A Journey through the Realms of Good and Evil: Ethics in Philosophy and Literature

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Abstract This article starts with a distinction between ethics in philosophy and ethics in literature. There is an opposition between the theoretical discussion of ethical principles in philosophy and a non-propositional representation of ethical issues and problems arising in life. In the central part of the article texts from world literature are discussed which illustrate various ways of dealing with ethical issues in literature: violence (Homer, *Iliad*; Shakespeare, *Hamlet*), loyalty (Homer, *Odyssey*; Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*), friendship (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*; Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*), and love (Jane Austen, *Persuasion*). These texts furnish ample proof of the capacity of literature for presenting ethical issues. In all the texts discussed the ethical impact is the result of literary or esthetical devices. In the last part of the article an interesting recent development will be referred to: The extraordinary power of literature to represent ethical situations, problems and dilemmas has attracted the interest of philosophers. Some philosophers have directed their scholarly attention to literature, for instance to a philosophically-minded novelists like J. M. Coetzee. Hampe (2014) recommends philosophers to put narration in the service of their philosophical work. Gabriel (2015) accords cognitive capacity both to philosophy and literature. He speaks of complementarity of cognition in the two areas of writing. There is a rapprochement of philosophy and literature to be observed, particularly in the field of ethics.
Key words ethics; propositional discourse; non-propositional discourse; soliloquy; monologue; point-of-view
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Introduction

Of all branches of philosophy ethics is perhaps most clearly related to the life of humans. Generally ethics investigates the question of what makes, in Aristotle's definition, a happy or good life. This definition occurs in Aristotle's treatise on ethics, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, which has retained its importance and significance throughout history. Since it is highly relevant for scholars who engage in ethical criticism, some of the essential ideas of Aristotle will be referred to. The philosopher insists that the goodness he is dealing with is "human goodness", "the good *for man* or happiness *for man*" (Aristotle 2004, 28; 1102a). The good for man "is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue" (Aristotle 2004, 16; 1098a), which is to be dissociated from mere usefulness: "Let us, then, separate the things that are good in themselves from those that are merely useful" (Aristotle 2004, 11; 1096b). The idea that "the perfect good is self-sufficient" is specified by Aristotle so as to include relatives and fellow-citizens:

> By self-sufficient we mean not what is sufficient for oneself alone living a solitary life, but something that includes parents, wife and children and fellow-citizens in general; for man is by nature a social being. (Aristotle 2004, 14; 1097b)

So happiness (*eudaimonia*) is an individual's successful way of living, but it also has a social component. Martha Nussbaum (1990) has taken up Aristotle's definition of ethics as being concerned with a good life in her interpretation of literary texts. To define ethics a little more concretely for our purposes, it can be said that it is concerned with right and wrong conduct in certain circumstances and it examines concepts such as virtue, good and evil, justice, friendship and so on. As such ethics is part of all cultures. When we speak of ethics the whole world, Eastern or Western, knows what we are talking about, even though we may not all share the same assumptions. One reason for differences of ethical concepts in various cultures is that ethics is frequently related to religion and that many religions have

an inbuilt ethical component. Therefore it is difficult to formulate a universal ethics, although there is, regardless of cultural differences, a considerable number of universal concepts and values to be examined in ethics. Participating in an international conference on ethics and literature in Korea, cross-cultural encounters are facilitated, which may open new perspectives and may help us to overcome our inherited positions. Most important is in my opinion open-mindedness and respect and tolerance towards concepts of living one's life which differ from one's own inherited traditions.

The starting-point of my argument is that there is a necessity to expand the meaning of the philosophical term cognition or insight — German "Erkenntnis" — to include literature as a provider of insight or cognition. I argue that philosophy and literature represent two differing, but equally acceptable forms of cognition, propositional cognition in philosophy referring to matters of the world of facts and non-propositional cognition emerging in literary-fictional representations of the reality of life. Applied to ethics, there is an opposition between the theoretical discussion of ethical principles in philosophy and a non-propositional representation of ethical issues and problems arising in life. Now I would not say that statements or assertions or propositions formulated in philosophy are superior to non-propositional insights emerging in literature. Following the philosopher Gottfried Gabriel (2015), I would like to argue that there is a complementary relation between two types of cognition, philosophical and literary cognition. We know, of course, what philosophical cognition is. It is the result of logical argument and deduction; it appears in the form of propositions that are proved by logical operations. By way of contrast literary cognition is non-propositional. It is the result of specifically literary devices, i.e. meaning-generating elements of the text's form such as plot, perspective, foregrounding and more basic textual features like syntax, diction and style. I will not expand these reflections on the differences between literature and philosophy, since this would require a monograph.[1] I will rather look at a number of examples from literary texts to demonstrate different ways of dealing with ethical issues in literature. I will, in other words, take a journey through ethically significant episodes in world literature beginning with Homer's *Iiad*. Homer's works are included because a comparison with later European texts has a heuristic value, revealing continuities and discrepancies. After my analytic work I will come back to the relation of philosophy and literature.

The Moral Status of the Hero: Homer's Achilles and Shakespeare's Hamlet

As Aristotle points out in his *Poetics*, Homer's *Iliad* does not cover the whole

story of the Trojan War chronologically, from its beginning to its end, but the epic centers the action round one single theme, namely the anger of Achilles, its origin, its process, and its end. The reason for the anger of Achilles, who is the chief war hero of the Greeks, is his quarrel with Agamemnon, the ruler of Mycenae, who is their most important prince. Achilles takes exception to the way Agamemnon handles the issue of the booty the Greeks have made in raids on local towns and to the arrogant way in which he disregards his, Achilles', own claim. Now there is one crucial point in the epic's initial episode on which I would like to focus. When Agamemnon threatens to rob Achilles of his own prize, the girl Briseis, Achilles is infuriated and his heart is torn "whether to draw the sharp sword from his side […] and disembowel Agamemnon, or control himself and check his angry impulse" (Homer 2003, 9; 190-192). When Achilles, as a result of this inner conflict, is drawing his sword from its sheath, something significant happens. Athene, goddess of war, wisdom and the arts and crafts, comes down from heaven and stands behind him, without anybody else's being aware of her presence:

> Athene stood behind Achilles and seized him by his auburn hair. No one but Achilles was aware of her; the rest saw nothing. Achilles was amazed. He swung round, recognized Pallas Athene at once —so wonderful was the light from her eyes — […] (Homer 2003, 9; 198-201)

This is a wonderful moment of physical action. Athene holds Achilles back by his blond hair and he turns round and perceives the goddess. In the ensuing dialogue Athene convinces Achilles to take his hand from the sword and to insult Agamemnon "with words instead." And Achilles does indeed drive "the long sword back into its scabbard" (220-221) and he admits that a hero has to respect what the gods say. The intervention of the goddess shows, of course, the influence of the gods who are an essential part of the world of Homer's epics, but it is also a narrative device to stress the ethical quality of the hero. Athene would not intervene in Achilles' life, if he as a character had not a moral potential. The appearance of the goddess is in the *Iliad* is a regular epiphany. The light from her eyes is awe-inspiring to Achilles. She holds the hero back from committing a violent deed, by physical intervention at first and then by verbal persuasion. This early scene in the epic characterizes its protagonist ethically. It constitutes his ethical identity. He is not a ruthless, bloodthirsty fighting machine, but a complex person, who has his violent impulses under control. The fact that Achilles' turning away from seeking his enemy's blood is the result of divine intervention, does not really call

in doubt the autonomy of his will. He is involved in the decision-making. It is his choice whether to follow Athene's request or not. Also it is important that the goddess Athene is Achilles' constant companion all through the epic, just as she is associated with Odysseus in the *Odyssey.* It is not possible to separate her from the protagonists of the two epics. It is deeply significant and a cultural testimony that at the beginning of the first larger literary work in Europe there is a war hero who restrains himself from using violence.[2]

It is indeed momentous that in the first European epic we find a central hero, an outstanding war hero who possesses ethical complexity and shies away from killing a man who has insulted him. The same holds true for the protagonist of an English tragedy, which was written more than 2000 years later and is sometimes called the epitome of European drama, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. I do not want to deny the enormous cultural difference between the Greek epic and the Early New English drama, but there is a certain affinity of the two heroes, as far as their dealing with violence is concerned. *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy, which was a popular dramatic genre in Early Modern literature. The Danish prince Hamlet feels it his duty to avenge the murder of his father by his uncle Claudius, who immediately after the murder ascended the throne of his dead brother and married his sister-in-law Gertrude, i.e. young Hamlet's mother, a deed which was considered incest at the time. A problem is that Hamlet is quite, but not entirely sure, if Claudius is the murderer. So he stages a play whose plot is very similar to the events that happened at the court of Denmark, to test the reaction of his uncle. As he perceives the consternation of his uncle, who breaks off the performance of the play, he has the evidence he needs and is "hot" to kill him. In this situation a perfect opportunity offers itself to him to perform his revenge. Rushing to his mother's closet, Hamlet suddenly encounters his uncle at prayer, an excellent opportunity to kill him, as he realises himself. Drawing his sword he says, "Now I might do it pat, now a is a-praying. /And now I'll do't. [*Draws his sword.*]"

Now at a moment which all proper avengers hanker after, a moment which could not be better suited for the performance of revenge, Hamlet refrains from killing his uncle, and delivers a passionate soliloquy: [3]

> Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying.
> And now I'll do't. And so a goes to heaven;
> And so am I reveng'd. That would be scann'd:
> A villain kills my father, and for that
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven.
Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
A took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought
'Tis heavy with him. And am I then reveng'd,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and season'd for his passage? No!
Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent:
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game a-swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't,
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
As hell, whereto it goes.
(Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1982, 316-318; II.3.73-95)

He justifies his lack of action by arguments which have been discussed controversially by critics. He argues that killing Claudius during prayer would mean that his uncle's soul would be saved. This would not be proper revenge. Thus he will postpone the killing until he finds Claudius in an irreligious posture, committing a vile action. He will then trip him, so "that his heels may kick heaven" and his soul may go to hell. There is an interesting contrast in Hamlet in this scene between the violence of his language and his shrinking from action. In whatever way we may judge Hamlet's verbal radicalism, the central fact of the scene is that he does not kill Claudius. Like the infuriated Achilles he puts down his sword. And how many reasons he may put forward to justify his restraint, the simple dramatic truth is that he refrains from assassinating his enemy when he is in the most violently revengeful mood and when he has the best opportunity for doing so. This is a truth about Hamlet's character: He is not capable to commit premeditated murder. That is why he is disqualified as an avenger, whose business it is in revenge tragedy to plan and ruthlessly execute murder. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is actually a revenge tragedy without an avenger as a central character. Hamlet is definitely capable of acting when he is nettled and when he feels himself cornered. Examples are his killing of Polonius and sending to death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

In the prayer-scene he says that he would kill Claudius if he caught him in a sinful act, in flagranti, so to speak. His final killing of Claudius then occurs in flagranti. Having realised the extent of Claudius' murder plot, the victims of which are Hamlet's mother, Laertes and Hamlet himself, he retaliates unhesitatingly, stabbing him with the poisoned foil and forcing him to drink the poisoned wine. His last words to Claudius — "Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane, / Drink off this potion. " (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 414; V.2.330-331) — are decidedly not the words of a man incapable of action. But he is — and this is a mark of his moral personality — not capable of deliberately planning and performing revenge. The idea of premeditated murder is alien to him. Just as in the case of Achilles it is the mark of a great hero that in addition to strength and prowess he possesses an extraordinary degree of moral awareness and that he allows his actions to be guided by moral criteria. Although Hamlet with his predilection for soliloquy and his subjectivity is essentially a modern character, he and Achilles are kindred spirits as far as the ethical foundation of some of their acting is concerned.

The Representation of Loyalty in Literature: Homer's Eumaios and Dickens's Sam Weller

When Odysseus returns to Ithaca after his adventurous travels, he disguises as an old beggar in a tattered cloak. He is forced to conceal his identity, because he does not want to alert his enemies, the suitors who have occupied the palace of his wife, Penelope. As instructed by Athene, he first seeks out his favourite servant, the faithful swineherd Eumaois. This is a deeply moving scene. Eumaios does not recognize him, but treats him with warm hospitality. In their conversation the swineherd laments the loss of his master Odysseus. He tells how well he was treated by him and speaks of him in high terms. For Odysseus it is painful that he cannot speak the truth and has to dish up a false story. In this touching scene something extraordinary happens in narrative terms. The *Odyssey* is except for the interpolated I-narratives, an authorial narrative, or, to put it another way, it is third-person narration with an omniscient narrator. Now in the scene under discussion the narrator refers to Eumaios in the third person and at the same time he addresses him with the second-person "you" and his name. Here is a longer passage:

> And you, Eumaeus, the swineherd, said in reply, 'Stranger, it is not right for me to turn away any stranger, even one in a worse state than you are, for strangers and beggars all come in Zeus' name, and a gift from folk like us is none the less welcome for being small. Servants cannot make large gifts when

> they are always in fear of their overbearing masters. I mean these new ones; as for my old master, the gods have set their faces against his return. *He* would have looked after me properly and given me possessions, and a cottage and a bit of land, and a wife that any man would be glad to have, as a kind master does for a servant who has worked hard for him and whose work heaven has prospered, as it prospers the job I toil for. Yes, the King would have rewarded me well for this, had he grown old in Ithaca.' (Homer, *Odyssey*, 182-183; Book 14)

The passage quoted is a self-presentation of the speaker. He presents his ethos as a host, who, in spite of his poverty and under untoward circumstances, welcomes a strange beggar as a guest and praises his lost master, Odysseus, who would have, as he declares, taken care of him and rewarded him for his hard work, had he grown old in Ihaca. The poignant effect of this speech is, of course, caused by the fact that Odysseus is, unbeknownst to the swineherd, present in the scene as a disguised old man. Classical philologists are usually not interested in the narrative intricacies of the texts they study. But in this instance the fact that the narrator steps out of his role as a distanced teller of the story and directly addresses the swineherd, is an expression of sympathy and, perhaps, even love for this character. It is the narrative peculiarity of the scene — the paradoxical conjunction of the second and third person pronoun in the reference to the swineherd — in which the moral caliber of the character and loyalty as a value are emphasized, which is actively demonstrated later when he helps his master to clear Helena's house of the evil suitors.

Now I will again take a leap over two thousand years, this time to adduce an instance of a servant's loyalty in a Victorian work, Charles Dickens's comic novel *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837). The master-servant relation between the corpulent Mr. Pickwick and the lean Samuel Weller is a transformation of Cervantes' constellation of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, which inverts the physical build. The master's rounded body structure fits the warm-hearted, cheerful disposition which characterizes Mr. Pickwick, who is averse to physical activity. By way of contrast, Sam Weller is tall and gaunt. He is dressed in a dandyish way with a striped waistcoat with black sleeves and glass buttons, a bright handkerchief wound round his neck and a hat thrown carelessly on one side of his head. He is extremely astute, witty, agile and absolutely loyal to his master, with his sharp mind and sense of reality the opposite of the idealistic Pickwick.

In the relation between Pickwick and Weller Dickens highlights the tension between idealism and realism. It is Weller who realizes his master's inability to

deal with the wiles and deceits of the world and infallibly helps him out of difficult situations. With his witty comments and invented proverbs Sam Weller is the soul of *The Pickwick Papers* as a comic novel. In a conversation with another servant figure, Job Trotter, Sam Weller characterizes the relationship between himself and his master:

> 'Mr. Weller,' said Job, with real tears in his eyes, for once, 'I could serve that gentleman till I fell down dead at his feet.'
>
> 'I say!' said Sam, 'I'll trouble you, my friend! None o' that!'
>
> Job Trotter looked amazed.
>
> 'None o' that, I say, young feller,' repeated Sam, firmly. 'No man serves him but me. And now we're upon it, I'll let you into another secret besides that,' said Sam as he paid for the beer. 'I never heerd, mind you, nor read of in story-books, nor seen in picters, any angel in tights and gaiters — not even in spectacles, as I remember, though that may ha' been done for anythin' I know to the contrairey — but mark my vords, Job Trotter, he's a reg'lar thourough-bred angel for all that; and let me see the man as wenturs to tell me he knows a better vun.' (Dickens 1988, 734; Chapter 45)

The narrative technique Dickens applies in this passage has to be taken into account. This is not a regular eulogy. Sam's avowal of loyalty to his master and his praise of him is given in a dialogue between two servants and the pathos of his words is mitigated by the use of Cockney dialect and the humour of the scene. Sam's praise of his master in the context of the Victorian servant milieu is worlds apart from the sentiments expressed by Eumaios in the Odyssey, but the absoluteness of loyalty is what the two figures have in common. Loyalty is obviously an ethical value which is universal, and I believe it is appreciated all over the world, Western or Eastern. To give at least one example of the comic nature of Sam Weller's conduct, the lawsuit in the centre of the novel's plot will serve. Mr. Pickwick is falsely sued for breach of marriage promise to his landlady Mrs. Bardell, who is incited by the vicious lawyers Dodson and Fogg to take legal action and thus get money out of Pickwick. When Weller is called to the bar as a witness, he comically exposes the corrupt lawyers. As sergeant Buzfuz wants to get evidence out of Weller, he asks him, "You were in the passage, and yet saw nothing of what was going forward [on the upper floor]. Have you a pair of eyes, Mr Weller?' Weller answers with the 'most equanimity and simplicity of manner":

> 'Yes, I have a pair of eyes,' replied Sam, 'and that's just it. If they wos a pair o' patent double million magnigifyin' gas microscopes of hextra power, p'rhaps I imight be able to see through a flight o' stairs and a deal door; but bein' only eyes, you see, my wision's limited.' (Dickens 1988, 573; Chapter 34)

This answer dumbfounds the interrogator and amuses the spectators and, of course, the readers. It is Sam's intention to do "Messrs Dodson and Fogg's case as much harm as he conveniently could, and saying just as little respecting Pickwick as might be" (575).

The Representation of Friendship in Literature: Hamlet and Horatio, Huck Finn and Jim

Friendship is an important topic in ethics, for, as all theorists and commentators agree, there is no good or happy life without friendship. In Shakespeare, who dealt with practically all the problems and emotions humans are faced with, friendship is a great topic. There is, for instance, the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* or the relationship of Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Caesar.* And there are instances of female friendship, notably that of Rosalind and Celia in *As You Like It*, a fact which is noteworthy, because since classical times friendship tended to be exclusively a male affair. I will choose the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio, because Hamlet's attitude towards friendship seems to be much steeped in Aristotle's discussion of the topic in his *Nicomachean Ethics.* For Hamlet it is of essential importance to have a friend. He is isolated at the Danish court and subjected to a system of espionage operated by King Claudius and his councillor Polonius, so that he cannot trust anybody. It is a great disappointment to him to see that his school-mates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern allow themselves to be used as tools in the control system of the state. And he is shocked that his love Ophelia seems to be used by her father Polonius to sound him out, which explains his misogynic attack against her in the so-called Nunnery Scene. Even when he delivers his great soliloquy "To be or not to be," he is eavesdropped by Polonius, without the prince being aware that he is spied on.

An intriguing document of Hamlet's appreciation of his friend and of friendship in general is to be found in Act III, 2 where the dialogue of Hamlet and Horatio passes into a monologue of praise, a eulogy in fact. Hamlet praises his friend as the best interlocutor he has ever had, just a man / As e'er my conversation cop'd withal" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1982, 290; III.2.54-55) and, denying that he is flattering, he makes a great speech in praise of his friend:

> Nay, do not think I flatter,
> For what advancement may I hope from thee
> That no revenue hast but thy good spirits
> To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor by flatter'd?
> No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
> And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
> Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?
> Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,
> And could of men distinguish her election,
> Sh'ath seal'd thee for herself; for thou hast been
> As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing,
> A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
> Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
> Whose blood and judgment are so well commeddled
> That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
> That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
> In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
> As I do thee. [...] (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1982, 290-292; III.2.56-74)

The main points in this monologue are the denial of flattery in friendship, friendship as the result of free choice, the necessity of moral excellence in a friend, and the spiritualization of friendship indicated in the references to the "soul" and "the "heart's core." All these criteria are discussed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the section dealing with friendship. It seems as if Hamlet had got acquainted with Aristotle's ethics during his studies at Wittenberg. The moral qualities mentioned in Hamlet's monologue are absent at the court of Denmark in the play, at which lying, simulation, dissimulation and deceit are the rule. Once aspect, which Aristotle investigates in his ethics is the question, if friendship is possible between people of different social status, especially between master and slave. Hamlet and Horatio are completely aware of the difference between them as to rank and wealth, but nevertheless their relation is founded on attachment and mutual respect. This state of things ties in with Aristotle's conceding that in spite of social difference friendship can be possible. This seems to be the case in the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio. Yet one linguistic feature in the dialogue has still to be commented. Hamlet constantly addresses Horatio with the pronoun "thou," which

in Early New English suggests intimacy or lower status, while Horatio uses the pronoun "you" and the formula "my lord", when he addresses Hamlet. This may be difficult to understand for Asian readers in whose languages personal pronouns are, as far as I know, not so important. According to my knowledge, which is extremely limited, the Chinese language has a difference between the usual second person pronoun "ni" and the polite pronoun "nin". As far as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is concerned, the use of the different pronouns has an indexical function. Only at the play's end does Horatio address Hamlet with the intimate second person pronoun "thou/thy":

> Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.
> (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1982; V.2.364-365)

In these lines, which are perhaps the shortest apotheosis in all literature, the friendship of Hamlet and Horatio finds its fulfilment.

I will now come to my second example of friendship, taken from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), set in the region along the Mississippi in the United States at the time before the Civil War. It is a friendship between two boys who have run away from their home town in Missouri, Huckleberry Finn, who is a kind of good-hearted social misfit, and Jim, Miss Watson's black slave, who plans to flee from his mistress who wants to sell him to other owners. Jim plans to make his way to the town of Cairo in Illinois, a free state. As the friendship between the two boys is growing, Huck decides to support the runaway slave, which brings him into a conflict with the values of society. Huckleberry Finn thinks a good action, i.e. setting a slave free, to be a crime. In the novel the vision of the protagonist-narrator is subjective and specifically limited, in so far as he does not on an intellectual level recognize the dilemma which he has to cope with. Mark Twain makes his protagonist's soul the battle-ground of conflicting forces. His placing the *psychomachia*, a battle fought between the forces of evil and the forces of good, within the soul of a boy is an innovative achievement. Huck's problem emerges already on a linguistic level. Although he is an outsider, he has internalized social norms, which are mirrored in his language. Thus his intention to set free his friend, the slave Jim, appears to him as a crime, a "low-down thing," "nigger stealing," in fact, and in religious terms, a "sin," on account of which his conscience torments him: "The more I studied about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling" (Twain 1960, 262;

Chapter 31). His attempt to pray fails — "the words wouldn't come":

> Why wouldn't they [the words]? It warn't no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from *me*, neither. […] It was because my heart warn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting *on* to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth *say* I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie, and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie — I found that out. (Twain 1960, 262; Chapter 31).

Huck Finn believes his conduct to be morally bad, when it is actually good. His inner turmoil is the result of a conflict of two value systems which co-exist in his consciousness, a conflict which pains him, but which is not intelligible to him. What happens in the child's consciousness is, to use Habermas' terms, a battle between official morality and individual ethics. On the one hand, there is Huck's true heart "deep down" which prompts him to save Jim, while, on the other hand, the norms of society and religion — under the name of "conscience" — put pressure on him, so that his intuitively good moral decision is called in doubt and he is made to feel guilty. In a much-quoted monograph Henry Nash Smith speaks of an opposition in Huck between "a sound heart" and "a deformed conscience" (Nash Smith 1972, 113-117). In this mental crisis, in which the categories of good and bad are jumbled and in which Huck seems to lose the sense of his identity, he believes that his heart is not "right" and that he is "playing double" (262), but he ultimately relies on a moral substance "deep down" in him which remains intact in spite of all his doubts and self-incriminations. He does the right thing, believing that he is "wicked" (262) and that through his conduct he is going to "hell" (264). The depiction of Huck's mental crisis and moral confusion derives its authenticity from the voice of the narrator. It is first-person narration which makes possible the credible presentation of the situation of a character who, without anybody else's help, goes through the experience of a moral crisis.

Love — The Representation of Kind Acts in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

When we deal with the literary treatment of ethical issues, a chapter on Jane Austen is required, a writer who is considered to be one of the outstanding moralists in the history of the novel. Since she hardly ever expresses her moral attitudes in propositional statements, it is necessary to examine her narrative art. That is

why she is an exemplary case for ethical criticism. Placing her art in the tradition of Anglo-Scottish moral philosophy — Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) — may yield some affinities, but this does not lead into the heart of her art. For an ethical appreciation of her art it is absolutely necessary to take into account the specific point-of-view narration which she invented. Point-of-view narration — as it emerges in her novels — usually has a more or less covert narrator. Action is presented as seen through the eyes of a character, who is a reflector or internal focalizer, but *not* a narrator. As far as the depiction of moral issues is concerned, the explicit presence of the narrator and his/her authority as a dispenser of moral attitudes and values is reduced. In Austen's *Persuasion* (1818), for instance, the moral quality of Captain Wentworth's actions is perceived only by the protagonist, Anne Elliot, and the reader, who gets hardly any information outside her point of view. Similarly, the hypocrisy of Mr. Elliot is only transparent to the protagonist, who, to use Henry James's term, is an "intense perceiver." As a typical example of the presentation of action in the novel, I would like to turn to a passage from Chapter 9 of *Persuasion*, in which the protagonist, Anne Elliot, is in an uncomfortable situation, being busy about her ill nephew and at the same time troubled by his little brother, who clings to her neck. Remonstrance of other persons present in the room is of no avail, but suddenly she is relieved:

> In another moment, however, she found herself in the state of being relieved; some one was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it. (Austen 1990, 79; Chapter 9)

The action is presented entirely from the subjective point of view of the protagonist. She feels that something is happening to her, as the passive construction "she found herself in the state of being relieved" indicates. With her limited vision, which is caused by her kneeling position by the sick child, she cannot perceive the author of the action, as is shown in the use of the indefinite pronoun — "*some one* was taking him from her." Maria Edgeworth recognized the point-of-view technique *avant la lettre* in this passage, writing to a friend: "Don't you see Captain Wentworth, don't you in her place feel him, taking the boisterous child off her back as she kneels by the sick boy on the sofa" (quoted in Austen 1990, 235). Only at the very end of

the passage does Anne come to realize that it was Captain Wentworth who helped her. The point-of-view technique is here emphasized by a syntax of suspense (Fill 2003). The resolution of the relatively long sentence coincides with the moment of recognition in what is a remarkable instance of iconic structuring. After this incident she has to mentally digest the incident, which is represented in a passage of internal focalization, beginning with a narrative description of her inner life: "Her sensation on the discovery made her perfectly speechless. She could not even thank him. She could only hang over little Charles, with most disordered feelings" (79). Then the form of narrative report changes over to free indirect style, as she tries to interpret the incident: "His kindness in stepping forward to her relief — the manner — the silence in which it had passed — the little particulars of the circumstances [...]" (79). Later the narrator takes over again, referring to "such a confusion of varying, but very painful agitation, as she could not recover from" (79). The poignancy in the representation of the incident derives from the special situation in which Anne Elliot finds herself. She regrets having, under the pressure of her family and her mentor Lady Russell, rejected her fiancé, Captain Wentworth, seven years earlier and now encounters him again. Thus a little act of kindness on his side throws her into a tumult of conflicting emotions. The passage is an example of the representation of an action from a character's limited point of view. The technique of limiting the angle of vision to one character's perception and focusing on this character's inner life results in an intensified expression of moral action and the reaction it stimulates.

The incident from *Persuasion* evinces a remarkable shift from the representation of physical action to the depiction of inner life. The emphasis is on the mental reaction which an action causes. With this innovation Austen proves to be one of the founders of the psychological novel. Another example of Austen's shift from externality to interiority is the episode in which Captain Wentworth secures a seat in the carriage of Admiral Croft for Anne, who is fatigued after a long walk in the country (Chapter 10). Her reaction to Captain Wentworth's kindness is represented in a long passage predominantly written in free indirect style, the beginning of which runs as follows:

> Yes, — he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest. She was very much affected by the view of his disposition towards her which all these things made apparent. This little circumstance seemed the completion of all that had gone

> before. She understood him. He could not forgive her, — but he could not be unfeeling. (Austen 1990, 89; Chapter 10)

Anne Elliot understands Wentworth's action as a sign of his moral sensitivity. The whole passage is an attempt to interpret his conduct as a mixture of his resentment at her having "jilted" him and of his genuine kindness. In the course of her reflection on Wentworth's motives, phrases such as "pure, though unacknowledged friendship" and "his own warm and amiable heart" emerge, and Anne's emotions are referred to as "so compounded of pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed" (89). Though Anne is never shown to own it to herself, the reader realizes that she is still — or again — in love with Wentworth and that she loves him for his moral excellence and the warmth of his heart. The passage achieves psychological analysis not from the superior position of an omniscient narrator, but from a focus within the character. The two examples from Austen reveal deep ethical cognition of a kind, which is not accessible in philosophical treatises.

Results, Perspectives

Although all texts (or rather excerpts of texts) adduced in this article are as ethical in substance as may be they differ most strongly from philosophical treatises in the field of ethics. This alone provides proof of the contention put forward at the beginning of this study, namely that philosophy and literature realize two different kinds of cognition. While in philosophy cognition is produced by way of logical argument and deduction and formulated in the form of propositions, cognition is in literature achieved in the form of fictional texts which deal with human issues and problems that are presented in an esthetical form. In all the texts discussed in this article the ethical impact is the result of literary or esthetical devices. In the passage from the *Iliad* it is the use of the goddess Athene soaring down from heaven in order to prevent Achilles from killing his enemy and to ask him to convert his intended angry action into vituperation. In a similar situation Hamlet puts back his sword into the scabbard, in this case without divine intervention. The dramatist employs soliloquy to show his protagonist venting his anger and his hatred against his enemy in violent language. Again action is converted into words. — The example of loyalty from the *Odyssey* shows Eumaios revealing his loyalty to Odysseus by delivering a eulogy on his apparently lost master. The narrator uses the change of the pronoun "he" to "you" in order to express his sympathy for the loyal servant. Sam Weller in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* also makes a speech in praise of his master, but in the cockney dialect and addressed to another servant.

He supports Pickwick in the court-room, when his master is falsely accused, and ridicules the proceedings by his wit, which produces comic effects. — In the first example dealing with friendship, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio changes into a monologue, a speech, in which the prince celebrates his friend Horatio, summoning up arguments occurring in Aristotle's theory of friendship. In the second example, *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain uses monologue within I-narration in order to present the contradictions in a boy's mind whose humanity makes him perform the right action of saving a black boy, when he actually believes that he is committing a sin. — The final example deals with little chivalrous actions in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, whose ethical impact is engendered by the novelist's masterly use of point-of-view.

The panorama of texts — or rather parts of texts — discussed in this article illustrates various ways of dealing with ethical issues in literature. They furnish, I hope, substantial proof of the capacity of literature for presenting ethical issues. Now the extraordinary power of literature to represent ethical situations, problems and dilemmas has recently attracted the interest of philosophers. In a situation felt as a crisis of mainstream philosophy, some philosophers have directed their attention to literature. In a monograph, which is a fierce indictment of traditional philosophy and its assertiveness, Michael Hampe has turned to philosophically-minded novelists like J. M. Coetzee as an antidote to what he believes to be the stagnation of academic philosophy. He recommends philosophers to put narration in the service of their philosophical work. Another philosopher is the above-mentioned Gottfried Gabriel (2015), who accords cognitive capacity both to philosophy and literature. His argument is commendable in that, as far as cognition is concerned, he concedes equal right of existence to philosophy and literature. He speaks of a complementarity of cognition in the two areas of writing. His monograph has a chapter entitled "The Truth of Literature?" ("Wahrheit der Dichtung?") and another chapter with the title "Literature and Morality" ("Dichtung und Moral"). He investigates individual literary texts with regard to the kind of cognition realized in them. Conversely, he also looks at literary forms of representation in philosophical texts. What is to be perceived here is a rapprochement of philosophy and literature, particularly in the field of ethics. A cooperation of the two forms of discourse — philosophical and literary-critical discourse — is certainly to be welcomed. At any rate, ethical literary criticism is a fruitful new departure in literary studies. Its field of investigation is inexhaustible and it attracts other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, political sciences and sociology.

Notes

1. For a more theoretically-oriented article see Müller (2015), for a morally-oriented contribution Zhemzhao (2015).

2. There are, of course, other sides to Achilles in war. But a further moving scene occurs, when after Hector has been killed by Achilles, Achilles and Priamos, Hector's father, have a conversation, in which the former weeps for his father's death and the latter for the death of his son.

3. For reasons I cannot specify here I quote the Arden Edition of Harold Jenkins (1982) and not the edition replacing it by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (2006).

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