

D. Form as Content: Diagnostic Questions

The exposition of the letter is nothing other than the development of the form.

Dante, Letter to Can Grande

The Aristotelian procedure tells us a good deal about what we are searching for and how, in general, the search might go. But so far it has told us little about how to inquire into the whole question of literary form and form's expression of content: what questions we might ask to delve more deeply into that question, what categories we might recognize in organizing the comparison between the novels and admitted philosophical texts. Such questions may be asked about any text and in any area, not only the ethical domain. And to be asked well they must be asked about the entire form and structure of each text, not only about a brief excerpt. But in order to have some place to begin ourselves, let us simply listen to several beginnings—beginnings, all of them, of texts in pursuit of questions having to do with human life and how to live it. And, listening to the texts and the differences among them, listening to the shape of the sentences and the tone of the voices, let us see what questions start to arise, what questions seem as if they will lead us further toward an understanding of the ways in which content and form shape one another. I choose, here, only examples of high literary excellence, in which the fit between content and form seem to me to be particularly well realized and particularly artful.

TEXT A DEFINITIONS

1. By that which is self-caused I mean that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing.
2. A thing is said to be finite in its own kind when it can be limited by another thing of the same nature. For example, a body is said to be finite because we can always conceive of another body greater than it. So, too, a thought is limited by another thought. But body is not limited by thought, nor thought by body.
3. By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.
4. By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.
5. By mode I mean the affections of substance; that is, that which is in something else and is conceived through something else.
6. By God I mean an absolutely infinite being; that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.

TEXT B

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To

begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.

In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighbourhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life, and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits: both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender born towards the small hours on a Friday night.

TEXT C

Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend; yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted. A telegram from him bespeaking a room "only if not noisy," reply paid, was produced for the enquirer at the office, so that the understanding they should meet at Chester rather than at Liverpool remained to that extent sound. The same secret principle, however, that had prompted Strether not absolutely to desire Waymarsh's presence at the dock, that had led him thus to postpone for a few hours his enjoyment of it, now operated to make him feel he could still wait without disappointment. They would dine together at the worst, and, with all respect to dear old Waymarsh—if not even, for that matter, to himself—there was little fear that in the sequel they shouldn't see enough of each other. The principle I have just mentioned as operating had been, with the most newly disembarked of the two men, wholly instinctive—the fruit of a sharp sense that, delightful as it would be to find himself looking, after so much separation, into his comrade's face, his business would be a trifle bungled should he simply arrange for this countenance to present itself to the nearing steamer as the first "note" of Europe. Mixed with everything was the apprehension, already, on Strether's part, that it would, at best, throughout, prove the note of Europe in quite a sufficient degree.

TEXT D

You have implored me, Novatus, to write to you telling you how anger might be allayed. Nor does it seem to me inappropriate that you should have an especially intense fear of this passion, which is of all the passions the most foul and frenzied. For in the others there is some element of peace and calm; this one is altogether violent and headlong, raging with a most inhuman lust for weapons, blood, and punishment, neglecting its own so long as it can harm another, hurting itself on the very point of the sword and thirsty for a revenge that will drag the avenger down with it. For these reasons some of the wisest thinkers have called anger a brief insanity; for it is just that lacking in self-control, forgetful of decency, unmindful of obligations, persistent and undeflected in what it begins, closed to reasoning and advice, stirred up by empty causes, ill suited for apprehending the just and true—altogether like a ruin that crushes those beneath it while it itself is shattered.

As we read on in these works,⁵³ listening to the prose and following its structures, large and small, we might begin—especially in light of these juxtapositions—to ask ourselves some, or all, of the following questions.

Who is speaking here (in each case)? What voice or voices are addressing us and/or one another in the text? Here we would ask about the overt characters and narrators, but also about the whole presence of the author in the text as a whole. What sorts of human beings are confronting us, and do they, indeed, present themselves as human at all (rather than, say, as quasi-divine, or detached and species-less)? What tone do they use, what shape do their sentences have? What do we learn about their relationship to the other participants in the text, and to the reader? How do they seem to compare to one another, and to our own sense of ourselves, in security, knowledge, and power? (Who is it who tells us about Stretcher, and what sort of character is that? Who is Novatus, and what sort of person is addressing him? Who is presenting himself as the author of the life story we are about to read, and how secure does he seem to be in his knowledge? Where do those definitions come from, and who is the “I” that speaks them? Is there in each of the texts, taken as a whole, an implied consciousness distinct from that of each of the characters and speakers?)

Then, too, we might notice that these voices speak to us, and to one another, from different places or *points of view*, vis-à-vis their subject matter and vis-à-vis the reader’s own position. And another family of questions would begin to take shape. Do they (in each case) present themselves, for example, as immersed in the matter at hand as in a present experience in which they are personally involved? As reflecting on it from some posture of detachment—either temporal, or emotional, or both? As having no concrete position at all, but as seeing the world “from nowhere”?⁵⁴ (What is the letter writer’s practical relation to the anger of which he speaks? What does the form of David’s text show us about his own position vis-à-vis the story of his life? From what position does the “I” of “I have just mentioned” watch Stretcher? Is the “I” of the definitions immersed in daily life?) One and the same voice may occupy, at different times, different points of view toward the narrated material: so these questions must be followed through the text. And here, once again, we will also ask about the point(s) of view of the authorial consciousness, insofar as it animates the text, and also about the point(s) of view the reader is invited to take up toward the subject matter. (Does Seneca’s

text make the reader experience anger? Does James’s text invite the reader to see the world, more or less, through the eyes of Stretcher? And what point of view exactly is that? Is the point of view of Spinoza’s implied reader, or that of the implied author in the text, one from which the world seems to contain interesting stories?)⁵⁵

Asking all this might lead us to ask, as well—concerning the overall speech of the authorial presence, concerning the represented activity of the characters, and concerning the reader’s own activity—about the *parts of the personality involved*. What is active, or rendered active, in each case? Intellect alone? Or also emotions, imagination, perception, desire? There may, in principle, be different answers on the different levels we have mentioned. For Seneca’s text represents anger, but in a way that seems neither to express anger nor to arouse it in the reader. In fact, the force of the ugly representation is surely to distance the reader from it. On the other hand, the answers frequently are held together through an invitation to identify with the represented experiences—as Stretcher’s curiosity and his complex feeling become the reader’s own adventure; as Spinoza’s reader embarks, herself, on the intellectual activity represented in the text; as David’s love and fear, because we are led to love and to identify with him, become our very own.

Then, too, *what overall shape and organization* does the text seem to have, and what type and degree of control does the author present himself as having over the material? Does he, for example, announce at the outset what he is going to establish and then proceed to do just that? Or does he occupy, instead, a more tentative and uncontrollable relation to the matter at hand, one that holds open the possibility of surprise, bewilderment, and change? Do we know at the outset what the format and overall shape of the text is going to be? And how does it construct itself as it goes, using what methods? Is there a story? An argument?

Then, insofar as the voices that converse with us make assertions, what status seems to be claimed for them, implicitly or explicitly? That they are known to be true? Or simply believed? What is shown to be the basis of the knowledge or belief? Are the truths claimed to hold for all time, or for some period of time? And over the entire universe? Or only the human world? Or just certain societies? And so forth. How far, and in what ways, does the text express perplexity or hesitation? Then again, does the text give pleasure?⁵⁶ If so, what sort of pleasure does its texture afford? What is implied in and through the text about this pleasure, its varieties, its connections with goodness, with action, with knowledge? How does it lead us to feel about our own experiences of delight? David Copperfield’s narrative both gives the reader vivid sensory pleasure and (later) comments upon the importance of sensory pleasure in the ethical life. The pleasure of the text seems warm and generous—but also dangerously seductive: we sense that it is in tension with a certain type of moral firmness. Seneca’s text offers a more severe and solid satisfaction, with its powerfully crafted rhetoric of condemnation. It is the satis-

53. These passages are Spinoza, *Ethics*, opening section; Dickens, *David Copperfield*, opening paragraphs; Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, opening; and Seneca, *De Ira (On Anger)*, Book I, opening. The translation of Spinoza is that of Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, Ind., 1982), that of Seneca my own. Notice that I have, here, admitted a certain sort of paraphrase, namely, a good translation, as having, for our purposes, a style similar enough to that of the original to be discussible in its place. One cannot always do this well, especially with poetic works, and in every case the questions introduced here should be asked of the translation to see how well it reconstructs the stylistic message of the original. There is an excellent discussion of the style of the James paragraph in Ian Watt, “The First Paragraph of *The Ambassador*: An Explanation,” in *Essays in Criticism* 10 (1960), 254–68; a revised version appears in A. E. Stone, Jr., ed., *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of The Ambassadors* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969), 75–87.

54. This phrase is used by Thomas Nagel to characterize a certain conception of scientific objectivity and the perspective appropriate to it: see *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford, 1986).

55. On point of view and related concepts in the analysis of narrative, see the probing discussion of G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. J. E. Lewin (Oxford and Ithaca, N.Y., 1980).

56. For illuminating comments on this point, I am indebted to Cora Diamond. On the relationship between the text and patterns of desire, see Peter Brooks *Reading for the Plot* (see n. 4).

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faction of self-command; and it comes, we feel, at a cost, since it involves giving up a part of ourselves.⁵⁷ Spinoza's text imparts a particularly keen intellectual pleasure, the pleasure of knowing exactly what each thing is and how they are all connected. This pleasure, too, exacts a price: for it asks us to distance ourselves from most of our current relations to objects, to texts, to one another. James's text affords the pleasure of lucidly and subtly confronting our own bewilderment, our love of particulars, our sense of life's adventure. And it too asks us, in its very form, to give up something: the claim to know for sure and in advance what life is all about. In all these cases of form shaping content, we find, then, that the text gives pleasure of an appropriate sort. (Many texts in contemporary moral philosophy, by contrast, give no pleasure at all, of any kind, relevant or irrelevant.)

Each of these texts has a subject or subjects; and its treatment of its subject is marked by certain formal features. We want, then, to know how it speaks about whatever it selects. *Consistency* first: How much concern does the text display for giving a contradiction-free story of whatever its subject might be? If there are apparent contradictions, how are they treated, and what are they taken to show?

Then, *generality*: To what extent is the subject matter characterized in general terms and made the object of general claims? On the other hand, to what extent do particular people, places, and contexts figure in the claims, and how do they figure? As examples of something more general, or as irreducibly unique? Are Novatus and Seneca particulars in the same way in which David and Strether are particulars? Why does Seneca, in any case, write to his own brother in this highly general and abstract way? What is the significance of the fact that Spinoza's text does not tell a story of particulars at all?

Then, *precision*: How precise does the text attempt to be concerning its subject? How much vagueness or indeterminacy does it allow? And what sort of precision does it display as its proper concern? Precision in a philosophical text written *more geometrico* is just one sort of precision. The sentences of Dickens and James have another sort that is absent (deliberately) from Spinoza's sentences. For they capture, with vivid and subtle nuance, complexities of ethical experience that the more abstract text does not (or not yet) convey. There may even be, as Dickens's beginning suggests, a relevant sort of precision in the lucid characterization of the mysterious or unclear.

Texts ask and answer questions, offer *explanations* of the phenomena they address. How much of this concern for explaining does the text in question show? What sorts of explanations does it seek, and where does explaining come to an end? Natural science, history, psychoanalysis—each of these offers a different model of explaining. How are our texts related to these, and to other norms?⁵⁸

57. On Seneca, see Nussbaum, "The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions," *Apeiron* 20 (1987), 129–77, and "Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea*," forthcoming in a festschrift for Stanley Cavell, ed. T. Cohen et al., (Texas Tech University Press, 1990).

58. The relationship between literature and psychoanalytic theory is a large and important topic. For two approaches to it, see Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, and Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*. See also Wollheim, "Incest, Parricide, and the Sweetness of Art," lecture delivered at Brown University, February 1989, and forthcoming. Two representative collections of work in this area are *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore, Md., 1982) and *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. E. Kurzwel and W. Phillips (New York, 1983).

How is David Copperfield's scrupulous concern to tell the reader how each event in his life came about different from Spinoza's concern with deductive explaining? What does each offer us, for understanding and for life?

In all of this we must be asking, in close conjunction with these and other formal questions, questions about what is usually called content. What does the text in question seem to say, or show, *about* human life, *about* knowledge, about personality, about how to live? And how are these claims related to the claims made in and by the form itself? Frequently (as in all of these cases) we find consistency, and mutual illumination. David Copperfield writes with the kind of attention that he also praises. Seneca leads the interlocutor (and the reader) away from passion even while he condemns it. Spinoza cultivates the intellectual joy of which he will speak. James's text exemplifies, as a whole, a kind of consciousness of which it frequently speaks with praise. But clearly this need not always be the case. A text can make claims while its style makes rather different claims. Sometimes this is due to sloppiness. Sometimes, however, there are most interesting tensions: for texts may, in their form and manner, in the desires they express and nourish, actively subvert their own official content, or call its livability into question.

This questioning should be followed through using several different levels of formal analysis. We need to think of *genre*, and of the texts as extensions (or redefinitions or subversions) of an existing genre.⁵⁹ The decision to write a novel rather than a treatise already implies some views and commitments. But the relationship of the particular work to its predecessors and rivals in its own genre must also be considered: for there is no such thing as "the novel"; and some of the novels we shall discuss are critical of received ways of writing in that genre. This does not mean that we should after all discard the concept of genre. For even Beckett, whose assault on the novel is radical, writes against the background of certain expectations and desires that only a concept of genre can enable us to decode. It does mean that we must look beneath this general concept and analyze, much more concretely, the formal and structural features of the work before us in each case. We ask certain large-scale structural questions here—for example, about the role of the hero or heroine, the nature of the reader's identification, about the way in which the authorial consciousness is present in the text, about the novel's temporal structure. We also ask questions that are more often called stylistic, such as: What are the shape and rhythm of the sentences? What metaphors are used, and in what contexts? What vocabulary is selected? In each case, the attempt should be to connect these observations to an evolving conception of the work and the sense of life it expresses.

E. The Aristotelian Ethical View

Our craving for generality has another main source: our preoccupation with the method of science. I mean the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of prim-

59. For an eloquent defense of the concept of genre, and its ineliminability, I am indebted to a fine lecture by Ralph Cohen at the University of California, Riverside, May 1988.

different topics by using a generalization. Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book*

I have said that the novels studied in this volume make their claim to be philosophical in connection with a particular set of answers to the question, "How should one live?" This conception is developed and supported in several of the essays, especially "Discernment," "Finely Aware," and "Transcending." Its role in public, as well as private reflection is defended in "Discernment" and "Perception and Revolution." Here, therefore, I shall only enumerate briefly its most prominent features, commenting on the links between those features and the structure of the novel as a literary genre. The sense of life expressed in the structuring of these novels seems, then, to share the following features, which are also features of an Aristotelian ethical position.⁶⁰

1. *Noncommensurability of the Valuable Things*

It is not surprising that we find in these novels a commitment to qualitative distinctions: one could hardly imagine a *literary* art without that commitment. But the novel is committed more deeply than many other forms to a multiplicity and fineness of such distinctions. The organizing vision of the novels shows that one thing is not just a different quantity of another; that there is not only no single metric along which the claims of different good things can be meaningfully considered, there is not even a small plurality of such measures. The novels show us the worth and richness of plural qualitative thinking and engender in their readers a richly qualitative kind of seeing. The novelist's terms are even more variegated, more precise in their qualitative rightness, than are the sometimes blunt vague terms of daily life; they show us vividly what we can aspire to in refining our (already qualitative) understanding. The tendency to reduce quality to quantity appears in the novels (in the Ververs in the first half of *The Golden Bowl*, in Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. McChoakumchild); but, at best, it is seen as ethical immaturity—at worst, callousness and blindness. Mr. Gradgrind's aversion to the novel was well-grounded.⁶¹

60. Other contemporary philosophers who defend positions closely related to the position I describe here include David Wiggins (see n. 40); Bernard Williams (above, n. 40); Cora Diamond (see n. 40); John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62 (1979), 331–50; and, on certain issues, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, 1989). For related discussion of Aristotle, see *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley, 1980) and N. Sherman, *The Fabric of Character* (Oxford, 1989). See also L. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (London, 1980).

61. For argument against commensurability, see "Discernment," "Plato on Commensurability," "Flawed Crystals"; also *Fragility*, Chaps. 4, 6, 10. In "Discernment," the claim that values are commensurable is broken down into several more specific theses, whose relationship to one another is investigated; notes refer to contemporary philosophical analyses.

1a. *Pervasiveness of Conflicting Attachments and Obligations*

For the agent for whom "nothing will ever come to the same thing as anything else," there are few easy trade-offs, and many choices will have a tragic dimension. The choice between \$50 and \$200, when one cannot have both, is not terribly wrenching: what one forgoes is simply a different quantity of what one also gets. The choice between two qualitatively different actions or commitments, when on account of circumstances one cannot pursue both, is or can be tragic—in part because the item forgone is not the same as the item attained. The novel as form is deeply involved in the presentation of such conflicts, which spring straight from its commitment to non-commensurating description and to the ethical relevance of circumstances. One might, of course, describe some such dilemmas briefly, giving a vividly written example. But in "Flawed Crystals" I argue that it is only by following a pattern of choice and commitment over a relatively long time—as the novel characteristically does—that we can understand the pervasiveness of such conflicts in human efforts to live well.⁶²

2. *The Priority of Perceptions (Priority of the Particular)*

In these essays, and in the novels, much is made of an ethical ability that I call "perception," after both Aristotle and James. By this I mean the ability to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient features of one's particular situation. The Aristotelian conception argues that this ability is at the core of what practical wisdom is, and that it is not only a tool toward achieving the correct action or statement, but an ethically valuable activity in its own right. I find a similar case made out in James, with his constant emphasis on the goal of becoming "finely aware and richly responsible." Once again, this commitment seems to be built into the very form of the novel as genre.

Much needs to be said about the relationship of these concrete perceptions to general rules and general categories: for here the view could easily be misunderstood. It is very clear, in both Aristotle and James, that one point of the emphasis on perception is to show the ethical crudeness of moralities based exclusively on general rules, and to demand for ethics a much finer responsiveness to the concrete—including features that have not been seen before and could not therefore have been housed in any antecedently built system of rules. The metaphor of improvisation is used by both Aristotle and James to make this point. But rules and general categories still have enormous action-guiding significance in the morality of perception, as I try to show in "Discernment" and "Finely Aware." It is all a question of *what* significance they are taken to have, and how the agent's imagination uses them.⁶³

62. On conflict and its connection with commensurability, see "Discernment," "Plato on Commensurability," this volume; *Fragility*, chap. 4.

63. On perception of the particular, see "Discernment," "Finely Aware," "Perceptive Equilibrium," "Perception and Revolution," and "Steerforth's Arm," this volume. For related philosophical discussion, see the work of Wiggins and McDowell cited earlier; also M. de Paul, "Argument and Perception: The Role of Literature in Moral Inquiry," *Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988) 552–65; L. Blum, "Iris Murdoch and the Domain of the Moral," *Philosophical Studies* 50 (1986) 343–67, and "Particularity and Responsiveness," in *The Emergence of Morality in Young Children*, ed. J. Kagan and S. Lamb (Chicago, 1987).

The particular perception that takes priority, in this conception, over fixed rules and principles, is contrasted, both in Aristotle and in my discussions of him, with both the *general* and the *universal*.⁶⁴ It is important to distinguish these two ideas and to see precisely how "the priority of the particular" works with respect to each. Aristotelian arguments against *generality* (against general rules as *sufficient* for correct choice) point to the need for fine-tuned *concreteness* in ethical attention and judgment. They insist on the need to make ethical attention take into account, as salient, three things that general principles, fixed in advance of the particular case, omit.⁶⁵

(a) *New and unanticipated features*. Aristotle used analogies between ethical judgment and the arts of the navigator or doctor to argue that general principles designed to cover a wide range of cases seen in the past will prove insufficient to prepare an agent to respond well to new circumstances. Insofar as we train agents to think of ethical judgment as consisting simply in the application of such antecedently formulated rules (so long as we train doctors to think that all they need to know is contained in textbooks) we prepare them badly for the actual flow of life, and for the necessary resourcefulness in confronting its surprises.

(b) *Context-embeddedness of relevant features*. Aristotle and James suggest that to see any single feature of a situation appropriately it is usually essential to see it in its relations of connectedness to many other features of its complex and concrete context. This is another way in which surprise enters the ethical scene; and, here again, general formulations frequently prove too crude.

Notice that neither of these features prevents the Aristotelian ethical view from having a deep interest in the universal and in the universalizability of ethical judgments. So far as these features go, the Aristotelian might well hold, and usually does, that should the very same circumstances, with all the same relevant contextual features, present themselves again, it would again be correct to make the same choice.⁶⁶ This is frequently, indeed, part of the justification of the choice as correct. The Aristotelian will point out that, once we recognize as relevant as many features of context, history, and circumstance as this view actually does, the resulting (highly qualified) universals are not likely to be of much action-guiding usefulness. Certainly they will not play the role of codifying and simplifying that ethical universals have played in numerous philosophical views. But when we recognize that complex Jamesian judgments are, in many cases, universalizable, we recognize something important about the way in which a novel offers ethical education and stimulates the ethical imagination. But difficulty for even the highly concrete universal comes with the third Aristotelian argument for particular perceptions.

(c) *Ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships*. Responding to a novel of Henry James, the reader may often implicitly conclude: "If a person were to be in circumstances sufficiently similar to those this character is in here, the same words and actions would again be warranted." But these inferences can take

two different forms. If we consider, for example, the scene between Maggie and her father that is the subject of "Finely Aware," we might have an inference of the form, "If a person were like Maggie and had a father exactly like Adam, and the form, and circumstances exactly like theirs, the same actions would again be warranted." But we might also have a judgment of the form: "One should consider the particular history of one's very own relationship to one's particular parents, their characteristics and one's own, and choose, as Maggie does, with fine responsiveness to the concrete." The first universal, though not of much help in life, is significant: for one has not seen what is right about Maggie's choices unless one sees how they respond to the described features of her context. But the second judgment is an equally important part of the interaction between novel and reader—as the readers become, in Proust's words, the readers of their own selves. And this judgment tells the reader, apparently, to go beyond the described features and to consider the particulars of one's own case.

But suppose one found the description of one's own case—would that give rise, in turn, to a concrete universal that would incorporate everything that was of ethical relevance? The novels suggest that this is not always so. The account of Maggie's relationship to her father suggests that the describable and universalizable properties are not all that is of relevance. For we sense in Maggie and Adam a depth and quality of love that would not, we feel, tolerate the substitution of a clone, even one who had all the same describable features. She loves *him*, not just his properties, or him beyond and behind the properties—however mysterious that is.⁶⁷ And the reader is invited to love in the same way. Furthermore, it is a salient feature of human life, as the novels present it, that it is lived only once, and in one direction. So to imagine the recurrence of the very same circumstances and persons is to imagine that life does not have the structure it actually has. And this changes things. As Nietzsche points out, recommending such a thought experiment in the context of practical choice, it attaches a weight to our actions that the actual contingency of life rarely does: the weight of making the world for all eternity. On the other hand, Aristotle suggests that a certain *sort* of intensity will be subtracted: for he holds that the thought that one's children (for example) are "the only ones one has" is an important constituent of the love one has for them, and that without this thought of non-replaceability a great part of the value and motivating force of the love will be undercut. The absence of this intensity in a society (Plato's ideal city) gives us, he holds, a sufficient reason to reject it as a norm.⁶⁸ Maggie, then, has to realize that it is a part of her love that no qualitatively similar replacement would be acceptable; and a part of her human situation that the very same things will never come around again; that there is just one father for her, who lives only once. So the universalizable does not, it would seem, deter-

67. Much depends here on the conception of the individual and what it includes as essential: for discussion of the mystery and difficulty we get into here, see "Love and the Individual," this volume.

68. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York, 1974), Sect. 341. See the discussion of this view in Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (London & Boston, 1984). For the Aristotelian view, see *Pol.* 1262b22-3, discussed in "Discernment" and in *Fragility* chap. 12.

64. On general and universal, see also "Discernment," and "'Finely Aware,'" endnote.

65. See "Discernment" and *Fragility* ch. 10.

66. In this respect, the position resembles the one defended by R. M. Hare (above n. 16), who demands universalizability, but insists on very concrete universals. There is further discussion of Hare's position below, and in "'Finely Aware,'" Note, this volume.

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mine every dimension of choice; and there are silences of the heart within which its demands cannot, and should not, be heard. (See also "Discernment," and endnote to "'Finely Aware.'")

These reflections about love bring us directly to the third major feature of the Aristotelian conception.

3. *Ethical Value of the Emotions*⁶⁹

"But novels both represent and activate the emotions: so our dealings with them are marred by irrationality. They are not likely, therefore, to contribute to rational reflection." No other objection has been so frequently made against the literary style, and no other has been so damaging to its claims. Emotions, it is said, are unreliable, animal, seductive. They lead away from the cool reflection that alone is capable of delivering a considered judgment.⁷⁰ Certainly the novel as form is profoundly committed to the emotions; its interaction with its readers takes place centrally through them. So this challenge must be confronted.

A central purpose of these essays is to call this view of rationality into question and to suggest, with Aristotle, that practical reasoning unaccompanied by emotion is not sufficient for practical wisdom; that emotions are not only not more unreliable than intellectual calculations, but frequently are more reliable, and less deceptively seductive. But before we can go very far with this issue, it is very important to notice that the traditional objection is actually two very different objections, which have been confused in some contemporary versions of the debate. According to one version of the objection, emotions are unreliable and distracting because they have nothing to do with cognition at all. According to the second objection, they have a great deal to do with cognition, but they embody a view of the world that is in fact false.

According to the first view, then, emotions are blind animal reactions, like or identical with bodily feelings, that are in their nature unmixd with thought, undiscriminating, and impervious to reasoning. This version of the objection relies on a very impoverished conception of emotion that cannot survive scrutiny. It has had a certain influence; but by now it has been decisively rejected by cognitive psychology, by anthropology, by psychoanalysis, and even by philosophy—not to speak of our sense of life itself.⁷¹ However much these disciplines differ about the further analysis of emotions such as fear, grief, love, and pity, they agree

69. "Discernment" makes a parallel argument about the imagination, again with reference to Aristotle; the full elaboration of the position requires this.

70. This argument begins, in the Western philosophical tradition, with Plato's attack on rhetoric in the *Gorgias*; it is influentially continued in Locke (see n. 8) and Kant. For effective summaries of some of these traditions of argument, see Blum, *Friendship, Altruism* (see n. 60), and C. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions* (Chicago, 1988).

71. For different types of criticism of this position, see, from anthropology, Lutz, and R. Harré, ed., *The Social Construction of the Emotions* (Oxford, 1986); from psychoanalysis, the work of Melanie Klein; from cognitive psychology, among others, the work of James Averill (see Harré, ed. for a representative article), in philosophy, R. de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, Mass. 1987), B. Williams, "Morality and the Emotions" in *Problems of the Self* (see n. 40). A good collection of recent work from various disciplines is in *Explaining Emotions*, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley, 1980).

that these emotions are very closely linked to beliefs in such a way that a modification of beliefs brings about a modification of emotion. In drawing this conclusion, they are in fact returning to the conception of emotion that Aristotle shared with most of the other Greek philosophers. For they all held that emotions are not simply blind surges of affect, recognized, and discriminated from one another, by their felt quality alone; rather they are discriminating responses closely connected with beliefs about how things are and what is important.⁷² Being angry, for example, is not like experiencing a bodily appetite. Hunger and thirst do seem to be relatively impervious to changes in belief, but anger seems to require and to rest upon a belief that one has been wronged or damaged in some significant way by the person toward whom the anger is directed. The discovery that this belief is false (either that the event in question did not take place, or that the damage is after all trivial, or that it was not caused by that person) can be expected to remove the anger toward that person. Feeling grief presupposes, in a similar way, a family of beliefs about one's circumstances: that a loss has taken place; that the loss is of something that has value. Once again, a change in the relevant beliefs, either about what has happened or about its importance, will be likely to alter or remove the emotion. Love, pity, fear, and their relatives—all are belief-based in a similar way: all involve the acceptance of certain views of how the world is and what has importance.

There are various subtly different positions available (in both the ancient discussion and the contemporary literature) about the precise relationship between emotions and beliefs. But the major views all make the acceptance of a certain belief or beliefs at least a necessary condition for emotion, and, in most cases, also a constituent part of what an emotion is. And the most powerful accounts, furthermore, go on to argue that if one *really* accepts or takes in a certain belief, one will experience the emotion: belief is sufficient for emotion, emotion necessary for full belief. For example, if a person believes that X is the most important person in her life and that X has just died, she will feel grief. If she does not, this is because in some sense she doesn't fully comprehend or has not taken in or is repressing these facts. Again, if Y says that racial justice is very important to her and also that a racially motivated attack has just taken place before her eyes, and yet she is in no way angry—this, again, will lead us to question the sincerity, either of Y's belief-claims, or of her denial of emotion.⁷³

Because the emotions have this cognitive dimension in their very structure, it is very natural to view them as intelligent parts of our ethical agency, responsive to the workings of deliberation and essential to its completion. (Dante's *Intelligenza d'amore* is not an intellectual grasp of emotion; it is an understanding that is not available to the non-lover, and the loving itself is part of it.) On this view, there will be certain contexts in which the pursuit of intellectual reasoning apart from emotion will actually prevent a full rational judgment—for example by preventing an access to one's grief, or one's love, that is necessary for the full understanding of what has taken place when a loved one dies. Emotions can, of course,

72. On this see *Fragility*, Interlude 2: "The Stoics on the Extripation", and in this volume, "Narrative Emotions."

73. For extended discussion of this, and the concept of belief involved, see "The Stoics."

be unreliable—in much the same ways that beliefs can. People get angry because of false beliefs about the facts, or their importance; the relevant beliefs might also be true but unjustified, or both false and unjustified. "Narrative Emotions" argues that certain entire emotional categories—in that case, guilt about one's birth and one's embodiment—are always irrational and unreliable, whenever they occur. But the fact that some beliefs are irrational has rarely led philosophers to dismiss all beliefs from practical reasoning. So it is not easy to see why parallel failings in the emotions should have led to their dismissal. And the Aristotelian view holds, in fact, that frequently they are more reliable in deliberation than detached intellectual judgments, since emotions embody some of our most deeply rooted views about what has importance, views that could easily be lost from sight during sophisticated intellectual reasoning.⁷⁴

This brings us to the second objection. For although the greatest writers on emotion in the Western philosophical tradition (Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippus, Dante, Spinoza, Adam Smith) agree in finding in emotions this cognitive dimension, and although all deny that they are by nature unreliable in the way that the first objector has claimed, some of them still urge us to leave emotions out of practical reasoning, or even to get rid of them altogether. The objections of Plato, the Stoics, and Spinoza are very different from the objection that identifies emotions with bodily feelings; yet they, too, banish emotions from philosophy. On what grounds? Because they believe that the judgments on which the major emotions are based are all *false*. "Transcending" explores this issue in detail, as does my related work in Greek philosophy. But the core of the objection is that the emotions involve value judgments that attach great worth to uncontrolled things outside the agent; they are, then, acknowledgments of the finite and imperfectly controlled character of human life. (For the same reason Augustine held, against the Stoics, that they were essential to Christian life.) In other words, their dismissal has, in this case, nothing to do with the fact that they are "irrational" in the sense of "non-cognitive." They are seen as pieces of reasoning that are actually false, from the perspective of certain aspirations to self-sufficiency. But those aspirations and the views that support them may be called into question—as they are in this book. And if one takes up a different view of the human being's situation and proper ends, emotions will return as necessary acknowledgments of some important truths about human life.

Nothing in this project should (I repeat) be taken to imply a foundationalism concerning the emotions.⁷⁵ They can be unjustified or false just as beliefs can be. They are not self-certifying sources of ethical truth. But the project does try to show the inadequacy of the first objection, by showing the richness of the connections between emotion and judgment. And by its exploration of love and other precarious attachments, it shows an ethical conception that is at odds with the second objector's, and shows this sense of life as good.⁷⁶

74. See "Discernment," this volume and *Fragility*, chap. 3 on Creon; also C. Diamond, "Anything But Argument?" *Philosophical Investigations* 5 (1982) 23–41.

75. For criticism of this idea, see "Narrative Emotions" and "Love's Knowledge," this volume.

76. The rehabilitation of emotion in practical reasoning has, for obvious cultural reasons, been a prominent theme in contemporary feminist writing; see, for example, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982). The argument of this book has many connections with this and other related work in feminism, presenting the issues as important for all human beings who wish to think well.

There has recently been a very interesting body of work developing concerning the role of emotion in the law and in legal judgment. For two different recent examples, see Paul Gewirtz, "Aeschylus' Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101 (1988) 1043–55, and Martha L. Minow and Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Passion for Justice," *Cardozo Law Review* 10 (1988) 37–76. Both of these articles are deeply concerned with the role of literature and literary styles in the law, and see the connection of this issue with the issue of emotion's role. (Not incidentally, both are also concerned with feminism.) Gewirtz eloquent conclusion draws these interests together:

... But while the nonrational emotions can distort, delude, or blaze uncontrollably, they have worth in themselves and can also open, clarify, and enrich understanding. The values and achievements of a legal system—and of lawyers, judges, and citizens involved with a legal system—are shaped by what the emotions yield. . . . These observations suggest one important connection between literature and law that is rarely made explicit. Literature makes its special claims upon us precisely because it nourishes the kinds of human understanding not achievable through reason alone but involving intuition and emotion as well. If, as the *Orestia* suggests, law engages non-rational elements and requires the most comprehensive kinds of understanding, literature can play an important role in a lawyer's development. The inclusion of the Furies within the legal order—an inclusion that represents the linking of emotional spheres to law—links literature itself to law and underscores the special place literature can have in developing the legal mind to its fullest richness and complexity. (p. 1050)

On these issues, see also James Boyd White, *The Legal Imagination* (Chicago, 1973), *When Words Lose Their Meaning* (Madison, Wis., 1984), and *Heracles' Bow* (Chicago, 1985).

THIS BRINGS US TO THE FOURTH AND FINAL ELEMENT OF THE ARISTOTELIAN CONCEPTION, IN SOME WAYS THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL ONE.

4. Ethical Relevance of Uncontrolled Happenings

In the ancient quarrel, dramatic poetry was taken to task for implying, in the way it constructed its plots, that events that happen to the characters through no fault of their own have some serious importance for the quality of the lives they manage to live, and that similar possibilities were present in the lives of the spectators. Attackers and defenders of the literary agreed that the attention given to plot expressed, in itself, an ethical conception that was at odds with the Socratic claim (accepted by Plato in the *Republic's* attack on tragedy) that a good person cannot be harmed. So much seems to be true, as well, of our more modern fictional examples. The structure of these novels, as members and extenders of that genre, has built into it an emphasis on the significance, for human life, of what simply happens, of surprise, of reversal. James links his own interest in contingency with that of ancient tragedy, referring to the pity and fear of the characters before their situation. (And his readers are to be "participants by a fond attention," regarding the happenings as important, even as the characters do.) Proust tells us that one of the primary aims of literary art is to show us moments in which habit is cut through by the unexpected, and to engender in the reader a similar upsurge of true, surprised feeling. The ability of their texts to give insight is seen by both authors to depend on this power to display such uncontrolled events as if they matter to the characters, and to make them matter to the reader. And the Aristotelian conception holds that a correct understanding of the ways in which human aspirations to live well can be checked by uncontrolled events is in fact an

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important part of ethical understanding—not, as the Platonist would have it, a deception.⁷⁷

The Aristotelian conception contains a view of learning well suited to support the claims of literature. For teaching and learning, here, do not simply involve the learning of rules and principles. A large part of learning takes place in the experience of the concrete. This experiential learning, in turn, requires the cultivation of perception and responsiveness: the ability to read a situation, singling out what is relevant for thought and action. This active task is not a technique; one learns it by guidance rather than by a formula. James plausibly suggests that novels exemplify and offer such learning: exemplify it in the efforts of the characters and the author, engender it in the reader by setting up a similarly complex activity.⁷⁸

There is a further way in which novels answer to an Aristotelian view of practical learning. The Aristotelian view stresses that bonds of close friendship or love (such as those that connect members of a family, or close personal friends) are extremely important in the whole business of becoming a good perceiver.⁷⁹ Trusting the guidance of a friend and allowing one's feelings to be engaged with that other person's life and choices, one learns to see aspects of the world that one had previously missed. One's desire to share a form of life with the friend motivates this process. (We see this in the Assinghams, who find the basis for a shared perception of their situation through the loving desire to inhabit the same picture, to bring their abilities to one another's need.) James stresses that not only relationships represented within the novels, but the entire relation of novel-reading itself, has this character. Both certain characters, and, above all, the sense of life revealed in the text as a whole become our friends as we read, "participants by a fond attention." We trust their guidance and see, for the time, the world through those eyes—even if, as in the case of Dickens's Steerforth, we are led, by love, outside the bounds of straight moral judgment.

One might, if one were skeptical, wonder about this—thinking that love distorts as much as, or more than, it reveals. But the essays grow out of an experience in which the ability of love to illuminate has been a marked reality. One sees this, in the essays, in straightforward autobiographical ways—in the way in which my love for my daughter and my daughter's view of Steerforth led me to a revised conception of the connection between love and morality; in the way in which Hilary Putnam's changes of view illuminated, through friendship (which is not to say agreement, but something deeper than agreement), my own evolving views of the political life. One sees this, too, in the way in which still other figures and events, unnamed and absent, take form within the text, and lead the text to its perceptions. But above all one sees this in the story of my relationships with the novels themselves, which began earlier than almost any other love and are loves as intimate as any. The evolving story of those relationships is the story, as well, of the unfolding of thought, the shaping of sympathy.

77. See *Fragility*, chaps. 8–12.

78. On learning, see "Discernment" and "'Finely Aware,'" this volume.

79. See *Fragility*, chap. 12, and Sherman (see n. 60).

F. Novels, Examples, and Life

... I spoke of the novel as an especially useful agent of the moral imagination, as the literary form which most directly reveals to us the complexity, the difficulty, and the interest of life in society, and best instructs us in our human variety and contradiction.

Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*

One might grant that some text other than an abstract treatise is required if we are going to investigate the claims of the Aristotelian conception clearly and fully—both because of what a treatise can and cannot state and because of what it does and does not do to and for its reader. And yet one might still be far less certain that novels are the texts required. A number of different questions arise: Why these novels and not others? Why novels and not plays? Biographies? Histories? Lyric poetry? Why not philosophers' examples? And above all, why not, as James's Strether says, "poor dear old life"?

Here we must insist again that what we have on our hands is a family of inquiries, and not all our questions, even about how to live, will be well pursued in exactly the same texts. If, for example, we should want to think about the role of religious belief in certain lives that we might lead, none of the novels chosen here will help us much—except Beckett's, and that only in a somewhat parochial way. If we want to think about class distinctions, or about racism, or about our relationships with other societies different from our own—again, these particular novels will not be sufficient—although, as "Discernment" argues, most novels focus in some manner on our common humanity, through their structures of friendship and identification, and thus make some contribution to the pursuit of those projects. My choices of texts express my preoccupation with certain questions, and do not pretend to address all salient questions.⁸⁰ (For some curricular thoughts in connection with my position, see the endnote to "Perception and Revolution.")

Next, we should insist that neither all nor only novels prove appropriate, even for this small portion of the project. Not all novels are appropriate for reasons suggested by both James and Proust in their criticisms of other novel writers. James attacks the omniscient posture of George Eliot's narrator as a falsification of our human position. He also indicates that the conventional springs of dra-

80. Nor, of course, do they claim to represent the only places where one might turn for understanding on these issues. It will be obvious that I have confined myself to only one small part of one literary tradition; but in so doing I do not mean to imply that there are not other traditions, other perspectives, whose inclusion would be important for the full completion of this inquiry. And if one turns from these questions to others, this is even more important to remember. For there will be some issues whose investigation is absolutely essential to the full completion of our dialectical project that could not possibly be well studied using only literary texts from the high literary tradition of Europe and North America. We will need, before our project is anywhere at all, to get as good an understanding as we can of the ways of life of people very different from ourselves, and of minorities and oppressed groups in our own society. And although I would not concede that the works studied here are doomed to narrowness and bias by their origins, it is reasonable to suppose that the full and precise investigation of such issues would require turning, as well, to texts from other origins.

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unau interest played upon by many novels may, if we are not careful, corrupt our relation to our own daily lives with their more humdrum searches for precision of thought and feeling, their less dramatic efforts to be just.⁸¹ Proust's Marcel is critical of much of the literary writing he encounters, holding that it is insufficiently concerned with psychological depth. Both Proust and James write in a way that focuses attention on the small movements of the inner world. So the account I develop with reference to them cannot automatically be extended to all other novelists. On the other hand, I also believe that James has good arguments for the view that the novel, among the available genres, best exemplifies what he calls "the projected morality."⁸² I have suggested some of these connections between the structure of the novel and the elements of the Aristotelian view; the essays develop them further.

Not only novels prove appropriate, because (again, with reference only to these particular issues and this conception) many serious dramas will be pertinent as well, and some biographies and histories—so long as these are written in a style that gives sufficient attention to particularity and emotion, and so long as they involve their readers in relevant activities of searching and feeling, especially feeling concerning their own possibilities as well as those of the characters. In one case ("Love's Knowledge") I find in a short story sufficient structural complexity for the issues I am investigating there. Lyric poetry seems to me to raise different issues. They are important to the continuation of the larger project; I leave them to those who are more involved than I am in the analysis of poems. I leave for a future inquiry, as well, the ethical role of comedy and satire, both in the novel itself and in other genres.

But the philosopher is likely to be less troubled by these questions of literary genre than by a prior question: namely, why a literary work at all? Why can't we investigate everything we want to invest, at by using complex examples of the sort that moral philosophers are very good at inventing? In reply, we must insist that the philosopher who asks this question cannot have been convinced by the argument so far about the intimate connection between literary form and ethical content. Schematic philosophers' examples almost always lack the particularity, the emotive appeal, the absorbing plotfulness, the variety and indeterminacy, of good fiction; they lack, too, good fiction's way of making the reader a participant and a friend; and we have argued that it is precisely in virtue of these structural characteristics that fiction can play the role it does in our reflective lives. As James says, "The picture of the exposed and entangled state is what is required."⁸³ If the examples do have these features, they will, themselves, be works of literature.⁸⁴

81. See "Flawed Crystals"; and my "Comment on Paul Seabright," *Ethics* 98 (1988) 332–40.

82. See n. 7. It is clear that I am confining my discussion to available forms of verbal expression, and not even attempting to consider the relation of the verbal to the pictorial, the musical, and so forth.

83. H. James, *AN* 65. On James's view of morality, see also F. Crews, *The Tragedy of Man's Moral Drama in the Later Novels of Henry James* (New Haven, Conn., 1957).

84. Close to this is Iris Murdoch's use of examples in *The Sovereignty of Good*. Other philosophers who begin to approach this degree of complexity include Bernard Williams (see n. 40); Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge, 1979); and Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Rights, Resonance, and Risk: Essays in Moral Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

Sometimes a very brief fiction will prove a sufficient vehicle for the investigation of what we are at that moment investigating: sometimes, as in "Flawed Crystals" (where our question concerns what is likely to happen in the course of a relatively long and complex life), we need the length and complexity of a novel. In neither case, however, would schematic examples prove sufficient as a substitute. (This does not mean that they will be totally dismissed; for they have other sorts of usefulness, especially in connection with other ethical views.)

We can add that examples, setting things up schematically, signal to the readers what they should notice and find relevant. They hand them the ethically salient description. This means that much of the ethical work is already done, the result "cooked." The novels are more open-ended, showing the reader what it is to search for the appropriate description and why that search matters. (And yet they are not so open-ended as to give no shape to the reader's thought.) By showing the mystery and indeterminacy of "our actual adventure," they characterize life more richly and truly—indeed, more precisely—than an example lacking those features ever could; and they engender in the reader a type of ethical work more appropriate for life.

But why not life itself? Why can't we investigate whatever we want to investigate by living and reflecting on our lives? Why, if it is the Aristotelian ethical conception we wish to scrutinize, can't we do that without literary texts, without texts at all—or, rather, with the texts of our own lives set before us? Here, we must first say that of course we do this as well, both apart from our reading of the novels and (as Proust insists) in the process of reading. In a sense Proust is right to see the literary text as an "optical instrument" through which the reader becomes a reader of his or her own heart. But, why do we need, in that case, such optical instruments?

One obvious answer was suggested already by Aristotle: we have never lived enough. Our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial. Literature extends it, making us reflect and feel about what might otherwise be too distant for feeling.⁸⁵ The importance of this for both morals and politics cannot be underestimated. *The Princess Casanoviana*—justly, in my view—depicts the imagination of the novel-reader as a type that is very valuable in the political (as well as the private) life, sympathetic to a wide range of concerns, averse to certain denials of humanity. It cultivates these sympathies in its readers.

We can clarify and extend this point by emphasizing that novels do not function, inside this account, as pieces of "raw" life: they are a close and careful interpretive description. All living is interpreting; all action requires seeing the world as something. So in this sense no life is "raw," and (as James and Proust insist) throughout our living we are, in a sense, makers of fictions. The point is that in the activity of literary imagining we are led to imagine and describe with greater precision, focusing our attention on each word, feeling each event more keenly—whereas much of actual life goes by without that heightened awareness, and is thus, in a certain sense, not fully or thoroughly lived. Neither James nor Proust thinks of ordinary life as normative, and the Aristotelian conception concurs: too

85. I am thinking of Aristotle's claims, in both *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, about the connection between our interest in literature and our love of learning; see *Frangility*, Interlude 2.

much of it is obtuse, routinized, incompletely sentient. So literature is an extension of life not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life.

To this point we can add three others that have to do with our relation, as readers, to the literary text, and the differences between that relation and other relations in which life involves us. As James frequently stresses, novel reading places us in a position that is both like and unlike the position we occupy in life: like, in that we are emotionally involved with the characters, active with them, and aware of our incompleteness; unlike, in that we are free of certain sources of distortion that frequently impede our real-life deliberations. Since the story is not ours, we do not find ourselves caught up in the "vulgar heat" of our personal jealousies orangers or in the sometimes blinding violence of our loves. Thus the (ethically concerned) aesthetic attitude shows us the way. Proust's Marcel concurs, making a far stronger (and, perhaps, to that extent less compelling) claim: that it is only in relation to the literary text, and never in life, that we can have a relation characterized by genuine altruism, and by genuine acknowledgment of the otherness of the other. Our reading of Dickens complicates this point, as we shall see; but it does not remove it. There is something about the act of reading that is exemplary for conduct.

Furthermore, another way in which the enterprise of reading is exemplary is that it brings readers together. And, as Lionel Trilling emphasized, it brings them together in a particular way, a way that is constitutive of a particular sort of community: one in which each person's imagining and thinking and feeling are respected as morally valuable.⁸⁶ The Aristotelian dialectical enterprise was characterized as a social or communal endeavor in which people who will share a form of life try to agree on the conception by which they can live together. Each person's solitary scrutiny of his or her own experience may, then, be too private and non-shared an activity to facilitate such a shared conversation—especially if we take seriously, as the novels all do, the moral value of privacy regarding one's own personal thoughts and feelings.⁸⁷ We need, then, texts we can read together and talk about as friends, texts that are available to all of us. The ubiquity of "we" and the rarity of "I" in James's later novels, where the authorial voice is concerned, is highly significant. A community is formed by author and readers. In this community separateness and qualitative difference are not neglected; the privacy and the imagining of each is nourished and encouraged. But at the same time it is stressed that living together is the object of our ethical interest.

I have insisted, so far, on the inseparability of form and content in thoroughly written works. But I have also defended the novels as part of an overall search that will clearly require, for its completion, the explicit description of the contribution of the literary works and comparison of their sense of life with that involved in

other works. In pursuit of this search, the essays themselves use a style that responds to the literary works and, to some extent, continues their strategies; but

it also shows an Aristotelian concern for explanation and explicit description. And several of the essays (especially "Love's Knowledge") discuss the idea of a philosophical style that is the ally of literature, one that is not identical to the styles of the literary works, but directs the reader's attention to the salient features of those works, setting their insights in a perspicuous relation to other alternatives, other texts. It was already obvious in our account of the dialectical procedure that the comparison among conceptions must be organized by a style that is not entirely committed to one conception; but now we can see that even to begin that dialectical task, where literature is concerned, we need—even before we get to the investigation of alternative conceptions—a type of philosophical commentary that will point out explicitly the contributions of the works to the pursuit of our question about human beings and human life, and their relation to our intuitions and our sense of life.⁸⁸ The novels and their style are, we have argued, an ineliminable part of moral philosophy, understood as we have understood it; but they make their contribution in conjunction with a style that is itself more explanatory, more Aristotelian. In order to be the ally of literature, and to direct the reader to that variety and complexity, rather than away from it, this Aristotelian style itself will have to differ greatly from much philosophical writing that we commonly encounter: for it will have to be non-reductive, and also self-conscious about its own lack of completeness, gesturing toward experience and toward the literary texts, as spheres in which a greater completeness should be sought.⁸⁹ But it will need to differ from the novels as well, if it is going to show the distinctive features of the novels in a way that contrasts them with features of other conceptions. Both the literary works and the "philosophical criticism" that presents them are essential parts of the overall philosophical task.

Such a combination of literary richness with explanatory commentary could take many forms. Some writers—for example, Plato and Proust—incorporate both elements into a single literary whole. Some—for example, Henry James—connect their literary texts with an explicit commentary of their own. Other practitioners of philosophical commentary—from Aristotle to such present-day figures as Stanley Cavell, Lionel Trilling, Cora Diamond, and Richard Wollheim—write commentaries on works of art made by others. There is no single rule as to how this should be done. Much depends on the philosopher's degree of narrative ability, and on the type and degree of his or her commitment to the overall project of investigating alternative ethical conceptions. But in every case one must be careful that the form and the stylistic claims of the commentary develop and do not undercut the claims of the literary text. And one must not rule out the possibility that the literary text may contain some elements that lead the reader outside of the dialectical question altogether; that, indeed, might be one of its most significant contributions.

88. This point was first made to me by Richard Wollheim, in his comments on "Flawed Crystals," *New Literary History* 15 (1983) 185–92. See, in this volume, "Finely Aware," p. 162.

89. For a more extensive account of this point, see "Love's Knowledge," with reference to William James. On Aristotle's own style, see *Fragility*, Interlude 2.

86. See *The Liberal Imagination* (see n. 34), esp. vii–viii—Preface added 1974.

87. A subtle analysis of issues of privacy in the novel of consciousness is in D. Cohn, *Trans-parent Minds* (Princeton, N.J., 1978).

G. The Boundaries of Ethical Concern

And for what, except for you, do I feel love?
Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man
Close to me, hidden in me day and night?

Wallace Stevens
"Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"

This inquiry takes as its starting point the question, How should one live? And all the books I study here address themselves, in one or another way, to that question. But several of them also deal with love; and love, or its intelligence, is a connecting theme in these essays. This means that it is necessary, as well, to ask how far the novels invite or permit themselves to be enclosed by the bounds of the ethical question—to what extent, on the other hand, they express, and seduce the reader into, a consciousness that steps outside it. In these essays and in the novels, there is a recurrent conception (or conceptions) of an ethical stance, a stance that is necessary for properly asking and answering that inclusive ethical question. That stance is closely connected, frequently, with the stance of the author and reader. Our question, in each case, must then be, is this stance the organizing stance of the novel taken as a whole? Or (to put the point more dynamically) does the literary work constitute its reader (at times) as a consciousness that transcresses the bounds of that question? And if it does so, how does this bear on the novel's ethical contribution?

An author's answer to this question (and one's assessment of that answer, as reader and critic) will depend upon and express a view about the relationship between the ethical point of view and certain important elements in human life—especially forms of love, jealousy, need, and fear—that seem to lie outside of the ethical stance and to be in potential tension with it. The authors I discuss here vary (and also, perhaps, shift) in their views on this question. And my own view about the issue has also undergone a shift, leading me to focus on, or to turn for illumination to, one novel or author rather than another at different times. To clarify certain questions that the essays, taken together, will raise, I want to divide this evolution into three periods (although in reality they are not altogether temporally discrete). I shall focus on the example of erotic/romantic love.

In the first period, then, I believed that the Aristotelian ethical stance was inclusive enough to encompass every constituent of the good human life, love included. If one moves from a narrow understanding of the moral point of view to the more inclusive Aristotelian understanding, with its question about the good human life, one could, I then argued, think and feel about everything that is a plausible part of the answer to that question, passionate love included, asking how it fits with other elements and how one might construct a balanced life out of all of them. (I pointed, here, to the fact that Aristotle's ethical works include many aspects of human life that for Kant and many others would lie outside of morality: joking, hospitality, friendship, love itself. All these elements are securely inside the search for the good human life as Aristotle understands it, and can be evaluated and further specified by that search.)

In this period I emphasized the fact that James's conception of the ethical stance

appears to be summarily inclusive, that his novels are shaped by, and constitute in their reader, a consciousness that is always aware of the bearing of everything—the fortunes of the characters, the structure of the plot, the very shapes of the sentences—on the question about human life and how to live it. This consciousness is aware of non-ethical and even anti-ethical elements in life—such as jealousy, the desire for revenge, and erotic love insofar as it is linked to these. But the nature of its awareness of these elements is itself powerfully ethical. The reader is urged always to look at their bearing on the "projected morality," and to evaluate them as elements of (or impediments to) a good human life. My own belief that the Aristotelian ethical stance was complete as an attitude toward the various elements in life was the guiding idea in the writing of *Fragility*; and one sees it here in "Flawed Crystals," "Finely Aware," and "Discernment," with their assimilation of Aristotle and James.

Richard Wollheim, in his written commentary on "Flawed Crystals," argued that one of the salient contributions of the novel to our self-understanding was to lead its readers, at certain times and in certain ways, "outside of morality," making them accomplices of extra-moral projects, especially those based on jealousy and revenge.⁹⁰ In this way, he argued, the novel, showing us the boundaries of morality and its roots in more primitive attitudes, shows us something important about morality that we could not have seen from a moral treatise itself. My reply to Wollheim at that time, in the printed response, was to argue that our difference was merely verbal, the result simply of a difference in the use of the words "moral" and "ethical." He was using a narrower Kantian understanding of the moral, I a broader Aristotelian understanding. What was outside the ethical or moral in the former sense was inside it in the latter. Even (I said) if one did grant that at times *The Golden Bowl* does allow its readers to glimpse the boundaries of even this broader ethical stance, showing them a love that is, in its exclusiveness, incompatible with fine awareness and rich responsibility, and even if the novel does, up to a point, implicate its readers in that love's guilty partiality of vision, still it does so in a way that permits them always to retain a keen awareness of what the characters lose from view, and so in this way the novel remains always inside the ethical stance.

During a second period, I held more or less constant my view of Jamesian readership and its ethical features, but expressed a different attitude to love, in its relation to the Aristotelian ethical viewpoint. Or rather, I developed more deeply some elements of my view that had already been suggested in my reading of the ending of *The Golden Bowl*, though not in my reply to Wollheim. Here I insisted that certain significant human relationships, erotic love above all, demand a kind of attention that is in a deep and pervasive tension with the ethical viewpoint, even when that viewpoint is understood in the broad Jamesian/Aristotelian way. The demand of the relationship for both exclusivity and privacy is held to be ethically problematic, since even the inclusive Aristotelian understanding of the ethical stance emphasizes the connection of that stance with wide and inclusive attention and with the public giving of reasons. Thus, in "Perceptive Equilibrium," above all (and in the sections of "Steerforth's Arm" dealing with Adam Smith and

90. Wollheim (see n. 88).

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with James) I argued, following James and Stretcher, that there is a pervasive tension between love and the ethical, and between the sorts of attention required by each. Any life that wishes to include both cannot aim at a condition of balance or equilibrium, but only at an uneasy oscillation between the ethical norm and this extra-ethical element. (This point was first suggested in the brief remarks at the end of the reading of *The Golden Bowl* in "Flawed Crystals," about the need to improvise concerning when to hold onto the norm of fine awareness, and when to let it go.) As for James, my argument was that he sets his readers up in the point of view that is most favorable to morality, making them allies of Stretcher and showing Stretcher's viewpoint as the fruit of his own long engagement with literature. But James complicates the reader's attachment to Stretcher just enough to make the reader perceive, around the margins of the novel, the silent world of love, and to wonder, therefore, whether a more complete human good might not be "perceptive oscillation," rather than "perceptive equilibrium." To this extent, the novel would not, as such, contain a representation of that complete human good.

In this period I did not insist on any positive contribution that love might make to ethical understanding. I saw it as part of a complete human life, but a part that was, where ethical vision was itself concerned, subversive rather than helpful. Here I had lost confidence in, or lost sight of, the arguments contained in the reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* in chapter 7 of *Fragility*, which claimed that love's "madness" is essential not only for a full life, but also for understanding and pursuit of the good. "Love and the Individual" again recorded those arguments, but with some skepticism; and that heroine's evident absorption in the face and form of a particular individual is shown there as incompatible with broader ethical concern, even though she talks a lot about ethical concern.

Another argument influenced me at that time; it helps to explain my emphasis on the gulf between love and ethical attention. This argument is mentioned briefly in "Flawed Crystals" and "Perceptive Equilibrium," in my references to jealousy; but it is not developed at length, although it was a major theme in Wollheim's reply to "Flawed Crystals." It is worked out in detail in an account of Senecan tragedy that is part of my book in progress on Hellenistic ethics. This argument looks at the way in which erotic love, betrayed or disappointed, converts itself into anger and evil wishing toward the object, or the rival, or both. I argue that erotic love cannot be "domesticated" within an Aristotelian scheme for balanced and harmonious action toward the complete life, but must always be potentially subversive of the Aristotelian pursuit, because of this love's connection with anger and the wish to harm. In loving erotically, one risks not only loss, but also evil.

The third view is found in "Steerforth's Arm," the most recent of the articles. Here, led by my reading of Dickens (or perhaps also led again to Dickens by my interest in this possibility) I suggest that the non-judgmental love of particulars characteristic of the best and most humane ethical stance contains within itself a susceptibility to love, and to a love that leads the lover at times beyond the ethical stance into a world in which ethical judgment does not take place. Dickens presents a version of the morality of sympathy that is kinetic and romantic in a way that Stretcher's is not. Stretcher's "non-judgmental love of particulars" is not, at bottom, ever really non-judgmental. The insistent Aristotelian question, the ques-

tion about how all this now before me fits into some plan of how a human being ought to live, the question of whether the appropriate acts and feelings are being chosen, is never inaudible. The tradition into which Dickens fits his hero has different ancient roots. It is in Roman Stoic ideas of mercy and the waiving of straight judgment, developed further in Christian thought, that we see, I think, one origin of David Copperfield's conception of love. (Another origin is surely Romantic, as we see in David's preference for exuberant onward movement and in his association of stasis with death.)

According to this conception, love and ethical concern do not exactly have an equilibrium, but they support and inform one another; and each one is less good, less complete, without the other. Proust could certainly not accept this idea, since he believes that all personal love is necessarily solipsistic, indifferent to the well-being of the loved. It is more difficult to know whether, and how far, James could accept it. *The Ambassadors* and some parts of *The Golden Bowl* seem too preoccupied with getting it right, too much still in the grip of the demand for fine awareness and rich responsibility, to welcome love, with its exclusivity and its tumult, as a nourishing influence in the ethical life—even though it might at the same time be seen to be a central part of a rich or full human life. And yet, in the love of Hyacinth Robinson and Millicent Henning, in the way in which both Hyacinth and Lady Aurora mercifully love the Princess, in the portrait of the Assinghams in *The Golden Bowl*—and perhaps in Maggie Verwer's tender refusal of judgment at that novel's end, where we see a deep link between erotic attachment and a new, more yielding sort of moral rightness—we do find elements of this picture, signs that there is a grace in the yielding of tight control, and that indeed, as Maggie reflects, "the infirmity of art [is] the candor of affection, the grossness of pedgreee the refinement of sympathy."⁹¹

Philosophy has often seen itself as a way of transcending the merely human, of giving the human being a new and more godlike set of activities and attachments. The alternative I explore sees it as a way of being human and speaking humanly. That suggestion will appeal only to those who actually want to be human, who see in human life as it is, with its surprises and connections, its pains and sudden joys, a story worth embracing. This in no way means not wishing to make life better than it is. But, as "Transcending" argues, there are ways of transcending that are human and "internal," and other ways that involve flight and repudiation. It seems plausible that in pursuit of the first way—in pursuit of human self-understanding and of a society in which humanity can realize itself more fully—the imagination and the terms of the literary artist are indispensable guides: as James suggests, angels of and in the fallen world, alert in perception and sympathy, lucidly bewildered, surprised by the intelligence of love.⁹²

91. H. James, *The Golden Bowl* (New York, 1907-9) II.156; and see "Flawed Crystals," this volume.

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