LOVE'S KNOWLEDGE

Essays on Philosophy and Literature

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

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"It isn't playing the game to turn on the uncanny. All one's energy goes to facing it, to tracking it. One wants, confound it, don't you see?" he confessed with a queer face, "one wants to enjoy anything so rare. Call it then life," he puzzled it out, "call it poor dear old life simply that springs the surprise. Nothing alters the fact that the surprise is paralyzing, or at any rate engrossing—all, practically, hang it, that one sees, that one *can* see."

Henry James, *The Ambassadors*

Style for the writer, no less than colour for the painter, is a question not of technique but of vision: it is the revelation, which by direct and conscious methods would be impossible, of the qualitative difference, the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us. . . . And it is perhaps as much by the quality of his language as by the species of . . . theory which he advances that one may judge of the level to which a writer has attained in the moral and intellectual part of his work. Quality of language, however, is something the theorists think they can do without, and those who admire them are easily persuaded that it is no proof of intellectual merit.

Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*

You may know a truth, but if it's at all complicated you have to be an artist not to utter it as a lie.

Iris Murdoch, *An Accidental Man*

He shook his head sadly.

"I glanced over it," said he. "Honestly, I cannot congratulate you upon it. Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid."

"But the romance was there," I remonstrated. "I could not tamper with the facts."

"Some facts should be suppressed, or, at least, a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes, by which I succeeded in unravelling it."

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*

1

Introduction: Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature

"Ma dì s'i' veggio qui colui che fore
trasse le nove rime, cominciando
'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore.'"

E io a lui: "I'mi son un che, quando
Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando."

"And tell me if the man I see here
is the one who published the new poem, beginning
'Ladies, you who have the knowledge of love.'"

I said to him: "I am one who, when Love breathes
in me, takes note. And in whatever way
he dictates within, that way I signify."

Dante, *Purgatorio*, Canto XXIV

How should one write, what words should one select, what forms and structures and organization, if one is pursuing understanding? (Which is to say, if one is, in that sense, a philosopher?) Sometimes this is taken to be a trivial and uninteresting question. I shall claim that it is not. Style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters. Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content—an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth.

But this suggests, too, that there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it—views, especially, that emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty—that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose, a style remarkably flat and lacking in wonder—but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars. Not perhaps, either, in the expositional structure conventional to philosophy, which sets out to establish something and then does so, without surprise, without incident—but only in a form that itself implies that life contains significant surprises, that our task, as agents, is to live as good characters in a good story do, caring

about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing. If these views are serious candidates for truth, views that the search for truth ought to consider along its way, then it seems that this language and these forms ought to be included within philosophy.

And what if it is love one is trying to understand, that strange unmanageable phenomenon or form of life, source at once of illumination and confusion, agony and beauty? Love, in its many varieties, and their tangled relations to the good human life, to aspiration, to general social concern? What parts of oneself, what method, what writing, should one choose then? What is, in short, love's knowledge—and what writing does it dictate in the heart?

A. Expressive Plants, Perceiving Angels

> He chose to include the things
> That in each other are included, the whole,
> The complicate, the amassing harmony.
>
> Wallace Stevens
> "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"

In his preface to *The Golden Bowl,* Henry James describes the author's selection of appropriate terms and sentences, using two metaphors. One is a metaphor of plant growth. Focusing on his theme or idea, the author causes it "to flower before me as into the only terms that honorably expressed it."[1] And elsewhere in the prefaces, James frequently compares the author's sense of life to soil, the literary text to a plant that grows out of that soil and expresses, in its form, the soil's character and composition.

James's second metaphor is more mysterious. The fully imagined text is next compared (in its relation, apparently, to whatever simpler, more inert, less adequate language may have been, before its invention, on the scene to cover the subject) to some creatures of the air, perhaps birds, perhaps angels. The novelist's imagined words are called "the immense array of terms, perceptional and expressional, that, after the fashion I have indicated, in sentence, passage and page, simply looked over the heads of the standing terms—or perhaps rather, like alert winged creatures, perched on those diminished summits and aspired to a clearer air."[2]

These two metaphors point to two claims about the writer's art that seem worth investigating. To investigate and defend them is a central purpose of these essays. The first is the claim that there is, with respect to any text carefully written and fully imagined, an organic connection between its form and its content. Certain thoughts and ideas, a certain sense of life, reach toward expression in writing that has a certain shape and form, that uses certain structures, certain terms. Just as

1. Henry James, Preface to *The Golden Bowl,* in *The Art of the Novel* (New York, 1907), 339 (hereafter *AN*). In the volumes of the New York Edition (Scribners, 1907–9) containing *The Golden Bowl,* this passage occurs on I.xvi. James is actually talking here of the activity of "revision," the author/reader's re-imagining of the language and form of his text.

2. James, *AN* 339.

the plant emerges from the seeded soil, taking its form from the combined character of seed and soil, so the novel and its terms flower from and express the conceptions of the author, his or her sense of what matters. Conception and form are bound together; finding and shaping the words is a matter of finding the appropriate and, so to speak, the honorable, fit between conception and expression. If the writing is well done, a paraphrase in a very different form and style will not, in general, express the same conception.

The second claim is that certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist. With respect to certain elements of human life, the terms of the novelist's art are alert winged creatures, perceiving where the blunt terms of ordinary speech, or of abstract theoretical discourse, are blind, acute where they are obtuse, winged where they are dull and heavy.

But to understand that metaphor fully, we clearly need to connect it with the first. For if the novelist's terms are angels, they are also earthly and of the soil of finite human life and feeling. In the canonical medieval conception, angels and separated souls, lacking immersion in earthly ways of life and the body that is a necessary condition for such immersion, are able to apprehend only abstract essences and general forms. Lacking concrete sensuous imaginings, they cannot perceive particulars. On earth, they have only an imperfect cognition, as Aquinas says, "confused and general."[3] James, here, alludes to that conception and inverts it. His angelic beings (his words and sentences) are beings not without but of the imagination, "perceptional and expressional," drawn from the concrete and deeply felt experience of life in this world and dedicated to a fine rendering of that life's particularity and complexity. His claim is that only language this dense, this concrete, this subtle—only the language (and the structures) of the narrative artist, can adequately tell the reader what James believes to be true.

The essays in this volume examine the contribution made by certain works of literature to the exploration of some important questions about human beings and human life. Their first claim is that in this contribution form and style are not incidental features. A view of life is *told.* The telling itself—the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary, of the whole manner of addressing the reader's sense of life—all of this expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not, of what learning and communicating are, of life's relations and connections. Life is never simply *presented* by a text; it is always *represented as* something. This "as" can, and must, be seen not only in the paraphrasable content, but also in the style, which itself expresses choices and selections, and sets up, in the reader, certain activities and transactions rather than others.[4] The responsibility of the literary artist, then, as James conceives it and as

3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1 q.89 a.1.

4. On the work of art as a shaping of life, see Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1968, chaps. 1, 6; also his *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1978). The literature on the activity of the reader is by now vast, but see especially Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley, 1988); Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York, 1984); W. Iser, "Interaction Between Text and Reader," in *The Reader in the Text,* ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crossman (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 106–19; see also his *Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, Md., 1978).

this book will conceive it, is to discover the forms and terms that fittingly and honorably express, adequately state, the ideas that it is his or her design to put forward; and to bring it about that the reader, led by the text into a complex artistic activity "in his own other medium, by his own other art," is active in a way suited to the understanding of whatever is there for understanding, with whatever elements of him or herself are suited to the task of understanding. And we should bear in mind that all writers about life are, in James's view, literary artists, except those too inattentive to care at all about their formal choices and what these express: "The seer and speaker under the descent of the god is the 'poet,' whatever his form, and he ceases to be one when his form, whatever else it may nominally or superficially or vulgarly be, is unworthy of the god: in which event, we promptly submit, he isn't worth talking of at all."[5] The writer of a philosophical treatise, if the treatise is thoughtfully narrated, expresses, just as much as the novelist, in his or her formal choices, a sense of what life is and what has value.

This first claim is not unique to James. As we shall shortly see, it has very deep roots in the Western philosophical tradition, in the "ancient quarrel" between the poets and philosophers presented in Plato's *Republic* and continued in many subsequent debates. But, to confine ourselves for the present to the modern protagonists of this collection, we can point out that Marcel Proust develops, explicitly and in detail, a very similar thesis. Proust's hero Marcel holds that a certain view of what human life is like will find its appropriate verbal expression in certain formal and stylistic choices, a certain use of terms. And since the literary text is seen as the occasion for a complex activity of searching and understanding on the part of its reader, Marcel also holds that a certain view of what understanding and self-understanding are will appropriately issue in certain formal choices aimed both at stating the truth adequately and at eliciting, from the reader, an intelligent reading of life.

But Proust and James, and this volume with them, claim more than this. The first claim directs us to look for a close fit between form and content, seeing form as expressive of a view of life. But this already leads us to ask whether certain forms might not be more appropriate than others for the true and accurate depiction of various elements of life. This all depends, obviously, on what the answers actually are or may be to various questions about human life and about how we come to know it. The first claim implies that each available conception will be associated with a form or forms that fittingly state it. But at this point both James and Proust make a second claim, the claim expressed in James's second metaphor. This claim, unlike the first, depends on their particular ideas about human life. The claim is that only the style of a certain sort of narrative artist (and not, for example, the style associated with the abstract theoretical treatise) can adequately state certain important truths about the world, embodying them in its shape and setting up in the reader the activities that are appropriate for grasping them.

One might, of course, hold that the truths in question *can* be adequately stated in abstract theoretical language and also hold that they are most efficiently communicated to readers of a certain sort through colorful and moving narrative. Young children, for example, frequently learn some types of mathematics more

5. James, *AN* 340.

easily through amusing word problems than through abstract computations. But this hardly implies that the truths of mathematics have themselves any deep or intrinsic connection with the word problem form, or that they are deficiently stated in their abstract form. Where our questions about how to live are concerned, a similar claim has frequently been made for literature: it is held to be instrumental to the communication of truths that could in principle be adequately stated without literature and grasped in that form by a mature mind. This is not the position taken by Proust and James, or by this book. Literature may indeed have an important instrumental role to play in motivation and communication, and this is itself significant; but far more is claimed for it. My first claim insists that any style makes, itself, a statement: that an abstract theoretical style makes, like any other style, a statement about what is important and what is not, about what faculties of the reader are important for knowing and what are not. There may then be certain plausible views about the nature of the relevant portions of human life that cannot be housed within that form without generating a peculiar implicit contradiction. The second claim is, then, that for an interesting family of such views, a literary narrative of a certain sort is the only type of text that can state them fully and fittingly, without contradiction.

Two examples will make this clearer. Suppose one believes and wishes to state, as Proust's Marcel does, that the most important truths about human psychology cannot be communicated or grasped by intellectual activity alone: powerful emotions have an irreducibly important cognitive role to play. If one states this view in a written form that expresses only intellectual activity and addresses itself only to the intellect of the reader (as is the custom in most philosophical and psychological treatises), a question arises. Does the writer really believe what his or her words seem to state? If so, why has this form been selected above others, a form that itself implies a rather different view of what is important and what dispensable? One might get an answer to this question that would rescue the author from the charge of inconsistency. (For example, the author may believe that the psychological thesis itself is not among the truths that must be grasped through emotional activity. Or she may believe that it is among those truths, but be indifferent about whether the reader grasps it.) But it seems at least *prima facie* plausible to suppose that the author has either been oddly inattentive or is actually ambivalent about the view in question. Proust's text, by contrast, states in its form exactly what it states in its paraphrasable philosophical content; what it tells about knowledge it also commits itself to in practice, alternating between emotive and reflective material in just the way that Marcel holds to be appropriate for telling truth.[6]

Take, again, Henry James's belief that fine attention and good deliberation require a highly complex, nuanced perception of, and emotional response to, the concrete features of one's own context, including particular persons and relationships. Again, one could try to state this position abstractly, in a text that displayed no interest in the concrete, in emotional ties, or in fine-tuned perceptions. But the same difficulty would then arise: the text is making a set of claims, but its formal choices seem to be making a different and incompatible set of claims. It seems *prima facie* plausible to hold, as James does hold, that the terms of the novelist's

6. For a fuller discussion of this point, see "Love's Knowledge" in this volume.

art can state what James calls "the projected morality" more adequately than any other available terms.[7] Again, more needs to be said—especially about Aristotle, who makes statements about particularity that lie close to James's, but in a very different style (see §§E, F). But the general sense of the second claim is, I hope, by now emerging.

The predominant tendency in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy has been either to ignore the relation between form and content altogether, or, when not ignoring it, to deny the first of our two claims, treating style as largely decorative—as irrelevant to the stating of content, and neutral among the contents that might be conveyed. When philosophy's style is not ignored or declared irrelevant, a more interesting position, respectful of the first claim, has occasionally made its appearance. This view is that the truths the philosopher has to tell are such that the plain clear general non-narrative style most frequently found in philosophical articles and treatises is in fact the style best suited to state any and all of them.[8] Both positions will be disputed in this book. The first (the repudiation of the whole question of style) will be my primary target. I wish to establish the importance of taking style seriously in its expressive and statement-making functions. But the second must be confronted as well, if we are to make, inside philosophy, a place for literary texts. For if all significant truths or candidates for truth about human life really are such that the abstract philosophical style states them at least as well as the narrative styles of writers such as James and Proust, then even the acceptance of the first claim will do nothing on behalf of *those* styles, except to link them with illusion. We can hardly hope to settle here the question of truth about matters of such importance, or even to investigate more than a small fraction of the topics in which the question of truth and style arises. So the narrower and more modest claim of these essays will be that with respect to several interrelated issues in the area of human choice, and of ethics broadly construed (see §§C, E, G), there is a family of positions that is a serious candidate for truth—and which deserves, therefore, the attention and scrutiny of anyone who seriously considers these matters—whose full, fitting, and (as James would say) "honorable" embodiment is found in the terms characteristic of the novels here investigated. (Clearly there are differences among the novels, and we shall investigate them also.)

Throughout this book, I shall be speaking of author and reader: so a brief comment is necessary at the start to clarify what I do and do not mean by this. I view these literary texts as works whose representational and expressive content issues from human intentions and conceptions. This feature is, in fact, prominently dramatized in the novels studied here, in all of which the voice of an authorial consciousness is to be heard, and in all of which the making of the text is an explicit theme of the narrative itself. Moreover, all of them—especially James and Dickens—closely connect the stance of the author with the stance of the reader—as the authorial presence occupies in thought and feeling the reader's position, asking what the reader will be able to feel and think. It is important to distinguish, here, three figures: (1) the narrator or author-character (together with this character's conception of the reader); (2) the authorial presence that animates the text taken as a whole (together with the corresponding implicit picture of what a sensitive and informed reader will experience); and (3) the whole life of the real-life author (and reader), much of which has no causal relation to the text and no relevance to the proper reading of the text.[9] The first and the second pair are what will concern me here: that is, I will be concerned with intentions and thoughts that are realized in the text, and that may appropriately be seen in the text, not with other thoughts and feelings the real-life author and reader may find themselves having.[10] Both James and Proust insist on the difference between any real author's whole daily life, with its routines, its inattentions, its patches of deadness, and the more concentrated attention that produces and animates the literary text. On the other side, they correctly notice that the reader, too, may in many ways lapse, and may fail to be what the text demands. I am concerned with what is embodied in the text and what the text, in turn, requires of the reader. Thus nothing I say about the author here implies that critical statements made by the writer have any particular authority in the interpretation of the text. For such statements may very well be dissociated from the intentions that are actually fulfilled in the text. Nor, in speaking of intentions fulfilled in the text, am I thinking simply of conscious volitions to make an art-work of such and such a sort. Such a notion of intention would indeed direct us away from a scrutiny of all that is in fact realized in the text; and such narrow notions of intention have brought the entire notion of intention into discredit.[11] I am interested, then, in all and only those thoughts, feelings, wishes, movements, and other processes that are actually there to be seen in the text. On the other hand, seeing something in a literary text (or, for that matter, a painting) is unlike seeing shapes in the clouds, or in the fire. There the reader is free to see whatever his or her fancy dictates, and there are no limits on what she may see. In the reading of a literary text, there is a standard of correctness set by the author's sense of life, as it finds its way into the work.[12] And the text, approached as the creation of human intentions, is some fraction or ele-

7. On this point, see "'Finely Aware'" and "Discernment" in this volume. The phrase "the projected morality" is from the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, *AN* 45.

8. Especially influential here are the views of John Locke; they are discussed in "Fictions" and "Love's Knowledge."

9. For similar distinctions, see Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961; 2nd ed., 1983), and *The Company We Keep*, where the distinctions are connected with an analysis of ethical assessment.

10. An excellent account of the role of intention in interpretation is presented in Richard Wollheim's *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Eng., 1980) and his *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, N.J., 1987). Wollheim argues that the standard of correctness for the spectator's (or reader's) activity must be found by reference to the artist's intention; but that only those intentions are relevant that are causally involved in the production of the work. He also insists on the close interweaving at every stage of the artist's role with the spectator's; these are not so much two people as two roles, and the artist frequently occupies the spectator's role during the process of making. This account is very close to James's subtle analysis of the author's rereading in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl*. On intention, see also E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn., 1967).

11. A similarly broad notion of intention, with similar constraints, can be found in Wollheim's *Art and Its Objects* and *Painting as an Art*; see also Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York, 1969; repr. Cambridge, Eng., 1976).

12. For this contrast, see Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (especially the supplementary essay "Seeing-In and Seeing-As") and *Painting as an Art*, chap. 2.

ment of a real human being—even if the writer manages to see what she sees only in her work.

A problem seems to be raised by my use of Henry James's prefaces. In appealing from novels to prefaces, don't I after all confound the author-in-the-text with the real-life author, and give the statements of the latter an inappropriate authority? Here, three things may be said. First, an author need not be a bad judge of what has in fact been realized in his text. This is very often the case, for complex psychological reasons; but there are exceptions, and I think that James is one. Second, I do not treat the prefaces as infallible. Like most critics, I find them inaccurate at times in their claims about the reader's viewpoint, and on other related matters. But they remain remarkably perceptive and helpful guides to the novels. Finally, James strongly suggests that, once published together with the novels, they have become a part of the literary enterprise they introduce. It is, then, perhaps too simple to view them as comments by the real-life author. They are closely linked to the authorial consciousness of the novels, and link the novels together into a larger narrative structure, with discursive and narrative parts, and a connecting authorial presence of its own. I suggest, then, that in bringing his life's work together and linking its component parts with a more or less continuous discussion of literary art and its "projected morality,"[13] James has moved in the direction in which Proust moves in the creation of his own hybrid text, combining commentary and narration into a larger whole.

B. The Ancient Quarrel

> My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own), and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time—they, and the *Arabian Nights,* and the *Tales of the Genii*—and did me no harm. . . . This was my only and my constant comfort. When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. . . . The reader now understands, as well as I do, what I was when I came to that point of my youthful history to which I am now coming again.
>
> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

To show more clearly the nature of this philosophical/literary project, it will be useful (since it is in some ways so anomalous) to describe its beginnings and motivations, the soil from which it has grown. It grew, then, immediately and recently from my sense of the force and inevitability of certain questions, and from my bewilderment at finding these questions, on the whole, not addressed in the academic contexts I encountered, a bewilderment that only increased my obsession with the questions. More remotely, however, it began, I can only suppose, from the fact that, like David Copperfield, I was a child whose best friends were, on the whole, novels—a serious and, for a long time, a solitary child.[14] I can recall sitting for hours in the brown and silent attic, or in the tall grass of any field that was left unaltered by the chilly clear opulence that Bryn Mawr in general offered—reading with love, and thinking about many questions. Taking enormous delight at being in an open field, bewildered, reading, with the wind blowing round my shoulders.

In my school there was nothing that Anglo-American conventions would call "philosophy." And yet the questions of this book (which I shall call, broadly, ethical) were raised and investigated. The pursuit of truth there was a certain sort of reflection about literature. And the form the ethical questions took, as the roots of some of them grew into me, was usually that of reflecting and feeling about a particular literary character, a particular novel; or, sometimes, an episode from history, but seen as the material for a dramatic plot of my own imagining. All this was, of course, seen in relation to life itself, which was itself seen, increasingly, in ways influenced by the stories and the sense of life they expressed. Aristotle, Plato, Spinoza, Kant—these were still unknown to me. Dickens, Jane Austen, Aristophanes, Ben Jonson, Euripides, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky—there were my friends, my spheres of reflection.

In several projects of early adolescence I find (rereading them with a sense more of continuity than of rupture) some germs of later preoccupations. I find a paper about Aristophanes, discussing the ways in which ancient comedy presents social and ethical issues and inspires recognition in the audience. I find a paper on Ben Jonson, and the depiction of character and motive in the "comedy of humors." I find, somewhat later, a long play about the life of Robespierre, focusing on the conflict between his love of general political ideals and his attachments to particular human beings. The plot concerns his decision to send Camille Desmoulins and his wife, both loved friends, to death for the sake of the revolution. For Robespierre's asceticism and incorruptible idealism there is profound sympathy, and love, even as there is also horror at his ability to lose the vision of the particular and, losing that, to do terrible things. The questions of "Perception and Revolution" are there already—preparing me, no doubt, for a certain ambivalence toward the revolutionary movements that I soon after encountered. Finally, there is a long paper about Dostoyevsky and the whole question of whether the best way to live was one that seeks to transcend one's finite humanity; here, once again, I see some of the very problems and even distinctions that I still investigate.

As for Proust, my French literature courses meticulously surveyed the centuries, one each year, arriving by twelfth grade at the nineteenth; and he remained unknown to me. And Henry James. I read *The Portrait of a Lady* too early, with only moderate enthusiasm. *The Golden Bowl,* lent to me by a teacher, lay on my desk for two years, with its cover of white, black, and gold, the evidently cracked

13. James, *AN* 45.

14. If this alerts the reader to the possibility that a particular, not altogether immersed sense of life may have a role to play in writing these essays, this will begin to open up a central question of several of the essays themselves: In asking us to identify with and recognize ourselves in the sense of life expressed in his or her writings, where are authors of various kinds leading their readers, and how disposing them to various forms of human love? (See "Perceptive Equilibrium," "'Finely Aware,'" "Steerforth's Arm," in this volume.)

bowl, silent, feared, holding in its curve the apples of the Garden. I returned it, unread, at graduation.

What I find worth emphasizing about this time is, first of all, the obsessive quality of my focus, then as now, on certain questions and problems, which seemed simply to have arrived, and concerning which I seem hardly ever to have been able, from then on, not to think. And, second, the fact that by far the most natural and also fruitful way to pursue them seemed to me to be, then as now, to turn to works of literature. I was pursuing questions usually called philosophical; there is little doubt of that. And each of these early essays contains a fair amount of general analysis and discussion. But it seemed to me best to discuss the issues in connection with a text that displayed concrete lives and told a story; and to discuss them in ways that responded to these literary features. In part, this can be attributed to the absence of alternative texts; in part to the ambitions of the teachers at my exigent and feminist girls' school, who were powerful intellects somewhat confined and constrained in their high school role, and who sought to break through the boundaries of what was then taken to be a literary education suited for young women.

In college, already loving ancient Greek literature, I learned Greek. And, while beginning the study of the admitted philosophers (especially Plato and Aristotle), I focused above all on Greek epic and Greek drama, where I found problems that profoundly moved me. I learned to look closely at words and images; at metrical structures; at narration and organization; at intertextual reference. And I always wished to ask, What does all this mean for human life? What possibilities does this recognize or deny? Here again, as in my earlier studies, this questioning was encouraged, both as an appropriate way of approaching a literary text and as an appropriate place to pursue one's philosophical concerns and perplexities.

In graduate school, however, the situation was different. I encountered, in my effort to pursue this complex philosophical/literary interest, a threefold resistance: from the conceptions of philosophy and moral philosophy then dominant in the Anglo-American tradition; from the dominant conception of what ancient Greek philosophy included and what methods its study ought to use; and, finally, from the dominant conception of literary study, both within Classics and outside it. This was at Harvard in 1969; but these problems were in fact typical of their time, and by no means unique to Harvard.

To begin with the literary resistance, which I encountered soonest: ancient literary works were then being studied with an eye on philological and to some extent aesthetic issues, but not with an emphasis on their connections with the ethical thought of the philosophers, or, indeed, as sources of ethical reflection of any kind. Indeed, the ethical works of the philosophers did not figure as an essential part of graduate study in the Classics at all. On the reading list, of Aristotle, was only the *Poetics*, which was assumed to be a work that one could profitably study without any acquaintance with other Aristotelian works; of Plato, only those works, for example *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, which were seen as having importance for the history of literary style, and which were deemed not to be *philosophical* works in any case. (Most philosophers agreed with this.) In the broader world of literary study to which Classics was occasionally linked, aesthetic issues were understood (following, on the whole, standards set by New Critical formalism) to be more or less divorced from ethical and practical issues. One rarely found anything but contempt for ethical criticism of literature.[15]

On the side of philosophy, there was resistance too. Here Harvard was more pluralistic than most major philosophy departments, especially since Stanley Cavell was already teaching there and beginning to publish some of his remarkable work bridging literature and philosophy. But most of Cavell's work on literature was produced after that time; and at that time his work (largely concerned with Wittgenstein) did not address itself explicitly to questions in moral philosophy, or influence the way in which moral philosophy was taught and written by others.[16] For these reasons I remained for some years more or less ignorant of Cavell's work, and focused on the dominant positions in ethics. By this time, the positivist/metaethical movement in ethics that had for a long time discouraged the philosophical study of substantive ethical theories and practical ethical issues, confining ethics to the analysis of ethical language, was dying. Already, the revival of interest in normative ethics that has by now generated so much excellent work was beginning, led by John Rawls.[17] But the leading approaches to ethical theory in that revival were Kantianism and Utilitarianism—both positions that were, for good internal reasons, hostile to literature. These two approaches were taken to divide the field more or less exhaustively.

In the study of ancient philosophy the situation was even less hospitable to a philosophical study of works of literature. My supervisor, the wonderful scholar G.E.L. Owen,[18] had no veneration for conventional ways of proceeding in scholarship. To the study of ancient dialectic, logic, science, and metaphysics, he brought precise and deep historical learning and an iconoclastic temperament. Frequently, he overturned cherished distinctions and methods, to the end of constructing an account of the ancient thinkers both historically richer and philosophically deeper than those currently on the scene. But Owen had little interest in ethical problems; or, if any, only in issues about the logic of ethical language. This being the case, he never asked whether the conventional way of writing the history of Greek ethics was in fact fruitful and correct.

That way, familiar by now to many generations of students, was to begin Greek ethics with Democritus—perhaps with a backward glance to Heraclitus and

15. Somewhat after this time, Gregory Nagy (who was at that time working on Indo-European linguistics and metrics) began to produce, at Harvard, his now well-known work on connections between traditional genres and views of the hero: see *The Best of the Achaians* (Baltimore, 1979).

16. Cavell's earliest work in this area is collected in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (above, n. 11); for later work, see especially, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York, 1979) and *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, Eng., 1987).

17. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); Rawls's views are futher discussed in "Perceptive Equilibrium." On Rawls's, and my, use of the term "moral philosophy," see "Perceptive Equilibrium," n. 2. Rawls's influence has been enormous; but in fairness it should also be said that some philosophers of the immediately preceding period whose work focused on the analysis of ethical language were also concerned with substantive ethical questions: in particular, this is true of the work or R. M. Hare (*The Language of Morals* [Oxford, 1952]; *Freedom and Reason* [Oxford, 1963]; *Moral Thinking* [Oxford, 1981]).

18. See G.E.L. Owen, *Logic, Science, and Dialectic: Collected Papers in Greek Philosophy* (London and Ithaca, N.Y., 1986).

Empedocles—and to proceed onward with Socrates and the sophists; to focus most of one's attention on Plato and Aristotle; and to end with barely a nod to the Hellenistic philosophers. The ethical contribution of literary works was not taken to be a part of Greek ethical thought as such—but, at most, a part of the background of "popular thought" against which the great thinkers worked. "Popular thought" was taken to be a very different subject from philosophical ethics; and even this subject did not, it was thought, require the close study of literary forms or of whole literary works.[19] An interest in whole works of literature was therefore assumed to be a "literary" interest—by which was meant an aesthetic interest and not a philosophical interest. Aristotle, then, was inside philosophical training and Sophocles outside. As for Plato, he was split conveniently into two figures or sets of issues, to be studied in two different departments with different supervisors, whose own intellectual communication was typically slight. Some entire works (e.g. *Symposium*)[20] were, as I say, taken to be literary rather than philosophical; the others were taken to contain both excerptible arguments and literary decoration; it was thought that these two elements could, and should, be studied apart from one another, and by different people.[21]

But by this time I was already too set in my ways not to find this situation puzzling and disturbing. My interest in certain philosophical questions did not diminish; and I still found that the questions led me as much to works of literature as to works of admitted philosophy. And in a sense more so. For I was finding in the Greek tragic poets a recognition of the ethical importance of contingency, a deep sense of the problem of conflicting obligations, and a recognition of the ethical significance of the passions, that I found more rarely, if at all, in the thought of the admitted philosophers, whether ancient or modern. And I began, as I read more and more often the styles of the philosophers, to have a sense that there were deep connections between the forms and structures characteristic of tragic poetry and its ability to show what it lucidly did show.

Therefore, when I was advised to pursue the project of studying ethical conflict in Aeschylus by finding as my supervisor a literary expert in the Classics Department, I felt both assent and dissent. Dissent, because I was convinced that these were philosophical questions, whatever that meant; at any rate, some of the very same questions the philosophers were discussing, if not the same answers. It therefore seemed to make sense to pursue them right there, in conversation with the philosophers, and not off in some other department—all the more since the prevailing methods and aims in literary study made literary experts not very interested in such questions. Dissent, as well, because I loved philosophy in all of its forms, and sensed that the questions would be more clearly focused, even where literature was concerned, if they were studied in a dialogue with other philosophical thought. Assent, however, because I did perceive that any good study of these questions in tragedy would have to treat the poets not simply as people who might have written a treatise but didn't, nor yet simply as repositories of "popular thought," but as thinker-poets whose meanings and whose formal choices were closely linked. To that end, a close study of literary language and form was going to be essential.

But even more important than my own ambivalence about these disciplinary separations was the fact that by now my study of the Greeks was showing me that most of them would have found the separations unnatural and unilluminating. For the Greeks of the fifth and early fourth centuries B.C., there were not two separate sets of questions in the area of human choice and action, aesthetic questions and moral-philosophical questions, to be studied and written about by mutually detached colleagues in different departments.[22] Instead, dramatic poetry and what we now call philosophical inquiry in ethics were both typically framed by, seen as ways of pursuing, a single and general question: namely, how human beings should live. To this question both poets such as Sophocles and Euripides and thinkers such as Democritus and Plato were seen as providing answers; frequently the answers of poets and non-poets were incompatible. The "ancient quarrel between the poets and the philosophers," as Plato's *Republic* (using the word "philosopher" in Plato's own way) calls it, could be called a quarrel only because it was about a single subject. The subject was human life and how to live it. And the quarrel was a quarrel about literary form as well as about ethical content, about literary forms understood as committed to certain ethical priorities, certain choices and evaluations, rather than others. Forms of writing were not seen as vessels into which different contents could be indifferently poured; form was itself a statement, a content.

Before Plato came on the scene the poets (especially the tragic poets) were understood by most Athenians to be the central ethical teachers and thinkers of Greece, the people to whom, above all, the city turned, and rightly turned, with its questions about how to live. To attend a tragic drama was not to go to a distraction or a fantasy, in the course of which one suspended one's anxious practical questions. It was, instead, to engage in a communal process of inquiry, reflection, and feeling with respect to important civic and personal ends. The very structure of theatrical performance strongly implied this. When we go to the theater, we usually sit in a darkened auditorium, in the illusion of splendid isolation, while the dramatic action—separated from the spectator by the box of the proscenium arch—is bathed in artificial light as if it were a separate world of fantasy and mystery. The ancient Greek spectator, by contrast, sitting in the common daylight,

19. See, for example, the approach to the study of "popular morality" exemplified in A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960). K. J. Dover's *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford, 1974) is a methodologically far more adequate work, and its argument does not in any way rule out the possibility that literary works might have something to contribute to ethics studies as wholes and in their own right. But it is not that project that the book attempts.

20. K. J. Dover's edition of the *Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980) has on the back jacket a blurb reading: "Plato's *Symposium* is the most literary of all his works and one which all students of classics are likely to want to read whether or not they are studying Plato's philosophy." No matter who wrote this text, it is typical of approaches to that dialogue in the period I describe and, in fact, is consistent with the approach adopted by Dover himself.

21. See my discussion of these trends in Plato scholarship in a review of a group of new books on Plato in *The Times Literary Supplement,* June 1987; see also *Fragility* chaps. 6–7, Interlude 1. For examples of stimulating recent attempts to undo these separations, see Charles Kahn, "Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias,*" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983) 75–121; C. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven, Conn., 1986); G. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas* (Cambridge, 1987).

22. For a more extensive treatment of this issue, see *Fragility,* Interlude 1.

saw across the staged action the faces of fellow citizens on the other side of the orchestra. And the whole event took place during a solemn civic/religious festival, whose trappings made spectators conscious that the values of the community were being examined and communicated.[23] To respond to these events was to acknowledge and participate in a way of life—and a way of life, we should add, that prominently included reflection and public debate about ethical and civic matters.[24] To respond well to a tragic performance involved both feeling and critical reflection; and these were closely linked with one another. The idea that art existed only for art's sake, and that literature should be approached with a detached aesthetic attitude, pure of practical interest, was an idea unknown in the Greek world, at least until the Hellenistic age.[25] Art was thought to be practical, aesthetic interest a practical interest—an interest in the good life and in communal self-understanding. To respond in a certain way was to move already toward this greater understanding.

As for the study of ethical matters by the people whom we now call philosophers, this too was taken to be a practical and not just a theoretical enterprise. It was seen as tragedy was seen: as something that had as its goal the good human life for its audience. From Socrates and Plato straight through to the Hellenistic schools, there was deep agreement that the point of philosophical inquiry and discourse in the area of ethics was to improve, in some manner, the pupil's soul, to move the pupil closer to the leading of the good life.[26] This goal was taken to require a good deal of reflection and understanding; so producing understanding was itself an important part of the practical project. The philosophers were forced, then, to ask, and did ask, how *does* the pupil's soul seek and attain ethical understanding? What elements does it have that promote and impede understanding and good ethical development? What state is the soul in when it recognizes a truth? And what is the content of the most important evaluative truths it will learn? Having arrived at some (at least provisional) conclusions about these matters, they would then go on to construct discourses whose form would suit the ethical task, enlivening those elements in the souls of the pupils that seemed to be the best sources of progress, forming the pupils' desires in accordance with a correct conception of what matters, confronting them with an accurate picture of what has importance.

Both the ethical philosophers and the tragic poets, then, understood themselves to be engaging in forms of educational and communicative activity, in what the Greeks called *psuchagōgia* (leading of the soul),[27] in which methodological and formal choices on the part of the teacher or writer were bound to be very important for the eventual result: not just because of their instrumental role in communication, but also because of the values and judgments they themselves expressed and their role in the adequate stating of a view. An ethical discourse addressed to the soul expresses certain ethical preferences and priorities in its very structure; it represents human life as being this way or that; it shows, well done, the shape of a human soul. Are those representations truthful and illuminating? Is that the soul we want our pupils to confront as their teacher? That was the question that generated the ancient quarrel.

In Plato's attack upon the poets we find a profound insight: that all of the ways of writing that were characteristic of tragic (and much of epic) poetry are committed to a certain, albeit very general, view of human life, a view from which one might dissent.[28] Tragedies state this view in the very way they construct their plots, engage the attention of their audience, use rhythm and music and language. The elements of this view include at least the following: that happenings beyond the agent's control are of real importance not only for his or her feelings of happiness or contentment, but also for whether he or she manages to live a fully good life, a life inclusive of various forms of laudable action. That, therefore, what happens to people by chance can be of enormous importance to the ethical quality of their lives; that, therefore, good people are right to care deeply about such chance events. That, for these same reasons, an audience's pity and fear at tragic events are valuable responses, responses for which there is an important place in the ethical life, since they embody a recognition of ethical truths. That other emotions as well are appropriate, and based upon correct beliefs about what matters. That, for example, it is right to love certain things and people that lie beyond one's own control, and to grieve when these people die, when these things are removed. The tragic genre depends on such beliefs for its very structure and literary shape: for its habit is to tell stories of reversals happening to good but not invulnerable people, and to tell these stories as if they matter for all human beings. And the form sets up in its audience responses, particularly those of pity for the characters and fear for oneself, that presuppose a similar set of beliefs. It feeds the tendency of the spectator to identify with a hero who weeps uncontrollably over the body of a loved one, or goes mad with rage, or is terrified by the force of an insoluble dilemma.

But one may or may not accept these beliefs, this view of life. If one believes, with Socrates, that the good person cannot be harmed,[29] that the only thing of real importance is one's own virtue, then one will not think that stories of reversal have deep ethical significance, and one will not want to write as if they did, or to show as worthy heroes people who believe that they do. Like Plato's *Republic*, we will omit the tears of Achilles at Patroclus' death, if we wish to teach that the good person is self-sufficient.[30] Nor will we want works around that make their connection with the audience through the emotions—since all of them seem to rest on

23. See *Fragility*, chaps. 2, 3, 13, and Interludes 1 and 2. On the tragic festivals and their social function, see John J. Winkler, "The Ephebes' Song," *Representations* 11 (1985) 26–62.

24. On the connection between Athenian fondness for public critical debate and the development of rational argument, see G.E.R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason, and Experience* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981).

25. See Nussbaum, "Historical Conceptions of the Humanities and Their Relationship to Society," in *Applying the Humanities*, ed. D. Callahan et al. (New York, 1985), 3–28.

26. See Nussbaum, "Therapeutic Arguments: Epicurus and Aristotle," in *The Norms of Nature*, ed. M. Schofield and G. Striker (Cambridge, Eng., 1986), 31–74.

27. On this idea, see my "Therapeutic Arguments," and also *The Therapy of Desire* (Martin Classical Lectures, 1986), forthcoming. See also P. Rabbow, *Seelenführung* (Munich, 1954); I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Berlin, 1969).

28. See *Fragility*, Interludes 1 and 2.

29. *Apology* 41 CD; Socrates claims knowledge of this, although in general he denies that he has any knowledge.

30. *Republic* 387–88.

the belief (a false belief, from this point of view) that such external happenings do have significance. In short, one's beliefs about the ethical truth shape one's view of literary forms, seen as ethical statements.

It seemed to me then, as it does now, that this ancient debate approached these issues at the right level of depth, asking the right questions about the relationship between forms of discourse and views of life. By contrast, it seemed to me that the contemporary Anglo-American treatment of the elements in this quarrel—which compartmentalized the forms of discourse in such a way that there seemed to *be* no debate and no quarrel—prevented these important questions from being properly raised and discussed. It seemed to me important to begin to recover for the study of ancient Greek philosophy an account of these questions about luck, and of their implications for philosophical form. I began to pursue that task. One portion of this project became *The Fragility of Goodness;* I am currently working on the Hellenistic continuation of that ethical debate.

In this work a central role has been played by Aristotle, the nonliterary philosopher whom I most love, and who creates both illumination and a puzzle at the center of this project.[31] For Aristotle defends the claim of tragedy to tell the truth; and his own ethical view, as I have argued, is close to views that can be found in the tragedies. And yet Aristotle does not write tragedies. He writes philosophical and explanatory commentaries that are concrete, close to ordinary language, intuitive, but, still, not literary in their style. This led me to wonder whether there was not a form of philosophical writing that was both different from the expressive literary forms and also, at the same time, their natural ally—explanatory rather than itself expressive, and yet at the same time committed to the concrete, directing us to attend to the particulars rather than itself showing them in their bewildering multiplicity. I have tried to exemplify such a form here (see pp. 48–49).

But my interest in the ancient debate was motivated by an interest in philosophical problems whose force I felt, and feel, in life. I therefore began, while pursuing these historical issues, to look for ways of continuing the ancient debate in the contemporary philosophical context. The ancient debate had helped me to articulate much that I had sensed long before about the novels of Dickens and Dostoyevsky, what I was at that very time discovering in Henry James and in Proust. And through the pursuit of these connections a continuation of the debate began to take shape, one that would bring the lucid bewilderment and the emotional precision of these writers into conversation with the very different styles and forms that were and are most common in the philosophical pursuit of the very questions with which the novels are also occupied. I finished reading *The Golden Bowl* in a small flat in London's Lincoln's Inn on Christmas Day of 1975, alone. And the pity and dread of the indelible final lines became, from then on, interwoven with, and expressive of, my reflection about tragedy and its effect, about chance, conflict, and loss in the personal life.

At this time I began to teach philosophy. And turning to the contemporary philosophical scene with these concerns about form and style, I still discovered little there that addressed them. The ethical debate was becoming more complex; interesting criticisms of both Kantianism and Utilitarianism were beginning to be heard—sometimes with appeal to ancient Greek questions and debates. But so far as the *form* of ethical writing was concerned, there had been little further work. One could still observe, in the literary choices made, an odd mixture of antitragic depth with unreflective conventionality. That is, on the one hand, one saw in certain then influential moral philosophers of the past—in Kant, Bentham, and Spinoza, for example, and also in the most perceptive of their contemporary followers—a concern with the suitability of form to content, combined with an ethical view that could never find its fitting expression in novels or tragic dramas: the acceptance, that is, of my first claim, combined with a rejection of the second. One can see in the stylistic choices of such figures issues closely related to the ancient issues.[32]

On the other hand, however, most disciples and descendants of these philosophers on the contemporary scene did not (and still do not) give the impression of having chosen their styles with these philosophical questions about style in view. Nor did the opponents of these ethical positions, who might seem to have a special reason for reflecting on these matters. Whether Kant's views about inclination were being defended or attacked, whether the emotions were being praised or blamed, the conventional style of Anglo-American philosophical prose usually prevailed: a style correct, scientific, abstract, hygienically pallid, a style that seemed to be regarded as a kind of all-purpose solvent in which philosophical issues of any kind at all could be efficiently disentangled, any and all conclusions neatly disengaged. That there might be other ways of being precise, other conceptions of lucidity and completeness that might be held to be more appropriate for ethical thought—this was, on the whole, neither asserted nor even denied.

This situation resulted in part from the long predominance of ethical views that really did underwrite the conventional style—so that it had by then become second nature, as though it was *the* style for ethics. It owed much, as well—and one can hardly overestimate this—to the long-standing fascination of Western philosophers with the methods and the style of natural science, which have at many times in history seemed to embody the only sort of rigor and precision worth cultivating, the only norm of rationality worth emulating, even in the ethical sphere. That issue is as old as the debate between Plato and Aristotle over the nature of ethical knowledge. And it is certainly possible to make a substantial argument that the true nature of the ethical domain is such that it can best be conveyed in the style we usually associate with mathematics or natural science. This has been done, for example, by Spinoza, with great philosophical power; in a different way it has been done by the best of Utilitarian thought.

But there is a mistake made, or at least a carelessness, when one takes a method and style that have proven fruitful for the investigation and description of certain truths—say those of natural science—and applies them without further reflection

31. See *Fragility,* chaps. 8–12; on Aristotle's style, Interlude 2. See also my "Aristotle," in *Ancient Writers,* ed. T. J. Luce (New York, 1982), 377–416.

32. This is no mere coincidence, since most of these figures were close readers of the ancient Greek philosophers. The influence of the Stoics and their theory of emotion is especially pervasive.

or argument to a very different sphere of human life that may have a different geography and demand a different sort of precision, a different norm of rationality. Most of the moral philosophy I encountered lacked these further reflections and arguments. And frequently stylistic choices appeared to be dictated not by any substantial conception at all, not even by the model of science, but by habit and the pressure of convention: by Anglo-American fastidiousness and emotional reticence, and above all by the academicization and professionalization of philosophy, which leads everyone to write like everyone else, in order to be respectable and to be published in the usual journals. Most professional philosophers did not, I found, share the ancient conception of philosophy as discourse addressed to nonexpert readers of many kinds who would bring to the text their urgent concerns, questions, needs, and whose souls might in that interaction be changed. Having lost that conception they had lost, too, the sense of the philosophical text as an expressive creation whose form should be part and parcel of its conception, revealing in the shape of the sentences the lineaments of a human personality with a particular sense of life. As Cora Diamond writes, with wonderful clarity: "the pleasure of reading what has been written under the pressure of content shaping form, form illuminating content, has to do with one's sense of the soul of the author in the text, and . . . such pleasure, and such a sense of the soul of the author, is precisely what is irrelevant or out of place in the writing of professionals for professionals."[33]

So thoroughly were these issues lost from view that one found—and found increasingly as criticism of Kantianism and Utilitarianism mounted—writings in which there appeared to be the peculiar sort of self-contradiction between form and thesis that I have already mentioned. An article, for example, argues that the emotions are essential and central in our efforts to gain understanding on any important ethical matter; and yet it is written in a style that expresses only intellectual activity and strongly suggests that only this activity matters for the reader in his or her attempts to understand. There might have been some interesting reason for writing this way; but usually, in cases of this kind, the whole issue had just not arisen. Such articles were written as they were because that was the way philosophy was being written, and sometimes because an emotive or literary style would have evoked criticism, or even ridicule. Sometimes, too, because philosophers are not trained to write that way, and did not wish to admit that they might lack a relevant piece of equipment. In fact, it was clear that one could not regain for our community the ancient questions concerning style without both training oneself in professionally irrelevant ways and risking ridicule—although there were already courageous pioneers, especially Stanley Cavell, who took the risk.

The side of literature was not, even at this later time, any more hospitable. For, once again, there was change; but again, the views that were then reigning—as the New Criticism waned and Deconstruction took over—continued to be largely hostile to the idea of bringing a broad range of human concerns into connection with literary analysis. The ancient quarrel was rejected as old-fashioned and uninteresting, along with the work of some modern writers, such as F. R. Leavis and Lionel Trilling,[34] who had tried to continue it. It was assumed that any work that attempts to ask of a literary text questions about how we might live, treating the work as addressed to the reader's practical interests and needs, and as being in some sense about our lives, must be hopelessly naive, reactionary, and insensitive to the complexities of literary form and intertextual referentiality.[35]

To be sure, the "ancient quarrel" was sometimes defective in its *exclusive* focus on the practical. It sometimes ignored the fact that literature has tasks and possibilities other than that of illumination about our lives. (We should, however, remember that the ancient concept of the ethical was extremely broad and inclusive, taking in all ways in which texts shape mind and desire, and alter life by their pleasure.) And in many cases, too, the literary discourse of ancient writers could be insufficiently sensitive to the ways in which a literary text as a whole hangs together, both with itself and with other texts, to the play of metaphor and allusion, the self-conscious patterning of language. These same criticisms can sometimes be accurately made against more recent practitioners of ethical criticism. Sometimes they did force the text into a narrow moral straitjacket, neglecting other ways in which it speaks to its reader, neglecting, too, its formal complexities. Too often there were excessively simple theories about "the" moral role of literature, views that concealed many complexities. Nor can there be any doubt that

33. Cora Diamond, letter, August 30, 1988. See also the witty discussion of this question in Michael Tanner, "The Language of Philosophy," in *The State of Language*, ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Berkeley, 1980), 458–66. Tanner's paper begins with a commentary on the following passage of philosophical prose for professionals, taken from an article entitled "A Conceptual Investigation of Love":

> Having defined the field of investigation, we can now sketch the concepts analytically presupposed in our use of 'love'. An idea of these concepts can be gained by sketching a sequence of relations, the members of which we take as relevant in deciding whether or not some relationship between persons A and B is one of love. These are not relevant in the sense of being evidence for some further relation 'love' but as being, in part at least the material of which love consists. The sequence would include at least the following:
>
> (1) A knows B (or at least knows something of B)
> (2) A cares (is concerned) about B
> A likes B
> (3) A respects B
> A is attracted to B
> A feels affection for B
> (4) A is committed to B
> A wishes to see B's welfare promoted
>
> The connection between these relations which we will call 'love-comprising relations' or 'LCRs' is not, except for 'knowing about' and possibly 'Feels affection for' as tight as strict entailment. (W. Newton-Smith, in *Philosophy and Personal Relations*, ed. Alan Montefiore (London, 1973), 188–19. One should point out that the author is actually an outstanding specialist in the philosophy of space and time, where this style would seem to be more at home.)

This passage should illustrate, for readers unfamiliar with professional philosophical prose, what I am talking about in this section. Tanner admirably concludes, "What is needed is a recognition that there are other modes of rigor and precision than quasi-formal ones, and ways of being profound that do not require near-unintelligibility."

34. See especially F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (New York, 1948); L. Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York, 1950).

35. This position is effectively criticized in Arthur Danto, "Philosophy And/As/Of Literature," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 58 (1984), 5–20.

literary work of recent years has done an enormous amount to make readers more precisely and firmly aware of subtleties of literary structure and intertextual reference.

But the failure of what was oversimple in the ancient project, and in some—though certainly not all—of its recent continuations, should not have been taken as the failure of the entire ancient approach, and as an excuse for dismissing its motivating questions.[36] For clearly the ancient approach was not, at its best, insensitive to literary form. Form was, indeed, what it was all about. And it argued plausibly, moreover, that some of the most interesting and urgent questions about literary form itself could not be well pursued unless one asked about the intimate connections between formal structures and the content they express. Ethical criticism of this sort actually demands an exacting formal inquiry.

Nor is the charge that such criticism must inevitably be wooden and moralistic any more plausible, even in light of the ancient situation.[37] For frequently the view of human life expressed in the literary works, dealing, as they so frequently did, with the passionate love of particulars, with grief, pain, and bewilderment, seemed to its critics to be subversive of morality narrowly construed. That was what its defenders legitimately saw as one of its most essential ethical functions. Recent examples of fine ethical interpretation—for example, F. R. Leavis's essay on Dicken's *Hard Times* or Trilling's on *The Princess Casamassima*[38]—show the same point, turning to literature and its forms in order to subvert oversimple moralisms.

Again, far from insisting that all literature must play some single, simple role in human life, the best ethical criticism, ancient and modern, has insisted on the complexity and variety revealed to us in literature, appealing to that complexity to cast doubt on reductive theories.[39] It is, in fact, criticism that focuses exclusively on textual form to the exclusion of human content that appears to be unduly narrow. For it appears to take no account of the urgency of our engagements with works of literature, the intimacy of the relationships we form, the way in which we do, like David Copperfield, read "as if for life," bringing to the text our hopes, fears, and confusions, and allowing the text to impart a certain structure to our hearts.

The project I undertook was, then, to begin to recover, in the domain of the ethical, very broadly and inclusively construed, the sense of the deep connection between content and form that animated the ancient quarrel and that has usually been present in the greatest ethical thinkers, whether they were friends of literature or not and whether or not they wrote in a "literary" way.

36. Wayne Booth argues eloquently for a revival of a broad and flexible ethical criticism in *The Company We Keep* (Berkeley, 1988), criticizing oversimple versions and showing that ethical criticism need not have these defects. See my review in "Reading," this volume. For another defense of ethical criticism, see Martin Price, *Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel* (New Haven, Conn., 1983). Booth's book contains a comprehensive bibliography of ethical criticism.

37. This issue is discussed at length in Booth, with references to modern examples.

38. F. R. Leavis, "*Hard Times:* An Analytic Note," in *The Great Tradition,* 227–48; L. Trilling, "*The Princess Casamassima,*" in *The Liberal Imagination,* 58–92. On these critics, see also "Perceptive Equilibrium," in this volume.

39. This is plainly true of Trilling, Leavis, and Booth.

This is, clearly, not a single inquiry but a complex family of inquiries,[40] even if one considers only questions that are ethical in this broad sense, and not the many others with respect to which the relationship between content and form might profitably be studied. The essays here represent, then, simply a beginning of one small part of this larger inquiry, a beginning rooted in my love for certain novels and in my closely related concern with certain problems: with the role of love and other emotions in the good human life, with the relationship between emotion and ethical knowledge, with deliberation about particulars. No claim about novels in general, far less about literature in general, could possibly emerge from this book. But I believe that these larger questions can best be approached through the detailed study of complex particular cases—all the more since it is the importance of complex particularity that we shall, in these studies, be trying to make clear.

C. The Starting Point: "How Should One Live?"

> It is no chance matter we are discussing, but how one should live.
>
> Plato, *Republic*

> Here, as in all other cases, we must set down the appearances and, first working through the puzzles, in this way go on to show, if possible, the truth of all the deeply held beliefs about these experiences; and, if this is not possible, the truth of the greatest number and the most authoritative.
>
> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

The "ancient quarrel" had an exemplary clarity, since the participants shared a view of what the quarrel was about. However much Plato and the poets disagreed, they agreed that the aim of their work was to provide illumination concerning how one should live. Of course they were at odds concerning what the ethical truth was, and also concerning the nature of understanding. But still, there was some roughly single goal, however much in need of further specification, that they did share, some question to which they could be seen as offering competing answers.

One obstacle to any contemporary version of the ancient project is the difficulty of arriving at any account of what we are looking for that will be shared by the various parties. My aim is to establish that certain literary texts (or texts similar to these in certain relevant ways) are indispensable to a philosophical inquiry in the ethical sphere: not by any means sufficient, but sources of insight without

40. For other related philosophical work, see Stanley Cavell (works cited above, n. 15); Richard Wollheim (see n. 10); Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge, 1973); *Moral Luck* (Cambridge, 1981), *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London, 1979); Cora Diamond, "Having a Rough Story About What Moral Philosophy Is," *New Literary History* 15 (1983), 155–70, "Missing the Adventure," abstracted *Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985), 529ff; Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London, 1970); David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford, 1987); Bas van Fraassen, "The Peculiar Effects of Love and Desire," in *Perspectives on Self Deception,* ed. B. McLaughlin and A. Rorty (Berkeley, 1988), 123–56; Peter Jones, *Philosophy and the Novel* (Oxford, 1975).

which the inquiry cannot be complete. But then it is important to have some conception, however general and flexible, of the inquiry inside which I wish to place the novels, the project in which I see them as helping to state a distinctive alternative to Kantian and Utilitarian conceptions. A difficulty here is that some influential accounts of what moral philosophy includes are cast in the terms of one or another of the competing ethical conceptions; thus they will prove unsuitable, if we want to organize a fair comparison among them. For example, if we begin with the Utilitarian's organizing question, "How can one maximize utility?," we accept, already, a certain characterization of what is salient in the subject matter of ethics, of the right or relevant descriptions for practical situations—one that would rule out from the start, as irrelevant, much of what the novels present as highly relevant. Similarly, reliance on a Kantian characterization of the domain of the moral, and of its relation to what happens in the empirical realm, together with reliance on the Kantian's organizing question "What is my moral duty?," would have the effect of artificially cutting off from the inquiry some elements of life that the novels show as important and link to others—all in advance of a sensitive study of the sense of life that the novels themselves have to offer. So we would, it seems, be ill advised to adopt either of these methods and questions as architectonic guides to the pursuit of a comparison among different conceptions, different senses of life—among these the views of life expressed in the novels. It seems that we should see whether we can find an account of the methods, subject matter, and questions of moral philosophy (ethical inquiry) that is more inclusive.

And here, it must be stressed, what we really want is an account of ethical inquiry that will capture what we actually do when we ask ourselves the most pressing ethical questions. For the activity of comparison I describe is a real practical activity, one that we undertake in countless ways when we ask ourselves how to live, what to be; one that we perform together with others, in search of ways of living together in a community, country, or planet. To bring novels into moral philosophy is not—as I understand this proposal—to bring them to some academic discipline which happens to ask ethical questions. It is to bring them into connection with our deepest practical searching, for ourselves and others, the searching in connection with which the influential philosophical conceptions of the ethical were originally developed, the searching we pursue as we compare these conceptions, both with one another and with our active sense of life. Or rather, it is to recognize that the novels are in this search already: to insist on and describe, the connections the novels have already for readers who love them and who read, like David Copperfield, for life.

No starting point is altogether neutral here. No way of pursuing the search, putting the question, fails to contain some hint as to where the answers might lie.[41] Questions set things up one way or another, tell us what to include, what to look for. Any procedure implies some conception or conceptions of how we come to know, which parts of ourselves we can trust. This does not mean that all choices of procedure and starting-point are merely subjective and irrational.[42] It does mean that in order to attain to the rationality that *is* available (as the chimera of total detachment is not) we need to be alert to those aspects of a procedure that might bias it unduly in one direction or another, and to commit ourselves to the serious investigation of alternative positions.

Here both life and the history of philosophy combine to help us. For we do, in life, bring our experience, our active sense of life, to the different conceptions we encounter, working through them, comparing the alternatives they present, with reference to our developing sense of what is important and what we can live with, seeking a fit between experience and conception. And in the history of moral philosophy we also find an account of an inclusive starting point, and an open and dialectical method, that is, in effect, the philosophical description of this real-life activity and how it goes, when done with thoroughness and sensitivity. For the proponents of rival philosophical conceptions in ethics have usually not concluded that their inquiries and results were non-comparable with those of their opponents, or comparable only by a method of comparison that already throws the judgment to one or another side. They have, instead, frequently appealed to the inclusive dialectical method first described by Aristotle, as one that (continuous with the active searching of life) can provide an overarching or framing procedure in which alternative views might be duly compared, with respect for each, as well as for the evolving sense of life to which each is a response. Philosophers as different as Utilitarian Henry Sidgwick and Kantian John Rawls have appealed to Aristotle's conception of philosophical procedure as one that can, in its inclusiveness, be fair to the competing positions.[43] I concur in this judgment and follow this example—insisting, as well, that one of the salient virtues of this method is its continuity with "our actual adventure" as we search for understanding. (It is important to distinguish the Aristotelian procedure and starting point from Aristotle's own ethical conception, which is just one of the conceptions it considers.)

The Aristotelian procedure in ethics begins with a very broad and inclusive question: "How should a human being live?"[44] This question presupposes no specific demarcation of the terrain of human life, and so, *a fortiori,* not its demarcation into separate moral and nonmoral realms. It does not, that is, assume that there is, among the many ends and activities that human beings cherish and pursue, some one domain, the domain of moral value, that is of special importance and dignity, apart from the rest of life. Nor does it assume, as do utility theorists, that there is a more or less unitary something that a good agent can be seen as maximizing in every act of choice. It does not assume the denial of these claims either; it holds them open for inquiry within the procedure—with the result that, so far, we are surveying everything that Aristotle surveys, that we do actually survey: humor alongside justice, grace in addition to courage.

The inquiry (as I describe it more fully in "Perceptive Equilibrium") is both empirical and practical: empirical, in that it is concerned with, takes its "evidence" from, the experience of life; practical, in that its aim is to find a conception by which human beings can live, and live together.

The inquiry proceeds by working through the major alternative positions

41. See the further discussion of this in "Perceptive Equilibrium," this volume; also "Therapeutic Arguments" (see n. 26). And see Diamond, "Having a Rough Story" (see n. 40).

42. See "Therapeutic Arguments" (see n. 26).

43. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* 46–53; Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics,* 7th ed. (London, 1907), especially the preface to the sixth edition (republished in the seventh).

44. Bernard Williams presents an effective defense of this starting point in *Ethics and the Limits* (above, n. 40); see also *Fragility,* chap. 1, and "Perceptive Equilibrium," this volume.

(including Aristotle's own, but others as well), holding them up against one another and also against the participants' beliefs and feelings, their active sense of life. Nothing is held unrevisable in this process, except the very basic logical idea that statement implies negation, that to assert something is to rule out something else. The participants look not for a view that is true by correspondence to some extra-human reality, but for the best overall fit between a view and what is deepest in human lives. They are asked to imagine, at each stage, what they can least live well without, what lies deepest in their lives; and, again, what seems more superficial, more dispensable. They seek for coherence and fit in the web of judgment, feeling, perception, and principle, taken as a whole.

In this enterprise, literary works play a role on two levels.[45] First, they can intervene to make certain that we get a sufficiently rich and inclusive conception of the opening question and of the dialectical procedure that pursues it—inclusive enough to hold all that our sense of life urges us to consider. "Perceptive Equilibrium" discusses this question, showing how John Rawls's conception of the Aristotelian procedure might be enlarged by consideration of our literary experience.[46] And the style of this Introduction illustrates the inclusiveness of the Aristotelian approach.

But according to the terms of the ancient quarrel the very choice to write a tragic drama—or, we can now say, a novel—expresses already certain evaluative commitments. Among these seem to be commitments to the ethical significance of uncontrolled events, to the epistemological value of emotion, to the variety and non-commensurability of the important things. Literary works (and from now on [see §F] we shall focus on certain novels) are not neutral instruments for the investigation of all conceptions. Built into the very structure of a novel is a certain conception of what matters. In the novelists we study here, when we do find a Kantian character, or some other exponent of an ethical position divergent from the one that animates the narrative taken as a whole (James's Mrs. Newsome, Dickens's Agnes and Mr. Gradgrind[47]), those characters are not likely to fare well with the reader. And we are made aware that if the events in which we, as readers, participate had been described to us by those characters, they would not have had the literary form they now do, and would not have constituted a novel at all. A different sense of salience would have dictated a different form. In short, by consenting to see the events in the novel's world as the novel presents them, we are, as readers, already breaking ethically with Gradgrind, Mrs. Newsome, and Agnes.

My second interest in the novels, then, is an interest in this link between a distinctive conception of life (or a family of conceptions) and the structures of these novels. I shall argue, in fact, that there is a distinctive ethical conception (which I shall call the Aristotelian conception) that requires, for its adequate and complete investigation and statement, forms and structures such as those that we find in these novels. Thus if the enterprise of moral philosophy is understood as we have

45. A third function for literature in this inquiry is described in the Notes to "Plato on Commensurability," this volume.

46. See also H. Richardson, "The Emotions of Reflective Equilibrium," forthcoming.

47. On Mrs. Newsome, see "Perceptive Equilibrium"; on Agnes, "Steerforth's Arm," on Mr. Gradgrind "Discernment," this volume.

understood it, as a pursuit of truth in all its forms, requiring a deep and sympathetic investigation of all major ethical alternatives and the comparison of each with our active sense of life, then moral philosophy requires such literary texts, and the experience of loving and attentive novel-reading, for its own completion. This involves, clearly, an expansion and reconstruction of what moral philosophy has for a long time been taken to be and to include.

Nothing could be further from my intentions than to suggest that we *substitute* the study of novels for the study of the recognized great works of the various philosophical traditions in ethics. Although this may disappoint some who find moderate positions boring, I have no interest in dismissive assaults on systematic ethical theory, or on "Western rationality," or even on Kantianism or Utilitarianism, to which the novels, to be sure, display their own oppositions. I make a proposal that should be acceptable even to Kantians or Utilitarians, if, like Rawls and Sidgwick, they accept the Aristotelian question and the Aristotelian dialectical procedure as good overall guides in ethics, and are thereby methodologically committed to the sympathetic study of alternative conceptions. The proposal is that we should *add* the study of certain novels to the study of these works, on the grounds that without them we will not have a fully adequate statement of a powerful ethical conception, one that we ought to investigate. It will be clear that I sympathize with this ethical conception and that I present, in alliance with the novels, the beginning of a defense of it. But that's just it, it is the beginning, not the completion. And in the full working out of the inquiry the investigation of alternative views, in their own styles and structures, would play a central role. In fact, work on this larger inquiry will, as "Perceptive Equilibrium" argues, play a role even in the understanding of the novels, since one sees something more deeply and clearly when one understands more clearly that to which it is opposed.

There will be those who will object that no question and no procedure can possibly be fair both to the sense of life we find in a novel of James and to the very different view of, say, Kant's second Critique. And of course we have admitted that the procedure is not empty of content. In fact, the procedures of Aristotelian dialectic and the insights of the Aristotelian ethical view, though importantly distinct, are in many ways continuous with one another, in that the sense of life that leads us to build into the overall procedure an attention to particulars, a respect for the emotions, and a tentative and non-dogmatic attitude to the bewildering multiplicities of life will incline us also to have some sympathy with the Aristotelian conception, which emphasizes these features. But, first of all, the procedure as a whole simply *includes* these features: it does not, yet, tell us how to value them. And it instructs us to consider sympathetically all the significant positions, not only this one. In its inclusiveness and its flexibility, and above all its open-endedness, it can plausibly claim to be a balanced philosophical inquiry into all alternatives, not simply a partisan defense of this one. Furthermore, the procedure did not include these features for arbitrary theoretical reasons: it got them from life, and it included them because our sense of life seemed to include them. So if a procedure that includes what life includes is distant from certain theoretical alternatives, this is, or may be, a sign of narrowness in those theoretical alternatives.

But surely, some will say, any conception of procedure that has any content at all will incorporate a conception of rationality that belongs to one tradition of

thought rather than another, and which cannot therefore contain or sympathetically explore the thoughts of any other tradition. Traditions each embody norms of procedural rationality that are part and parcel of the substantive conclusions they support.[48] This is no small worry; but I think that a great deal, here, depends on what one makes of it, how determined one is or is not to make progress on the opening question. The Aristotelian procedure tells us to be respectful of difference; but it also instructs us to look for a consistent and sharable answer to the "how to live" question, one that will capture what is deepest and most basic, even though it will, of necessity, to achieve that aim, have to give up certain other things. To this extent its flexibility is qualified by a deep commitment to getting somewhere. It is built into the procedure itself that we will not simply stop with an enumeration of differences and with the verdict that we cannot fairly compare, cannot rationally decide. It instructs us to do what we can to compare and choose as best we can, in the knowledge that no comparison is, perhaps, altogether above somebody's reproach, since we must translate each of the alternatives, in effect, into our own evolving terms and hold them up against the resources of our own imaginations, our own admittedly incomplete sense of life. (We must note here that it is exactly that determination to compare and to arrive at something sharable that motivates both Rawls's and Sidgwick's choice of the Aristotelian procedure.) So why pursue this flawed method, instead of simply concluding that every ethical tradition is altogether noncomparable with every other, and that there is no single starting point, no single procedure?

The Aristotelian's answer to this is that this is what we actually do—and what we must most urgently do more, and do better. We do ask how to live. We do compare and assess one tradition, one way, one answer against another—though each one contains norms of procedural rationality—undeterred, in our neediness, by the messiness of that enterprise. What I propose here is not a merely theoretical undertaking, but one that is urgently practical, one that we conduct every day, and must conduct.[49] If we wish to regard the obstacles against fair comparison of alternatives as insuperable for reasons of methodological purity, we can always do so; but at enormous practical cost. And our common experiences, our active practical questions, give a unity and focus to the search that it might not seem to have when we regard it solely on the plane of theory. As Aristotle said, "All people seek, not the way of their ancestors, but the good."[50] The Aristotelian procedure gives explicit form to that search and urges its continuation. We want to know how the different ethical conceptions—including those distant from us in time and place—do or do not fit with our experience and our wishes. And in a world in which practical discourse is and must be increasingly international, we need to do this all the more urgently, as flexibly and attentively as we can, no matter how hard it is to do this well. As Charlotte Stant says to the Prince (before embarking on a project that is messy, urgent, and full of love), "What else can we do, what in all the world else?"[51]

But why, a different objector might ask, do I wish to dragoon literature into this practical/philosophical enterprise? And must this enterprise not make too many concessions to the philosophical demand for explanation to be altogether fair to literature? Isn't literature being turned, here, into a chapter in a textbook on ethics, and thus flattened and reduced? To this, the reply must first of all be that literature is there in the practical search already; and that it is not ordinary readers, but theorists, who have sometimes felt that the pressure of a practical question would, rather like a sweaty hand on an exquisite leather binding, sully the text's purity of finish.[52] Our actual relation to the books we love is already messy, complex, erotic. We do "read for life," bringing to the literary texts we love (as to texts admittedly philosophical) our pressing questions and perplexities, searching for images of what we might do and be, and holding these up against the images we derive from our knowledge of other conceptions, literary, philosophical, and religious. And the further pursuit of this enterprise through explicit comparison and explanation is not a diminution of the novels at all, but rather an expression of the depth and breadth of the claims that those who love them make for them. Depth, because the Aristotelian practical procedure shows with what they are to be compared, to what they are taken to be the rivals: namely, to the best and deepest of the other philosophical conceptions. Breadth, because the result of the dialectical enterprise should be to convince not only people of an already Jamesian sensibility, but all people interested in serious ethical reflection and in fair scrutiny of alternatives, that works like these contain something that cannot be fully stated otherwise and should not be omitted.

Nor, we must insist again, does this dialectical approach to works of literature convert them from what they are into systematic treatises, ignoring in the process their formal features and their mysterious, various, and complex content. It is, in fact, just this that we wish to preserve and to bring into philosophy—which means, for us, just the pursuit of truth, and which therefore must become various and mysterious and unsystematic if, and insofar as, the truth is so. The very qualities that make the novels so unlike dogmatic abstract treatises are, for us, the source of their *philosophical* interest.

48. For this challenge, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, 1988); I discuss MacIntyre's argument in a review article in *The New York Review of Books*, (December 7, 1989).

49. See also Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988), 32–53; "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," in a volume on the philosophical work of Bernard Williams, ed. J. Altham and R. Harrison, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, 1991. For one sketch of the political outcome of such an inquiry, see Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy," in *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. H. Richardson and G. Mara (New York, 1990).

50. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1268a 39ff, discussed in "Non-Relative Virtues" (above, n. 49).

51. James, *The Golden Bowl*, III, 5.

52. It is striking that in the last few years literary theorists allied with deconstruction have taken a marked turn toward the ethical. Jacques Derrida, for example, chose to address the American Philosophical Association on the topic of Aristotle's theory of friendship (*Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988), 632–44); Barbara Johnson's *A World of Difference* (Baltimore, 1987) argues that Deconstruction can make valuable ethical and social contributions; and in general there seems to be a return to the ethical and practical—if not, perhaps, to the rigorous engagement with ethical thought characteristic of the best work in moral philosophy, whether "philosophical" or "literary." No doubt a part of this change can be traced to the scandal over the political career of Paul de Man, which has made theorists anxious to demonstrate that Deconstruction does not imply a neglect of ethical and social considerations.