

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements xi

Introduction: Living As If	1
1 Imaginings—c. 1850	30
2 Perspectives—Eliot	64
3 Lies—James	101
4 What Ifs—Conrad	136
5 Doubts—Woolf	160
6 Ironies—Lewis	187
7 Theories—Murdoch	217
Epilogue: Ethical Criticism Now	247

Bibliography 269

Index 289

Introduction

LIVING AS IF

Let's Assume

Let's assume for a moment that we know what a fiction is and turn to the more practical question: How does it help us live? This book focuses on *literary* fiction and the ways it might be approached as a resource for living well or at least better.¹ It also draws on this richly self-reflexive form of madeupness to examine the wider role of fictiveness in our lives: the storied character we give experience, the illusions this can produce, and the benefits and pitfalls of such make-believe.² In an age of bad fiction—disinformation, fake news, and fake anti-fakery—we need some respect for fact, but we also need a more differentiated sense of the fictive, its many forms and its heterogenous uses. Fiction is not necessarily fraud, nor is it simply error and unreality.³ Indeed, it is often the

1. The tradition is too long to list in detail, but, broadly speaking, I am interested in a very self-conscious form of ethical criticism unfolding from the work of Martha Nussbaum and Wayne Booth in the 1980s and 1990s and the polemics surrounding them. See, for instance, Siebers, *The Ethics of Criticism and Morals and Stories*; Palmer, *Literature and Moral Understanding*; Goldberg, *Agents and Lives*; Parker, *Ethics, Theory, and the Novel*; Newton, *Narrative Ethics*. More recent contributions to this tradition are mentioned downstream.

2. By calling literary fiction self-referential I am not suggesting it is exclusively self-referential. For a critique of this position, see Miller, 'Is Literature Self-Referential?'

3. This seems to be the position taken by Bertrand Russell about all literary fictions when he declared that all the propositions of *Hamlet* 'are false because there was no such man.' Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, 277.

source of what's best about us—the space in which the good life is imagined and talked into being.

Fiction has many faces and the aim here is not to reduce it to a common essence, single definition or unitary function.⁴ While I show that fictions can help us to tell the truth, I also dwell on a number of practices where truth might seem to take second place to other kinds of value, from certain kinds of aesthetic experience to the little fictions we call politeness to more deceptive fictions such as lies and self-delusions. I am equally interested in those situations in which the truth of something seems to be assumed or disbelief at least suspended, or where the normal entailments of believing and disbelieving are put aside.⁵ I also examine situations in which this fictive attitude breaks down and the not-so-ness of our stories and practices loom large. This may make it impossible to proceed 'as if,' or it may, in fact, embolden us to do so. As Lytton Strachey once declared to Virginia Woolf: 'We can only live if we see through illusion.'⁶ Much of this book hinges on the different meanings we might give to the word 'through.'

The everyday experience of reading fiction provides us with some lived evidence that we can simultaneously commit to two sides of 'seeing through' at once. We know little Nell is made up, but this may not stop our tears when she goes to that storied place in the sky.⁷ Many have wondered about the seeming paradox of fiction and have tried to account for the affective force of illusions.⁸ These may be mere pseudo-feelings or 'quasi-feelings,' but it's hard not to feel or quasi-feel that much of everyday life involves feeling quasi (to invoke the Latin for 'as if')—say, when we wonder, speculate, or populate gaps in our

4. On what she calls the 'pluri-significance' of the word 'fiction,' see Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, 1–17.

5. My discussion of this 'as-if-ness' is deeply indebted to Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of 'As If'*. Also, Appiah, *As If*.

6. Woolf, *Diary*, 3.233.

7. On the oddities of such tears, see Radford, 'Tears and Fiction.'

8. Radford and Weston, 'How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?'; Walton, 'Fearing Fictions'; Lamarque, 'How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?'; Yanal, *Paradoxes of Emotion and Fiction*.

knowledge with fictions that we half-believe or provisionally assent to.⁹ ‘Do tell me everything that has, or hasn’t, happened,’ Henry James wrote to a friend, knowing that key parts of our lives are spent on things that don’t occur.¹⁰ Or as Wilde noted: ‘To most of us the real life is the life we do not lead.’¹¹ Many of our most intense moments take place in the ‘imagined “otherwise.”’¹² This counterfactuality is built into sentiments like hope or regret. ‘What queer speculations,’ Thackeray mused, ‘the “might have beens” are!’¹³ Yet there is some counterfactual queer-ness to all desire. After all, desire desires the world to be different so that its designs can be met—even when it yearns for the world to stay the same. The sense that life could be otherwise or that we could do otherwise is clearly foundational to our sense of freedom. Moral reality demands imagination—a fecund sense of ‘what if’ and an ability to think and act ‘as if.’

Though the book considers the moral significance of fictiveness, I also keep in mind that morality in general has often been declared a fiction.¹⁴ If literature sometimes invites us to think this unsettling thought, it should be admitted, nonetheless, that the thought is a vague one and may not lead to any revision of our practices. To emphasise the fictiveness of something may not say or do very much. Property is a fiction but only after the revolution will we truly think so. The same may be said about money. We can readily concede that ethical norms are artificial—say, historical and human-made—but this does not stop

9. On the role of quasi-emotions in art, see, in particular, Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. On why the distinction between ‘real-world feelings’ and fiction-inspired feelings has no real purchase, see Cohen, *Thinking of Others*, 29–51.

10. James, *Letters*, 3.174. For accounts of this would-be living, see Philips, *Missing Out*; Miller, *On Not Being Someone Else*.

11. Wilde, ‘The English Renaissance of Art,’ in *Essays and Lectures*, 128.

12. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 440.

13. Thackeray to Mrs. Carmichael Smyth, 17–19 April 1852. See *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, 3.39. Cited in Williams, *The Art of Uncertainty*, 109.

14. This moral fictionalism is often traced back to Nietzsche. But for more systematic defences of the position, see Mackie, *Ethics*; Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*; Kalderon, *Moral Fictionalism*.

them from becoming real or acquiring objectivity among ourselves.¹⁵ Of course, a very thick or ontologically committed sense of the objective can make us doubt our moral experiences. All moral interpretation, in certain eyes, is misinterpretation, while all moral judgement is error.¹⁶ Others dispute such views—not because moral judgements are true, but because they are deemed to state nothing and are therefore neither true nor false. The aim here is not to settle these meta-ethical questions, though I do want to stress literature's stubborn power to raise them.

One of the grounding assumptions of the book is that there is an irreducible as-if-ness in moral life.¹⁷ This, in a sense, is simply to acknowledge the limits of justification. We must all take certain things on trust if ethical experience is going to get off the ground. So, we behave *as if* we are free even though we may lack exhaustive grounds to conclude so. Or we often bring a certain as-if-ness to moral obligation: We operate as if certain rules are absolute and universally binding, though we may simultaneously feel that all rules must allow for exceptions. Many of us, it seems, are conditional norm-followers, choosing to assent to a rule when enough people do so—and some of us do so with our fingers crossed.¹⁸ As Kant urbanely observed in 1798, much of social life is a form of moral theatre:

On the whole, the more civilized human beings are, the more they are actors. They adopt the illusion of affection, of respect for others, of modesty, and of unselfishness without deceiving anyone at all, because it is understood by everyone that nothing is meant sincerely by this. And it is also very good that this happens in the world. For

15. As John Searle has argued, things may be observer-relative and ontologically subjective, but this should not lead us to surrender all notions of epistemic objectivity or truth and falsehood. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*.

16. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, 66.

17. Some might feel that moral seeing and, indeed, fictive seeing, involve a simple seeing-as rather than something more conditional or optional. When it comes to fiction, for instance, Hamburger emphasises its 'as structure' not its 'as-if structure.' See Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, 58. My position is that fiction allows for both forms of seeing.

18. On conditional norm-following, see Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*.

when human beings play these roles, eventually the virtues, whose illusion they have merely affected for a considerable length of time, will gradually really be aroused and merge into the disposition.¹⁹

Not all of morality is mere pretence here: Our moral fictions are parasitic on ‘real virtue.’ However, pretence is also constitutive: When enough of it goes on, the distinction between real and affected states becomes quite happily blurred. As if becomes just so. If literary fictions often pretend to see through pretence, they also suggest that it may be a mistake to get too wound up about the authenticity of moral appearances. As Kant noted, ‘If semblance indeed fell away, very likely nothing would remain for us at all.’²⁰

Nevertheless, there are times in moral life when our performances dip and we begin to fluff our lines. I consider those moments of moral turbulence when key elements of our ethics—say, our confidence in freedom or the dignity we feel it enshrines—begin to seem hollow or we struggle to align our sense of ourselves as moral agents with the idea of our own thinghood within a material universe. The root of the comic, according to Wyndham Lewis, derives from the fundamental absurdity of witnessing a thing behaving as if it were a person—as if, in other words, it were a free and self-legislating being.²¹ Lewis never quite got over the joke or ceased to disparage those who were taken in by it. And yet he never entirely relinquished his own need to be taken in or to regard humans as persons.

Here we might seek refuge in a certain kind of fictionalism—the conditions and limits of which I examine throughout the book. This is the Janus-faced knack of seeing through illusion—an ability, which in its baldest form involves committing to the utility of fictions that we simultaneously know to be untrue.²² As Wallace Stevens put it, ‘The final

19. Kant, ‘Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View,’ in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 263.

20. Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, 380.

21. Lewis, *The Wild Body*, 159.

22. As Vaihinger maintained: ‘Fictions are never verifiable, for they are hypotheses which are known to be false, but which are employed because of their utility.’ Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of ‘As If’*, xlii.

belief is to believe in a fiction, . . . to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.²³ Few of the writers who I consider in detail—Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Wyndham Lewis, and Iris Murdoch—openly embrace this fictionalism, but they all advertise the difficulty, even undesirability, of living without illusions. As Woolf put it, rather self-referentially, in *Orlando*, ‘Illusions are the most necessary and valuable things.’²⁴ No enthusiast of Woolf, Wyndham Lewis aspired to an entirely disenchanted condition. However, he ultimately drew on Kant to arrive at the paradoxical conclusion that ‘illusion must in short be our “real.”’²⁵

Underlying the endorsement of illusion in and through modern literature we find significant doubt.²⁶ I dwell on the ways our fictions—literary and nonliterary—allow us to express and mitigate our scepticism at one and the same time, allowing us to see through things in a double sense. Of course, the logical and psychological viability of such doubleness is open to question. Belief implies a conviction that something is true, not just a pretence that it is.²⁷ There may be cases, as William James insisted, where a certain ‘*faith in a fact can help create the fact*’—where, say, a conviction of the value of life can create a valuable life—but he also noted that these occasions were quite circumscribed.²⁸ The acrobatics of the White Queen are certainly impressive—‘sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast’—but this isn’t quite enough to squash Alice (‘one *can’t*

23. Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, 159.

24. Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 139.

25. Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 378. This included the notion of freedom as well as the illusion of a self—‘the arch-illusion, the ground and condition of all others’ (394).

26. As Zadie Smith recently put it: ‘Fiction—at least the kind that was any good—was full of doubt, self-doubt above all.’ Smith, ‘Fascinated to Presume,’ 73.

27. My sense of the grammar of belief is partly drawn from Bernard Williams, ‘Deciding to Believe,’ in *Problems of the Self*, 136–51.

28. See James, ‘The Will to Believe,’ in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, 29. As James noted, ‘The freedom to believe can only cover living options which the intellect of the individual cannot by itself resolve’ (32).

believe impossible things’).²⁹ Even in Wonderland there may be logical and grammatical constraints on what we can believe.

But believing may not be the right word when it comes to fiction—not least if we doubt whether fictions truly state anything. When we entertain or are entertained by a fiction we commit to a broad spectrum of attitudes—from receptive openness to ironic toleration to muzzled doubt—many of which fall well short of full belief. Moreover, our literary fictions repeatedly suggest that much of life is spent in this epistemic twilight. Hence the protracted as-if-ness and conditional metaphors of writers like Dickens, James, Conrad or Woolf.³⁰ The 144 instances of ‘as if’ in *To the Lighthouse*, for instance, can make all life feel provisional, ‘as if solidity had vanished altogether.’³¹ Which is not to say that nothing is captured or affirmed by Woolf’s many as ifs:

So fine was the morning except for a streak of wind here and there that the sea and sky looked all one fabric, as if sails were stuck high up in the sky, or the clouds had dropped down into the sea. A steamer far out at sea had drawn in the air a great scroll of smoke which stayed there curving and circling decoratively, as if the air were a fine gauze which held things and kept them softly in its mesh, only gently swaying them this way and that. And as happens sometimes when the weather is very fine, the cliffs looked as if they were conscious of the ships, and the ships looked as if they were conscious of the cliffs, as if they signalled to each other some secret message of their own.³²

These adventures in as-if-ness exhibit the epistemic virtues of a certain kind of fictionalism—the value of descriptions that are literally false. There are no sails in the sky, but operating as if there are helps us to appreciate the peculiar blueness of that fine day. The air is not made of gauze, but the simile successfully snags the inertness of the sky’s contents. Of course, the repeated as ifs concede to the not-so-ness of

29. Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 177.

30. For a discussion of Dickens’s addiction to ‘as if’ expressions, see Farina, “‘Dickens’s As If’”: Analogy and Victorian Virtual Reality.

31. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 80.

32. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 197–98.

analogy or simile, and as the similes accumulate, it can feel like we venture ever further into the improbable if not the unhelpfully false—not least when we are invited to treat the cliffs as if they are conscious. Behind such anthropomorphism in Woolf, we find a longing for metaphysical integration, a consonance between the ways of the world and human practices and modes of understanding—as if values nestled in facts, as if everything were purposive, as if the world participated in the human need for meaning. But harmony in the passage above is notably incomplete: If ship and cliff communicate, they do so in a language that remains unintelligible to human ears. ‘As if’ contains as much alienation as it does conviction in Woolf.

The ‘as ifs’ of metaphor express a need for meaning in the world. But since it is often unclear whether this meaning is invented or found, description lends itself to different kinds of fictionalism. This fictive attitude is most self-consciously expressed in Woolf’s conviction that ‘the whole world is a work of art’—a position that is presented as an empirical statement but equally operates as a rule or formula for living as if.³³ Woolf was neither the first nor the last to suggest that the world is best approached and vindicated when conceived as an aesthetic phenomenon.³⁴ In the chapters ahead I examine various attempts to treat life in the spirit of art, alongside the risks of doing so.³⁵ This fictionalism is not just aired in novels; the novel has also been cast as the paradigm for fictive living.³⁶ Henry James wondered in 1902 if we were not ‘pretty well all novelists now?’³⁷ Daniel Dennett in the 1980s had much the same

33. Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 85. This, of course, is an old fantasy. As Schelling put it: ‘The universe . . . is also to be viewed as an absolute work of art in which infinite intention mutually interpenetrates with infinite necessity.’ Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, 31.

34. Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, 33. Martha Nussbaum would also declare that the ‘well-lived life is a work of literary art.’ See Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 148. Collingwood put the matter a little more subtly: ‘All life is art, but no single moment of life is mere art.’ Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, 83.

35. The phrasing is drawn from Pater, *Appreciations*, 62.

36. ‘We live in a colossal novel,’ Novalis declared, though he also insisted that this novel should be made by us, not simply given to us. Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 134, 66.

37. James, *Literary Criticism*, 2.346.

feeling: We are all ‘virtuoso novelists,’ he insisted, busily writing ourselves up as heroes of our own plots.³⁸

But not all of our literary fictions are willing to indulge this story of our story-telling selves—not least because some of them believe that the task of living a life and narrating one involve very different requirements.³⁹ Moreover, the difference between real life and novelistic life is internal to the novel itself. The comedy of one of the first novels, *Don Quixote*, depends on the difference, and readers are invited to laugh at those who can’t manage the distinction (though this may also be a safe way of laughing at ourselves). Flaubert derives more tragic results from those who live novelistically.⁴⁰ This may be a classic gambit of fiction—illusions exposing illusions to boost their reality-effect—but clearly most novels proceed as if there is a reality independent of the stories we tell about it. Despite these ‘realist’ commitments, some writers and thinkers continue to cultivate a romantic or putatively postmodern picture of the world—namely the view that life is one ‘enormous novel.’⁴¹ This pan-fictionalism might capture the lived experience of a hypermediated or so-called post-truth world, yet it also overextends fictiveness until the category disappears. A basic condition of fictional experience, I argue, is that there are limits to this experience even if these limits are not easily drawn. Which is not to say that we haven’t a lot to learn by thinking analogically—as if novels were life, though there are evident restrictions to how much the analogy can be reversed.

So, this is a book about the novel’s metafictional powers and what it reveals about life’s many as ifs. I draw on philosophy to help say what fiction shows us about fictiveness, and I invoke fiction to expose the limits of what philosophy can say (not least about the ways in which the world might resist our conceptual schemes, or how perception and persuasion often exceed the power of argument). This may be to combine one minority sport with another in a fond address to the converted—the

38. Dennett, ‘Why Everyone Is a Novelist.’

39. According to Sartre’s Roquentin, we must choose either ‘to live or to recount.’ Sartre, *Nausea*, 61.

40. See Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*.

41. J. G. Ballard, ‘Introduction,’ in *Crash*, 5.

diminishing band who believe in fiction or at least the value of the dense, self-reflexive fictions that I examine in this book.⁴² The very ‘literary’ novel may not have the prestige in our culture it once had.⁴³ Nonetheless, it is worth spelling out why people might continue to stick with this antiquated progenitor of virtual experience—and why such experience is nontrivial, even vital. As I argue, belief in the value of the novel or the general value of the virtual is easily undermined by certain fictions about fictiveness—not least that it is always and simply false—as well as balder fictions about fact (what Sellars called ‘the myth of the given’: namely, that facts are directly available and self-interpreting and demand no mediation or construction-work).⁴⁴ Both myths breed dogmatism and dismissiveness. A fictive stance, however, usually demands a more subtle set of attitudes, shades of assent and dissent, and quasi-feelings. Fiction knows that most of life is spent between polar extremes of reality and unreality, actuality and wishfulness, arctic certainty and antarctic doubt, and that any mean we strike up will never be golden or endure for very long.

In what follows, then, I show how the novel expresses and conditions a kind of double vision: an epistemic doubleness where we can doubt and assent at one and the same time combined with an ontological unsteadiness where things feel real and don’t.⁴⁵ Within these states, moreover, we can strike a range of attitudes between a spectator’s distance and a participant’s absorption.⁴⁶ These fictive experiences, I argue, help

42. Zadie Smith suggests that we now ‘hardly see the point’ of this kind of fiction. ‘Why,’ she rhetorically asks, ‘have a silent dialogue with an invisible person about imaginary things?’ Smith, ‘Fascinated to Presume,’ 85.

43. Back in 1938 Collingwood was already issuing *ubi sunt*: ‘The novel, once an important literary form, has all but disappeared, except as an amusement for the semi-literate.’ Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, 331. On the ways in which we may have lost our faith in the novel and why we may need it more than ever, see Boxall, *The Value of the Novel*.

44. See Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*.

45. As Mann put it, ‘Authorship itself has always seemed to me to be a witness to and an expression of ambivalence, of here and there, of yes and no, of two souls in one breast, of an annoying richness in inner conflicts, antitheses and contradictions.’ Mann, *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, 9.

46. According to Walton: ‘The dual standpoint which appreciators take is . . . one of the most fundamental and important features of the human institution of fiction.’ Walton, ‘How Remote Are Fictional Worlds from the Real World?’, 21.

us to live more amphibiously or at least to come to terms with our own doubleness, our inwardness and outwardness, our social and antisocial natures (as we read about others alone),⁴⁷ our subjective and more objective sense of things.⁴⁸ Consistency demands, perhaps, that we remain in two minds about this two-mindedness—not least for the way it might seem to connive against certainty or what Harry Frankfurt called ‘wholeheartedness’—and there are situations in which a fictive attitude might seem unhelpful, even vicious.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, within the precincts of the novel and a good bit beyond it, we can experiment with the ‘ifs’ we live with and are often forced to repress. Doubt, as Charles Peirce remarked, is often ‘an uneasy and dissatisfied state,’ yet fiction allows us to savour our uncertainty as a form of pleasure.⁵⁰ Here we learn to appreciate that a life without ‘if,’ and the perhapsness it conditions, would be no life at all.

Fictive Thinking

How exactly do novels think? Perhaps they don’t think at all, and we are drawn to them because they provide a reprieve from the burdens of reflection. They were once disparaged, let us remember, as a kind of mental opium.⁵¹ Coleridge—who knew something about opiates—felt they led over time to ‘the entire destruction of the powers of mind.’⁵² Nonetheless, I want to focus here on how the mind might benefit from

47. This is a very broad-brush account of reading, and I don’t want to diminish the importance of Dickens’s public performances of his work. On this point see Gettelman, *Imagining Otherwise*, 56.

48. Cohen identifies another doubleness: the way we do and don’t want to court the possibility of death—and are partly drawn to tragedy for this reason. See Cohen, *Thinking of Others*, 48.

49. See Frankfurt, ‘Identification and Wholeheartedness,’ in *The Importance of What We Care About*, 159–76.

50. Peirce, ‘The Fixation of Belief,’ in *The Essential Peirce*, 1.114.

51. One Victorian commentator produced an ambiguous commendation: ‘The slightest novels are a blessing to those in distress, not chloroform itself a greater.’ See ‘The Morality of the Profession of Letters,’ reprinted in Stevenson, *Essays in the Art of Writing*, 69.

52. Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, 6.

the novel's 'as ifs'—as if events had a narrative aspect, as if someone were at hand to narrate, as if human beings are characters, as if these creatures think in sentences, as if we have intimate access to these sentence-like thoughts. The tall tales get even taller when they use a determinate plot. 'Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning,' Eliot announced at the start of one of her last beginnings.⁵³ The same might be said about our sense of an ending. Though philosophers have queried the hallowed status that has been given to narrative in recent decades, many still insist that our 'lives are somehow only comprehensible through a narrative explanatory structure.'⁵⁴ Novels explain reality partly by simplifying it, trimming out its complexity to reveal some pattern.⁵⁵ Woolf felt that they falsified life, but they also make sense of it through their useful falsehoods.⁵⁶ We see through them in a double sense.

But even enthusiasts of the novel might feel that they lack the cognitive dignity to be false. This is because fiction in general has often been regarded as nonreferential and nonassertoric. Defenders of the nonassertoric theory admit that novels *do* seem to assert things, say, about the past being a foreign country or about all happy families being alike, but they contend that these are just pretend-assertions or pseudo-statements.⁵⁷ However, this makes fiction pretend too much and rests on an over-rigorous conception of the really real statement. As Kendall Walton noted, there are different ways of asserting—declaring something to be the case in a lecture, raising a flag, honking a horn, wearing

53. Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 3.

54. Goldie, *The Mess Inside*, 1. See also Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*. For scepticism about the centrality of narrative to our lives, see Galen Strawson, 'Against Narrativity.' On both the value and limits of understanding ourselves in narrative terms, see Hutto, *Narrative and Understanding Persons*.

55. As James put it in a letter to Robert Louis Stevenson in 1884: 'All art is a simplification.' See James, *A Life in Letters*, 167; James was essentially agreeing with Stevenson's own view that novelists necessarily simplified. See Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance.'

56. As she put it in 1915: 'Its a bad habit writing novels—it falsifies life, I think.' Woolf, *Diary*, 1.28. Rudd, nonetheless, maintains that we can tell shapely stories about life 'without necessarily falsifying it.' Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 182.

57. Searle, *Expression and Meaning*.

a particular kind of rose—and there is no good reason to think that literature is incapable of making statements, however indeterminate or indirect.⁵⁸ Fictions like *Animal Farm* owe their being to such confidence, though presumably part of the power of this book derives from its pretence to assert nothing about any specific historical world.⁵⁹ Some novels could pretend a little harder not to assert and are spoiled by their need to tell us things. Fortunately, novels do more than describe or make statements—they express, solicit, play, and fool about, often leaving the paler game of factual description to others. As we are bluntly told in *Daniel Deronda*: ‘Attempts at description are stupid.’⁶⁰

Novels clearly convene experiences as much as they enlist descriptions, aspiring to a kind of experiential knowledge that is different from forms of ‘knowing that.’ They aim, we might say, for a ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ over and above mere ‘knowledge by description.’⁶¹ This is a kind of knowledge that normally attends the mere having of an experience—for instance, the knowledge of eating chocolate ice cream that comes with eating chocolate ice cream.⁶² We can easily doubt, of course, that fictions acquaint us with anything in this direct sense. Indeed, we may query the very notion of ‘knowledge by acquaintance,’ regarding it as yet another myth of the given.⁶³ If the concept is little more than a fiction of knowledge, it nonetheless underscores the distinctiveness of novelistic thinking. Literary fiction repeatedly strives to

58. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 78.

59. *Animal Farm* embodies a power that Catherine Gallagher attributes to all fiction—‘a nonreferentiality that could be seen as a greater referentiality.’ See Gallagher, ‘The Rise of Fictionality,’ in *The Novel*, 342.

60. Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 91.

61. See Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, 414; Zhang, *Strange Likeness*, 146–53. Collingwood makes a related distinction between ‘expression’ and ‘description.’ See Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, 105–24.

62. As William James explained, ‘I know the color blue when I see it, and the flavor of a pear when I taste it’—to know these things is indistinguishable from experiencing them. James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1.217.

63. According to Monroe Beardsley, for instance, ‘Acquaintance . . . does not become knowledge in the strict sense until the data are combined and connected by reasoning.’ Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 383. I treat Wittgenstein’s doubts about this kind of knowledge in chap. 7.

understand what it's like *to be* an 'x' or what it's like *to be* in situation 'y'.⁶⁴ One of its foundational 'as ifs' is the attempt to know from the inside—to summon up the what's-it-likeness of certain tastes, moods or emotions through the voodoo of words.⁶⁵ Again, this is not a creditable epistemic task for some—arguably, it invests knowledge with mystical objectives, a search for the holy qualia of consciousness or some inwardness which can't in principle be known⁶⁶—but an investment in the inner-thisness of beings, I would argue, remains one of fiction's key regulative ideals and is one of the reasons why it exceeds (for better or worse) philosophical or propositional forms of knowledge.⁶⁷

The difficulty of capturing this inner-thisness is acknowledged by the analogical way the epistemic quest is conceived: 'What's it *like*?'⁶⁸ The search for likeness concedes in advance to the as-if-ness or near-miss quality of descriptions in pursuit of experience. 'It seemed as if an electric stream went through Dorothea, thrilling her from despair into expectation': This gives us some sense of another person, but the narrator and even Dorothea struggle to identify fully what's it like to be Dorothea.⁶⁹ Conrad's Marlow is deeply sceptical of ever being able to recover these inner states even for their erstwhile experiencer ('No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of

64. 'Facts about what it is like to be an X,' Nagel admits, 'are very peculiar, so peculiar that some may be inclined to doubt their reality, or the significance of claims about them.' But he mounts a famous defence of these facts nonetheless. See Nagel, 'What's It Like to Be a Bat?' My position on literature's commitment to what's-it-like states is similar to the one adopted by Catherine Wilson in 'Literature and Knowledge.' See also Day, *Novel Sensations*.

65. Day rightly notes that the literary search for these inner states intensifies under modernism. See Day, *Novel Sensations*.

66. On why this desire for knowledge from inside is usually misplaced, see Hacker, 'Is There Anything It Is like to Be a Bat?' See also Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*.

67. Of course, there are exceptions that confirm the rule. Take, for instance, Wyndham Lewis's 'externalist' method and his insistence that 'good art must have no inside.' See Lewis, *Tarr*, 267.

68. Hence the centrality of metaphor to fictive experience. On this see Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, 64–65, where he argues that metaphors attempt to acquaint and not just describe.

69. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 35.

one's existence').⁷⁰ Novels, nonetheless, continue to bend language into new shapes to create what's-it-like feelings—what it's like to be Marlow or Mrs. Dalloway, what it's like to murder someone or to have an affair. Thomas Nagel thinks this curiosity has its limits—we can't quite fathom what it's like to be a bat—though the characters of some novels have found Nagel too defeatist on this point.⁷¹

One may well wonder whether inwardness is invented or represented through novels, but throughout the book I consider the various arguments that are often made to defend this fictional thinking: the way it can condition a respect for persons by giving us a sense of their complexity and distinctiveness; the way we might extend our own minds by imagining the lives of others and so forth.⁷² Indeed, the great 'as if' of free indirect discourse—as if we live within a character's head, though we abide in the third person—is arguably a cognitive and moral achievement.⁷³ It remains an achievement despite and because it is an idealisation, giving us access to a mind that its ostensible owner might never seem to possess.⁷⁴

Novels, however, do not just lean into characters, they also lean out and capture experience through a wider lens. One of the most famous of these perspectival shifts occurs in the transition between the first and second sections of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Figures who had loomed so large in the inward-leaning first section are despatched in a series of cold parentheses in the second, more distanced account of human affairs. Life lived from the inside, the novel intimates, is an important business,

70. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 30.

71. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 168–69. Our lack of epistemic access to bats is challenged by Coetzee's protagonist in *Elizabeth Costello*, 75–80.

72. According to Iris Murdoch, novels embody the principle of tolerance and respect for the sovereignty of individuals. Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, 472. On the novel as a school for sympathy or a form of attunement to others, see chap. 3.

73. On its epistemic and ethical significance, see Cohn, *Transparent Minds*.

74. For D. A. Miller this is an 'impossible identification,' for it affords the reader 'at one and the same time the experience of a character's inner life as she herself lives it, and the same experience of an inner life as she never could.' See Miller, *Jane Austen*, 61. For a recent attempt to present this free indirectness as a foundational feature of the novelistic, see Bewes, *Free Indirect*.

but watched from without—or from some notional point of view of the cosmos—this conceit can seem absurd.⁷⁵ Novels repeatedly oscillate between these immanent and transcendent perspectives—or what Lukács called their ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ poles.⁷⁶ From an immersive inwardness we move to a very different ‘as if’—a fictive standpoint in which the world is viewed from nowhere within it. The aim here may be to arrive at a *total* or, indeed, perspectiveless perspective—yielding, in Woolf’s words, a ‘world seen without a self’ or without the usual limitations of an empirical seer.⁷⁷ This may be a mere fiction of omniscience—incompletely realised, say, by the narrative voice in a novel or occurring in the gaps between characters and awaiting completion by the reader. But the friction between the subjective and objective ‘as if’ is a rich source of irony, making values, commitments, and attachments flicker in and out of life.⁷⁸

In the chapters that follow, I treat the novel as a fundamentally ironic structure—a source of double consciousness of various kinds.⁷⁹ This is partly a product of the doubleness that I’ve suggested all readers bring to all fictional experience, the way we treat a thing as true while knowing that it isn’t.⁸⁰ But it is also a function of the novel’s perspectival character. This perspectivism is not an invitation to conceive of everything as relative or subjective.⁸¹ The belief that we see from a perspective, I argue, is entirely compatible with a strong commitment to objectivity in practical and theoretical life. One reason why we read is to expose ourselves to different and rival outlooks—arguably in the name of a

75. I draw here on Nagel’s ideas of the absurd in *Mortal Questions*, 11–23.

76. See Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*.

77. This is the world ‘seen without a self.’ Woolf, *The Waves*, 221.

78. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 75–76, 84.

79. The ironic aspect of not only the novel but literature in general has long been emphasised. As Northrop Frye proposed, ‘The literary structure is always ironic because “what it says” is always different to “what it means.”’ Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, 81. See also Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*.

80. As Newsom put it: ‘The essence of entertaining fictions is to inhabit a dual standpoint while denying that there is more than one frame at all.’ See Newsom, *A Likely Story*, 103.

81. Here I am indebted to Simon Blackburn’s essay ‘Perspectives, Fictions, Errors, Play.’

greater objectivity.⁸² Yet, as I show, novels also force us to experience the painful gap between perspectives—not just the rifts between characters but the chasms within character, the fractiousness of any one person's vision of anything. The disjunctions lend themselves to different kinds of description—the distance between the personal and impersonal, immanent and transcendent, engaged and disengaged viewpoints—but they have long shaped the house of fiction, not least because they structure the palace of thought itself.⁸³

When we think 'as if' through fiction, of course, it can feel as if we have overcome the limits of thought or as if the chasms between perspectives have been finally bridged. So, we get the impression that we can know another from the inside, allowing self and other, or first-person and third-person knowledge, to merge in the fictional 'as if.' David Copperfield feels he *is* Tom Jones when he reads Fielding and maybe we feel like David when we read David.⁸⁴ Novels allow us to escape into other lives, but we also discover that those fictional lives are characterised by many of the epistemic constraints that we endure in our own. The difficulty of aligning a personal and impersonal perspective is writ large in the novel—shaping its characters' experiences and the rudiments of its form—and it informs other kinds of duality. 'I'm not an observer. I'm a hater,' somebody says in *The Awkward Age*.⁸⁵ The contrast is starkly drawn, but it shows how difficult it is to be an impartial spectator and a committed agent at one and the same time (though again readers are often tantalised by the fantasy of being both). We are both things and persons, yet, as Lewis noted, it is hard to subscribe to both of these thoughts at once.

This splitness reveals why fictional thinking is a source of ironic understanding—or a self-consciously incomplete form of knowledge. Fiction helps us to think more than we know, but it also shows that we know a lot less than we think. Or it reveals the incorrigible plurality of

82. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 92.

83. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 196–213; Peter Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment*, 10. See also McGinn, *The Subjective View*, 127.

84. Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 53.

85. James, *Novels, 1896–1899*, 733.

knowing. If we know from different perspectives, we have different perspectives on knowing—as lived acquaintance, say, or as description—and not all of these can be reconciled. Because fiction aspires to an experiential knowledge exceeding mere description, it can be notoriously difficult to describe what our fictional experiences say or what this lived knowledge knows.⁸⁶ One of the more plausible theories of the aesthetic is that it is a pleasurable form of unknowing, pre-knowing, or would-be knowing. As Kant suggested, the intellectual faculties are aroused by the attempt to identify what our aesthetic feelings might say, but these quests never reach the promised land of knowledge or at least conceptual knowledge—though they repeatedly urge us to seek this knowledge out.⁸⁷ So, we respond to a first-order set of as-if-experiences with a second-order ‘as if’—namely, criticism. In the criticism practiced in these chapters, I consider different ways that fictions curate complex events that can never be fully cashed in for propositional knowledge or final beliefs—though I repeatedly reach for propositions and philosophical discourse to account for what these experiences might mean.⁸⁸

The speculative character of these ‘as ifs’ may seem futile—arguably as cognitively fruitless as fiction itself. But in the chapters that follow I intend to tease out the intellectual and moral value of fictional thinking: its readiness to venture into what’s-it-like states; its openness to wonder mixed with a certain refusal to be fully taken in; its awareness of its own incompleteness as a form of knowledge, but also as a version of doubt, its deeply interested disinterestedness, its gift of double vision. Novels also turn their own doubleness on themselves and find themselves wanting. ‘As if there could possibly be true stories,’ scoffs Sartre’s Roquentin. Narrative rigs our explanations in advance and predetermines

86. For the sense that the inner is a ‘delusion’ and that attempts to know it violate the basic grammar of knowing, see Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, 2.84.

87. See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Collingwood would present art as a ‘question which expects no answer.’ Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, 79.

88. So, while I accept the broad sweep of Lamarque and Olsen’s critique of the ‘propositional theory of literature,’ I also think it is overstated, overlooking the way literature both makes statements and solicits statements, while triggering useful wonder about their truth. Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*. For a critique of Lamarque and Olsen, see Rowe, ‘Lamarque and Olsen on Literature and Truth.’

the meaning of actions through the fatal teleology of plot. As Roquentin puts it: ‘You appear to begin at the beginning . . . And in fact you have begun at the end.’⁸⁹ Novels, however, are not an endless series of Crentans, toothlessly declaring they’re false. Their doubts about themselves are also doubts about the world and the fundamental concepts we bring to it—character, action, intention, agency, and value. As we shall see, suspicions about these properties in a novel can easily make us suspect the moral intelligibility of experience as such.

Moral Irony

‘The good ended happily, and the bad ended unhappily. That is what Fiction means.’⁹⁰ Wilde liked to expose the moral wish-fulfilment that drives much of our fiction-making, and many novelists have followed suit with their own disillusioning tales. Nonetheless, critical discussion of the novel’s powers can still breed wishfulness and metafiction. The tales we tell about its moral value, for instance, are sometimes too good to be true and overlook the downsides of its many virtues. So, while we can easily emphasise the novel’s modal force—its ability to make us feel as if ‘we have lived another life’—this itself is not an unmixed good.⁹¹ We can emerge from these counterfactual worlds with a rich sense of possibility and even an enhanced feeling of freedom.⁹² However, the what ifs of fiction also alert us to the frightening contingency of what is. Novels extend our sense of the possible—allowing us to experience this state as not quite actual and yet as something more than the wholly unreal—but visits to these elsewhere worlds can also distract us from our freedom.⁹³ This is the

89. Sartre, *Nausea*, 62.

90. Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest in Complete Works*, 376.

91. James, *Literary Criticism*, 2.242. Miller makes the nice point that in reading we also perform a commitment to being ourselves—remaining on the sofa independent of the narrative. See Miller, *On Not Being Someone Else*, 55.

92. Mandel, Hilton, and Catellani, *The Psychology of Counterfactual Thinking*. On fiction as emancipation, see Berman, *Fiction Sets You Free*.

93. This is to draw on James’s sense of the possible in its fullest sense. James, *Pragmatism*, 88. According to Cora Diamond, fiction allows us to approach the world as a space of ‘wonderful possibilities’—a claim I return to in the epilogue. See Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 313.

romantic's mistake, in Hegel's eyes—someone who chooses to live in would-be, could-be or might-be worlds, never in the finite or actual world.⁹⁴ Freedom would appear to require proper exercise—the actual practice of deeds, not just the cultivation of options—if it is to stay in shape.⁹⁵ A recurrent fear of novels—and one often voiced within them—is that they are a bad distraction from the real business of doing and turn us into addicted spectators instead of committed agents.⁹⁶

By considering the moral hazards as much as the benefits of fiction's 'as ifs,' I hope to make a contribution to what is broadly known as 'ethical criticism.' The phrase can sound both tautological and oxymoronic. Many have found the method too foresworn, instrumentalising, or beside the point when it comes to art. We can easily maintain, on the other hand, that criticism is always 'ethical' and is as old as reading itself.⁹⁷ However, the more circumscribed and philosophically self-conscious version that I have in mind came to life in the late 1980s and 1990s⁹⁸ and has thrived ever since—despite and because of the various waves of criticism it has drawn.⁹⁹ In recent years, the approach has met with some resistance even by those who concede to the practical or didactic value of art, with efforts to differentiate an aesthetic education from a

94. See, in particular, Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 37–39.

95. As William James baldly noted, every deed involves the 'murder' of possibilities. See James, 'On Some Hegelisms,' in *The Will to Believe*, 200. On the necessary 'murder' of potential selves, see 'Great Men and Their Environment,' in *The Will to Believe*, 171.

96. James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1.129.

97. As we shall see in the chapter on James, the defence of art's independence from a marauding moralism has long roots. Many of these moves were rehearsed by Richard Posner over a hundred years later. See Posner, 'Against Ethical Criticism' and 'Against Ethical Criticism: Part 2.'

98. For histories of this 'ethical turn,' see Davis and Womack, *Mapping the Ethical Turn*; Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz, *The Turn to Ethics*; Altes, 'Ethical Turn,' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*; Murphy, "Let me look again."

99. Recent works exemplify the good health and methodological diversity of the tradition. Jesse Rosenthal looks at the literary significance of moral sense theory in *Good Form*, while Matthew Sussman emphasises the virtues of virtue ethics in *Stylistic Virtue and Victorian Fiction*. Elsewhere Dorothy Hale has readvertised the ethical virtues of narrative in *The Novel and the New Ethics*, though the novelty of such ethics might well be queried at this point in the story.

moral one when it comes to the study of literature.¹⁰⁰ I try to have it both ways by offering a ‘critique’ of ethical criticism in the old sense of that term, providing an account of both its powers and its limitations.¹⁰¹

Ethical criticism has repeatedly shown how literature can join hands with philosophy to produce a sophisticated form of reflection on the good life. The two disciplines have proved complementary, precisely because of their differences. If literature strives to recover what’s-it-like feelings, philosophy helps to clean up and organise the intuitions that are activated by these encounters.¹⁰² A novel, in turn, can stress-test our more systematic theories and expose the limits of all abstract theorising.¹⁰³ ‘Dense fictions,’ as Bernard Williams called them, obviate the situational complexity of ethical deliberation and decision-making, the difficulty of applying and interpreting rules in specific settings.¹⁰⁴ They may even emphasise the ultimate irreducibility of moral life to rules. The temporal dimension of novels, moreover, reveals the trickiness—and often the unwisdom—of arriving at any principles that would see us through an entire life. Finally, the identifications and allegiances we often strike with characters—as we age, endure, and feel alongside them—can make us question the nature, possibility and value of impartial judgement. Fiction, then, can make us think more sensitively about ethics, but this subtlety is belied by too much boosterism about its

100. See Clune, *A Defense of Judgment*, 186. For a sophisticated sense of the moral elements and limits of aesthetic experience, see Bromwich, ‘How Moral Is Taste?’ in *Skeptical Music*.

101. By old sense I mean Kantian sense—as opposed to the kind of ‘critique’ that is caricatured by Rita Felski in *The Limits of Critique*.

102. Daniel Dennett has also emphasised the importance of ‘intuition pumps’ within philosophy. Dennett, *Intuition Pumps*.

103. On the limits of our ethical theories and the ways literature attunes us to their inadequacies see, in particular, Diamond, ‘Losing Your Concepts.’ See also Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 291–307, 367–81. For a broader discussion of the limits of moral theory in relation to literature, see Härmäläinen, *Literature and Moral Theory*.

104. Eliot put this particularism best: ‘Moral judgements must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot.’ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 498.

powers. Indeed, the moral case for literature has repeatedly been overstated in ways that do violence to a range of values, even perhaps to moral ones.¹⁰⁵ I remain convinced, nonetheless, that a reflective ethical criticism—one that attunes us to the complexity and weirdness of moral experience—remains crucially important in what can feel like crudely moralistic times. The historical conditions that call for a reappraisal of moral criticism are examined at the end of the book.

At this point I would merely suggest that any plausible criticism needs to acknowledge two kinds of limit. The first and rather obvious constraint is that morality does not exhaust normativity. ‘Literature,’ as Iris Murdoch noted, ‘is soaked in the moral,’ but it is also steeped in a wider language of import.¹⁰⁶ Our fictions house a range of goods—esthetic, cognitive, political, and moral. Some of these values are potentially mixed (and the various blends will be studied throughout), but they can also stand apart from each other and make very different calls on our respect and attention. The object of the ‘good life’ may be to integrate our interests and attachments as much as possible, a harmonisation that may require us to exceed narrow conceptions of the moral in the name of a more expansive kind of ‘ethics’—and this is a kind of breadth that I consider and endorse throughout the book.¹⁰⁷ Yet unless things are made vanishingly broad, clashes between ethical commitments and other values will not go away and I shall explore a range of these conflicts in the chapters that follow. A second constraint on ethical

105. In Kant, for instance, the overriding of art’s independence in the name of morality risks undermining the very freedom that allows art to function as a ‘symbol of the good.’ See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 225. I take this point up again in the epilogue.

106. Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, 254.

107. The pathway for such an expansion was set out by Bernard Williams in the 1980s, though Williams also suggested that this was merely a turn towards earlier habits of thinking about a decent life after the bad rigours of modern forms of moralising—its attachment to strict ‘oughts’ and universal prescriptions, its relentlessly other-regarding sense of virtuous action, its tendency to identify goodness with impartiality and so forth. Williams spoke up for something less pure and more plural, an approach that acknowledged the legitimacy of self-care and self-culture, values that are expressive of who we are as agents within a particular time and location in the world, as well as a range of lowercase virtues—goods that did not need to be converted into strict obligations for their value to be seen. See Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

criticism derives from the limits of moral thinking itself. This is not just the way our moral values and practices fail to internally cohere or to deliver final and definitive knowledge. It is also a function of the practical ironies of moral thought itself—the reflection that moral reflection may not always be very good for us.

‘Nothing humanely great,’ Conrad insisted, ‘has come from reflection.’¹⁰⁸ This may be a self-indicting thought, but it is staged throughout his novels and the modern novel as a whole. The disease of self-consciousness is one of the novel’s great themes and it might seem to resist in advance the Socratic presuppositions of much ethical criticism: the strong confidence that a reflective life is a good one.¹⁰⁹ Reflection may make us human, but it can also transform us into depraved animals: alienated from our natural intuitions and often no closer to the good.¹¹⁰ Its moral hazards were emphasised by Bernard Williams: ‘*Reflection can destroy knowledge.*’¹¹¹ Williams overstated the case, but it is clear that reflection can erode confidence and leave us feeling lost in moral space. Faced with the impenetrable darkness of the world on the Congo River, Marlow intimates that the best course of action is to stop thinking and to attend to the engine. As he makes clear in *Chance*, ‘to be busy with material affairs is the best preservative against reflection,’ adding to this the mordant joke that a man contemplating suicide finds some sort of relief in the practical act of preparing the razor.¹¹² It is ultimately unclear what we should *do* with these thoughts. Should they generate more thought or less? And how should we appraise novel-reading itself: Is it a form of distraction from the razor, or an extended education in our need for one?

108. Conrad, *A Personal Record*, 11.

109. For a defence of this Socratic outlook and a critique of what she identifies as the Tolstoyan view—namely, that we should stay away from ‘fundamental questions’—see Callard, *Open Socrates*. Callard notes fiction’s ability to raise fundamental questions and its intrinsic limitations when it comes to answering them.

110. Rousseau, *The Discourses*, 138.

111. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 148. The italics are in the original.

112. Conrad, *Chance*, 253.

If books are machines to think with, as I. A. Richards proposed, they can sometimes make us think too much.¹¹³ The point, of course, is easily exaggerated. Virginia Woolf noted her capacity to read automatically, ‘very much like a cow chewing cud.’¹¹⁴ We often read to be absorbed—not necessarily to think—and yet novels can absorb us into compulsive forms of thinking.¹¹⁵ In *The Sacred Fount*, for instance, Henry James seemed to parody the kind of obsessive inquiry that his own novels practiced and were liable to bring about. It is as if the narrator has taken James’s advice too seriously—‘to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern’—and the process seems to drive him mad (at the end of the novel the reader, too, might need an ambulance).¹¹⁶ He is fatally prone to the same over-seeing that Gilbert Osmond detected in Madame Merle: ‘You always see too much in everything; you overdo it; you lose sight of the real.’¹¹⁷ We may crave the simple real, but novels often fail to secure its location. This is partly because of the ironies of their form—a perspectivism in which ‘everything is seen as many-sided’—and the kinds of doubleness they force us to endure.¹¹⁸

Novels, therefore, can provoke second thoughts about thought itself and can expose and arrest the vulnerable optimism of assuming that our next thought will be a better one. We may have no choice but to think on, but the activity doesn’t necessarily end in a reflective equilibrium in which the poison finally acts as cure.¹¹⁹ If novels disturb our confidence in the reflective life—while also forcing us to practice it—they equally test a Socratic faith in the unity of knowledge and virtue. This

113. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, vii. Some suggest that the fault lies not with books but with their oversophisticated readers. On the supposed dangers of reading too deeply, see Best and Marcus, ‘Surface Reading’; Felski, *The Limits of Critique*; Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary*, 175–95.

114. Woolf, *Diary*, 3, 103.

115. On the ways in which fiction absorbs us, see Ong, *The Art of Being*, 11, 58, 74, 158–62.

116. James, *Literary Criticism*, 1, 53.

117. James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, 517.

118. Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 75.

119. What Nussbaum calls ‘perceptive equilibrium’ is, in my view, equally elusive. Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 168.

presumption might seem to underpin some of the sunnier versions of ethical criticism, feeding the belief that novel-reading is doubly improving, that moral and epistemic progress are co-extensive, that good books make us good, if only by helping us to determine what goodness is.¹²⁰ One reason I begin with the Victorian novel is that it often lacks this confidence about itself or must make the case for its own moral value in the face of a more suspicious set of audiences.¹²¹ These novels frequently confirm that Aristotle was right: that knowledge of the good is of supreme importance to our lives, that in the absence of such knowledge we are like archers without any clear sense of our target.¹²² But novels can also make us doubt that there is any such target or that we can speak of *the* good as something unified, objective, or independent of the archer.¹²³ Henry and William James often suggest that the target is produced by the act of aiming: that the good or the meaningful is always in the process of being invented rather than found—and that novels might even partake in this moral creativity.

The thought that the good is a fiction need not be deflationary or devaluing and can inspire new experiments in living. Nor does it preclude knowledge or agreement about the many goods we have made up. Clearly, some people doubt a fiction's ability to know anything or to allow us to agree on anything, but this is not the approach I take here.¹²⁴ Our stories can at least supply us with a lived acquaintance with the practical and theoretical limits of knowing: the gap that appears between knowledge and virtue, or the knowledge that knowledge isn't

120. The connection between intellectual and moral virtue is extremely strong in Nussbaum's appraisal of novels. These artworks are 'moral achievements'—acts of perception that perform and train up our capacities 'to see and feel and judge . . . to miss less, to be responsible to more.' Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 164. Novels are not only morally educating, they are a key 'vehicle of citizenship.' Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 94.

121. As one of the chief devotees of the novel's moral powers concedes: 'We are so accustomed to the novel that we tend to forget how morally controversial a form it has been in the eyes of various sorts of religious and secular moralisms.' Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 184.

122. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.

123. On these points see Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, 88–137.

124. As Kant argued, an aesthetic judgement 'does not belong to the faculty of cognition at all.' Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 26.

always in our interests. The value of even this wisdom may be doubted though it may also indicate that we are inevitably drawn to knowledge as a value in-and-for-itself (a position I assume throughout this book). It simultaneously demonstrates that valuing is a plural affair and that not all goods can be reduced to the *morally* good or practically beneficial. Our fictions often record our devotion to truth even if it leads to heart-ache and moral nausea. Kafka's sadomasochistic sense of reading may not be for everyone: Books need not wound or stab us or affect us like a disaster.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, ethical criticism can deliver too safe an account of our reading encounters, making them fit with a preexisting moral framework or moral theory.¹²⁶ Or it subordinates the novel to an all too simple tale of self-improvement, often overlooking the heterogeneity of the better.¹²⁷ As we shall see, our fictions repeatedly disturb our basic intuitions about what is true or right or valuable and can leave us more confused than improved, or at least deeply uncertain about what improvement would look like. Some, of course, might embrace the paradox and deem this an improvement on the kind of certainty they set out with.

Novels clearly depend on a spirit of openness or what is sometimes talked up as a suspension of disbelief, but, as I show throughout the book, they also possess a sceptical energy that is in part a product of their form. This propensity for doubt is celebrated in James's 'The Middle Years' and generates a strange sense of commitment ('Our doubt is our passion, and our passion is our task').¹²⁸ One may well wonder, of course, how far doubt can or ought to go (as we've often been told: 'If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes

125. Franz Kafka to Oskar Pollak, letter, 27 January 1904, in *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, 16.

126. In Nussbaum, for instance, novels repeatedly threaten to make Aristotelians of us all, so we learn that on essential ethical issues 'James's view is the Aristotelian view.' Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 201.

127. Some worry that a reality-cancelling fantasy of improvement has 'infected' the novel itself. See Cusk, *Outline*, 99.

128. James, *Collected Stories*, 2.123.

certainty').¹²⁹ If there are epistemic and psychological limits to how much doubting we can reasonably do—either in novels or outside of them—there may also be *moral* limits to our cultivation of doubt. I take seriously Raymond Gaita's contention that scepticism in ethics is either a frivolous or corrupt intellectual practice, for it questions what no one *really* doubts or it doubts what one really shouldn't.¹³⁰ There is much to be said for this position and it captures the kind of moral queasiness many of us are liable to feel when exposed to the novels of Wyndham Lewis—where rape is smilingly rendered as a cosmic jest and human beings are less moral agents than talkative machines.

Lewis's nihilistic comedies often bring us to the threshold of the palatable—to that limit-point noted by Hume—where moral discomfort or disapproval make it impossible to experience aesthetic pleasure.¹³¹ Or, if we continue to experience pleasure, we might begin to worry about ourselves. But Lewis also shows how difficult it is for scepticism in ethics to be fully maintained. Nihilism, in Lewis, after all, is strikingly incomplete, at least on the question of freedom. He repeatedly sets out to doubt this fundamental value, but, as we shall see, he also struggles to sustain such scepticism.¹³² His heroes often end up in a bad place: neither credulous enough to embrace their freedom nor sceptical enough to disavow it. They are thus locked into a toxic form of irony and approach all life with a sneer. If they make occasional raids into the land of sincere conviction and moral action, they often remain deeply compromised as agents.

Lewis helps us to appreciate that not all forms of irony are benign and that if we are to survive as moral agents, irony will have to practice some doubleness about itself. But it is important to stress that we do not necessarily embark on doubt or irony for corrupt or frivolous reasons.¹³³

129. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 18.

130. Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 314.

131. See Hume, 'On the Standard of Taste.'

132. As Peter Strawson noted, humans lack the capacity to fully disbelieve in their freedom, even if they lack sufficient grounds to believe it. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment*, 1–28.

133. On irony as a form of 'committed reflection,' see Lear, *A Case for Irony*. Lear draws this conviction from Kierkegaard or one of his pseudonyms: 'From the fact that irony is present it

Our questions may stem from a desire for wholeheartedness or a justified life—even though both goals are liable to retreat as we advance towards them. It may be a mistake, of course, to seek justifications for everything or to demand grounds where none are to be found—no least because the moral norms we set out to scrutinise might seem foundational to all proper scrutiny itself. But the mistake is not necessarily a moral error, nor is all scepticism about ethics embarked on in bad faith. As I argue throughout this book, the novel is very good at recovering the phenomenology of those moments where the world—and not just our will—makes us doubt the intelligibility and viability of our moral schemes.¹³⁴ Moreover, the wonder is frequently motivated by moral commitment, not by intellectual gamesmanship. Dorothea Brooke is no slouch on moral matters, but, as we shall see, her devotion to the good life frequently leads to bewilderment and muddle.

Bewilderment may be partly the point.¹³⁵ As George Eliot put it to Charles Bray in 1859: ‘I only wish I could write something that would contribute to heighten men’s reverence before the secrets of each other’s souls, that there might be less assumption of entire knowingness.’¹³⁶ Though she was sometimes regarded as a woman of ‘no doubts’,¹³⁷ Eliot brought her dislike of such knowingness remarkably far, even querying the basic ‘line between the virtuous and the vicious.’ That line, she argued, was not a safeguard to morality but was, in fact, an ‘immoral fiction.’¹³⁸ Fiction was too true to be good in any simple sense for Eliot because goodness was a blurry and complex matter. Of course, it is one

does not follow that earnestness is excluded.’ Climacus [Kierkegaard], *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, 277n.

134. According to Diamond, literature can sensitise us to those moments where we feel ‘shouldered out’ from our moral schemes. Diamond, ‘The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,’ 58.

135. As James put it in his preface to *The Princess Casamassima*: ‘If we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell.’ James, *Literary Criticism*, 2.1090. On these issues, see Armstrong, *The Challenge of Bewilderment*.

136. Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, 3.163.

137. James, *Literary Criticism*, 1.1009.

138. Eliot, *Essays*, 147. On moral agency and decision-making in the face of uncertainty, see Williams, *The Art of Uncertainty*, chap. 1.

thing to present vagueness or complexity as a moral fact; it is another to doubt moral fact altogether. I explore these different shades of doubt in the chapters ahead. We may continue to doubt the value of doubt, or we may feel that 'wonder-sickness' should not be part of these adventures in wonder.¹³⁹ The novel's irony may not be for everyone, but in a world of often militant certainty, there may be some virtue to these kinds of unknowingness. This, at least, is one of the book's final beliefs or animating fictions.

A theory of fiction is also a theory of life, and no single book can do remote justice to either. The discussions that follow are incomplete studies, a series of night raids into vast topics. Though reflections ranging across a century of fiction may seem too widely dispersed, I am aware that the book covers a fairly restricted length of time in the life of the novel. It also remains rather provincial in its focus on European-based writers all working in English. While provincialism is an inevitable fact of mental and moral life—or so I argue at various points in this book—I am aware that I might have made my provinces bigger. The novels I have chosen are simply the books I have thought about and thought with for several years and I believe there are advantages to the fact that they are old friends to many others: Some background can be assumed as we home in on specific moral questions. A final practical note: I have kept the chapters reasonably discrete and free-standing so that they may be read on their own or skipped out. I'd like the book to inform, not impede, the proper task of living as if.

139. The condition of 'wonder-sickness' is diagnosed by James in 'The Sentiment of Rationality.' See James, *Writings 1878–1899*, 150.

INDEX

- absolute knowledge, 67, 69, 98
absorption in literature, 24, 264
Accidental Man, An (Murdoch), 222, 225
action in Lewis, 210
Adam Bede (Eliot), 31–32, 55, 80
Adorno, Theodor, 232, 261–63, 263n74, 264n80
adventure, 139–40, 253–55
aerial views in Eliot, 80–89
aesthetic experience in James, 114–17
aestheticism, 116
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (Carroll), 6–7
all-seeingness, 69, 98–99
altruism, 74
Ambassadors, The (James), 104, 119–22
American Scene, The (James), 110
Amis, Martin, 235
amour propre, 76–77, 93
Anarchical Fallacies (Bentham), 37
Animal Farm (Orwell), 13
Anscombe, G. E. M., 139
anti-individualism of Lewis, 194
Apes of God, The (Lewis), 191
art: function of, 256–60; in James, 114–16; in Murdoch, 218–22, 232; in Woolf, 8, 184–85
Art and Eros (Murdoch), 219–20
Art of Being Ruled, The (Lewis), 189, 194, 198, 215
as-if-ness, 4, 7–8, 11–19, 50
associations, imaginative, 58–59
‘Author of Beltraffio, The’ (James), 116
Awkward Age, The (James), 17, 101
Bagehot, Walter, 33, 45n53
Beardsley, Monroe C., 13n63
‘Beast in the Jungle, The’ (James), 107, 112–13
belief: in general, 6–7; in Lewis, 191; ordinariness of, 183, 184; will to believe, 110–13, 128
benevolent deceit, 123, 126–27, 131–32
Bentham, Jeremy, 35; *Anarchical Fallacies*, 37; *Chrestomathia*, 42–43; empiricism, 39–41; imagination of, 30, 37–38; mistrust of figurativeness, 46–47, 47n56; on moral hazards of fictions, 38–39; neutrality, 49; periphrastic method, 39–40; on pleasure, 44; on poetry, 43–44; taste of, 44–45; utilitarianism, 42–44
Berkeley, George, 169, 170n32, 173n38, 223
bewilderment, 28
Black Prince, The (Murdoch), 227, 231, 233, 239, 242–43, 245
blame game in Conrad, 150–55
Blast 1 (Lewis), 204–5
Blast 2 (Lewis), 189, 191–92, 204–5
Blasting and Bombadiering (Lewis), 193, 216
Bleak House (Dickens), 33, 38
Bourdieu, Pierre, 265
British empiricism, 164–65
Bruno's Dream (Murdoch), 227–28, 234, 241
Burrow, Colin, 236
‘Candleman's Spring-Mate’ (Lewis), 200
Carroll, Lewis, 6–7

- categorical imperative, 133
- causation in Conrad, 144–45
- Cavell, Stanley, 70n15, 99n63, 149n47, 183, 257n50
- Chance* (Conrad), 23, 143
- characterisation in Murdoch, 234–37
- Chesterton, G. K., 53
- Childermass, The* (Lewis), 192
- Chrestomathia* (Bentham), 42–43
- Christianity, 68–69
- circus, in Dickens' *Hard Times*, 45
- Clune, Michael, 260–61
- cognitive role of art, 256–58
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 11
- Collingwood, R. G., 8n34, 10n43, 13n61, 18n87, 248n6, 248n8
- Collini, Stefan, 254n36
- Comte, Auguste, 57n84
- conditional norm-following, 4
- Conrad, Joseph, 14–15, 23; and blame game, 150–55; *Chance*, 143; contagion of example in, 156–59; counterfactual thinking in, 138–39; on ethical view, 158; *Lord Jim*, 138–39, 143–46, 146–50, 150–55; metaphysics of chance in, 143–46; overview of luck in, 136–40; personal luck of, 140–43; varieties of luck in, 146–50; *Under Western Eyes*, 158
- conscience in Eliot, 81
- conscience of taste, 115–16, 120, 262
- contagion of example in Conrad, 156–59
- convictions: in James, 110–13; in Lewis, 191–92
- counterfactual thinking, 19, 136–59
- Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change* (Lewis), 201, 207–8
- culpability in Conrad, 150–55
- customs in Woolf, 166, 174–79
- da Vinci, Leonardo, 163
- Daisy Miller* (James), 118
- Daniel Deronda* (Eliot): descriptions in, 13; distance from emotions in, 71; images in, 57–58; objectivity in, 86–87; perspective in, 81–83; self-love in, 76–78; sympathy in, 96–97
- Darwall, Stephen, 92
- Darwin, Charles, 145
- Davidson, Donald, 48
- deception in James, 101–5; cage of deception, 130–35; fatal deceit, 123–30; good-enough life, 114–22; truth-seeking, 105–14
- decisionism in Lewis, 210–13
- Delectable Mountain, 81–82
- Dennett, Daniel, 8–9
- dense fictions, 21
- descriptions in novels, 13–14
- detachment: in Lewis, 190; in Murdoch, 241–42, 242n57
- Dewey, John, 255, 256, 257
- Diamond, Cora, 19n93, 21n103, 28n134, 138n12, 251n20, 253
- Dickens, Charles: *Bleak House*, 38; critique of utility principle, 43–44, 52–53; facts in, 41; fancy in, 42–53; fictionalism, 48–53; figurativeness, 46–49; figurativeness in, 46–49; *Hard Times*, 39, 41, 42–53; imagination of, 30, 32–34; on legal fictions, 38; *Little Dorrit*, 50–52, 54; *Our Mutual Friend*, 50–51, 53–54; periphrastic method in, 39; pleasure in, 44–46; pleasure in fiction of, 44–46; seeing-as, 53–56; self-reference in, 46; self-reference in fiction of, 46; taste of, 44–45, 45n53; uses of fancy, 42–53
- dictatorship in Schmitt, 211
- disenchantment, 60–61
- disinterestedness, 262–65
- divine power, imagination as, 31
- dogmatism, 184–86
- Dombey, Paul, 55
- double consciousness, 69–70, 89–98
- doubleness: in Eliot's fiction, 89–98; general discussion, 10–11, 16–18; in Lewis, 189–91

- doubts: and dogmatism, 184–86; general discussion, 6–7; in Hume, 166–73; limits of, 26–27; Peirce on, 11; and snobbery, 160–66; therapies for, 174–83; in Woolf, 160–86
- dove metaphor in James, 129–30
- efficient causality, 145
- egoism: in Eliot, 72–80; in Murdoch, 220–21
- Eliot, George: *Adam Bede*, 31–32, 55, 80; altruism in, 74; on beginnings, 12; conscience in, 81; descriptions in, 13; on Dickens' imagination, 32; distance from emotions in, 71; double consciousness in, 69–70; doubleness in, 90–91, 100; egoism in, 72–80; humiliation in, 87–89; images in, 57–58; imagination in, 56–57, 58; imagination of, 30–32, 32n9, 34–35; impossible vastnesses, 98–100; *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, 58–59, 63, 73, 80–81, 84; inner states in, 14; on knowingness, 28; *The Lifted Veil*, 73, 83, 93; love in, 61; metaphors in, 78–79; *The Mill on the Floss*, 21n104, 59–62, 79, 87, 99; narcissism in, 75–77; objectivity in, 80–89; perspective in, 81–83; perspectives in, 65–67, 69–71; projections in, 34–35; quasi-realism in, 63n96; on realism, 36; *Romola*, 58, 76, 89; *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 61, 75, 87; seeing double, 89–98; seeing-as, 55, 56–63; selfishness in, 72; self-love in, 76–78; *The Spanish Gypsy*, 89; sympathy in, 91–98; total vision of world, 68–69. See also *Daniel Deronda*; *Middlemarch*
- Eliot, T. S., 191
- empathy, 92
- empiricism, 39–41
- epistemic narcissists, 184
- ethical criticism: current debates about moralism, 250–51; disinterestedness in, 262–65; function of art, 256–60; general discussion, 20–26; and moral education, 260–61; moral risks, 254–56; Nussbaum, 1n1, 25n120, 253–54; resistance to offensive material, 249–50
- ethics in James, 118
- Existentialists and Mystics* (Murdoch), 217–18, 227, 229, 232–33, 235, 244
- external world, belief in, 169–71, 173
- externalist method of Lewis, 188–89, 199
- Fairly Honourable Defeat, A* (Murdoch), 226, 230
- faith as fact-constituting, 110–13, 128
- fancy in Dickens, 42–53
- fatal deceit, 123–30
- Felix Holt* (Eliot), 73
- Feuerbach, Ludwig, 31, 56, 69, 85, 86, 87
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 198
- fictionalism, 3–5, 48–53
- fictive attitude in Lewis, 192, 216
- fictive living, 8–9
- fictive thinking, 11–19
- Fields, James T., 33–34
- figurativeness, 46–49
- 'Figure in the Carpet, The' (James), 107
- Fire and the Sun, The* (Murdoch), 220
- first-person perspective: in Eliot, 71–72, 90–92; as ifs, 17; in James, 66; in Lewis, 189–90; in Murdoch, 236–38
- Flight from the Enchanter, The* (Murdoch), 230
- 'Franciscan Adventures' (Lewis), 193
- Frankfurt, Harry, 11, 54n70, 102n8
- freedom: in Kant, 203; in Lewis, 193–95, 198
- Frye, Northrop, 16n79
- functionalist method, 266
- Gaita, Raymond, 27
- Gauguin, Paul, 141
- God, perspective of, 67–68
- Golden Bowl, The* (James), 101, 104, 113, 114n40, 130–35
- good-enough life in James, 114–22

- Goodman, Nelson, 248, 257
 goodness, 25
 guilt in Conrad, 154–55, 159
- habits, 166, 174–79
Hard Times (Dickens): critique of utility
 principle, 43–44, 52–53; facts in, 41;
 fictionalism, 48–53; figurativeness in,
 46–49; periphrastic method in, 39;
 pleasure in, 44–46; self-reference
 in, 46; uses of fancy, 42–53
 Hare, R. M., 231, 235
Haunted House, The (Woolf), 162–63,
 177
Heart of Darkness (Conrad), 14–15
 hedonic paradox, 77–78
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 20, 69,
 70, 77, 86, 88, 89–90, 189, 193, 195, 203–5,
 259n60
Henry and Cato (Murdoch), 224, 225
Hitler Cult, The (Lewis), 194, 215
 Hume, David: dogmatism in, 184; doubts
 in, 165–71, 174–75; habits and customs
 in, 174–75; imagination in, 31; moral
 prejudices in, 252; morality in, 62;
 naturalism in, 174; projections in, 34;
 resistance to offensive material in,
 249–50; true scepticism in, 183n51
 humiliation in Eliot, 87
 humour in Lewis, 204–9
- illusion-making in Woolf, 179–81
 illusions, 5–6
 imagination: magical thinking, 31;
 projections, 34–35; seeing-as, 53–63;
 ubiquity of fiction, 37–42; uses of fancy,
 42–53
 imagistic thinking, 56–57
 impartial sympathy, 96
Impressions of Theophrastus Such
 (Eliot), 58–59, 63, 73, 80–81, 84
 inner-thiness of beings, 14
 instrumentalisation in James, 130–35
 inwardness: as ifs, 14–16; in Murdoch, 221,
 234–35, 238–43
 irony: in Lewis, 187–216; moral, 19–29;
 romantic, 204–6
- James, Henry, 3, 8, 139; aesthetic in, 114–17;
The Ambassadors, 104, 119–22; *The*
American Scene, 110; ‘The Author of
 Beltraffio’, 116; *The Awkward Age*, 17, 101;
 ‘The Beast in the Jungle’, 107, 112–13;
 bullshit, 102, 105, 107; cage of deception,
 130–35; *Daisy Miller*, 118; on Dickens’
 imagination, 32n9; on Eliot, 57n87,
 59n90; fatal deceit in, 123–30; *The*
Golden Bowl, 101, 104, 113, 114n40,
 130–35; good-enough life in, 114–22; on
 habits, 166n24; ‘The Liar’, 101–4;
Literary Criticism, 106; lying in, 101–5;
 ‘The Middle Years’, 26–27, 106; *The*
Portrait of a Lady, 24, 109, 116n48;
 resistance to categorical assertion,
 107–8; *The Sacred Fount*, 24; *The Spoils*
of Poynton, 116; *The Tragic Muse*, 116;
 truth-seeking in, 105–14; will to believe
 in, 110–13, 128; *The Wings of the Dove*,
 113, 123–30
 James, William, 13n62; on art as a moral
 educator, 115n44, 260; conviction in, 6;
 on habit, 166n24; on interest as a
 condition of truth, 80, 263; on the limits
 of rules, 118; on moral action, 259–60;
 moral judgement in, 117; moral styles,
 120; perspectives in, 66, 71; ‘the sadness
 of things’, 172n36; on Truth with a big ‘T’,
 105; truth-making in, 109–10
- Jameson, Fredric, 265
Jews: Are They Human? The (Lewis), 216
 justice in Conrad, 145–46, 159
- Kant, Immanuel, 22n105, 25n124; aesthetics,
 18, 107, 185, 219, 262, 264n81; categorical
 imperative, 133; disinterestedness in, 262;
 freedom in, 203; good will, 142–43; as ifs,

- 267; imagination in, 36; on lying, 123, 124, 133–34; on mind-dependent appearances, 79; moral theatre in, 4–5
- Keynes, J. M., 160n5
- knowledge: absolute, 67, 69, 98; by acquaintance, 13–14, 90, 91, 220; by description, 13–14, 90, 91, 220; first-versus third-person, 237–38; limits of knowing, 25–26; truth-seeking in James, 105–14
- language, imagining through, 57
- Leavis, F. R., 45
- Left Wings Over Europe* (Lewis), 210
- legal fictions, 38
- Lewes, G. H., 32–33, 35, 35n27, 56, 79
- Lewis, Wyndham: antiromanticism of, 193–201; *The Apes of God*, 191; *The Art of Being Ruled*, 189, 194, 198, 215; belief in, 191; *Blast 1*, 204–5; *Blast 2*, 189, 191, 192, 204–5; *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 193, 216; ‘Candleman’s Spring-Mate’, 200; *The Childermass*, 192; comedy in, 201–9; conviction in, 191–92; *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change*, 201, 207–8; detached perspective in, 190; externalist method of, 188–89, 199; fictive attitude in, 192; ‘Franciscan Adventures’, 193; freedom in, 210–14; *The Hitler Cult*, 194, 215; humour in, 206–9; on illusions, 6; *The Jews: Are They Human?* 216; *Left Wings Over Europe*, 210; liberty in, 193–95, 194–95, 198, 210–16; *Men Without Art*, 188–92, 194; moral discomfort in, 27; nature in, 195–96, 199–200; politics in, 215–16; romantic irony in, 204–7; root of comic in, 5; ‘A Soldier of Humour’, 205–6; surfaces in, 188–89; *Tarr*, 192, 194–201, 206–14; *Time and Western Man*, 188–89, 191; two-mindedness of, 189–91; *The Wild Body*, 193, 201–2
- ‘Liar, The’ (James), 101–4
- liberty in Lewis, 193–95, 198, 210–16
- Lifted Veil, The* (Eliot), 73, 83, 93
- Linton, Eliza Lynn, 77n32
- Little Dorrit* (Dickens), 50–52, 54
- living as if: fictive thinking, 11–19; moral irony, 19–29; role of fictiveness in life, 1–11
- Locke, John, 58, 65, 164, 168, 169
- Lord Jim* (Conrad): and blame game, 150–55; counterfactual thinking in, 138–39; metaphysics of chance in, 143–46; varieties of luck in, 146–50
- love: in Eliot, 61, 76–77; in Murdoch, 231–32, 233, 245; self-love, 74–78, 80
- luck in Conrad: blame game, 150–55; in Conrad’s life, 140–43; contagion of example, 156–59; metaphysics of chance, 143–46; overview of, 136–40; varieties of, 146–50
- Lukács, Georg, 16, 67, 220n10, 236
- lying in James: cage of deception, 130–35; fatal deceit, 123–30; general discussion, 101–5; good-enough life, 114–22; harm caused by, 130–35; truth-seeking, 105–14
- machine metaphors in Lewis, 200–201
- Mackin, Timothy, 162n7
- magical thinking, 31
- Mann, Thomas, 10n45, 223
- manners in Woolf, 161–62, 177–79, 184–85
- ‘Mark on the Wall, The’ (Woolf), 162–63, 177
- Men Without Art* (Lewis), 188–92, 194
- mental opium, 11–12
- metaphors: in Bentham, 46–47; in Dickens, 47–49; in Eliot’s fiction, 78–79; in Lewis, 200–201; in Woolf, 173, 179
- Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Murdoch), 217, 222, 228, 230, 232, 240, 244–45
- metaphysics of chance in Conrad, 143–46
- meta-symbolism in James, 130, 133
- ‘Middle Years, The’ (James), 26–27, 106

- Middlemarch* (Eliot): conscience in, 81;
 doubleness in, 90–91, 100; egoism in,
 76–77; humiliation in, 87–89; imagina-
 tion in, 56–57, 58; inner states in, 14; love
 in, 61; metaphors in, 78–79; objectivity
 in, 82; perspectives in, 65–67, 69–71;
 projections in, 34–35; selfishness in, 72;
 sympathy in, 92–95, 98
- Mill on the Floss*, *The* (Eliot), 21n104, 59–62,
 79, 87, 99
- Miller, D. A., 15n74, 256n45
- Moments of Being* (Woolf), 161
- Montaigne, Michel de, 176–77
- moral education, 260–61
- moral fictionalism, 3–5
- moral geometry, 49
- moral irony, 19–29, 76
- moral judgements, 4, 21n104, 117
- moral luck. *See* luck in Conrad
- moral personality, 150–53
- moral prejudices, 252
- moral realism, 251–52
- moral reflection, 23
- moral responsibility, 139–40, 142,
 158–59
- moral risks, 254–56
- moral styles, 120
- moral values, 62–63
- morality: and art, 262; fictiveness of, 3–6;
 good-enough life, 114–22; as-if ness in,
 4–5; in James, 114–22; in Murdoch, 217;
 in Williams, 118
- Morley, Henry, 42
- mountaintop view in Eliot, 80–89
- Mrs. Dalloway* (Woolf), 173, 175, 180–81
- Murdoch, Iris, 22; *An Accidental Man*, 222,
 225; *Art and Eros*, 219, 220; art in, 218–22,
 232; *The Black Prince*, 227, 231, 233, 239,
 242–45; *Bruno's Dream*, 227–28, 234,
 241; characterisation in, 234–37; on
 consciousness, 247–48; detached
 perspective in, 241–42; egoism in,
 220–21; *Existentialists and Mystics*,
 217–18, 227, 229, 232–35, 244; *A Fairly
 Honourable Defeat*, 226, 230; *The Fire and
 the Sun*, 220; first- versus third-person
 knowing in, 237–38; *The Flight from the
 Enchanter*, 230; *Henry and Cato*, 224,
 225; inwardness in, 221, 234–35, 238–43;
 love in, 231–33, 245; *Metaphysics as a
 Guide to Morals*, 217, 222, 228, 230, 232,
 240, 244–45; *Under the Net*, 223, 224n29,
 225, 227–29, 231, 235; *The Nice and the
 Good*, 223, 238; particularities in, 226–33;
The Philosopher's Pupil, 224–27;
 philosophy in, 218n6, 219, 222–26; *The
 Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, 229,
 238, 241–42, 244; *The Sandcastle*, 223;
The Sea, The Sea, 223, 234, 235, 239;
 self-knowledge in, 238, 240; *The Time
 of the Angels*, 224–26; *The Unicorn*,
 223, 229–30; *An Unofficial Rose*, 228;
 value in, 244–45; value of art in,
 218–22; *A Word Child*, 223, 227, 234
- Nagel, Thomas, 14n65, 15, 70n17, 137–38,
 140, 147, 148, 153
- narcissism: in Conrad, 150–51, 155; in Eliot,
 75–77; in Murdoch, 240
- narrative, 12, 18–19
- naturalism in Hume, 174
- nature in Lewis, 195–96, 199–200
- neutrality, 49
- Newman, John Henry, 260n62
- Newsom, Robert, 16n80
- Nice and the Good*, *The* (Murdoch),
 223, 238
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 3n14, 8n34, 52n82,
 64–65, 196, 208, 263n75
- Night and Day* (Woolf), 176
- nonassertoric theory, 12–13
- nonreferentiality, 12–13
- Novalis, 8n36, 158, 187
- Nussbaum, Martha, 1n1, 8n34, 24n119,
 25n120, 25n121, 26n126, 157, 253–54,
 259n56

- objectification in James, 134–35
- objectivity: in Eliot, 67, 80–89; in Murdoch, 220–22
- omniscience, 67–68
- Orlando* (Woolf), 6, 180–81
- Orwell, George, 13
- Our Mutual Friend* (Dickens), 50–51, 53–54
- pan-fictionalism, 9
- particularity in Murdoch, 226–33
- Peirce, Charles, 11
- perceptions in Woolf, 167–73
- periphrastic method, 39–40
- personal identity: in Hume, 170; in Woolf, 172
- perspectives in Eliot: general discussion, 64–66; impossible vastnesses, 98–100; perspectival gaps, 66–67; seeing double, 89–98; view from here, 72–80; views from mountain, 80–89
- perspectivism, 16–18, 24
- Philosopher's Pupil, The* (Murdoch), 224–27
- pier-glass metaphor in Eliot's *Middlemarch*, 78–79
- pleasure in fiction, 44–45
- poetry, 43–44
- political fictions, 38–39
- political romanticism, 195, 215–16
- Portrait of a Lady, The* (James), 24, 109, 116n48
- possibility, sense of, 19–20, 138–39, 208–9, 210
- projections, 34, 110
- pure fact, 48–53
- quasi-emotions, 2–3
- quasi-realism, 63n96
- real entities of Bentham, 39–41
- realism: Eliot's definition of, 36; goal of, 35–36; moral, 251–52; quasi-realism, 63n96; representational, 168–69; in Williams, 36n30; in Woolf, 172–73, 185
- reflection, moral hazards of, 23–24, 256
- remorse in Conrad, 150–55
- representational realism, 168–69
- Richards, I. A., 24, 191
- romance of action in Lewis, 210–14
- romantic irony in Lewis, 204–6
- romanticism in Lewis, 193–201
- Romola* (Eliot), 58, 76, 89
- Rorty, Amelie, 111n36
- Rosenbaum, S. P., 172n37
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 231n110, 76, 77, 195–96, 255
- Ruskin, John, 35n29, 36n31, 49, 263
- Russell, Bertrand, 1n3, 165, 166, 181n50, 184
- Sacred and Profane Love Machine, The* (Murdoch), 229, 238, 241–42, 244
- Sacred Fount, The* (James), 24
- safety, 254–55
- Sandcastle, The* (Murdoch), 223
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 18–19, 47–48
- Scenes of Clerical Life* (Eliot), 61, 75, 87
- scepticism, 6–7, 11, 26–27
- scepticism in Woolf: and dogmatism, 184–86; Hume's influence, 166–73; and snobbery, 160–66; therapies for doubt, 174–83
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von, 8n33
- Schlegel, Friedrich, 203–5, 207
- Schmitt, Carl, 195, 207, 210, 212–16
- Sea, The Sea, The* (Murdoch), 223, 234–35, 239
- Searle, John, 4n15, 68, 107n18
- seeing double, 89–98
- seeing-as, 53–63
- self-consciousness, 23
- self-deception, 104, 110–13, 126–27
- self-forgetting, 264
- self-government in Lewis, 197–98
- selfishness, 72–80
- self-knowledge in Murdoch, 238, 240
- self-love, 74–78, 80
- self-realisation, 118, 119, 176

- self-reference, 46
 shame in Conrad, 154
 Simcox, Edith, 67–68
 similes, 48
 Smith, Adam, 75, 79–80, 92, 149
 Smith, Zadie, 8n26, 10n42, 25n18
 snobbery, 160–66, 184–85
 ‘Soldier of Humour, A’ (Lewis), 205–6
 Sorel, Georges, 211
Spanish Gypsy, The (Eliot), 89
 spectator versus participant knowledge,
 18, 20, 66–67, 88–89, 190, 211, 216, 259
 Spinoza, Benedictus de, 34n26, 56n87,
 58n88, 74, 83, 98
Spinoza’s Ethics (Spinoza), 34n26, 56n87,
 58n88
 ‘Spirit of Fiction, The’ (Morley), 42
Spoils of Poynton, The (James), 116
 Stephen, Leslie, 165, 166
 Stevens, Wallace, 5–6
 Strachey, Lytton, 2, 179
 Strawson, Peter, 27n132, 190n11
 subjective perspective: in Eliot, 89; in
 Murdoch, 220–22
 suicide attempt of Conrad, 140–41
 Sully, James, 57n86
 Summerson, Esther, 33
 surfaces in Lewis, 188–89
 symbolism: in James, 130, 133; in Murdoch,
 222–23
 sympathy, 72, 91–98
- tables, in philosophical thought, 166–67
Tarr (Lewis): case against romanticism in,
 195–201; fictive attitude in, 192; freedom
 in, 210–14; humour in, 206–9; liberty in,
 194–95
 taste: in Bentham, 44–45; in Dickens, 45;
 in James, 115–16, 120
 Thackeray, William Makepeace, 3
 theories in Murdoch, 217–22; ancient
 quarrels, 222–26; defence of particulars,
 226–33; losing our minds, 233–46
- third-person perspective: in Conrad, 151; in
 Eliot, 89–92, 98; in James, 66; in Lewis,
 189–90; in Murdoch, 237–38
Time and Western Man (Lewis), 188,
 191, 194
Time of the Angels, The (Murdoch), 224–26
To the Lighthouse (Woolf): as ifs in, 7–8;
 perspectival shift in, 15–16; philosophy
 in, 165–67; pursuit of truth in, 181–83;
 therapies for doubt in, 175, 177–79;
 uncertainty in, 173
Tragic Muse, The (James), 116
Treatise of Human Nature (Hume), 31,
 33, 34, 94, 96, 170–71, 170n32, 174,
 183n51
 Trilling, Lionel, 251–52
 truth in Woolf, 181–83
 truth-seeking in James, 105–14
 two-mindedness in Lewis, 189–91
- ubiquity of fiction, 37–42
 uncertainty in Woolf: and dogmatism,
 184–86; Hume’s influence, 166–73; and
 snobbery, 160–66; therapies for doubt,
 174–83
Under the Net (Murdoch), 223, 224n29, 225,
 227–29, 231, 235
Under Western Eyes (Conrad), 158
Unicorn, The (Murdoch), 223, 229–30
 universality: in Eliot, 85–86; in Murdoch,
 227–28
Unofficial Rose, An (Murdoch), 228
 utilitarianism, 42–44
- Vaihinger, Hans, 5n22
 value: in Eliot, 53–63; heterogeneity
 of, 22–23, 104–5, 114–16, 248–49; in
 Murdoch, 244–45; subjectivity of, 62
 vanity, 76–77
 verificationism, 233–34
 views in Eliot: from here, 72–80; from
 mountain, 80–89
 virtuous hypocrisy, 51

- Walton, Kendall L., 10n46, 12–13
Waves, The (Woolf), 171–73, 175–76
 Wells, H. G., 105, 114, 142
 what ifs, 4, 20, 136–59
 what's-it likeness, 14, 90, 99, 256
 wholeheartedness, 11
Wild Body, The (Lewis), 193, 201–2
 Wilde, Oscar, 3, 19
 will to believe, 110–13, 128
 Williams, Bernard, 21, 22n107, 23, 104n11, 118, 123n64, 137–38, 140–41
 Williams, Carolyn, 36n30
Wings of the Dove, The (James), 112–13, 123–30
 wishful thinking, 111, 123
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 98, 107, 264n80; on art, 98, 264n80; on dogs, 224n28; on doubt, 26–27, 164; on inner self, 241; on the limits of grounds for belief, 162; Murdoch on, 221, 224; on power of human gaze, 37; on Ramsey, 266; seeing and imagination, 55; on self-analysis, 240n54; on theory, 227; on third-person perspective, 237; on trust, 163; and verificationism, 233–34
 Woolf, Virginia: British empiricism in, 164–65; and dogmatism, 184–86; habits and customs in, 175–78; *The Haunted House*, 162–63, 177; Hume's influence, 166–73; as ifs in, 7–8; illusions in, 6, 179–81; *To the Lighthouse*, 7–8, 15–16, 165–67, 173, 175, 177–79, 181–83; manners in, 177–79, 184–85; 'The Mark on the Wall', 162–63, 177; *Moments of Being*, 161; *Mrs. Dalloway*, 173, 175, 180–81; *Night and Day*, 176; on novels falsifying life, 12; *Orlando*, 6, 180, 181; perceptions in, 167–73; perspectival shift in, 15–16; philosophy in, 165–67; pursuit of truth in, 181–83; on reading automatically, 24; realism in, 172–73, 185; snobbery of, 160–66, 184–85; therapies for doubt in, 175, 177–79; truth in, 181–83; uncertainty in, 173; *The Waves*, 171–73, 175, 176
Word Child, A (Murdoch), 223, 227, 234
 words, imagining through, 57
 Wordsworth, William, 41
 world-making, 110–14