

The Literary Example as Philosophical Methodology:
Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice* and Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue*

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

The question of the moral and cognitive content of literature has classical bona fides that imply it is a foundational question for philosophy, but philosophical interest in it has been narrow and intermittent. Conversely, narrative examples have been so ubiquitous in philosophy the methodologies underlying their use have seldom been made the center of philosophical inquiry. In this thesis, I make a comparative analysis of Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice* and Nomy Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue*, arguing their use of literary examples both relies on the unique properties of the literary example, and is conceptually productive rather than merely evidentiary or illustrative.

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Introduction

Analytic philosophers, with their love of clarity, precision, and definitional exactitude, can be forgiven if they view with raised-eyebrow the claim that from fiction one can draw truth. Yet philosophers and non-philosophers alike often find in great literary works evocative and challenging philosophical ideas, that are difficult to justify cordoning off from the discipline. In this thesis, I provide a comparative analysis of two philosophical works, Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* and Nomy Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency*, that are conspicuous outliers: they treat the connection between moral philosophy and literature as perfectly natural and assiduously deploy literary examples as the driving force behind their conceptual products. Here, I am most interested in the axis of literature and the example in philosophy: in the *literary* example *in* philosophy. In Chapter 1, I provide an exegesis of two central literary examples in each work, as well as an initial indication of the strengths of Fricker and Arpaly's methodologies with respect to literary examples. In Chapter 2, I respond to some of the most interesting and prominent objections to using literary examples in philosophy and, in my responses, seek to achieve a greater degree of clarity on how literature and philosophy can be brought into a more productive relationship than they seem to offer. In Chapter 3, I first provide a comparison between Fricker and Arpaly's methodologies. Second, I address difficulties arising from presenting literary works in a truncated form. Third, I consider the most pressing objections to the Fricker and Arpaly's choice of literary examples, and especially concerns that the depiction of Black characters in the works they draw from are outdated and racist. I conclude the chapter by arguing that Fricker and Arpaly's methodologies both rely on the unique characteristics of literary examples, and are conceptually productive rather than merely evidentiary or illustrative.

As Martha Nussbaum notes, “Philosophy and literature have had a very uneasy relationship throughout the Western philosophical tradition. Already in the *Republic*... Plato’s Socrates refers to a ‘quarrel of long standing’ between the poets and the philosophers—which he then pursues, expressing both a deep love of literary art and a reluctance to admit it into the instructional plan of the ideal city.”¹ Here, Nussbaum draws attention to two features of the *Republic* that deserve more attention. First, that the question of the moral-didactic effect of literature holds a prominent place in this most influential of dialogues, a place that would seem to single it out as a foundational question for philosophy. However, as Nussbaum subsequently argues, though this debate was utterly fundamental to subsequent Greek and Roman philosophers, and was kept alive by “Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger... and many others,” it was to be “virtually neglected” by Anglo-American analytic philosophy since the twentieth century.² Thus, one is faced with a troubling departure: a question which would seem to have every right to be counted one of philosophy’s most basic has, in the recent history of its analytic half, received only narrow and syncopated attention.

Second, Nussbaum highlights Plato’s complex ambivalence towards literature, and this is worth saying more about. Many are aware that, in the *Republic*, Socrates offers several forceful arguments for the banning of nearly all narrative literature from his imaginary utopia, on the basis that it has a deleterious effect on the citizenry’s morals.³ However, fewer seem to have considered just how incongruous it is for Plato to put this argument in Socrates’ mouth. Afterall, the Socratic dialogue is *itself* a literary form, in which standard literary techniques such as

¹ Martha Nussbaum, “Ralph Cohen and the Dialogue Between Philosophy and Literature.” *New Literary History* 40, no. 4 (2009): 757.

² Nussbaum, “the Dialogue Between Philosophy and Literature,” 757.

³ Plato and C. D. C. Reeve, *Republic in A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012), 378b.

perspective and characterization are deployed with great skill and to great effect. Further, literary references, often from the very poets Socrates singles out for censure in the *Republic* (Hesiod and Homer), practically spout from Socrates in every dialogue. Finally, Plato not infrequently has Socrates spin involved mythic narratives of his own, such as the Myth of Theuth in the *Phaedrus* or the exceptionally involved Myth of Er with which he concludes the *Republic*.⁴ Further complicating matters, Plato's ambivalence towards the moral-didactic qualities of literature can be contrasted against his student Aristotle's, with Aristotle "regarding arts as such and theater in particular as ways of educating emotions such as pity and fear by means of clarifying them... by presenting cognition with... exemplary or maximally fitting objects for certain emotions such that our capacity to recognize the appropriate objects of said emotions and our disposition to undergo these affective states in the right circumstances are enhanced."⁵ Clearly, as typified by the Platonic and Aristotelian approaches, and as borne out by history, Nussbaum is fully justified in characterizing philosophy's attitude to literature as complexly ambivalent.

A second fault line in philosophy relevant to my purpose here, is a methodological one regarding the use of examples. This too maps roughly onto a Platonic-Aristotelian divide, this time in ontology. While Plato's Theory of Forms and dialectic style treats the ideational and universal as primary, Aristotle sets up the concrete and particular ("primary substances") as the most fundamentally real. That being said, I am even more interested in contemporary contributions to this debate. Though, as Sven Hansson notes, "Examples have a central role in almost all dialects of philosophical discourse,"⁶ their sheer ubiquity has led methodologies of

⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 614b-621b.

⁵ Noël Carroll, "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding," in *Aesthetics and Ethics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 131.

⁶ Sven Ove Hansson, "Condensed Examples in Philosophy." *Theoria* 72, no. 2 (2006), 97.

example to too often be taken for granted in philosophy; a noticeable departure from philosophy's usually self-critical (the cynical would say "naval gazing") attitude. Regarding the use of *literary* examples in philosophy, Helen Small notes "Philosophers themselves... have been largely silent about this aspect of their method. Those who do use literature typically account for their reasons; those who don't, don't."⁷ This is unfortunate, because tailor-made, rather schematic thought experiments, that seemingly serve a purely illustrative role, are overrepresented in analytic philosophy. Because this is so, and has been for some time, this is in danger of being normalized. However, part of my purpose in writing is to seek to give a sense of how both the *types* of examples analytic philosophers can engage with and the *way* they are used can be radically expanded. In focusing critical attention on this, I join philosophers, such as Toril Moi, who feel examples have a much more instrumental role to play in philosophy than mere illustration. As Moi states, philosophy that is uncritical or unconcerned about the way it uses examples "inevitably pushes the theorist away from the particular case and toward the giddy heights of abstraction"⁸ and becomes "abstract and overgeneralizing, operating at a vast remove from... concrete experiences."⁹ Like Moi, my view is that examples cannot be afterthoughts, but should inform theorizing at every step. In focusing on Fricker and Arpaly, I hope to draw attention to the work of philosophers who do just that.

⁷ Helen Small, "The Literary Example in Moral Philosophy Today." *Boundary 2* 40, no. 2 (2013), 49.

⁸ Toril Moi, "Thinking Through Examples: What Ordinary Language Philosophy Can Do for Feminist Theory," *New Literary History* 46, no. 2 (2015), 200.

⁹ Moi, "Thinking Through Examples," 193.

Chapter 1

To provide an account of the way the literary example is used in *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue* that captures how these examples become conceptually productive, it is necessary to detail the key instances in which Fricker and Arpaly deploy them, as well as map the web of connections between their central literary examples and the conceptual work they undertake in these books. In this chapter, I provide an exegesis first of Fricker's of *Epistemic Injustice* and then of Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue*. For each, I provide a brief summary of the thesis and content of the book and then a more detailed exposition of how the author deploys two central literary examples. For Fricker, these examples are from the Anthony Minghella screenplay of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. For Arpaly, they are from John Le Carré's *Single and Single* and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In the course of these exegeses, I provide an initial indication of what is unique about literary examples, and about the particularly evocative and conceptually productive ways Fricker and Arpaly use them.

Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice*

Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice* is dedicated to elucidating two forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. For Fricker, an epistemic injustice is "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower."¹⁰ Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker's testimony is assigned less credibility than it deserves. While Fricker explores the idea of *incidental* testimonial injustice, she considers the central case to be when a testifier's word *systematically* receives deficient credibility due to an *identity prejudice* (such as sexism or

¹⁰ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

racism) held by their hearers.¹¹ The second subtype of epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustice, is “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization,”¹² where “hermeneutical marginalization” is having one’s self understanding and unique understandings of the world barred entry to the ideational mainstream of one’s society. Through the discussion of epistemic injustice and its subtypes, Fricker postulates corrective virtues corresponding to each: the virtues of epistemic justice, testimonial justice, and hermeneutical justice. On Fricker’s account, the one embodying such virtues seeks to neutralize or correct for the effects of internalized identity prejudice or imbalances in the available hermeneutical resources and, by doing so, achieve a sensibility both more epistemically and morally sound. Importantly, Fricker considers these virtues *hybrid* epistemic/moral virtues, as their actualization irreducibly serves both moral and epistemic ends, so that *Epistemic Injustice* can plausibly be read as either a work of epistemology or moral philosophy (or, perhaps most accurately, as both at the same time).¹³

Significantly, Fricker begins the body of her book with a literary example. At the very start of Chapter 1 of *Epistemic Injustice*, Fricker references a specific passage from Anthony Minghella’s (1999) screenplay for the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*:

Herbert Greenleaf uses a familiar put-down to silence Marge Sherwood, the young woman who, but for the sinister disappearance of his son, Dickie, was soon to have become his daughter-in-law: ‘Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts.’ Greenleaf is responding to Marge's expressed suspicion that Tom Ripley—a supposed friend of Dickie and Marge, who has curried much favour with Greenleaf senior—is in fact Dickie's murderer.”¹⁴

¹¹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 28.

¹² Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 158.

¹³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 120-128.

¹⁴ Minghella in Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 9.

What initially intrigues Fricker here is that, though it is clear Mr. Greenleaf exercises some form of gender-based power to undermine Marge's credibility, it is not *prima facie* apparent how this power operates to make it so devastating in this situation, or how such power relates to other forms of social power that may be at play.¹⁵ As Fricker notes, answering such questions is necessary to "paint a portrait of testimonial injustice and to home in on its distinctive central case"¹⁶ and this motivates her impending fine-grained analysis of social power, identity power, and collective social imagination in this chapter.

It is in this analysis that Fricker brings Mr. Greenleaf's speak up for a second time. According to Fricker, though this may seem an obvious deployment of gender-based identity power to a contemporary reader, it might be performed entirely unwittingly (the story is, after all, set in the Fifties), such that Mr. Greenleaf might consider himself "well-intentioned and benevolently paternal."¹⁷ Further, in silencing Marge, Greenleaf unconsciously invokes collective social conceptions of the time that paint women as "insufficiently rational because excessively intuitive" as well as that women "should never pitch their word against that of a man,"¹⁸ much less an older family man. Interestingly, even "If we were to interpret Marge as thoroughly aware of the distorting nature of the stereotype used to silence her, it would still be no surprise that she should be silenced by it,"¹⁹ which nicely explains why, during the course of the plot of the film, Marge's struggles to be heard are increasingly ineffectual. Therefore, in Chapter 1, Fricker uses the "Greenleaf example" to both introduce her discussion of social power, identity power, and the shared social imagination, and to *refine* it. Greenleaf and Marge's

¹⁵ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 9.

¹⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 9.

¹⁷ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 15.

¹⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 15.

¹⁹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 15.

interactions serve not simply to illustrate the results of Fricker's conceptual work around these ideas, but the details of the case, including how they relate to the overall plot of the film, interact with Fricker's more technical definitional work to flesh in the details of her conceptualizations.

Fricker reintroduces the Greenleaf example at the beginning of Chapter 4, in a search for just what virtue Greenleaf lacks in his reception of Marge's testimony, as well as what Greenleaf's moral status is given the historical context.²⁰ After filling the reader in on some more relevant details of the film's plot, Fricker offers another fine-grained analysis of Greenleaf's attitude towards Marge, but this time from a different angle. According to Fricker, Greenleaf wrongly believes Marge is ignorant of her fiancé's (Greenleaf Jr.'s) multiple affairs, and must therefore both be protected from the painful truth of his infidelity *and* be considered a less than reliable informant concerning the man who hid so much from her.²¹ This leads Greenleaf to misconstrue key pieces of evidence, that Marge correctly gauges the meaning of, and collaborate with Ripley (the real killer) in painting Marge's increasingly desperate attempts to finger Ripley for the murder as grief-induced hysteria.²² The result is that, though the clear eyed Marge makes the most complete and accurate assessment of the evidence, Greenleaf's prejudiced perception of her (as a supposedly deceived and deficiently rational woman) causes him to come to a radically unfair assessment of her credibility as a testifier and eventually to collude in undermining her status as a knower, such that "we see poor Marge in some measure actually becoming what she has been constructed as" illustrating the "power some prejudices have for self-fulfilment."²³

²⁰ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 86.

²¹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 87.

²² Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 88.

²³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 89.

From this rich analysis of *Mr. Ripley*, Fricker draws several philosophical insights. First, that Greenleaf's failure lies in "*failing to correct for identity prejudice*" in his "testimonial sensibility."²⁴ This sets the stage for Fricker's articulation of the virtue of testimonial justice, which consists in doing just this, reflexively. Further, the plot of *Mr. Ripley* turns out to be an ideal illustration of how epistemic injustice results in both a moral failure (failing to treat Marge with the respect she deserves) and an epistemic one (failing to accurately assess Marge's testimony such that justice can be found for Greenleaf's son), which are inextricably intertwined, a point Fricker makes repeatedly about epistemic injustice and its corresponding virtues. Third, Fricker takes the opportunity to argue that "Greenleaf's prejudiced perception of Marge is ultimately non-culpable."²⁵ Here, Fricker makes some key distinctions between agential and purely structural factors, arguing that the reigning "Social-imaginative ideas" of women of the Fifties exerts such pressure on Greenleaf that, despite failing to embody the virtue of testimonial justice, he is ultimately non-culpable for this.²⁶ Finally, Fricker makes the observation, with respect to the operations of identity power, that "In testimonial exchanges, for hearers and speakers alike, no party is neutral." In order to fully embody the virtue of testimonial justice, Greenleaf would have also had to be self-reflective enough to acknowledge that his scepticism towards Marge was based also in *his own* understanding of himself as a (presumably rational, benevolently paternal) *man*.²⁷ Here again, the points of contact between the literary example and Fricker's conceptual work are innumerable, such that it becomes difficult to tell whether Fricker is *applying* her conceptualizations to produce an enhanced understanding of *Mr. Ripley*, or is productively *drawing them out of* the text itself in some way.

²⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 89.

²⁵ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 89.

²⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 90.

²⁷ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 91.

Later in the same chapter, Fricker returns to the Greenleaf case to do some much more detailed theorizing on the culpability of historical persons who fail to exercise the virtue of testimonial justice. Revisiting the difficult question of Greenleaf's culpability in his treatment of Marge, Fricker notes that, even if Greenleaf is not (fully) culpable as an American man living in the Fifties, as progress is made, the "Herbert Greenleafs" of the world become increasingly culpable for relevant acts of prejudice.²⁸ In other words, if claiming the relevant critical concepts (of sexism and paternalism, for instance) were not available in the shared "social imaginary" of the time is a pretty good excuse, this excuse begins to tarnish as these conceptual resources become increasingly available. However, as Fricker notes, Greenleaf should not be held responsible for not achieving the "critical perspective on gender" requisite for fully understanding the wrong he does Marge if it was nowhere available to him.²⁹ Poignantly, Fricker characterizes Greenleaf as suffering from epistemic and moral bad luck in this respect, as he has every reason to discover his son's killer and yet is held back from doing so by his own inculcated prejudices.³⁰ From this, Fricker goes on to make distinctions between *circumstantial* bad luck, relating to one's socio-historical situatedness, and *constitutive* bad luck, relating to the sort of person one is.³¹ These concepts, finally, lead to an appropriately fine-tuned set of tools for resolving one's conflicted feelings in judging Greenleaf: *routine* and *exceptional* moral judgements, which correspond to the *resentment of disappointment* and the *resentment of blame*.³² Though these concepts are nuanced, they come down to acknowledging Greenleaf's act as a *routine* one and the resentment he is entitled to for it one of *disappointment* rather than

²⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 100.

²⁹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 100.

³⁰ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 101-102.

³¹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 103.

³² Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 105.

blame. These distinctions are useful in considering how far an average moral agent can be expected to break away from the public morality of their day, as well as distinguishing between the moral blame one deserves for conformism to bad principles versus for violating even the morally sound principles one knows. As in previous instances, Fricker here appears to spawn multiple highly novel philosophical ideas from what can only be described as highly involved literary criticism.

A second literary example that is frequently central to discussion in *Epistemic Injustice*, is one drawn from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In Chapter 1, directly after two realistic but somewhat schematic examples of mistakes in credibility attribution, Fricker introduces the *Mockingbird* example thus: "in order to furnish the philosophical imagination less crudely, let us turn to an example from literature that provides us with a historically truthful fiction."³³ What follows is an extensive direct quote and a lengthy exegesis of the trial scene in *Mockingbird*, in which Atticus, a principled White lawyer, pleads with an all White jury to acquit Tom Robinson, a Black man wrongly accused of rape, in a rural court in 1930s Alabama. However, Fricker does not stick to straight exposition here, but rather draws the reader's attention to key elements and interpretations of the scene that will provide fuel and clarity for her theory of testimonial injustice. On Fricker's reading "The trial proceedings enact what is in one sense a straightforward struggle between the power of evidence and the power of racial prejudice, with the all-white jury's judgement ultimately succumbing to the latter. But the psychology is subtle, and there is a great complexity of social meanings at work in determining the jury's perception of Tom Robinson as a speaker."³⁴ Here, Fricker is interested in *just how* the jury succumbs to their

³³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 23.

³⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 23.

racial prejudice, despite overwhelming exculpatory evidence, to find Robinson guilty. One layer of complexity, is that Robinson is hemmed in by the circumstances of the inciting incident: Mayella Ewell, a poor White woman, attempted to seduce him.³⁵ As a Black man living in an intensely, paranoidly racist society, resisting Mayella's advances, accepting them, or running away are all options fraught with danger and in each instance a White jury would perceive him as guilty.³⁶ Here, Fricker relies on the "meatiness" of the literary example: the book's overall narrative provides a convincing portrait of the sort of society in which such a miscarriage of justice might happen, and the reader is provided with a wealth of detail on the circumstances of the case, from which Fricker draws often. Importantly, and unlike schematic examples, these details provide resources not only for Fricker to draw on when useful to her conceptual mission, but also for the reader's moral intuitions to act on in a way analogous, though not identical, to moral case studies from real life.

Continuing her analysis here with an appraisal of the epistemic/moral wrong the jury perpetrates, Fricker argues "it is important that we are to interpret the novel so that the jurors really do find... [Robinson] guilty... they do not privately find him innocent yet cynically convict him anyway."³⁷ On Fricker's reading, like Greenleaf, the jurors are genuinely the dupes of their own prejudice. Their own inability to correct for the unfair appraisal of a Robinson's testimony causes them to fail in their duty to deliver justice, despite seeing themselves as honestly seeking it. Drawing on the broader context *Mockingbird* provides, Fricker notes that "even the most hateful prejudicial ideologies may be sustained not only by explicitly hateful thought and talk but also by more domestic stereotypical ideas" referencing "a relatively light-

³⁵ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 23.

³⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 24.

³⁷ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 25.

hearted theme of epistemic untrustworthiness that runs through the book as a leitmotif,” such as when various characters associate Black people with spurious rumours and outdated superstitions.³⁸ Finally, Fricker uses the Robinson case to introduce a difference between *systematic* and *incidental* cases of epistemic injustice that is pivotal for her overall philosophical project.³⁹ She does so by pointing out that, though her “initial sketch” of testimonial injustice captures something of the *prejudicial credibility deficit* Robinson suffers from in court, “it misses a crucial feature of the sort of testimonial injustice that Tom suffers,” namely, the fact that Robinson suffers from this deficit *in every arena of his life*.⁴⁰ In other words, that he experiences testimonial injustice *systematically*. Fricker’s wording here indicates something of what is going on here methodologically: her “initial sketch” of testimonial injustice is challenged, modified, and fleshed out by her engagement with a *specific case* of testimonial injustice from literature. Here, it seems both the nuance and complexity of the chosen case *and* of Fricker’s response to it furnish conceptual permutations of central importance to Fricker’s philosophical project. Because this is so, Lee and Fricker seem each to deserve significant credit for the meeting of the minds achieved in these passages of *Epistemic Injustice*: Lee, for providing a narrative at once evocative and philosophically rich enough to engage Fricker on multiple levels, *and* Fricker, for the sheer amount of meaning she is able to mine from *Mockingbird* through her thoughtful attention to every element of its composition.

In Chapter 2, the Robinson example comes up again and again in a fine-grained discussion of the way prejudice operates in credibility attribution, with Fricker referring to it as “our chief example.”⁴¹ Here, Fricker uses the Robinson example to differentiate between cases of

³⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 26.

³⁹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 27.

⁴⁰ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 30.

⁴¹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 36.

prejudice penetrating down to the level of core beliefs, pointing out how racial prejudice has become an essential element of the jurors' worldview, and prejudice "at the non-doxastic level," such that "Many instances of testimonial injustice will be importantly unlike Tom Robinson's case... owing not to prejudiced beliefs at all but only to stealthier, residual prejudices, whose content may even be flatly inconsistent with the beliefs actually held by the subject."⁴² This, Fricker claims, is a necessary distinction if testimonial injustice is to be recognised as continual and pervasive.⁴³ Fricker also uses the case to add some nuance to her assertion that experiencing a credibility deficit in one's testimony is an insult that discriminates against one "in respect of some essential feature" of being a *social being*, such that it can cause it to be difficult to maintain one's sense of dignity and personhood.⁴⁴ For Robinson, though he may face nothing but contempt from his fellow White citizens, the "fragmentary nature" of his social identity, his membership in a parallel Black community that accepts him as an epistemic equal, may grant him access to the "shared resources" necessary for him to remain psychologically whole.⁴⁵ Here, even when engagement with a literary work is *not* the center of Fricker's discussion, her constant references back to her "chief example" indicates the role it plays in establishing continuity between Fricker's various interrelated conceptual forays in *Epistemic Injustice*. Because Fricker has, earlier in the book and at the cost of considerable space, fleshed out the Robinson example so fully and so numerouslly connected it to her conceptual project, she can rely on this earlier work to economically and meaningfully refer back to it at will. Because the Robinson example is a tool Fricker has taken the time to sharpen in the first half of *Epistemic Injustice*, she can employ it to great effect in the latter half with minimal effort.

⁴² Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 36.

⁴³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 36.

⁴⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 54.

⁴⁵ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 54.

The final section in which the Robinson example plays an instrumental part, is in Fricker's discussion of the *naïve* versus *corrective* forms of the virtue of testimonial justice, in Chapter 4. Here, Fricker focuses on a uniquely literary aspect of *Mockingbird's* treatment of epistemic injustice: the fact that the reader sees the trial through the eyes of Scout, Atticus's young daughter, in companionship with her neighbourhood friend, Dill. Fricker uses the overall context of the narrative to explain that Scout, while being positively influenced by her anti-racist father, Atticus, and their intelligent and matter-of-fact Black housekeeper, Calpurnia, is still at an impressionable stage of childhood in which her natural empathy is at war with the racist ideational firmament of the society in which she is growing up.⁴⁶ The complex interactions between Scout's fundamentally good nature and her receptiveness to both the racist and anti-racist views permeating her world frequently results in inconsistencies: like her father, Scout *believes* Tom, partly intuitively and partly on the basis of her father's advice to "listen rather than watch" to tell if Tom is lying.⁴⁷ However, as Fricker puts it, "Her thoughts are naturally couched in the rotten terminology of the day, so that she sometimes gives voice to the standard racist attitudes."⁴⁸ Therefore, Scout is caught somewhere between a *naïve* testimonial justice, and the *corrective*, self-reflective testimonial justice that characterizes the moral/epistemic character of her father. To contrast Scout's against a more purely naïve testimonial sensibility, Fricker references Scout's friend Dill's tearful reaction to the prosecutor's hateful way of speaking to Tom.⁴⁹ Though Fricker does not explain this, Dill, despite being a year older than Scout, consistently demonstrates he is not her equal in maturity throughout the events of *Mockingbird* (though he retains a childish charm and sensitivity that, in Scout, is in the process of callousing

⁴⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 94-95.

⁴⁷ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 94.

⁴⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 95.

⁴⁹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 95.

over).⁵⁰ Importantly, none of Fricker's interpretations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* feel like a stretch, even to one who has read the novel closely, as each is argued for intelligibly and backed up by decisive textual evidence when necessary. Further, the explicitness and intentionality with which epistemic themes are addressed in the novel carry the fascinating implication that Harper Lee investigated similar philosophical ideas to Fricker, only through a different medium. Affinities such as that between Fricker and Lee's projects should prompt a reconsideration of the too clear-cut boundaries those on both the philosophical and literary sides sometimes draw between the disciplines.

Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue*

Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue* is dedicated to investigating problem cases in moral psychology that trouble the discipline's conceptions of rationality, psychological coherence, autonomy, and moral worth. Ultimately, Arpaly articulates a conception of moral worth that better explains the importance of emotional and intuitive responses to moral dilemmas, and argues that an agent's rational deliberations may not always be the definitive factor in either their will or the moral praise or censure they deserve. Here, the concept of *unprincipled virtue* is key. For Arpaly, an agent practices unprincipled virtue when their intuitive moral sensibility overcomes morally misguided principles they have accepted as correct on a rational level. Importantly this conception, for at least some cases, turns on its head the conventional priority granted rational deliberation in moral psychology, such that acting *on one's intuitions* is sometimes considerably more "rational" than acting *on one's best considered judgement*.⁵¹ Arpaly demonstrates how a theory of moral worth that takes seriously the role of the

⁵⁰ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, First Harper Perennial Modern classics edition, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006, c. 1960).

⁵¹ Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 36.

subconscious in moral decision making can help answer difficult questions about assigning moral praise and blame in cases where an agent's rational decision-making and intuitive impulses clash. Further, Arpaly uses her conception of unprincipled virtue to trouble dominant philosophical conceptions of autonomy, first arguing that the use of the term "autonomy" in moral psychology is incurably diffuse and misleading, and then that even a delimited conception of agent autonomy is less important to moral worth than it is usually considered to be.

Like Fricker, the first words of Arpaly's first chapter introduce a literary example, this time from John Le Carré's *Single and Single*. Here, Arpaly provides an exposition and a lengthy direct quote from a particular scene in *Single and Single*, in which the narrative's protagonist, Oliver, is arriving at Heathrow Airport. As Arpaly describes, Oliver is

a young lawyer in a prestigious firm and heir apparent to his illustrious father, Tyger Single, who heads the firm. The firm is heavily involved in organized crime. Oliver has always known that his father acts immorally, he still has no plans to leave his post. He enjoys the money and the prestige and, in addition, he loves his father deeply and wishes to please him. At a critical moment, however, Oliver defects to the side of the law, in whose service he remains to perform some courageous acts for which the reader takes him to be praiseworthy and admirable.⁵²

Arpaly draws the reader's attention to the strange quality of the airport scene in which Oliver makes the momentous decision to inform on his father. Here, in a passage directly quoted by Arpaly, Le Carré vividly describes Oliver's feeling of a lack of agency and disconnection from the actions he takes. Instead of consciously deliberating, Oliver experiences his semi-intoxicated drift into the decision to pick up a red airport phone and ask for the chief of customs like a sleepwalker. Oliver is aware of mental anguish, but he only becomes conscious that he has prepared himself for this moment, by drinking and by taking note of the location of the phone upon departure, gradually, after it is already too late to back down from his resolution.

⁵² Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 3.

Ultimately, he never feels he has consciously decided to turn informant until he has already hopeless implicated himself. Here, the literary style, the sheer vividness with which Le Carré captures the moment, seems to play just as important a role as the expansive context of the plot of *Single and Single*. Through his use of literary technique, Le Carré invites the reader to identify with Oliver in a way that calls out their moral and folk-psychological intuitions; that reminds them, perhaps, of similar feelings surrounding momentous decision they have undertaken, and so enhances the intuitive plausibility of the account.

Here, Arpaly draws the reader's attention to the fact that "Oliver is... unlike run-of-the-mill exemplars of agency" in the moral psychology literature, in that he in no way seems to typify the "autonomous, rational agent" that is usually the object of approval.⁵³ In fact, Oliver seems in important respects to be driven by his subconscious, a phenomenon usually considered highly suspect by the moral psychologist, but the reader still gets the impression he has acted well, in fact has succeeded in turning an important corner in his life by making a difficult but highly morally praiseworthy decision.⁵⁴ As Arpaly is explicit about here, she utilizes this case from literature to trouble a philosophical subdiscipline that, due to its insularity, has become inordinately focused on a selection of examples that tend to vindicate a focus on rational deliberation and a neglect for subconscious motivations: "Oliver Single presents us with a sort of agent that moral psychologists have not been trying to understand."⁵⁵ Thus, Arpaly can be seen, quite intuitively come to think of it, to be reaching into a neighbouring discipline, literature, for the material with which to trouble the insular philosophical sub-discipline within which she works. Further, though the example of Oliver is obviously handpicked, Arpaly asserts "actions...

⁵³ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 4-5.

⁵⁴ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 6-7.

⁵⁵ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 7.

like Oliver's defection, are more important than eating nuts, and more morally significant" both taking a jab at the commonplaceness and simplicity of many philosophical examples and indicating the prevalence, and thus the need to make sense of, cases of momentous decisions taken without obvious rational deliberation. For Arpaly, Le Carré, despite working in literature rather than moral psychology, has articulated a plausible, nuanced case of a phenomenon it is important for moral psychology to make sense of, but has nonetheless been neglected in that field. For those who have had the experience of engaging deeply with a novel however, that a work of literature can have psychological and even philosophical insights largely missing from the psychological and philosophical literatures might seem less than surprising.

Arpaly reintroduces the Oliver case in her fourth chapter, in a discussion of the relationship between agent autonomy and moral praise. As Arpaly succinctly puts it "any theory that implies... that Oliver Single is not morally responsible is unacceptable, for a nonresponsible agent cannot be praiseworthy, and we should be able to praise Oliver Single."⁵⁶ This reintroduction of the Oliver example follows on the heels of a discussion of several somewhat fantastical cases concerning agent autonomy from the moral psychology literature. Importantly, Arpaly states that, in her examination Oliver's moral praiseworthiness, she did not find it necessary to refer to the concept of agent autonomy at all.⁵⁷ This prompts Arpaly to argue that "autonomy," in any of the various senses it is used in philosophy, "unless it affects praiseworthiness or blameworthiness when all else is equal... is not important for moral responsibility."⁵⁸ In other words, if Oliver would make a poor example of "a fully autonomous agent" on any of the available conceptions of autonomy, and yet one still finds him morally

⁵⁶ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 129.

⁵⁷ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 129.

⁵⁸ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 130.

praiseworthy for his actions, one is justified in asking how important “autonomy” is for moral praiseworthiness, despite the fact it has often been considered essential to it in moral psychology. Here again Arpaly, taking advantage of Le Carré’s evocative style, mobilizes the reader’s moral intuitions to trouble conceptualizations in moral psychology: it truly *is* difficult to argue Oliver is not morally praiseworthy, once the context surrounding his decision to turn informant is understood, and Arpaly persuasively argues a theory of responsibility that cannot account for this is seriously flawed. In relying on Le Carré’s writing to prompt the reader’s intuitions in this way, Arpaly seems to have pulled the clever trick of delegating a challenging piece of writing to an expert: from my experience, few philosophers could render a scene with such psychological complexity or plausibility as Le Carré does.

A second literary example that features prominently in *Unprincipled Virtue*, is borrowed from Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and appears in Chapter 1, shortly after the initial discussion of the Oliver case. *Huckleberry Finn* is set in the early 1800s Missouri of Mark Twain’s childhood, and has Finn, a wayward boy turned amateur river rafter as its protagonist. Arpaly focuses on the memorable moral heart of the narrative, a passage in which Finn must decide whether or not to turn Jim, an escaped slave he has been traveling with, in to the authorities. What is interesting for Arpaly here is that, though “Huckleberry’s best judgment tells him that he should not help Jim escape slavery but rather turn him in... when a golden opportunity comes to turn Jim in, Huckleberry discovers that he just cannot do it and fails to do what he takes to be his duty, deciding as a result that, what with morality being so hard, he will just remain a bad boy.”⁵⁹ Thus, Finn’s case is one in which an agent’s rationally assented to principles are in conflict with his moral intuitions, though his moral intuitions are clearly on the

⁵⁹ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 9.

side of right from an outside perspective: in other words, a case of *unprincipled virtue* of just the kind Arpaly is interested in. Arpaly notes that though Finn would not count as particularly moral on either a Kantian or Aristotelian view of moral praiseworthiness, she is nevertheless after a theory of moral worth that would account for “that thing about Huckleberry Finn which makes him seem more than an accidental good-doer, and better than some people with liberal principles who are still viscerally prejudiced against people of different races.”⁶⁰ In this contrast, Arpaly indicates the salient difference between Finn (the unconscious moralist) and the viscerally racist liberal, is the difference between a good will paired with bad principles, and good principles paired with a bad will, rather than just a difference between agents’ rational faculties. After all, if rationality was what counted for moral praiseworthiness, Finn would lose out in the comparison, being rationally committed to the conventional, racist ideas of his day. Instead, according to widely shared moral intuitions given greater clarity by engagement with the Finn case, Finn is clearly morally superior to the viscerally racist liberal, and probably also to less extreme instances of those who, when it comes down to it, fail to live up to their (morally laudable) principles.

Arpaly returns to the Huckleberry example for a more in-depth analysis in a discussion of moral responsibility in her third chapter. After an explication of the impromptu friendship Finn and Jim form on the river, Arpaly notes that “Like many children (and adults) Huckleberry is not very good at abstract deliberation, and it never occurs to him to doubt what his society considers common sense”⁶¹ (note here the similarity to Fricker’s concepts of *routine* and *exceptional* moral acts, as well as her treatment of Scout’s psychological development). Here, Arpaly plays on the

⁶⁰ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 10.

⁶¹ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 75.

rather intuitive idea that those lacking exceptional abstract deliberative faculties can still be highly moral beings, despite failing to achieve a critical perspective on the public morals of their time and place. Second, Arpaly acknowledges that “there are many stories one could tell about Huckleberry’s motives,” including those that would find him undeserving of praise, such as those that attribute to him, as he attributes to himself, merely a lack of willpower to carry out his principled decisions, as a racist boy who accidentally acts well.⁶² However, as I have described, Arpaly offers an interpretation of this passage that *does* find him morally praiseworthy. As textual support for this position, Arpaly notes that, throughout the novel and leading up to this pivotal moment, Finn develops a remarkably close friendship with his traveling companion, such that he comes to treat him and, perhaps unconsciously, to *view* him, as a human being deserving of dignity and respect.⁶³ This is illustrated by a scene earlier in the novel in which, to his own surprise, Huckleberry finds himself apologizing to Jim over an unintentional slight, something which would be next to incomprehensible to someone who had truly internalized the racist ideology Finn pretends to.⁶⁴ It is in this sense then, in Finn’s willingness and ability to view Jim as a human being on the most basic and intuitive level that Finn is superior to the viscerally racist liberal. Here, the advantage of using an example that comes with its own fleshed out context, in the form of a plausible socio-relational portrait, is brought home, as Arpaly’s rich interpretation is enabled by Twain’s rather touching portrayal of an unlikely friendship formed despite seemingly insuperable racial barriers.

Arpaly continues her analysis of the Huckleberry case here as she turns her attention to the topic of “the depth of one’s concern for the right-making features of one’s actions.”⁶⁵ Though

⁶² Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 76.

⁶³ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 77.

⁶⁴ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 77.

⁶⁵ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 92.

the discussion here is complex, Arpaly's main point is that the degree to which one acts as one does *for* the reasons that *make that action moral*, is the degree to which one deserves moral praise.⁶⁶ On this account, Arpaly claims Finn deserves moral praise because "The strength of his concern for Jim as a person is a testimony to the shallow nature of his racist attitudes, not the other way around."⁶⁷ In other words, when Finn acts, it is *from* a respect for Jim's dignity as a human being. In this circumstance, the fact that the stronger of Finn's motivations is unconscious seems immaterial. Additionally, on the strength of her interpretation, and again drawing on the broader context of the narrative, Arpaly makes the claim that Finn's actions reflect well on his *character*; that his "concern with all that is human seems to be a deep feature of his character, while his racist convictions do not seem to be so."⁶⁸ Arpaly's analysis of the Huckleberry case here also leads her to question the valorisation in moral psychology of agential self-control, coming to the conclusion that "to the extent that there is a property called 'self-control' that is independent of the content of the desires to be controlled, it is hard to see it as anything but morally neutral."⁶⁹ Again, if self control were the morally decisive factor Finn would be blameworthy for *not* turning Jim in rather than failing to hold to his (bad) principles. Here, similarly to Fricker, Arpaly repeatedly uses an in-depth literary analysis as a springboard for sequential conceptual refinements to her account of moral worth. Just how much of this conceptual work Arpaly had already completed *before* engaging with the Finn example is unknown, but as it is articulated in *Unprincipled Virtue*, many of its finer points seem inextricably wrapped up with her engagement with the details of this fictional case. Here, it

⁶⁶ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 93.

⁶⁷ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 93.

⁶⁸ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 93.

⁶⁹ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 99.

would seem, is another instance of deep engagement with a literary example *driving* strong conceptual work in philosophy.

The final section in which the Huckleberry case plays an instrumental part, is in Arpaly's discussion, at the end of Chapter 4, on the relevance of character-building and "fast-action" for moral worth. Here, Arpaly considers the objection that what Finn is *really* praiseworthy for is engaging in, at least somewhat intentional, "character-building" previous to his decision not to turn Jim in, such that he was equipped with the right moral intuitions when the time came to use them.⁷⁰ This, however, Arpaly finds implausible. Relying on the broader context of the narrative, she claims that "Huckleberry simply never engages in character-building exercises."⁷¹ While the fact that a fictional character is not depicted as engaging in character-building exercises may not appear very good support for Arpaly's view that admirable *people in the real world* also do not, I take Arpaly to be gesturing at the quite plausible observation that most of us experience significant character growth while seldom making considered decisions to "build" our characters. Here, what is true of Finn is also true of most real people. Finally, Arpaly applies the idea of "fast-action" to the Huckleberry case. Earlier in *Unprincipled Virtue*, Arpaly notes that tennis players are able to make what are judged "brilliant" plays during a fast-paced match, without deliberation.⁷² Arpaly introduces this example to indicate the limits of straightforwardly associating rational deliberation in a cool hour with cognitive excellence, and snapshot, intuitive decision-making with irrationality.⁷³ Arpaly compares Finn to the fast-acting athlete to argue that, like the fast-acting athlete, who requires cognitive skill and resources to make snapshot decisions mid-game, Finn's decision not to turn Jim in "is only possible *against the background*

⁷⁰ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 139.

⁷¹ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 139.

⁷² Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 51-53.

⁷³ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 52.

of other beliefs.”⁷⁴ In other words, even if Finn has not consciously engaged in character-building, the fact that his moral education has turned out such an intensely empathetic individual *speaks well* of *some* aspect of his reflective capacities.⁷⁵ Like the athlete, whose brilliant tactical judgment in the heat of a match is the result of a both long hours of training and an internalization of relevant strategy, Finn requires both moral acuity and a lifetime of previous behaviour informed by it to arrive at the version of himself that can make the right judgement call at this crucial moment, even if this preparation does not fit the mold of deliberately undertaken “character building.” Here, again like Fricker, though the interplay between Arpaly’s philosophical conceptualizations and her engagement with a rich example from literature are manifold, the result of the interaction, a nuanced and innovative philosophical account, is clear. As I have begun to indicate here, this result stems directly from both the unique strengths of the well-chosen literary example and the *way* these authors use such examples to power conceptual innovations.

⁷⁴ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 147.

⁷⁵ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 147.

Chapter 2

In the previous chapter, I have provided an initial sense of what is significant about the literary example in philosophy and in the ways Fricker and Arpaly use it. However, Fricker and Arpaly's reliance on literary examples is unusual in analytic philosophy, and many philosophers remain highly skeptical of the moral, didactic, and cognitive potential of literature, and thus also of it ever having a close relationship with philosophy. As I have referenced, what the status of literature in philosophy should be is almost as old a question as philosophy itself, and the use of examples has been a hallmark of philosophical reasoning for just as long. Accordingly, providing an exhaustive review of the relevant literature is untenable here. Instead, in this chapter, I address and respond to select arguments *against* the use of literary examples in philosophy, attempting to include the most influential and recent contributions when possible. I begin with the Platonist and Utopian critiques, then address those skeptical of the *process* by which literature might communicate truth, and end with a discussion of Formalism. In the course of this series of objections and rebuttals, I come to an account of learning from literature on which the medium is essentially morally neutral, every element of a literary work is communicative and meaningful, and the aesthetic and moral qualities of a literary work are inextricably intertwined. Finally, the attentive reader will soon notice that the definition of "literature" I am working from is rather broad, including for instance plays and films. In this, I take my cue from Fricker, who analyses the film version of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, as well as James Harold and Noël Carroll, philosophers of art who frequently address film and television in the same breath as classic literature, and as part of a broad category that can be labelled "narrative art."

Platonism and Utopianism

As Noël Carroll notes, Platonism is “the oldest and best known” view on the philosophical worth of literature.⁷⁶ On Platonism, literature as a whole has a negative moral valence: it has an evil rather than a beneficent influence on the reader. Plato held this for two related reasons: first, because literature holds up immoral characters for admiration, and second, because literature invites its audience to *identify* with its characters in a morally suspect way.⁷⁷ Specifically, Plato worried the actor or reader of a play would, in the process of reading the dialogue of a given character, allow their own identity to be subsumed into that of the character.⁷⁸ Though *prima facie* implausible, this view of the power of identification has been given a persuasive, modern rearticulation by Richard Posner. Riffing off Nussbaum’s claim that the engaged reader forms a sort of sympathetic friendship with the authors they read, Posner argues “Bookish people do make friends with an author and even more commonly with his characters... Literature offers a vast choice of friendships. Many of them are with evil, dangerous, or irresponsible people – *awful* role models. To befriend them is to risk being led astray.”⁷⁹ Articulating a closely related fear on suspect cross-class identification in literature, Katie Ebner-Landry argues that, especially in the much-vaunted classic literature canon, the way in which people from different classes are depicted often leads those *of all* classes to identify with and aspire to be like the wealthy characters, while despising the working-class characters.⁸⁰ This is evident in, for instance, the way Dickens’ protagonists improbably speak perfect Queen’s English, in contrast to their supporting cast and despite having the same class and regional antecedents as them:⁸¹ Dickens seems to use this, consciously or not, as an indication the protagonist will experience upwards

⁷⁶ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 128.

⁷⁷ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 128.

⁷⁸ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 128.

⁷⁹ Richard A. Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism,” *Philosophy and Literature* 21, no. 1 (1997), 21.

⁸⁰ Katie Ebner-Landry, “A Critique of Martha Nussbaum’s Liberal Aesthetics,” *Political Theory* 52, no. 3 (2024), 397-398.

⁸¹ George Orwell, “Charles Dickens,” In *Essays*. (London: Penguin Books, 2000, c. 1940), 56.

mobility, in both character and wealth, while the companions of their earlier, impoverished days are somehow lower class *essentially*. Ebner-Landy's critique of prescribed identification with upper-class characters also pinpoints the reason one might feel discomfort at some of the film adaptations of Jane Austen or Tolstoy novels that eschew the intricacies of character for breathless portraits of the style and ceremony of the privileged (the movie adaptation of *Crazy Rich Asians* is an even more recent examples of this phenomenon). In such adaptations, partly perhaps due to their rendering in a visual medium and partly because of the need to appeal to a broader audience, filmmakers seem much more inclined to prescribe admiration for characters' wealth than the works original authors were. As a group, worries about identification with morally suspect characters question whether the unique ability of narrative literature to cause the reader to empathize with and inhabit the world of a character could have a deleterious rather than edifying effect.

Carroll offers several convincing rebuttals of Platonic fears of identification. The first is one that, with their Aristotelian grounding, Fricker and Arpaly's work is in sympathy with. That is, that Plato's suspicion of identification presupposes that rationality and the emotions are in essential conflict rather than that the emotions are intrinsic to cognition in important ways.⁸² If the latter view is correct, it opens up the possibility that *educating* the emotions is important for moral reasoning and, more specifically, that identification and empathy for diverse characters might play a part in it. Second, referencing Diderot, Carroll argues that Plato overstates and oversimplifies the power of identification for both actor and reader, as "no one could become Oedipus and continue the performance. If I become as jealous as Othello, I would surely forget

⁸² Carroll, "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding," 131.

my lines and my blocking, as well as my rehearsed gestures and grimaces.”⁸³ Further, as Carroll argues, the process by which a reader or audience identifies with a character is often much more complex than simply placing themselves directly “in their shoes.” Instead, for instance, the audience knows significantly more than Oedipus throughout the course of that narrative, and instead of feeling what Oedipus feels (perish the thought!), the audience is “overtaken by rather distinctively different feelings of pity” and “concern for him from an external, observer’s point of view.”⁸⁴ Finally, Ebner-Landry’s class-based critique should be considered salutary for a lover of classic literature: it is perfectly true that literature often presents the perspectives of the affluent with considerably more nuance than those of the marginalized. Keeping this in mind when reading, for instance, the works of Tolstoy, which include beautifully rendered portraits of aristocrats alongside incongruously cartoonish peasants, is eminently advisable. However, I contend it is up to the discerning reader to make the distinction between works that glorify wealth, or set up middle-class values as aspirational, and those that portray the lives of the privileged with nuance. If Platonic fears of identification have any force, it is likely only in this limited sense: that popular works that pander to a less-than-discerning audience may give their audience exactly what they want. There is, after all, a great difference between the movie version of *Crazy Rich Asians* and *Downton Abbey*. In the first, the audience is invited to bask in affluent characters’ wealth and privilege, in the latter a plausible attempt is made to portray their human frailty.

A closely related argument, that perhaps belongs in a “big-tent” conception of Platonism, is that the novel is a morally questionable medium, both because it is fundamentally bourgeoisie

⁸³ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 131.

⁸⁴ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 131.

and, relatedly, because its focus on the subjectivity of individuals causes it to eschew structural criticism. As George Orwell has observed, “If you look for the working classes in fiction, and especially English fiction, all you find is a hole.”⁸⁵ Similarly, in another biting historical critique, Posner notes how “The rise of the novel coincided with the rise of the bourgeoisie, the expansion of literacy, and the growth of science and philosophical realism – developments that stimulated demand for a form of literature that would depict realistically the activities and experiences of ordinary life.”⁸⁶ Here, what is suspect is not that realist novels attempt to depict “ordinary life,” but that, due to historical conditions within which the form has developed, those with the time and money to write novels have been most concerned with “ordinary life” *as experienced* by the upper classes. Similarly, Ebner Landry, referencing Watt, argues “the early novel did not only carry the stylistic marks of new middle-class values... but relied on the new phenomenon of middle-class leisure time and a new audience of middle-class readers to sustain it as an industry... even when it did represent the working class, was doing so for a reader of a different social status.”⁸⁷ In other words, if the novel, right from its inception, has been an essentially bourgeois form, how can one look to the novel for a depiction of the marginalized that isn’t fundamentally coloured by middle-class perceptions of them as “other”? Extending this critique along Marxist/Hegelian lines, Ebner-Landry argues that “by focusing on how a given person experiences a dilemma in literary fiction, we may deny ourselves an investigation about the broader social foundations that make this dilemma exist in the first place.”⁸⁸ On this view, the tendency in literature and literary criticism to focus on the subjective experiences of individuals

⁸⁵ Orwell, “Charles Dickens,” 36.

⁸⁶ Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism,” 6.

⁸⁷ Watt in Ebner-Landry, “Nussbaum’s Liberal Aesthetics,” 396.

⁸⁸ Ebner-Landry, “Nussbaum’s Liberal Aesthetics,” 385.

distracts from infinitely more important questions about the structural factors that undergird them.

In response, I argue that, like most artistic mediums, narrative literature is dynamic and flexible enough that it should be considered neutral outside the hands of a particular practitioner. In any social arrangement *not* characterized by crushing material poverty, there is no reason the marginalized cannot engage in genre storytelling in all the relevant ways and, in post-modern times, there are many such examples. Therefore, the fact the production of novels has historically been the purview of the leisured classes does not mean it must remain so forever, though realizations about the historical dominance of middle and upper-class perspectives may cause one to cast a critical eye on the classical literary canon. In response to the second part of this critique, that the novel's focus on the personal precludes a critique of the structural, I believe there are numerous counterexamples, even in the accepted canon. In fact, one of the unique contributions of narrative literature is that it can *personalize* the political. For instance, it has already been discussed how Scout's personal experience of the trial of Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* includes a, subtle but effective, structural critique of the way racism can infiltrate the collective imaginary of a society, undermining the epistemic status of its marginalized members. In fact, as Fricker does an excellent job of elucidating, viewing the trial from Scout's perspective renders the structural critique inherent in *To Kill a Mockingbird* all the more poignant, by providing a realistic portrait of a child's troubled relationship with the racist ideology of her time and place. Another compelling counterexample would be E.M. Forster's use of nuanced depictions of the personal relationships between British and Indian nationals in *A Passage to India*, to launch a biting indictment of British imperialism. As these counterexamples show, the fact that literature focuses on the subjective is not a barrier to structural social

criticism, but rather *the unique means by which* narrative literature can render such criticisms vivid and immediate.

The opposite view to Platonism is Utopianism, which is the view that, in an important sense, *all* works of literature have a *morally positive* valence. As Carroll describes “Marxists like Marcuse and Ernest Bloch... tend to think that art is essentially liberatory by virtue of the ways in which artworks, ontologically, are distinct from mere real things. In virtue of this contrast, art, so to say, is always on the side of freedom.”⁸⁹ For Utopians, the relevant ontological difference has to do with literature’s *fictive* quality: the fact that it describes alternative realities to the actual, that it deals in *the possible* rather than the actual. In this sense, literature must necessarily expand the reader’s imaginative horizons, because their conception of possible avenues of action are expanded. It is in this sense the Utopian connects engagement with literature to the exercise of freedom. The most compelling articulation of the view that literature has an overall positive moral valence is from James Harold, when he states “the fact that great narratives are structured in such a way as to invite openness, reflection, and moral growth seems to me independent grounds for saying that they are morally praiseworthy.”⁹⁰ Here, Harold emphasizes the *invitation to reflection* he sees as implicit in literature as the key to its salutary nature. Utopianism may not initially seem *an objection* to the philosophical worth of literature. Afterall, if *all* literature is morally positive, surely philosophers should feel empowered to borrow examples from literature at will. However, I argue Utopianism is both untenable and unhelpful: in practice, philosophers should be highly selective, as I believe both Fricker and Arpaly are, in their selection of examples from literature. As Carroll convincingly argues, Utopianism fails the “*Triumph of the*

⁸⁹ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 129.

⁹⁰ James Harold, “On Judging the Moral Value of Narrative Artworks,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 2 (2006): 268.

Will test.”⁹¹ In other words, a commitment to Utopianism prevents one from following the intuition that *The Triumph of the Will*, a hagiographic film about Hitler’s performance at the 1934 Nurenburg Rally, is irredeemably evil (the film is remembered for being as artistically groundbreaking as it is morally hollow).⁹² Further, Utopianism railroads the literary critic into, often counterproductively, searching for a revelatory moment in literary works that may be highly morally ambiguous or even blatantly immoral in outlook.⁹³ Therefore, like the varieties of Platonism discussed, Utopianism impedes the ability of the reader to render meaningful moral judgements by making a far too broad assumption about the moral valence of literature as a whole.

Process Arguments

For M. J. Sirridge, *the process* by which literature can yield knowledge is hopelessly obscure. In an essay on the possibility of attaining truth from fiction, Sirridge argues fictional examples “form one of the mainstays of philosophical thinking. They are an essential part of our theory-building about the actual world” but, at the same time, “We seem to have no satisfactory explanation of how these methods work epistemologically.”⁹⁴ Afterall, how can a collection of fictive statements, including little or nothing of what would usually be deemed “evidence,” have an epistemically sound result? The first argument I address on *the process* by which literature might yield knowledge, is Andras Stokke’s argument that a statement being in a work of fiction acts as an automatic defeater of belief in it, such that fiction operates epistemologically very differently than testimony.⁹⁵ On Stokke’s view, unlike testimony, on the epistemic views most

⁹¹ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 131-132.

⁹² Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 131-132.

⁹³ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 132.

⁹⁴ M. J. Sirridge, “Truth from Fiction?” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 35, no. 4 (1975): 470-471.

⁹⁵ Andreas Stokke, “Fiction as a Defeater,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (forthcoming): 1.

sympathetic to the knowledge-yielding properties of testimony, the fact that a statement appears in a fictional work should automatically prompt one not to believe it. *Prima facie*, this would seem to not be a very controversial or even interesting assertion. After all, most people understand the content of narrative fiction to be, well... fictional. However, as Stokke notes, many *do* feel they *learn* something from reading purely fictional works, and Stokke finds the most plausible explanation for why this occurs in The Patchwork View.⁹⁶ On The Patchwork View, “many fictional works are *patchworks* of pure assertions and fictive statements... while fictional works consist mainly of statements with non-assertoric, fictive force, sometimes authors include statements with assertoric force among these fictive statements.”⁹⁷ Good examples of works that contain statements that are clearly meant to be straightforwardly assertoric are the novels of Anthony Trollope or Honoré de Balzac, in which the author intersperses their narrative with moralizing statements directly addressed to the reader (sometimes even prefaced by “Dear reader...”). On Stokke’s view, while the obviously assertoric statements the author includes might have an epistemic status similar to that of testimony, on an account of testimony that grants it independent epistemic force, the rest of the content of a work of fiction should be considered *a priori* epistemically suspect because fictional.

There is something about Stokke’s Aristotelian passion for classification, a passion he shares with many analytic philosophers, that should strike the lover of literature as somewhat stunted and artificial here. As Elise Miller, quoting Ogen, cuttingly puts it “Clinicians are taught to avoid lifeless language... or interpretations that ‘sound like prepackaged analytic theories being delivered by nobody in particular to nobody in particular.’”⁹⁸ However, as Tzachi Zamir

⁹⁶ Stokke, “Fiction as a Defeater, 10.

⁹⁷ Stokke, “Fiction as a Defeater,” 5.

⁹⁸ Ogen in Elise Miller, “Mourning and Melancholy: Literary Criticism by African American Women.” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 35, no. 2 (2016): 482.

argues, the problem with the archetypically analytic response to literature Stokke's critique embodies is not simply that it is "stylistically dry," but that it "presupposes a wrong, perhaps even crippled, view of what human understanding is."⁹⁹ As Zamir, very eloquently, states the case

If human understanding, when functioning at its best, is not limited to accepting only what can be conclusively verified empirically or deductively but involves embracing suggestive processes that embed contingent beliefs in experiences that give them living, operating depth, then philosophy as it is practiced, taught, and published in some quarters involves perpetuating a mistake as to the nature of rationality as such.¹⁰⁰

For Zamir, then, Stokke misses a complex "suggestive process" underlying literary narratives, that a schematic classification of statements into "fictive" and "assertoric" serves only to further obscure.

Just why Stokke misses the mark becomes clearer when one thinks of just *what* one looks to literature for. Stokke appears quite focused on the factual, for instance when he argues that, in order to accept Tolstoy's descriptions of the use of samovars in the 19th century Russian army, one requires significant additional context about Tolstoy's realist purpose in writing as well as his own real life experience of such things as samovars.¹⁰¹ However, if all one really wishes to learn is factual details about practices in the 19th century Russian army, one *really is* best served by reading a detailed work of history by a specialist in that field, and one can avoid *War and Peace* altogether in good conscience. What Stokke seems to miss here is that, unlike the sort of testimony usually considered by epistemologists, the sort of knowledge one goes to literature for is not factual, or at least not straightforwardly so. Carroll seems to get much closer to the mark when he argues that

⁹⁹Tzachi Zamir, "An Epistemological Basis for Linking Philosophy and Literature." *Metaphilosophy* 33, no. 3 (2002): 333.

¹⁰⁰ Zamir, "Linking Philosophy and Literature," 333.

¹⁰¹ Stokke, "Fiction as a Defeater," 9.

in mobilizing what we already know and what we can already feel, the narrative artwork can become an occasion for us to deepen our understanding of what we know and what we feel...In the course of engaging a given narrative we may need to reorganize the hierarchical orderings of our moral categories and premises, or to reinterpret those categories and premises in the light of new paradigm instances and hard cases, or to reclassify barely acknowledged phenomena afresh.¹⁰²

Carroll follows this up with an analysis of how the play *A Raisin in the Sun* causes ethnically and racially distinct audiences to react negatively against racism, as the narrative enables them to recognize the humanity of the play's Black characters.¹⁰³ Importantly, "audience members put together previously disconnected belief fragments in a new gestalt in a way that changes their moral perception... it is not primarily that White audience members acquire a new piece of moral knowledge; rather they are prompted to make connections between the beliefs they already possess."¹⁰⁴ Here, Carroll drives home the point that what is of value in literature is not the factual information it contains, but rather its social and moral significance *for a given audience*, and its ability to prompt rearticulations of previously vague moral intuitions. Similarly to *A Raisin in the Sun*, Mark Twain and Harper Lee's work is unlikely to turn a dyed-in-the-wool racist into an anti-racist. However, for the vast majority that have some understanding of the wrong of racism, even if somewhat inarticulate, such narratives can serve as a means for clarifying that understanding through an engagement with "hard cases," constructed with enough realism and complexity for the moral faculties to engage with, similarly to their engagement with real cases.

A second "process argument" worthy of discussion, is J.M. Sirridge's argument that the process by which novels communicate moral truths is intractably difficult to pin down. Sirridge begins by noting that most novels are considered to illustrate a general proposition or principle, such that they are taken to have a "moral," but that, because these works do not explicitly state,

¹⁰² Carroll, "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding," 142.

¹⁰³ Carroll, "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding," 142-143.

¹⁰⁴ Carroll, "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding," 142, 143.

let alone argue for, these principles, the “nature of their association with” their presumed moral, is unclear.¹⁰⁵ Here, Sirridge uses Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, and its associated moral of “Unacknowledged guilt leads to perdition, whereas expiated guilt leads to salvation,” as her central example.¹⁰⁶ Sirridge argues this Proposition View of literature relies on *interpretive claims*, which are claims about the content of a work of art that are not entirely explicit in the work itself.¹⁰⁷ However, Sirridge argues interpretive claims are intractably difficult to justify. As an example, Sirridge zeros in on a specific passage of *The Scarlet Letter* in which a stranger is depicted as beginning to stare at the character Hester Prynne, before “A writhing horror twisted itself across his features.”¹⁰⁸ For Sirridge though “Most readers would not hesitate to say that the stranger’s look of horror was caused by what he saw. Nevertheless, the passage does not say this, for, strictly speaking, the causal link is missing.”¹⁰⁹ Because the text does not explicitly state that Prynne is the cause of the stranger’s look of horror, the reader is ultimately unjustified in assuming it to be so. For Sirridge, *critical significance claims*, claims about the *overall moral* a narrative implies, face precisely the same impossibility of justification: because the text is not explicit in arguing for them, it cannot be said to meaningfully “contain” them. As Sirridge puts it, the cognitive content of literature cannot be anything like the content of normal speech acts because “there is a good deal of difference, epistemologically speaking, between being told the truth by implication and being told by implication from a largely untrue set of reports something which happens to be true.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Sirridge, “Truth From Fiction,” 455.

¹⁰⁶ Sirridge, “Truth From Fiction,” 455.

¹⁰⁷ Sirridge, “Truth From Fiction,” 455-456.

¹⁰⁸ Hawthorne in Sirridge, “Truth From Fiction,” 456.

¹⁰⁹ Sirridge, “Truth From Fiction,” 456.

¹¹⁰ Sirridge, “Truth From Fiction,” 462.

As a first step in answering Sirridge, I would argue viewing most works of literature as straightforwardly containing “a moral,” is brutally reductive. Most works of literature with any moral worth are sufficiently nuanced to resist such simplistic interpretations. Instead, high quality literature is likely to contain multiple “morals,” some of which may be in tension with each other, and none of which can neatly be encapsulated in a single sentence. A second step, is to again resist hard-and-fast classifications of the constituent parts of a work of literature that, like Stokke, Sirridge is insistent on applying. In this case, Sirridge wants to classify some sentences as *explicit reports* (clear, though fictive) and others as the raw material for *interpretive* or *critical significance claims* (ultimately unjustifiable). A much more plausible theory of how literature communicates moral truths is that of Harold, who argues that a work “*prescribes* responses to the events, characters, actions, and situations that it describes... These prescriptions can be evaluated morally as if they had been made by an agent” (my emphasis).¹¹¹ According to Harold, it is counterproductive to associate some statements in fiction directly with the author and classify others as purely fictive, or to separate the content of a work into what is explicit or sketchily implied by it. This is because *every element* of a literary work is instrumental in the author’s communication of ideas to the reader. As Harold explains, authors utilize multifarious literary techniques to prescribe particular responses to their readers to particular features of a narrative, and thus shaping the reader’s responses to events by a less-than-neutral telling of the story. For instance, authors invite the reader to identify with particular characters, partly through the use of perspective.¹¹² In *To Kill a Mockingbird* for instance, it is not coincidental the reader identifies with and takes the part of Scout and her father, and not the hardnosed prosecutor in the trial of Tom Robinson. The reader knows next to nothing about the prosecutor, other than that he

¹¹¹ Harold, “the Moral Value of Narrative Artworks,” 262.

¹¹² Harold, “the Moral Value of Narrative Artworks,” 263.

cynically encourages the jury's underlying racism to discredit Robinson, whereas Atticus in particular has been depicted throughout the novel as morally exemplary in a variety of trying circumstances.

As Harold argues, authors make use of three-dimensional characters, two-dimensional characters, changes of perspective, various implied distances between “characters, narrators, and the author,” and by controlling “the degree to which the reader gets to see events from a perspective of a character,” to *prescribe* various kinds of engagement with the characters and events of a narrative.¹¹³ For Harold then, the reader must remain attentive to *every element* of a work of literature, from the way a character's body language is described, to whose perspective a key event is viewed from, to whose internal reflections a reader is privy to, to what a narrator's comments on events are, to how closely the narrator can be judged to embody the views of the author as, taken together, these constellate the best available picture of *how* the author intends their narrative to be taken. This view captures the quite plausible and intuitive sense a reader gets that an author's choices in narration are highly intentional and that great works of literature are chock-full of meanings, while serving as an effective foil to Stokke's and Sirridge's far too schematic frameworks. Relatedly, it is manifestly implausible that authors expend the extraordinary time and energy needed to write a novel simply to record a perfectly neutral account of a series of events with no moral import. The reader takes it for granted that the author has both a perspective and a *purpose* in writing: that they have put pen to paper to *communicate* to the reader something important *through* the lens of their unique worldview.

Formalism

¹¹³ Harold, “the Moral Value of Narrative Artworks,” 263.

Another set of arguments against the use of literature in philosophy fall into the “Formalist” camp. While the arguments discussed thus far have taken the stance that literature is too morally or epistemically suspect to be useful in philosophy, Formalism is more concerned with safeguarding the integrity of literature against those in philosophy who would make an instrument of it, or moralists who would reduce literary analysis to a matter of presentist moral hygiene. On Formalism, “the artistic and the moral realms are separate. Art has nothing to do with moral goodness, or with badness, for that matter, and moral value neither contributes anything to nor subtracts anything from the overall value of the artwork.”¹¹⁴ Richard Posner articulates a cogent version of this thesis in his appropriately titled “Against Ethical Criticism.” According to Posner, literature succeeds solely on the basis of its formal achievement, of the author’s use of “changes of pace, shifts of voice and point of view, the echoing and doubling of themes, the arousing of expectations and the deferral of their satisfaction, the creation and release of tensions, and the harmonizing of disparate elements – properties similar to those of instrumental music.”¹¹⁵ Because, according to Posner, the distinctive satisfaction one can derive from literature is “especially foreign to a moralistic outlook”¹¹⁶ reading moral significances into literature is at best a distraction and at worst completely obscures the unique benefit literature can render the engaged reader. For Posner, while the events of a narrative may mirror reality in noticeable ways, and though an author’s philosophical beliefs may infiltrate their corpus, any significance the reader gleans from this is incidental rather than essential to the “point” of literature. Instead, what is valuable in literature is what is valuable in most other forms of art: its ability to engage the aesthetic sensibilities.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 127.

¹¹⁵ Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism,” 24.

¹¹⁶ Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism,” 22.

¹¹⁷ Posner, “Against Ethical Criticism,” 22.

Though Posner's claims seem in obvious tension with both many authors' intentions in writing and many readers' takeaways from socially engaged works of literature, his motivations are laudable and his argumentation nuanced. In arguing the locus of merit for literature is only in its aesthetic qualities, Posner explicitly reacts against philosophers, such as Nussbaum, who tend to view literature primarily instrumentally, as a means for educating the emotions or expanding the reader's sense of empathy for distinct others. There is likely something to this critique. For instance, Ebner-Landry criticizes Nussbaum for making Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* central to her work as a consultant for the World Institute for Development Economics Research, which included producing criteria for evaluating a nation's "quality of life."¹¹⁸ That *Hard Times* includes philosophically rich ideas about the effect of early-industrial capitalism on the quality of life of Britain's working classes in the 1800s is doubtless. That those insights can survive vast chronological, cultural, and geographic distances is dubious. Further, Posner's sometimes strident pillorying of narrow-mindedly moralistic literary criticism is, at its core, justified. When he claims that "To devalue a work of literature because of its implicit or explicit politics, morality, or religion... is intolerant, philistine, puritanical, illiberal... and, when it expresses itself in an assumption of moral superiority to our predecessors, complacently ethnocentric,"¹¹⁹ he is putting his finger on what is suspect in a strain of literary criticism that eschews historical context and moral ambiguity for easy answers. All this to say that, in arguing for an ultimately indefensible position, Posner succeeds in making a number of remarkably prescient points.

However, granting Posner these points, his main thesis remains implausible. First, it is difficult for the formalist to overcome the fact that the vast majority of readers find moral

¹¹⁸ Ebner-Landry, "Nussbaum's Liberal Aesthetics," 382.

¹¹⁹ Posner, "Against Ethical Criticism," 8.

significances in just those great works of literature Posner lauds for their aesthetic merits. As George Saunders has articulated, we feel great authors to “regard fiction not as something decorative but as a vital moral-ethical too. They changed you when you read them, made the world seem to be telling a different, more interesting story, a story in which you might play a meaningful part, and in which you had responsibilities.”¹²⁰ Is it possible to read *Anna Karenina* without feeling pity for a woman hemmed in and finally crushed by the stultifying moral constraints of her society? That so many have read an implicit criticism of conservative marital customs into this work is difficult to write off as a vast coincidence, or even as incidental to the book’s notable aesthetic strengths: There seems to be no way the novel would turn out as it did without Tolstoy intending, and succeeding, in conveying a complex and affecting sense of injustice and wasted potential, and that this sort of intentional social criticism could fail to be morally significant just because it appears in a work that *also* has aesthetic merit is implausible. As Carroll suggests, it is much more productive to view such works as “expressly designed to elicit moral reactions” such that “audiences respond morally to them on the basis of their recognition that that is what they are intended to do.”¹²¹ Second, it is not true that the moral and aesthetic in literature can be separated in the first place, as Posner seems to assume. As D. E. B. Pollard notes, it is often “By the vividness of his narrative and the quality of his characterization” that an author persuades one to treat the moral outlook expressed in a work as “a serious candidate for truth.”¹²² In other words, it is partly through the deft deployment of literary technique that an author elicits an intuitive recognition of the plausibility of his narrative from the reader. For instance, if Anna was a less fully developed and realistic character, the reader

¹²⁰ Saunders, George, *A Swim in the Pond in the Rain*, (New York: Random House, 2022): 5.

¹²¹ Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 137-138.

¹²² Pollard, D. E. B., “M. J. Sirridge, Fiction, and Truth,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 38, no. 2 (1977): 256.

would fail to identify with her suffering in the way that makes Tolstoy's implied social critique so immediate and compelling. In this way, the moral and aesthetic strengths of a work of literature are often inextricably intertwined. Perhaps worryingly, this is true not only for admirable works, but also for evil ones. For instance, the ground-breaking cinematography of *The Triumph of the Will*, in rendering its pro-nazi message more forceful, certainly makes the work that much more evil.

Finally, Posner carries his point only through some significant tinkering with the natural language meanings of the words "moral" and "aesthetic" such that his thesis's *prima facie* implausibility is defined away. In brief, when Posner uses the word "moral" what he really means is the ordinary meaning of "moralistic," a smug, narrowminded moral outlook, rather than the usual, much broader, meaning of "'ought' in human affairs." In contrast, he ends up smuggling much of the usual meaning of "moral" into the word "aesthetic." For instance, Posner claims "The aesthetic outlook *is* a moral outlook, one that stresses the values of openness, detachment, hedonism, curiosity, tolerance, the cultivation of the self, and preservation of a private sphere."¹²³ An observer with less skin in the "aesthetic versus moral" debate in the philosophy of literature will recognize that here Posner subsumes a broadminded liberalism into the meaning of "aesthetic," significantly cutting down the philosophical difference between himself and Nussbaum, the philosopher he sets up as his primary opponent. While it is unclear how Posner could otherwise plausibly argue for quarantining the "moral" from literature, this definitional tinkering is ultimately unnecessary and confusing. Even if one accepts large parts of Posner's argument, the moral remains an important aspect of what literature has to offer, though Posner has it answer to a different name. Ultimately, most if not all great novels, and certainly

¹²³ Posner, "Against Ethical Criticism, 2.

those by Lee and Twain that Fricker and Arpaly use, would be almost incomprehensible without understanding their authors as working from and seeking to communicate a moral vision of the world.

Chapter 3

In my first chapter, I provided a detailed exposition of how Fricker and Arpaly use two central literary examples in *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue*. In my second, I stepped back to address more general arguments by philosophers skeptical of the potential for interaction between literature and philosophy. In the course of doing so, I began to develop an account of this interaction that I take to be more functionally useful than the alternative views I discuss in explaining how philosophers, such as Fricker and Arpaly, are able to use literary examples so effectively. On this account, literature is a morally neutral medium; finding truth in literature involves an appraisal of *every element* of a narrative rather than breaking it down into distinctly classified components; and the aesthetic and moral worth of a literary work are inextricably intertwined, such that a narrative can be considered a unified statement of the author's moral outlook. In this final chapter, my mission is to bring together my exposition of these two works in Chapter 1 and my discussion of the philosophy of literature in Chapter 2 to create an account of how Fricker and Arpaly use literary examples in *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue*. In the service of this, I first provide an initial comparison between Fricker and Arpaly's methodologies. Second, I look at some potential issues with Fricker and Arpaly's specific choice of examples, and particularly what status claims that the *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* examples contain racist portrayals of Black men should have. Third, I argue Fricker and Arpaly's use of the literary example is not primarily either evidentiary or illustrative. Finally, I argue Fricker and Arpaly use their central literary examples in a way that is conceptually productive: That refines and enriches the concepts at the heart of their philosophical projects in *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue*.

A Methodological Comparison

Thus far, I have written as though what I have called the two central examples of *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue* are the only ones contained within these works, and also like Fricker and Arpaly are almost interchangeably similar in their approach to literary examples. To provide a full account of their methodologies of literary example however, I will now have to complicate both of these impressions. First, Fricker and Arpaly both use many other examples, of a variety of types, in *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue*. In *Epistemic Injustice*, for instance, two literary examples other than the ones I have chosen to focus on appear prominently, in chapter 7, and receive a significant amount of analysis from Fricker. The first, is from Ian McEwan's novel *Enduring Love*, in which the protagonist, Joe, is the unlikely victim of stalking by a religious fanatic obsessed with converting him.¹²⁴ The second, is from Edmund White's autobiographical novel *A Boy's Own Story*, which chronicles his experiences of cognitive dissonance as a gay boy and young man struggling with prevailing stereotypes in the U.S. of the 1950s.¹²⁵ Further, beyond providing extensive analysis of these secondary literary examples, Fricker seems to bring them into conversation with her philosophical project to refine her conceptualizations, similar to the use she makes of the *Mr. Ripley* and *Mockingbird* examples. So why have I chosen to treat the *Mr. Ripley* and *Mockingbird* examples as central and not these? First, they appear in chapter 1, and are referred back to repeatedly in subsequent chapters, unlike these later literary examples, which only appear in the book's last chapter. Second, and partly as a result of their early appearance, Fricker spends, in aggregate, considerably more time on these two central examples than on any other in the book. Third, explaining the prominent place these examples achieve, these examples can also be called "central" because they relate directly to several of the book's central *conceptual products*, as I

¹²⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 156-159.

¹²⁵ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 163-168.

have shown in my exegesis of them. This is in contrast to the two literary examples from chapter 7, which relate to *incidental* epistemic injustice and psychological unity (much less central for Fricker than testimonial and hermeneutical injustice). Finally, Fricker herself seems to treat these examples as central: She uses the *Mr. Ripley* example to set the stage for the entire book and refers to the *Mockingbird* example as “our chief example.”¹²⁶

Another productive question to ask about Fricker’s methodology of example, is why she chooses to prioritize *literary* examples over other types of examples. Significantly, one thing that becomes apparent in reading *Epistemic Injustice* is that Fricker considers herself a feminist philosopher and, indeed, is primarily interested in the topic of epistemic injustice *because* of a deep commitment to the goals of feminism.¹²⁷ This is evident not only in her discussion of the *Mr. Ripley* example, in which the character Marge faces pervasive sexism, but also in several real-world examples she discusses in-depth. For instance, Fricker analyzes a passage from Simone de Beauvoir, in chapter 2, that seems to depict the young writer being shamelessly browbeaten by Jean Paul Sartre at university.¹²⁸ Fricker also uses two real world examples drawn from Susan Brownmiller’s memoir on the U.S. women’s movement, both of which also appear in Fricker’s final chapter. One is from a woman attending workshops on female health in the 60s, who discovers she has unknowingly been suffering from post-partum depression, while the other is of a woman achieving conceptual clarity on workplace sexual harassment through group consciousness raising meetings in the 1970s.¹²⁹ Beyond these more detailed discussions, Fricker frequently brings up similar real-world cases of women suffering epistemic injustice, of one

¹²⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 36.

¹²⁷ This is, perhaps, a contestable interpretation. But I feel there is textual evidence from *Epistemic Injustice* that is sufficient to make it a highly likely one.

¹²⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 50-51.

¹²⁹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 148-150.

variety or another, throughout *Epistemic Injustice*. With this in mind, the natural questions to ask seem to be “If Fricker is the committed, pragmatic feminist philosopher she appears to be in these passages, why aren’t *all* her examples real-world cases of epistemic injustice against women? Why doesn’t she *lead* with the Brownmiller examples? Why does she turn to literary examples at all, let alone grant them *primacy*?” Obviously, questions of authorial intention are beyond what I can offer here: Only Fricker could answer the above. However, as I indicate in my discussion below, literary examples have unique characteristics that will sometimes render them, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, demonstrably more effective than real-world examples. If I am correct in this, it may go some way towards explaining Fricker’s seemingly incongruous reliance on them.

With Arpaly, zeroing in on central examples is considerably more difficult, if only because of the sheer number of examples Arpaly deploys in *Unprincipled Virtue*. In this, one finds a significant difference between Fricker and Arpaly’s ways of working with examples. Though literary examples form the centerpieces of several of Fricker’s chapters and, as I have earlier argued, references back to them help to establish continuity between the different sections of *Epistemic Injustice*, there are several chapters in which she uses no literary examples, and is also rather light on examples of any sort. These chapters read more like the, more or less, purely theoretical work that most analytic epistemologists engage in most of the time. *Unprincipled Virtue*, on the other hand, is positively *chock-full* of examples of every sort: nearly *every page* of the book contains an example, and many contain several. While Arpaly’s references to literary works are innumerable, she also offers many remarkably well-fitted thought experiments, personal anecdotes, and historical examples (especially, for whatever reason, from the history of Nazi Germany). As Moi has said of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, its “range and

interdisciplinarity... is an effect of Beauvoir's interest in... particular experiences, and in their myriad differences. At times it is as if she is piling up the examples, as if to force us to see that they have no single thing in common. Yet there still is a systematicity—a pattern—to it all.”¹³⁰

This statement could easily have been about Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue*. In defending my choice of which examples to treat as central in Arpaly, many of the arguments that applied to Fricker's examples also apply here: that they appear at the beginning of the book, that Arpaly expends the most words on them, that they relate to Arpaly's central concepts, and thus that Arpaly's attitude towards them is distinct from her attitude to her many other examples.

However, it is important to note that with Arpaly, one must dip into a pool swimming with examples to fish out the central cases, whereas with Fricker the selection was sparser to begin with.

Another potentially significant difference is that Fricker is working in the field of virtue epistemology whereas Arpaly is working in moral psychology. However, I do not find this to be a significant one. While they are working in distinct subfields of philosophy, the Aristotelian basis of Fricker and Arpaly's work forms a throughline. Both most frequently reference Aristotle and those in the very broad “Aristotelian camp” in philosophy. Similarly, when they choose to differ from an Aristotelian conception, they usually find it significant enough to explicitly note the differences, indicating that even their departures from Aristotle are, in some way, responses to him. Finally, the central concepts of these works clearly bear a relation to Aristotle's virtue ethics. With Fricker, the whole framework within which forms of epistemic injustice (vices) and forms of epistemic justice (virtues) are set up as oppositional character traits, that are learned and refined through practical experience, mirrors the framework of virtue ethics. For Arpaly,

¹³⁰ Moi, “Thinking Through Examples,” 212.

unprincipled virtue is similarly a character trait attaching to individual agents that is refined through an ongoing process of practical engagement with moral dilemmas. In both these frameworks, the role of emotion and intuition in cognition is a positive one, which places both authors on the Aristotelian side of one dimension of the enduring “reason versus passion” debate in philosophy. Finally, it is worth noting here that my reading of Fricker is an unusual one. Though Fricker repeatedly claims her conceptualizations are hybrid, being equally and irreducibly both moral and epistemic, Fricker has usually been read as an epistemologist, and has received the most uptake in that field. By treating *Epistemic Injustice*, as I think I must to meaningfully compare it with *Unprincipled Virtue*, as a work of *moral* philosophy, I am taking the road less travelled, though I feel I am perfectly justified in doing so by Fricker’s own reports.

Potential Methodological Issues

One objection to Fricker and Arpaly’s use of literary examples, is quite a general one: that, though some literary works have philosophical worth, this value is lost when they are presented in a truncated form. In fact, it is quite intuitive that the special qualities of a literary work, including its ability to draw the reader in and engage their moral faculties, can only come into effect if the reader actually sits down and reads the work, full-length and in its original form. Afterall, one should not really expect to experience from the *Coles Notes* of *The Lord of the Flies* what is most worthwhile in the experience of reading the original novel. This, however, raises the uncomfortable question “Well, how different *are* Fricker and Arpaly’s treatments from *Coles Notes* versions?” As Zamir puts it “great literary works inherently resist the ‘heresy of paraphrase,’ and... it is simplistic to conceive of literature as providing conceptual lessons. But such a charge can arise only if the overall aesthetic value of a work is being exhaustively reduced

to its philosophically relevant features.”¹³¹ But what are Fricker and Arpaly doing if not mining literature for “conceptual lessons,” and reducing them to their “philosophically relevant features”? If this is so, it would seem they *are* committing “the heresy of paraphrase”: treating a literary passage isolated from the context of the work to which it belongs, and thus obscuring its original significances.

While this objection has some *prima facie* plausibility, there are several reasons why I find it ultimately not very damaging. As Carroll argues, “we are often possessed of general propositions that are very abstract and that we may not be able to connect with particular situations. That is, they are so abstract that they leave us at a loss about how to apply them. But narrative artworks can supply us with vivid examples that enable us to see how to apply abstractions to particulars.”¹³² While the literary example may have other desirable properties, it is important to remember that, on a pretty basic level, it simply fulfils one of the roles one expects from examples, but better: it allows one to apply an abstract concept to a concrete case, but provides a case that is more vivid and has more plausible and realistic context than the thought experiments philosophers most often resort to. Because this is so, well-chosen literary examples have a better chance of engaging the reader’s moral faculties and intuitions, and less danger of confusing them, as some particularly outlandish thought experiments clearly do (if one is perplexed about how to think about autonomy after reading cases of soul swapping or mind control, the fault is likely not yours).

Szabados and Soifer offer a remarkably lucid explanation of their methodology of example at the end of a paper on hypocrisy that includes several life-like, contextualized

¹³¹ Zamir, “Linking Philosophy and Literature,” 333.

¹³² Carroll, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding,” 146.

examples based on the authors' personal experiences, as well as from realist fiction (interestingly, in offering an explicit explanation of their methodology of example, Szabados and Soifer do what neither Fricker nor Arpaly do in the works under consideration). Their discussion is revealing: "In response to Nussbaum's objection that philosophers' examples are abstract, schematic, and hypothetical, thus lacking in robust, concrete detail and complexity, we adopted a wide range of examples from literature... How much detail is needed? Surely neither too much nor too little. For irrelevant excess is likely to confuse, while a deficiency of relevant facts leads to bad judgment or to a paralysis of judgment."¹³³ In this, I judge them to be right on the mark, and I see Fricker and Arpaly walking this same fine line, between too much and too little detail. In the amount of space they dedicate to contextual exposition, direct quotation, and literary analysis, of each of their chosen examples, they must necessarily be exactingly selective.

When all is said and done, the use of literary examples in *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue* does *not* strike the reader as reductive, despite the fact that, in an important sense, of course it is. Neither author attempts to cram every ounce of meaning contained in the original work into the limited space they have to discuss it. Instead, they narrow in on a key scene and the particular theme it connects to in the greater work, providing only the context absolutely essential to making sense of this scene and theme. It is grounding to remember that, in the main, this is just what literary criticism consists in: viewing a larger work in only one of its many aspects, even though this fails to convey how multifaceted the original may be. Further, this seems to be the standard tactic employed out of nothing but bare necessity, as many full-length novels would require whole series of books to *exhaustively* analyse them. For instance, a

¹³³ Béla Szabados, and Eldon Soifer, "Hypocrisy, Change of Mind, and Weakness of Will: How to Do Moral Philosophy with Examples," *Metaphilosophy* 30, no. 1–2 (1999): 75.

surprising number of critics who have attempted to make sense of Dostoevsky's sprawling and philosophically rich *The Brothers Karamazov*, have focused on the content of a single chapter "The Grand Inquisitor," and how the complex political allegory therewithin relates to one or more broader themes within the work. Therefore, in being selective in their discussions of literary examples, Fricker and Arpaly are doing no less than what any other literary critic does, though they do do something *more* by then bringing the product of their analysis into conversation with their conceptual philosophic work.

Issues with Choices of Examples

Another set of potential issues stems from the specific examples Fricker and Arpaly chose to use. For instance, I began to have serious doubts about the suitability of John Le Carré's novel *Single and Single* for this kind of work, upon reading it for this thesis. I have already made the case that the aesthetic and moral elements of literature are inextricably intertwined, and the difficulties here arise from this quarter. The fact is, that *Single and Single*, it turns out, is a *very bad* novel. First, there is reason to think it is bad stylistically. Take Le Carré's description of a visiting Russian businessman: "With his tribesman's mute glower and slouched shoulders, and his wintry hands hanging forward of him, he resembles an emaciated Cossack slumped over a slack rein."¹³⁴ What Le Carré seems to want to communicate is merely that the visitor looks archetypically "Russian." But what is the result of all this exaggerated description? A hopelessly cartoonish caricature that confirms instead of complicates the Western stereotype of the Eastern European as some sort of "primordial peasant" type: in fact, it might be more accurate to say this description is cut *whole cloth* from a stereotype, rather than being drawn from any first-hand

¹³⁴ Le Carré, John. *Single & Single*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999): 103.

perception. As the reader may now be anticipating, *Single and Single* is not just stylistically bad, but *conceptually* so as well, and for some of the same reasons. It is significant, for instance, that it is not only the Russians that get a recognizably stereotypical treatment: There is also a fiercely loyal yet totally intellectually dependent Indian manservant; a hard-headed policeman, jaded yet driven by an abiding thirst for justice; several high-powered businessmen who turn out to be unmanly, grasping, selfish little men; a flamboyant and articulate, yet weak spined and duplicitous gay man; several untrustworthy and corrupt foreign officials who pretend to know less English than they do... the list goes on. As I have already discussed, the use of two-dimensional characters can be strategic, and two-dimensional characters appear in many great works of literature. However, an issue arises when one realizes *nearly all* Le Carré's characters are two-dimensional and, further, two-dimensional-because-negatively-stereotypical. Though I do not have space here to discuss everything wrong with *Single and Single*, I submit, on the basis of the above evidence alone, that it is a very bad novel. Accordingly, it presumably cannot be included in the narrower sense of the term "literature," as a provocative work with conspicuous aesthetic strengths. If this is so, how did it make its way into Arpaly alongside the work of Mark Twain? Why does one find it in Arpaly at all?

While it is somewhat surprising to find an author as thoughtful and perspicacious as Arpaly making it through a book like *Single and Single*, I argue her use of an example from it is ultimately defensible. That is because, despite his many failings as a writer, Le Carré has at least one noticeable strength: he is extremely good at writing the interior perspective of a person undergoing a crisis. Why this is, I can only guess at, but it is evident in two passages from *Single and Single*. The first, is the very first scene of *Single and Single*, in which the reader watches the gang-style execution of a traveling businessman by a group of foreign thugs from the

businessman's perspective. While I do not have room here to quote directly from this passage, Le Carré maintains the tension for all sixteen of its pages, keeping the reader guessing about what will happen next while offering a remarkably plausible depiction of the psychological effects of impending death. Whether Le Carré is simply phoning it in for most of the rest of the book (he has, after all, already written a great many thrillers) or if his writerly gift is unusually specific, I could not say. What *is* clear is that the writing in this passage is vastly better than what is on offer elsewhere in this book. Importantly, the other interior depiction of crisis in *Single and Single* is just the one Arpaly directly quotes, of Oliver Single deciding to turn informant as he arrives at Heathrow Airport. Like the first chapter, this passage is noticeably stronger than the rest of the book. Therefore, though Arpaly *can* be said to draw from a very bad novel, she does so extremely selectively, picking one of two short passages in it that are actually quite good. In fact, when I first picked up *Single and Single*, I was expecting to read a great thriller, on the basis of the quality of the direct quote from *Unprincipled Virtue*. Though it was not, I feel the above vindicates Arpaly's use of it. As it turns out, you *can* draw a very good example from a very bad novel, though I suspect this is only rarely the case.

A second, and I feel more significant potential problem with Fricker and Arpaly's choice of examples, regards the claim that *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* include racist depictions of Black men. While, in a broad sense, this would pose a potential problem for any borrower, if true, it is worth noting why it would be particularly damaging for Fricker and Arpaly. It is not a coincidence that both authors treat as central literary examples that deal with racism. For Fricker, racism, especially racism that permeates a society's shared "social imaginary" is, like sexism, a prime source of epistemic injustice. Therefore, it is fitting that she devotes so much time to the trial of Tom Robinson and Scout and Atticus's reactions to it. For

Arpaly, her most-discussed case of unprincipled virtue is that of Huckleberry Finn, a boy who overcomes the ubiquitous racism of his society to act as a true friend to a Black traveling companion. Further, Finn is contrasted against the “viscerally racist liberal,” who espouses progressive principles but reacts negatively to racialized others when meeting them in-the-flesh. While not all Arpaly’s many other examples directly relate to the wrong of racism, there is a background preoccupation with the moral problem of discrimination that can be seen in, for instance, her many references to the moral rottenness of members of the Nazi regime. All this to say that, even more than in other works of moral philosophy, there is a lot riding on Fricker and Arpaly getting their depictions of racism right here: Because the problem of racism is essential to their conceptual work here, an accurate rendering of it is not only ethically pressing, but *conceptually* so.

And yet, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* fail to provide three-dimensional portraits of the Black characters most essential to their narratives, for whom the sympathy and understanding of the reader would seem to be essential to the success of the work. In *Mockingbird*, the most fleshed-out Black character is Calpurnia, Atticus and Scout’s Black housekeeper. Calpurnia is not a two-dimensional character. She features prominently in several of the narrative’s vignettes, leading up to the Robinson trial, and the reader learns some interesting things about her through them: she is strict, but firm; she is able to read (unusual for a Black denizen of Maycomb County at this time); she somewhat uneasily straddles the two worlds of Maycomb county, working in the White quarter but living and going to church in the Black quarter; and she is highly respected both in Atticus’s household and her own community as an upstanding woman of character. So far, all well and good; apparently Lee *was* capable of writing a three-dimensional Black character, though it is probably non-coincidental that that

character was a housekeeper. However, Fricker never mentions Calpurnia, so one is left with the one Black character from the work Fricker does mention: Tom Robinson. Robinson, however, is not only not a two-dimensional character in *Mockingbird*, he is barely a character at all. Almost everything the reader learns about him is second-hand and, in the few scenes in which he appears in person, he is rarely allowed to speak for himself or speak naturally. Even by the end of the work, the reader is less likely to see him as a specific, realistically rendered person, and more as a symbolic victim of White racism, which seems to be the role he plays in the novel.

On the criterion of Black representation, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* seems to do even worse. While Jim is a character present for a significant part of the narrative, his depiction leans into the racist stereotypes of Twain's time, which assumed Black slaves to be irresponsible and childlike. Arpaly unconsciously describes the problem herself when she states "Twain makes it very easy for Huckleberry to perceive the similarity between himself and Jim: the two are equally ignorant, share the same language and superstitions, and all in all... there is no particular reason to think of one of them as inferior to the other."¹³⁵ Both Jim and Finn being what an urbanite might disdainfully call "country bumpkins," living at a time when universal education was a good deal less universal than it is today, much of this appraisal seems justified, and Twain, growing up a wayward boy in early 1800s Missouri himself, can be relied upon to render this aspect of their characters accurately. The problem, however, is that Finn and Jim are rendered as *equally* ignorant, superstitious and, though Arpaly doesn't mention it, irresponsibly childish. But Finn is a young boy and Jim is a grown man: Jim *should* be superior to Finn, at least in maturity and judgement, but is noticeably not. Because of the vividness of the narrative and his iconic status in literary culture, it is quite natural for readers to think of Finn as eternally young,

¹³⁵ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 76-77.

irresponsible, and wayward, enjoying his ragamuffin existence on the river forever. However, as the autobiographical nature of the work indicates, this is not plausible: the real Mark Twain *did* grow up, to become a successful author no less. And Finn, if he were a real boy of his type *would* have matured, as Twain and most wayward boys everywhere do. On the contrary, Jim has already reached maturity without progressing beyond the judgement of a child, and thus there is no reason to believe he, as he is rendered by Twain, ever will. Thus, the reader is left with the impression that the story's only significant Black character is no better than a child in a man's body, a troubling impression if, as would seem to be the case, Twain considers Jim a typical Black slave.

In light of these troubling depictions of Black men, and of the resulting contradiction to their seeming commitment to antiracism in their work, what is one to make of Fricker and Arpaly's use of these literary examples? Firstly, *à la* Posner, I argue it would be wrong to discount *Mockingbird* and *Huckleberry Finn* as worthless because morally outdated. As I hope my discussion of how Fricker and Arpaly use these works shows, *Mockingbird* and *Huckleberry Finn* have significant literary and philosophical merits: they are detailed, psychologically astute, largely realistic, and wrapped up in the very same philosophical issues Fricker and Arpaly tackle in a more technical style. Further, it would be premature to jump to the conclusion that, even from a strictly moral standpoint, these works have been a deleterious influence. It is important to remember that Lee and Twain were writing in different eras than the present (1960 and 1884, respectively) and for different audiences. Further, both their works were semi-autobiographical attempts to make sense of childhoods lived in oppressively racist societies they had come to view as morally debased, yet still neither had access to the critical perspectives a person living today does. Further, as Carroll, quoting Jean-Jacques Rousseau, notes ““An author who would brave

the general taste would soon write for himself alone.’ That is... authors... design their works in such a way that they rely on a fit between their narratives and a roughly common cognitive, emotive, and moral stock that is shared by the readers, viewers, and listeners who make up the expected audience of the work. If there were no such common background, there would be no communication, since there could be no uptake.”¹³⁶ Was there, in 1960, enough uptake among Lee’s readers for her evocative portrait of a racially prejudiced trial to be effective? Or in 1884, among Twain’s readers for an account of innate moral goodness triumphing over pervasive racism? As it turns out, there was. However, it is as unfairly presentist to expect Lee or Twain to write a novel on race that would live up to present expectations as it would be to expect their intended audience to accept it. Though it is of course true that Black people *were* part of Twain and Lee’s reading publics, the content and perspectives included in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Mockingbird* strongly suggest they saw themselves as writing for a predominantly White audience that viewed American race relations from a White perspective. Though this is another facet of these works that is likely to produce a feeling of unease in a modern reader, it is also likely neither Twain nor Lee had the range of experience to write from any other perspective, or *for* any broader segment of American society: If they did choose to make the attempt in their times, they might have found themselves mainly writing for themselves. In reality, all a morally farsighted author can hope for is to move the dial of public moral consciousness slightly in the right direction, and it is almost indisputable that both Lee and Twain did this for their respective reading publics. Finally, some of Fricker’s concepts are of use here. For Lee and Twain’s failures of moral imagination one is justified in feeling the “resentment of disappointment,” though likely not the “resentment of blame.” Afterall, their work includes “exceptional moral acts,” those that

¹³⁶ Carroll, “Narrative, Art, and Moral Understanding,” 140-139.

reach beyond their antecedents and the public morals of their day. The same cannot be said of Le Carré's performance in *Single and Single*, which is remarkably regressive for the year 1999.

Though Lee and Twain may ultimately be vindicated (or at least forgiven), Fricker and Arpaly, writing in the early 2000s, *should* be held accountable for the way they use them. For instance, on my reading, there are no counterbalancing literary (or other) examples in Fricker or Arpaly that *do* offer a three-dimensional depiction of a Black character or a first-hand description of experiencing racism *by* a Black author. There are only these two, in some ways noticeably deficient, examples from historical White authors (would it have been so hard to include a passage of James Baldwin or Toni Morrison?). Further, neither Fricker nor Arpaly acknowledge or comment on the questionable aspects of the depictions of racism they engage with. This is a shame, because a discussion of these issues would have saved them from appearing insensitive to valid concerns about the historical representation of minorities in literature (and philosophy, for that matter). Just in case it is necessary to say so, the fact they were working in the early 2000s is no excuse either: in fact, many philosophers working with literature even earlier evince an awareness of problems of racial representation in the classic canon. Another unfortunate result, from Fricker and Arpaly's perspective at least, is that commentators have taken notice of their failure to discuss issues of race, and Fricker at least has faced sustained criticism over it that has sometimes undercut her philosophical contributions in *Epistemic Injustice*.¹³⁷ Finally, as these critiques justly point out and as I have earlier noted, it is particularly important for Fricker and Arpaly to get the racial dimensions of epistemic injustice and unprincipled virtue right, as the fact that these concepts are anti-prejudicial seems intrinsic to Fricker and Arpaly's articulation of

¹³⁷ I am aware of at least two such critiques of Fricker: Gaile Pohlhaus Jr.'s "Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance" and Kristie Dotson's "A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression."

their central concepts: In other words, their *conceptual work too* is the poorer for this defect. For all these reasons, the failure to acknowledge or correct for the limitations of how their central examples depict race should be considered a real defect of *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue*.

What the Literary Example is *Not*

In most of this thesis so far, I have been either discussing adjacent topics to, gesturing obliquely at, or teasing its central argument: that Fricker and Arpaly use of literary examples in *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue* is conceptually productive. This section, in which I rule out the possibilities that their use of literary examples is primarily evidentiary or illustrative, represents the last of these dodges before I make the final, plain statement of my case. When considering what the cognitive content of literature might be, classifying the literary as some unique kind of evidence sometimes feels natural, especially to those philosophers, such as those in the philosophy of science or the epistemology of testimony, who are used to thinking in evidentiary terms. However, as I have already discussed, Sirridge and Stokke provide good reasons to doubt the productivity of this approach. As Stokke highlights, Tolstoy is *not* the most reliable source of information on the historical details of 19th century Russia.¹³⁸ Further, pointing to the evident fictive nature of most statements in literature, Sirridge argues “‘I read it in a novel,’ is never per se good evidence for a claim about the way the world is.”¹³⁹ All things considered, in this case the simplest explanation truly is likely the best: because fictional, statements contained in literature should not be considered analogous in any way to statements of fact, and therefore do not make good evidence.

¹³⁸ Stokke, “Fiction as a Defeater,” 109.

¹³⁹ Sirridge, “Truth From Fiction,” 453.

There is, however, another possibility: that fictional events at least provide evidence *of possibility*. Here, one is thinking roughly along Utopian lines in attributing positive value to the fact that literature deals in possibilities. On this argument, literature may direct the reader's attention to a previously unconsidered contingency that, though it has not been proven to have taken place, may be worthwhile to consider for some theory-specific reason. This gets close to, but does not quite realize one reason literature is taken so seriously by its readers: that it *does not seem to matter* to literature's value that it is not factual (i.e. not "a true story"). However, as long as one continues to think in evidentiary terms, I judge this insight will sit awkwardly in one's framework of understanding, and the true merits of literature in philosophy are unlikely to become clear. Ultimately, the language of evidence presupposes the primacy of the factual, and relegating literature to the type "evidence of possibility," seems to set it up as a sort of second-best: as a deficiently factual, though potentially motivating, sort of evidence. As Sirridge warns, one should not jump "too quickly to the conclusion that if works of fiction are in fact fictional, they cannot serve as evidence at all, and therefore cannot have cognitive status."¹⁴⁰ However, I argue Sirridge's claim that the "quasi-evidential" status thought experiments have should be extended to the literary, is unlikely to capture what is uniquely valuable in literature.¹⁴¹ The problem here is not in assuming fiction is in no way evidentiary, but in attempting to explain fiction in the language of evidence in the first place.

Epistemic Injustice and *Unprincipled Virtue* provide good cases for why the literary example in philosophy does not have to be evidentiary. Afterall, these are both primarily *conceptual* works. Fricker and Arpaly do not set out to "prove" that epistemic injustice or

¹⁴⁰ Sirridge, "Truth From Fiction," 470.

¹⁴¹ Sirridge, "Truth From Fiction," 470-471.

unprincipled virtue exist in the world. Instead, they assume the reader accepts that certain phenomena that could be called by those names exist, then they draw the reader's attention to plausible cases of those things, then they introduce increasingly fine-tuned ways of thinking about them (*conceptual* tools to assist the understanding in making sense of such phenomena). While Fricker and Arpaly engage with multiple cases, including multiple real cases that testify to the existence of the phenomena they are interested in, the *point* of their writing does not seem to be to provide evidence of epistemic injustice or unprincipled virtue in the world, but rather to *understand* these things better. Ultimately, this may be one of the best ways to understand why Fricker and Arpaly place literary cases at the center of their works: in work that is primarily *conceptual*, the cases one wants to work with do not have to be real, though they should be appropriately plausible; instead, what counts is how rich their depiction of the relevant phenomena is. In the literary examples Fricker and Arpaly choose, the phenomena they are most interested in are depicted extraordinarily richly and, in fact, the purposiveness and semi-omniscience of the authorial voice in them provides a degree and depth of detail that it is difficult to find in most non-fiction. When realist fiction succeeds, it is by the cogency of the moral vision of its author and the perspicacity of its social and psychological depictions. Because Fricker and Arpaly are writing conceptual moral philosophy, it should thus be unsurprising they would seek to engage with great literature.

If there are good reasons to doubt Fricker and Arpaly use literary examples as evidence, another possibility is that, like philosophers seem to most often do in the analytic tradition, they use them *illustratively*. On this account, Fricker and Arpaly's conceptual work and the illustrative work they get their examples to do happen in complete isolation from each other. On the one hand, Fricker and Arpaly are offering theoretic conceptualizations, drawn presumably from their

own minds as well as their engagement with the work of other philosophers. And, indeed, much of the work of *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue* seems to be done along the lines of just these conventional philosophical methods, as both philosophers offer numerous, highly technical articulations of their conceptualizations, as well as numerous references to closely related work by other philosophers. On the other hand, and after the fact, they choose to *illustrate* those concepts with examples that drive home these conceptualizations: that can be made to demonstrate in more concrete terms the features of the concepts that Fricker and Arpaly have already fully formed. On this account, the example plays a supporting role after the fact, allowing the philosopher to communicate what they have already articulated technically but in a more accessible form, or showing how what has previously been wholly abstract would look in concrete terms.

This account of Fricker and Arpaly's methodologies of example is far from implausible: it is, after all, the way most philosophers working in their fields seem to use examples. However, there is good textual evidence in *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue* to refute it. First, if the above account were correct, one would expect the conceptualization to come *first* and the example (illustration of the conceptualization) to come *second*. Instead, as I have noted, both Fricker and Arpaly *begin* the body of their work with a literary example (Arpaly without even including an introduction, as Fricker does). And it is a feature of these works that references to literary examples are shot through theoretical discussions, just as conceptual refinements are shot through with the analysis of literary examples. Therefore, these works do not evince the standard two-step chronology presupposed by explication/illustration. Second, as these philosophers are exceptionally effective in showing, many of the concepts they are seeking to articulate and refine *already seem present* in the literary works they consider themselves, and to such an extent that it

is not always clear who the basic concept is coming from: the philosopher or literary author. Another way of saying this is that, on a close and philosophically-minded reading of their works, it appears Mark Twain thought of the idea of unprincipled virtue in 1884 and Harper Lee of epistemic injustice in 1960.

Now, this last is not completely fair to the originality of Fricker and Arpaly's work, these concepts and the precision with which they understand them are entirely their own. Further, it is to the credit of Fricker and Arpaly how effectively they are able to draw these ideas, which are far from fully explicit in the originals, *out* of these novels, through the skillful deployment of textual evidence and literary analysis. However, there is evident, at the very least, an intense *philosophical sympathy* between these philosophers and their chosen literary correspondents: they *really do* seem to be talking about *the same basic ideas*, but through different mediums. Interestingly, this introduces an intractable chicken and egg problem. Though it is at best only speculation, I can almost see in my mind's eye Fricker, on the basis of some indefinable impulse or vague recollection, opening the pages of *To Kill a Mockingbird* again, for the first time as an adult perhaps, and exclaiming "*This* is it! *This* is just what I've been addressing in my current program of research." Ultimately, because of the way Fricker and Arpaly deploy these examples, and because of the philosophical quality of the texts they draw from, considering them to be doing purely illustrative work, separate from the conceptual work that is at the centre of Fricker and Arpaly's books, is wrongheaded. Instead, what is happening is similar to, but in another sense quite different from, what Fricker and Arpaly do when they engage with the work of *philosophers* who addresses the same subject as them. While literary examples doubtless *do* play an illustrate role, similar to the standard way of using examples in analytic philosophy, they *also* play a *conceptually productive* role, in the way Fricker and Arpaly choose to use them at least.

The Literary Example as Conceptually Productive

So what exactly do I mean when I claim Fricker and Arpaly's use of the literary example is "conceptually productive"? I mean that the concepts they introduce and refine in these works are richer and more fully developed than if they had chosen to articulate them in purely theoretic terms, or even within a theoretical discourse that used examples, whatever their kind, in a way that suggested they were included for merely illustrative purposes. This is true not only of Fricker and Arpaly's most basic articulation of their central concepts ("epistemic injustice" for Fricker and "unprincipled virtue" for Arpaly), but also of the numerous refinements they make to these and the many secondary concepts they develop to buttress them. Recall, for instance, how Fricker begins her book. Though Fricker provides a very brief and general definition of epistemic injustice in her introduction, it is only with the *Mr. Ripley* example that she begins to discuss in detail the idea of prejudicial credibility judgments, a buttressing concept that turns out to be essential to her account of how epistemic injustice, and particularly its subtype of "testimonial injustice," functions in societies. Further, it is unclear how *or whether* Fricker would be able to give such a nuanced description of how this functions, with the accompanying discussion of historic versus individual factors and of the ability of prejudicial stereotypes to constrain their targets to act out prejudiced expectations of them, *without* the three-dimensional and contextualized characters of Mr. Greenleaf and Marge to work from. After all, it is Mr. Greenleaf's tragic failure, caused by his sexist reception of Marge's testimony, to give the proper weight to various pieces of evidence in a case he is highly motivated to solve, that prompts and provides the material for Fricker's discussion of the limits of the "social imaginary" in a given historic context. Similarly, the material for the discussion of the tendency of negative stereotypes to encourage confirming behaviour is Marge's descent into seeming instability in the face of

implacable disbelief, over a sustained period, from her fellow male investigators. While it is at least *possible* to imagine Fricker coming to such refinements of these concepts through purely theoretic means, her engagement with the example *is* the means by which she *did* come to them, and it is, just like many of Fricker's other concepts that seem to benefit from a deep engagement with examples, a counterfactual toss-up whether a version of *Epistemic Injustice* lacking such careful attention to a particular case could have contained as conceptually rich an account of prejudicial credibility deficit.

Similarly, recall Fricker's introduction of the *Mockingbird* example, which occurs in *Epistemic Injustice* shortly after her initial discussion of Marge and Greenleaf. So far, Fricker has provided an initial, schematic definition of epistemic injustice, as well as a more detailed account, through a discussion of the *Mr. Ripley* example, of how credibility deficits can result from personal prejudices. However, what Fricker has yet to do is capture the irreducibly *social* character of epistemic injustice. Using the trial of Tom Robinson, Fricker is able to provide a remarkably nuanced and universalizable account of what these social dimensions might be, despite it being based on a fictionalized set of particularities. As Fricker notes, in the trial of Robinson "the psychology is subtle, and there is a great complexity of social meanings at work."¹⁴² As it turns out, it is *just this* psychological subtlety and complexity of social meanings in *Mockingbird*, the very same characteristics that make it a great novel, that provide such fertile ground for the extension and refinement of Fricker's theoretical account. Through engagement with this example, Fricker brings to light how one can cynically take advantage of prevailing prejudices in the "social imaginary" (as the prosecutor does in calling out the prejudices of the jury); how one can suffer from epistemic injustice *systematically* (as Robinson does in every

¹⁴² Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 23.

arena of his life); how people under the sway of prejudice can make mistakes in credibility attributions “honestly” (as the jurors, who truly *believe* in Robinson’s guilt despite the countervailing evidence, do); the interaction between violent and seemingly innocuous incidents of prejudicial credibility deficit (the significance of the frequent remarks that cast aspersions on Black residents’ trustworthiness and rationality for the ultimate conviction of Robinson); the importance of credibility for survival as a social being (how Black characters rely on the support of their community in the face of almost universal White disbelief); and the important differences between holding the virtue of epistemic justice naïvely or correctively (which can be seen in the differences in epistemic sensibilities between Atticus, Scout, and Dill).

Clearly, Fricker is able to draw a wealth of relevant meaning from the *Mockingbird* case. However, it is important to note this is far from coincidental. In evaluating Lee’s contribution as a philosophically-minded novelist, one must understand that it is far from coincidental that the theme of epistemic untrustworthiness pairs so effectively with the epistemic deficiencies on display at Robinson’s pivotal trial; or that Atticus, Scout, and Dill represent psychological variations in their responses to the atmosphere of racism permeating Maycomb County. Instead, the novel can only be understood as rich in ideas if one recognizes the intentionality with which Lee writes: that, in the way she forms her narrative she invites particular moral responses from the reader, she is establishing the significance of its events in the telling of them. Understood in this light, it should be rather unsurprising Fricker’s engagement with literary examples is conceptually productive: the literary examples are *conceptually rich themselves*. Of course, in recognizing the ideas inherent in these works, in drawing them out through insightful literary criticism, and in building them into a highly sophisticated and philosophically engaged theoretical framework, Fricker goes far beyond anything Lee or Minghella could have imagined.

As such, her work exemplifies what can be gained in the interaction between philosophy and literature.

Similarly, recall Arpaly's use of the *Single and Single* example, in which Oliver decides to turn informant during his arrival at Heathrow Airport. What Arpaly is to provide in *Unprincipled Virtue* is, in one sense, just an extended argument on why unconscious and non-deliberative psychological factors are often much more decisive in moral cognition than has often been assumed in moral psychology. And this scene is able to, with remarkable economy, capture several subtleties of this view of moral cognition, which Arpaly is careful to draw out here and brings up repeatedly in later theoretical discussions. First, Oliver has intentionally, though largely unconsciously, *prepared* himself for making this life changing decision. For instance, he has made a mental note of where the red airport phone is located and its official function; he has drunk just enough in-flight alcohol to feel somewhat out of his ordinary self, but still lucid enough to act; and he has set his mind to dwelling on his father's apparent moral defects, which have been piling up for Oliver over the past few years. In aggregate, these act as an indication that, despite not being conscious of it, it is *Oliver* and *not* his resentment or exhaustion acting: rather than being driven by "passion" Oliver's moral judgement *is* involved, at every step of the way, though it acts at a deep, largely unconscious level.

Further, it is clear from the larger context of *Single and Single*, which Arpaly provides the necessary context of, that Oliver is ultimately highly morally praiseworthy for his defection: he is to be instrumental in bringing down an international narcotics-smuggling operation that his father is involved up to his neck in. Importantly, as Arpaly complains several times in *Unprincipled Virtue*, it was not possible for Arpaly to find an example with such features in the moral psychology literature (which, according to Arpaly, is over-preoccupied with rational actors

deliberating in “a cool hour,” and is wont to characterize those acting from “passion” as a priori irresponsible). If this is so, Arpaly seems constrained to look outside her own field for philosophical sympathy, which she finds (as unlikely as it might seem) in Le Carré and Twain’s novels. Finally, Arpaly’s use of this example is productive in a third way, and based on a characteristic of good examples that sometimes goes underappreciated. In describing Oliver’s state of mind particularly vividly, Le Carré does something that is essential to the plausibility of both realist literature and case studies in moral philosophy: he creates an account of subjective experience that is *intuitively plausible*; that draws from the reader an unmistakable feeling of recognition. Like Oliver, most have experienced just this disconcerting, floating feeling of detachment when making an important decision in a time of emotional crisis. I myself have, at least, had just this feeling of acting without knowing quite why, and in spite of a feeling of psychological distance from the self that acts, and almost always at a time of great mental strain. Therefore, in using the example from Le Carré, Arpaly underscores one of her most important points: that this is a psychological phenomenon *that happens*, and happens often enough to seem a pretty basic fact of human psychology. Therefore, Arpaly later argues, it must be accounted for in any complete account of moral cognition. Thus, Arpaly takes advantage of the unique qualities of the literary example to establish a gap in the moral psychology literature and to *motivate* her conceptual critique.

Recall also Arpaly’s use of the example from *Huckleberry Finn*. It is true that, in describing how Finn revolts from turning Jim in on an intuitive level and despite his belief it is the “right” thing to do, Arpaly does simply illustrate what a case of unprincipled virtue looks like. However, her discussion of the case is far more involved than a simple illustration would require, and ends by yielding a series of conceptual innovations that appear inextricably linked to

her literary analysis of the novel. For instance, it is important for Arpaly's version of unprincipled virtue to capture "that thing about Huckleberry Finn which makes him seem more than an accidental good-doer,"¹⁴³ and this commitment seems to result from the realization that Finn's pivotal action of refusing to turn Jim in results from a deep feature of his moral character that is, ultimately, highly admirable. Here, the framework of Aristotelian virtue ethics, which treats the individual's moral character traits as primary, and the boyhood adventure novel, which investigates the moral development of its protagonist, are brought into a productive relationship. What is unexpected and ingenious in her treatment *Huckleberry Finn* however, is just the range of relevant meanings Arpaly is able to extract from it, and equally how seamlessly she is able to incorporate them into a cogent philosophical framework. Who could have guessed that the antics of Huckleberry Finn, one of literature's most beloved children, could be so informative in deciding on the relevance of competing conceptions of autonomy for moral praiseworthiness, or the relationship between moral intuition and character building. And yet, in each of these later, highly technical theoretical discussions, Finn pops his tousled head up again, and always in a way that takes advantage of the unique context of his character and circumstances. Because this is so, Arpaly is fully justified in expending considerable space to explicate and analyse these details of Twain's story. In doing so, she demonstrates how engagement with the particularities of a plausible psychological portrait can enrich a much more general theory of moral psychology. Ultimately, when I claim Fricker and Arpaly's use of literary examples is conceptually productive, what I mean is that it is almost impossible to imagine them producing equally effective versions of their conceptual works without them.

¹⁴³ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 10.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that Miranda Fricker and Nomy Arpaly's use of literary examples in their books *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue* are conceptually productive. In my first chapter, I provided an exposition of *Epistemic Injustice* and *Unprincipled Virtue*, focusing on the use of two central literary examples for each: the Anthony Minghella *The Talented Mr. Ripley* screenplay and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for Fricker, and John Le Carré's *Single and Single* and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for Arpaly. Here, I emphasized the many instances of interaction between Fricker and Arpaly's analyses of these examples and their broader theoretical projects. In my second chapter, I considered and rejected several philosophical frameworks for understanding literature. Platonism and Utopianism fail because they assume an overall moral valence for literature, whereas literature should be considered a morally neutral medium; Stokke and Sirridge's classificatory frameworks fail because, in breaking literary works into definitionally distinct elements, they obscure the unity of the author's expressive project; finally, Posner's Formalism fails because it fails to acknowledge the irreducible moral nature of literary enterprises. In my third chapter, I made a comparative analysis of Fricker and Arpaly's methodologies of example; reviewed some issues with their use and choice of examples from literature (focusing on the aesthetic limitations of *Single and Single* and the charges that *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* include racist depictions of Black men); ruled out the possibilities Fricker and Arpaly use literary examples evidentially or illustratively; and, finally, made a final statement of my central thesis that Fricker and Arpaly use literary examples to further their conceptual projects.

Before I release you, dear reader, I wish to note one peculiarity of this thesis and how it relates to the contribution I see myself as making here. The attentive reader may have noticed, if

by nothing else than the frequency with which I use the word, this thesis is a *methodological* work. In other words, my primary concern here has been to provide a critique of the *methods* philosophers deploy in their philosophizing, and in particular the method of using examples from literature. This is unusual in philosophy. Generally, philosophical writings engage with *content* of other philosophical writings (with the ideas therein themselves), rather than with the methods by which that content is formulated or expressed. In taking this unconventional tack, I have been motivated by a negative and a positive set of impressions. On one hand, I have often found analytic philosophy to be too detached from particulars and wont to eschew complex, plausibly realistic examples for schematic, tailor-made examples. On the other hand, I have found the work of particular philosophers, Fricker and Arpaly among them, to be refreshingly unafraid of real-world complexities and deeply conscious of the relationship between particulars and the universalizable. Therefore, in providing a laudatory account of Fricker and Arpaly's methodologies of example, I hope to contribute to a re-evaluation of philosophical methods: to prompt those writing in philosophy to engage with richly detailed and life-like examples, and to do so in the service of creating richer conceptual products.

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