tell them what happened during the day. We love to tell stories and we love to listen to them. Narrative is everywhere: news, gossip, dreams, fantasies, reports, confessions, and so on and so forth.

In particular, we spend a deal of time consuming all kinds of fictional narratives, such as novels, cartoon stories, movies, TV serials. Surely it will be of some use to ponder whether fiction is good for us or not. Indeed, this is a problem with a long history going back to ancient philosophers. Plato famously excluded poets from his ideal republic, for he thought their creations were ultimately untrue. Put in the simplest terms, he regarded poems as lies. He did not believe something offered as fiction could justify itself. His brightest pupil Aristotle thought differently. One major point of Aristotle's theory is said to be: (1)while history expresses the particular, concentrating on specific details as they happened, poetry can illuminate the universal, not allowing the accidental to intervene. Hence the justification.

As the debate continues to the present time, researchers in psychology have shown us a new way of dealing with this old problem. From various experiments, it emerges that fiction has the power to modify us. Reportedly, (2)“when we read nonfiction, we read with our shields up. We are critical and skeptical. But when we are absorbed in a story, we drop our intellectual guard. We are moved emotionally, and this seems to make us rubbery and easy to shape.” This might sound rather simplistic, but importantly, researchers are attempting to tell us that reading fiction cultivates empathy. When a reader is immersed in the fictional world, she places herself in the position of characters in the narrative, and the repeated practice of this activity sharpens the ability to understand other people. So, nurturing our interpersonal sensitivity in the real world, fiction, especially literary fiction, can shape us for the better.

Although this is not exactly news, it is surely comforting to have scientific support for the importance of fiction. Nevertheless, a careful distinction is in order here. It may be true that fiction actually makes one behave with better understanding towards the people around one. (3)They can grasp another person's feelings in an instant, act on them, and clinch a deal or win a trial. The result may well leave the person on the other side feeling anguished or defeated. Conversely, we

have all known bookish, introverted people who are not good at puzzling out other people, or, if they are, lack the ability to act on what they have grasped about the other person.” (Here bookish people are, we are meant to understand, keen readers of fiction.) Empathetic understanding and sympathetic action are different matters — how and why they are so, in connection with reading fiction, will be further explored by future research, we hope.