**GUIDING QUESTION**

“What is the relationship between stories and Christian morality?”

→ **Hauerwas, A Story Formed Community: Reflections on Watership Down.**

* H’s central point is that Christian communities, like the rabbit warrens, are story formed communities. This means that Christians need to be true to their story (i.e., story of the Hebrew people and its culmination in the story of Jesus) and live in such a way that they can really hear its truth (rather than distorting this truth). To do so Christians must develop the skills or virtues called for by their story, they must tell, retell, and enact this story in new ways, test their interpretations of the story for their truthfulness, and organize Christian community (politics) according this story.

* The remainder of his argument focuses on the content of the Christian story in relation to the story of Watership Down and what this implies about Christian morality. Passages from Hauerwas in the first paragraphs of pages 13, 15, & 35 are especially important.

* Character is also story formed because stories fundamentally mediate and shape the relation between self and world that character names.

→ **3 Key Aspects Of The Relationship Between Stories And Morality**

1) Stories Mediate
2) Narrative Quality Of Experience
3) Storied Identity

1) **Stories mediate** by functioning as our windows to the world (like a pair of eyeglasses that help us to see more clearly): stories interpret, describe, and imagine the world.

* Stories mediate how the self interprets how the world is (description) as well as how it should be (prescription). Both shape the self’s intentions towards the world.

* Stories = windows to the world; eyeglasses or filters through which we see and intend
  a) **reflect**—help us see ourselves and our world more clearly from the distance of a story; we see ourselves in the story and so learn about ourselves
  b) **frame**—our attention by pointing out what we should notice; certain aspects of our world become more important in the context of the story (e.g., attention to the dignity of the poor in the Gospels); for one who is persuaded by the vision of a story, some things become more valuable than others based upon their meaning in the story.
  c) **illuminate**—the world; translucent quality of stories allows light to shine on our world through the lens of the story; stories provide vision and insight into the meaning of what is going on; this vision shed new light on our world and allow us to perceive it more truthfully

* Examples: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—we feel what it is like to be separated your family members as each is sold into slavery like a commodity; Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*—we imaginatively participate in world of the slaughterhouses for meat packing and feel a deep sense of injustice at the working conditions.

2) The narrative quality of human experience refers to the fact that we experience our lives as an ongoing story full of memory and anticipation. Stories (imaginatively) suggest how things should be.

* Memory + Anticipation (Expectations) ▶ Experience
* Stories = integrations of memory and anticipation into a meaningful whole; a gestalt—the parts look different in light of one’s perception of the whole (ex. picture of a lady can be perceived as young or old depending upon perspective).

3) Human Identity = Storied Identity. Our story is simultaneously “who we are” and “who we might become.” Stories are the most fundamental way to account for the complexity and mystery of ourselves and our world.

* **Identification + Experience = Identity**

* How we choose to identify with our experience (remember it, anticipate it, and imagine how it should be) shapes who we become.

* **Who we are now = memory of who we think we have been + anticipation of who we expect to become (what possibilities we believe in).**

* We imaginatively experience and then, if we are sufficiently persuaded, enact what a story implies for our lives.

→ **IDENTITY = A Product Of Identification With Others.**

* To identify with others involves some degree of identification with the groups, values, and stories to which these loved ones have committed their lives. Stated in another way, a story brings a world into existence. We enter into this world by identifying with the characters, actions, groups, roles, etc. that it engenders. When our identification with a story is strong enough then we act according to its vision of who we are and who we could be. Relationships tend to be the driving force behind our commitment to a storied vision.

  **Self/Community internalize vision/attitudes--→ Stories**

  **Self/Community ←----Externalize actions ←---- Stories**

* To ask “Who was MLK or Jesus?” = to ask for the relationships that shaped them, the stories that were told to them, the stories that they chose to tell to others, and how they imagined and lived in the world. “What story did they author through their lives?”

→ **Imagination Is The Central Vehicle Through Which Stories Shape Us.**

* Stories engage us at our deepest level by imaginatively engaging all 5 senses. Stories provide far more than mere intellectual content. They engage the whole person heart and head. Imagination provides an experience that can be just as real as “the actual world” and more powerful.

→ **5 Instances In Which We Most Need Stories According To Timothy O’Connell**

1. **contingency or unpredictability of life** - the world is full of possibilities and only some will be realized; we use stories to make some sense of why some were realized and others were not.
2. **interpersonal communion** - we use stories when we want to connect with people at the deepest and most intimate levels
3. **collapse/catastrophe** - we turn to stories when everything in our life seems to be falling apart and we want something to give us direction and hope
4. **moral ambiguity** - we turn to stories when we face moral uncertainty, doubt, or feel pulled in two different directions at once
5. **disenchantment** - we turn to stories to renew our spirit when life seems dry, dull, and without enthusiasm

* Common characteristic of all 5 instances = a human need to make sense out of life
Question To Test Your Ability To Apply These Ideas:
In what sense does American capitalism have a story? Does it have a history? Does it offer a vision of how things are and should be? Does it offer criteria for determining what is due to each person (justice). Give examples.